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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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A Study of Mechanization and the Fall from Grace in
Flannery O'Connor's Fiction

Helen Ann Savitsky

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

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ABSTRACT

A Study of Mechanization and the Fall from Grace in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction

Helen Ann Savitsky

The dilemma that faces Flannery O'Connor's characters is one that Flannery O'Connor believes is crucial to modern man. The people in her fictions are caught between a compulsion to believe and a desire to deny belief. Because O'Connor's theme is the quest for spiritual redemption, the characters must resolve the conflict between belief and denial. To do so, they must overcome the temptations posed by a mechanized society and by the rationalistic philosophies that accompany mechanization.

It is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate the relationship between mechanization and the fall from spiritual grace in O'Connor's fictions. It will be shown that the characters, caught up in their obsession with mechanical things, tend to lose their humanity and their souls. They take on the characteristics of the machines that they worship. Flannery O'Connor, however, believes that faith can lead them back to their

spiritual selves. By deflating their false idols, she also brings these errant wanderers down to earth. They begin to perceive what is real and eternal. With her use of machines and mechanization, O'Connor warns that a mindless worship of negative values can lead to everlasting damnation as well as to a hell on earth.

To Georgia, Irene, Rosy and Telly who helped
me to see things in the right perspective.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The City as the Place of Lost Souls	7
Chapter 2: The Country Laid Waste	31
Chapter 3: Man as Machine	61
Chapter 4: Towards Redemption	84
Conclusion	106
Endnotes: Introduction	110
Endnotes: Chapter 1	111
Endnotes: Chapter 2	114
Endnotes: Chapter 3	117
Endnotes: Chapter 4	120
Endnotes: Conclusion	123
Bibliography: Primary Sources	124
Bibliography: Secondary Sources	125

Introduction

Flannery O'Connor's central characters are all caught up in a terrible dilemma. It is this dilemma and the tension that it generates that form the action of all her fictions. Her characters are caught between a compulsion to believe and a desire to scorn belief. O'Connor's theme is the quest for spiritual redemption. The characters must ultimately come to terms with their conflicting impulses in order that they might resolve their reluctant spiritual quest.

This paper proposes to discuss the role that mechanization has in promoting the tendencies towards agnosticism and secular humanism that we find in the novels and short stories of Flannery O'Connor. This mechanization expresses the basic values of the society, urban and rural, that is depicted in O'Connor's fictions. A preoccupation with and a desire for the instruments and fruits of mechanized life motivates almost all of her characters. Only a few main characters question this compulsion, or struggle with it. The vast majority of these characters embrace it wholeheartedly, and to a tragicomic degree.

This concern with mechanization and its ill effects is not a new theme in American Literature. In his book The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America, Leo Marx traces the history of this concern as evinced in some important American texts.

To Leo Marx, Captain Ahab of Moby Dick is a prime example of the dangers inherent in an overweening machine-worship. Marx says of Ahab, "He is the perverted, monomaniac incarnation of the Age of Machinery, as he himself had admitted earlier: 'all my means are sane, my motive and my object mad.'"¹

Ahab has been seduced by the available power, a product of rationalism, neither good nor evil. The use he puts it to is irrational and unwise. Potential power and the fruits of power must be perceived and judged as two separate entities. Leo Marx points out that Ahab lacks the wisdom to make this distinction properly:

Of the qualities necessary for survival, Melville endows Ahab with the power and Ishmael with the wisdom. Ishmael is saved as Job's messengers had been saved, in order that he may deliver to us a warning of disasters to come.²

Ahab identifies with, and ultimately becomes a machine. Machine-like, he hums to himself "producing a sound so strangely muffled and inarticulate that it seemed the mechanical humming of the wheels of his vitality in him."³ According to Leo Marx, Ahab regards his crew of men as "human tools... To accomplish his object Ahab must use tools; and of all tools used in the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order."⁴ Marx further elaborates:

As the Pequod approaches the white whale, Ahab's preoccupation with power becomes obsessive. Images of machinery, iron, forges, wheels, fire, and smoke fill his speech. In a fit of manic inspiration he 'orders' from the blacksmith, whom he calls Prometheus, a 'complete man' fifty feet high with a chest modelled after the Thames Tunnel, no heart at all, and about a quarter of an acre of brains.⁵

We see in Ahab a lost soul, questing for knowledge and control at the expense of his own salvation, seeking a prideful, godlike dominance over his men, and over nature, divorced from light and love. Marx speaks of Ahab's "Faustian compulsion to impose his will upon the cosmos. In Melville's hero the thrust of Western man for ultimate knowledge and power is sinewed with hatred."⁶

In the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, we again encounter the machine as villain. The beauty and promise of the American landscape is threatened by the ugliness of the encroaching mechanization viewed on the river banks, and by the cruelty and greed of urbanized society. "Again and again, in this allegedly Christian, aristocratic, cultivated society, Huck meets unspeakable cruelty."⁷ The machine is the symbol of the downfall and destruction of the American pastoral dream, the possibility of an ideal new world, symbolized by Huck's raft:

The thought that this great promise was to be submerged in history (in his [Samuel Clemens'] view a dreary record of man's last hopes) gave rise to the image of a monstrous steamboat that suddenly bulged out of the night, big, scary, inexorable, and smashed straight through the raft.

Again, in The Education of Henry Adams, Henry Adams sees mechanization as the embodiment of all negative and dangerous impulses. In the words of Leo Marx: "On one side he lines up heaven, beauty, religion, and reproduction; on the other: hell, utility, science, and production."⁹

Likewise, Henry James, exploring the rural region near Farmington, Connecticut, discovers that "there is

nothing in the scene, capable of resisting the domination of the machine.¹⁰

It is this repeated theme in American History and Literature that Flannery O'Connor continues in her fictions. She, too, depicts men being used as machine parts, characters so obsessed with machines that they behave like robots, and intellectuals who value knowledge and shun emotion. Her concern, however, does not centre on the creation of an ideal society in this world; the importance of spiritual redemption in the hereafter is O'Connor's message to her audience. Of course, the quality of life on earth effects the quality of life after death, according to traditional Christian beliefs. The physical states of O'Connor's characters reflect their spiritual states. In her stories and novels, the steamboat is still crushing the raft; but now it has become a bulldozer or a car. The results are still the same: negative values are overpowering positive ideals.

Flannery O'Connor is not as pessimistic as Henry James when she surveys the society of her times. Faith can resist the domination of the machine; it does for those of her characters lucky enough to experience

revelation of the mystery that science cannot explain.

For those who have faith are saved; those who do not are condemned to the alienating and meaningless universe, bestowed on them as a result of machine-worship. If they do not realize their misdirection, there will be no redemption. This is O'Connor's warning. Her aim in writing these stories is to make her audience aware of the dangers inherent in mindlessly sharing the values of a society whose goals and endeavours could best be symbolized by the machine.

Chapter 1

The City as the Place of Lost Souls

The Urban landscapes that greet the O'Connor characters, in the various stories and novels, may range from the discouraging to the hellish; they are never, however, charming, promising, or hopeful.

The characters who journey to the city from rural areas are attempting to escape. They seek a refuge from a fate which they consider worse than anything they can imagine. It is an inner compulsion, an obsession with religion that they attempt to flee. Or it may be just a lack of self-knowledge, a failure to accept one's place in the scheme of things, both religious and secular. Some are moved to prophesy about where the errors of modern preoccupations will lead; but they push this distasteful notion aside. Like Jonah, they assume that if they go far enough away, they can escape God's voice and His sight. They want to be free.

In the novel The Violent Bear It Away, Francis Marion Tarwater should be warned by his first glimpse of the city, that he is heading for disaster and the

domain of the damned. He has just set fire to his dead uncle and his uncle's house, to avoid the Christian duty of burial. This he does rebelliously, knowing it is wrong. He wants to prove to himself that religious dictates do not matter and can be ignored. Ironically, his introduction to the city, (while hitchhiking with a salesman), has the appearance of "The Terrible Speed of Mercy"¹ answering his deed:

"Look," Tarwater said suddenly, sitting forward, his face close to the windshield, "we're headed in the wrong direction. We're going back where we came from. There's the fire again. There's the fire we left!"

Ahead of them in the sky there was a faint glow, steady, and not made by lightning. "That's the same fire we came from!" the boy said in a high voice.

"Boy, you must be nuts," the salesman said. "That's the city we're coming to. That's the glow from the city lights. I reckon this is your first trip anywhere."

"You're turned around," the child said; "it's the same fire."²

His later knowledge that he cannot escape his "calling" and his alienation or sense of displacement while in the city are foreshadowed in such phrases as "headed in the wrong direction," and "it's the same fire." His confused sense of direction reflects a state of being spiritually lost.

This analogy between the city and hell is made even

more forcefully in the story "The Artificial Nigger."
Mr. Head explains the sewer system to Nelson, hoping to dampen his pride in being city-born:

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

The city will indeed be a hellish experience for young Nelson. For one thing, his Virgil, Mr. Head, is hardly "one of the great guides of men,"⁴ that he fancies himself to be. Here he demonstrates his unsuitability as guide to the young; one-upmanship is more important than truth to him. He pays for his show of pride when his prophecy becomes reality. Then, he is figuratively "sucked down endless pitchblack tunnels," "never heard from again"; in other words, the guide becomes physically and spiritually lost. At that point, "The old man felt that if he saw a sewer entrance he would drop down into it and let himself be carried away."⁵

As well as seeming hellish, the first glimpse of the city, seems to promise alienation and death. Tarwater sees a used-car graveyard, where everything is divided into separate parts. The city itself seems part and parcel of this junkyard -- an image of urbanized life.

He [Tarwater] was sitting forward on the seat, looking out the window at a hill covered with old used-car bodies. In the indistinct darkness, they seemed to be drowning into the ground, to be about half-submerged already. The city hung in front of them on the side of the mountain as if it were a larger part of the same pile, not yet buried so deep. The fire had gone out of it and it appeared settled into its unbreakable parts.

The image of drowning here foreshadows the drowning incident that will haunt Tarwater in the future. He will find that his escape to the city merely draws him closer to his fated role as baptizer.

Wasteland imagery occurs throughout O'Connor's descriptions of cities. Sally Fitzgerald states, in her introduction to Three by Flannery O'Connor, that there is some evidence that Flannery O'Connor was influenced, "possibly even set going," by T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," when writing her first novel, Wise Blood.⁷ Frederick Asals observes that "Nothing is more

revealing of the general tenor of the imagery in Wise Blood than the descriptive adjective that appears most often: ugly, a word followed at some distance by sour.⁸ The following is a description of what Hazel Motes, the protagonist of Wise Blood, observes as he drives through the city:

He went past railroad yards for about a half-mile and then warehouses...He went past long blocks of gray houses and then blocks of better, yellow houses...He went past blocks of white houses, each sittigg with an ugly dog face on a square of grass.

The imagery here is of sameness and lack of progress. No matter how far Haze drives he is still in the same places. Warehouses or railroad yards, what is the difference? The desolation is the same. Gray houses, yellow houses, white houses, what does it all mean? No matter the colour, the houses are always all alike. They are not welcoming human habitations that reflect the variety and interests of their inhabitants; they are cold, soulless barracks, with "ugly dog faces." There is no human dimension to them, no individuality, just a rational, geometrical, logical sameness. One gets the impression that a gigantic machine, a gargantuan cookie cutter, or a "peeler," has processed them all in the same mold.

Beyond these surface impressions is the persistent, gnawing sense of entrapment. For Haze, who has fled to the city to escape, there is no escape. Like a man in a nightmare, he runs but gets nowhere. There is still the same street, the same houses, the same desolation, no matter how fast he goes.

The city is a machine-made hell, a damnation created by men, for men. The machines in the car graveyard are symbolic of man's role and man's fate in this city -- depersonalization and disintegration.

Donald Gregory has noted that Haze's quest follows three stages. He seeks "first for a life without sin, later for conversion 'to nothing,' and, finally, for redemption through suffering."¹⁰

Failing in his attempt to be sinless, because of his army experiences, Haze comes to the city to preach his lack of belief; he also comes to practice what he preaches. He "sins" joylessly and mechanically. Instead of finding comfort in his conversion to nothing, however, he finds a horror that he cannot face. The yawning void is worse than what he is running from in the first place. This entrapment is worse than the one

he flees.

The no-place that is the city is the kind of alienation that destroys the body and soul of the conscious person. While a deadened or unconscious modern city-dweller, i.e., a human machine, may go through the motions of living for years, the thinking or obsessed individual will go mad.

Tanner, in the short story "Judgement Day," also perceives the city as a wasteland and as a prison unfit for human habitation. Machines are everywhere in evidence; even the people are robotlike:

At home he had been living in a shack but there was at least air around it. He could put his feet on the ground. Here she didn't even live in a house. She lived in a pigeon-hutch of a building...It was no place for a sane man. The first morning she had taken him sightseeing and he had seen in fifteen minutes exactly how it was. He had not been out of the apartment since. He never wanted to set foot again on the underground railroad or the steps that moved under you while you stood still or any elevator to the thirty-fourth floor. When he was safely back in the apartment again, he had imagined going over it with Coleman. He had to turn his head every few seconds to make sure Coleman was behind him. Keep to the inside or these people 'll knock you down, keep right behind me or you'll get left, keep your hat on, you damn idiot, he had said, and Coleman had come on with his bent running shamble, panting and muttering, What we doing here? Where you get

this fool idea coming here?¹¹

Tanner comes to New York City from the South, to escape the terrible role of "a nigger's white nigger."¹² In his pride he refuses to accept his spiritual and physical place in life; he will not recognize that all human beings are equal before God. This leads to displacement, or alienation in the city.

In New York he experiences alienation through a "living death." He is literally entombed or buried alive:

He couldn't escape...The window looked out on a brick wall and down into an alley full of New York air, the kind fit for cats and garbage. A few snow flakes drifted past the window but they were too thin and scattered for his failing vision.¹³

Walled in and cut off from nature, he is imprisoned in horror.

If he had known it was a question of this -- sitting here looking out of this window all day in this no-place, or just running a still for a nigger, he would have run the still for the nigger. He would have been a nigger's white nigger any day.¹⁴

Tanner's dreams also reflect his imprisonment in a living death. He is in a coffin, waiting to be

released. In reality he learns that what awaits him is death and judgement day, those last things with which Flannery O'Connor is most concerned. He literally wakes up to judgement day, as in his dream. Belatedly, due to a role reversal, Tanner gets a revelation of equality and of the shared displacement in the universe. In New York City he is the outsider and the seeming inferior; and the Negro actor, who has a role to play there, is now the seeming master of his environment. In fact, they are both equals, something Tanner failed to see in his relationship with the Negro Coleman. The Negro actor must use physical force to make Tanner see this. Wide awake spiritually, Tanner is now impervious to the prison his body occupies, in the city, and more immediately between the spokes of the bannister. In death he is freed from nothingness by a timely vision.

Tanner's discovery is that it is better to be "a nigger's white nigger" and to have a place or role in society, to be part of a social order or pattern, than to have no place, to be dehumanized. Robert Fitzgerald has written that "almost all her [O'Connor's] people are displaced."¹⁵ This displacement or alienation is largely due to mechanization. Leo Marx speaks of the

machine's effect on man:

Although it is morally neutral, the machine in a capitalist setting helps to transform the worker into a commodity for sale on the labor market. His work takes on a mechanical, meaningless character. It bears little or no relation to his own purposes. The result is the typical psychic set of industrial man which [Karl] Marx calls alienation. In Erich Fromm's words, the alienated man is one for whom "the world (nature, others, and he himself) remain alien ... They stand above and against him as objects, even though they may be objects of his own creation. Alienation is essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the object."¹⁶

Karl Marx went on to say "The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things."¹⁷

O'Connor's characters find this situation in full force in the city. This is a mechanized society, where old values no longer exist. The lack of spiritual nourishment, the isolation from human values and love have a telling effect on young Tarwater. His spiritual hunger becomes a physical manifestation; he literally starves in the city:

The first day in the city he had become conscious of the strangeness in his stomach, a peculiar hunger. The city food only

weakened him. He and his great-uncle had eaten well. If the old man had done nothing else for him, he had heaped his plate. Never a morning he had not awakened to the smell of fat back frying. The schoolteacher paid scarce attention to what he put inside him. For breakfast, he poured a bowl of shavings out of a cardboard box; in the middle of the day he made sandwiches out of lightbread; and at night he took them to a restaurant, a different one every night run by a different color of foreigner, so that he would learn, he said, how other nationalities ate. The boy did not care how other nationalities ate. He always left the restaurants hungry, conscious of an intrusion in his works. Since the breakfast he had finished sitting in the presence of his uncle's corpse, he had not been satisfied by food.¹⁸

This lack of satisfaction with processed, machine-made, unnatural food continues. When Tarwater attempts to satisfy his raging hunger with the poor food, he has to vomit it up. It is poison to him.¹⁹

Sheppard's son Norton, in the story "The Lame Shall Enter First," experiences the same trouble when attempting to nourish himself. His alienation stems from the loss of his dead mother's love, and from the rejecting attitude of his father. He tries to satisfy his hunger for love; but all he has at hand is machine-made, un nourishing foods, which do not satisfy:

The boy approached the bar with the jar of peanut butter under his arm, a plate with a quarter of a small chocolate cake on it in

one hand and the ketchup bottle in the other ...He climbed up on the stool and began to spread peanut butter on the cake...The child turned the bottle of ketchup upside-down and began thumping ketchup onto the cake.²⁰

Norton's father ironically taunts him for not sharing with a "hungry" boy, blind to his own son's obvious hunger. Poor Norton vomits up his food, unable to find the sustenance he needs in this garbage his father gives him both materially and emotionally.

Everything came up, the cake, the peanut butter, the ketchup -- a limp sweet batter. He hung over it gagging, more came, and he waited with his mouth open over the plate as if he expected his heart to come up next.²¹

In the story "The Artificial Nigger," Mr. Head and Nelson suffer hunger and thirst in the city. This is just symptomatic of some of the other torments that they suffer in this hellish place. First they lose the lunch that they brought with them; then they lose their way home. Separated from the nourishment of the country, they proceed to lose each other. Everything falls apart. When the bond of love that holds them together is severed, they are lost souls, each incomplete without the other. The city is a place to mislead one, both physically and mentally. This fact is exemplified by their experience with the weighing

machine:

They came in the middle of the next block to a store that had a weighing machine in front of it and they both in turn stepped up on it and put in a penny and received a ticket. Mr. Head's ticket said, "You weigh 120 pounds. You are upright and brave and all your friends admire you." He put the ticket in his pocket, surprised that the machine should have got his character correct but his weight wrong, for he had weighed on a grain scale not long before and knew he weighed 110. Nelson's ticket said, "You weigh 98 pounds. You have a great destiny ahead of you but beware of dark women. Nelson did not know any women and he weighed only 68 pounds.²²

The machine manages to get everything wrong; it has a total disregard, moreover, for the age and type, or the individuality, of customer it serves. Collecting pennies is all that it is good for. These same qualities of coldness, heartlessness, dishonesty, and monetary greed are mirrored in Mr. Head during the course of the story. He comes to deny his grandson, for fear of having to pay for the damage that Nelson accidentally causes. The city brings out these monstrous qualities in Mr. Head, qualities which were not as noticeable before. In the urban atmosphere they seem quite acceptable.

This lack of human warmth is a recurring theme in the O'Connor stories and novels that are set in the

city. In Wise Blood, a street vendor who is selling potato peelers suggests that Hazel Motes substitute the machine for a human companion:

"Whyn't you take one of these home to yer wife?" the peeler man was saying.

"Don't have one," Haze muttered...

"Well, you got a dear old mother, ain't you?"

"No."

"Well pshaw," the man said, with his hand cupped to the people, "he needs one theseyer just to keep him company."²³

Enoch Emery, in the same novel, complains of the inhumanity of the people of Taulkinham: "'Look like all they want to do is knock you down,'"²⁴ he says. This observation is prophetic of Haze's later metamorphosis into a machine-man, when he runs over Solace Layfield.

Enoch goes on to observe "'This is one more hard place to make friends in. I been here two months and I don't know nobody."²⁵

Tanner, in "Judgement Day," is relentless in his efforts to make friends with the Negro who lives in the apartment next door. This man responds by knocking Tanner down, and later by killing him. Tanner's daughter had earlier warned him against trying to be friendly. In the city, there is little human contact:

"You keep away from them. Don't you go over there trying to get friendly with him... That's the way people were meant to get along in this world. Everybody can get along if they just mind their business. Live and let live."... "Up here everybody minds their own business and everybody gets along. That's all, you have to do."²⁶

Tanner is treated as an object or ignored when he tries to impinge on his neighbours' business:

He [the Negro] came on without appearing to see there was anyone else in the hall. "Haddy, John," Tanner said and nodded, but the Negro brushed past without hearing and went rattling rapidly down the stairs. ²⁷ Could be deaf and dumb, Tanner thought.

The Negro's woman "gave him a flat stare, then turned her head away and stepped wide of him as if she were skirting an open garbage can."²⁸

This evident deafness, dumbness, and blindness extends to all the other senses in the case of Rayber, in The Violent Bear It Away. In an attempt to guard himself against his emotions, he shuts himself off from all other human beings, including his son, Bishop:

He did not look at anything too long, he denied his senses unnecessary satisfactions. He slept in a narrow iron bed, worked sitting in a straight-backed chair, ate frugally,

spoke little, and cultivated the dullest for friends. At his high school he was the expert on testing. All his professional decisions were prefabricated and did not involve his participation...He kept himself upright on a very narrow line between madness and emptiness, and when the time came for him to lose his balance, he intended to lurch toward emptiness and fall on the side of his choice.²⁹

Rayber has thus sacrificed all human characteristics, in order to perfect his seeming control over himself and his life. He has turned himself into a machine, with a machine's emotional limitations. He rules out love, but he can justify murder as reasonable and civilized. His manner of life is an accurate description of a living death; it takes the loss of Bishop to make him realize this, however.

These machine-men, like Rayber, have no use for human values. At the same time, they have put a greater premium on material goods. One could say that materialism has become their religion.

We see a demonstration of commerce as religion during the peeler episode, in Wise Blood. In a role reversal, the "machine-seller" becomes a priest, while the preacher Hawks becomes a "hawker." These two con men compete with each other for their congregation. It

is not the souls of the crowd that they are trying to save. Saving is not their concern; they want these people to squander, to lose their money. The Salesman "stood in front of this altar, pointing over it at various people... 'You ain't gonna let one of these go by?'" he asks in the language of a backwoods preacher. The potato appears here as a symbol of baptism and spiritual rebirth: "The machine was a square tin box with a red handle, and as he turned the handle, the potato went into the box and then in a second, backed out the other side, white"³⁰ (Italics mine). The salesman-preacher goes on to assure his congregation "You'll thank the day you ever stopped here," the man said, 'you'll never forget it. Ever' one of you people purchasing one theseyer machines'll never forget it!"³¹. This is salvation by machine and by consumerism.

Meanwhile, false-preacher Hawks horns in, saying "Come on and give a nickel if you won't repent."³² His wording has both these alternatives seem equally effective paths to salvation.

The most blatant example of religion reduced to a machine-made commodity, and to a con game, occurs when

Haze meets Onnie Jay Holy. Everything about this man is false, including his name. His real name is Hoover Shoats. As with Asa Hawks' last name, this man's last name conjures up an animal image; it is that of a man in a low position on the evolutionary scale of humanity. His first name is a brand name of a type of machine. His smile is described as something machine-made and false. "He was not handsome but under his smile, there was an honest look that fitted into his face like a set of false teeth."³³

Onnie Jay has commercial expertise; he sets out to create a need, meanwhile entertaining his audience:

"I wight I had my gittarr here," the man [Onnie Jay] said, "'cause I just somehow can say sweet things to music better'n plain. And when you talk about Jesus you need a little music, don't you, friends?"³⁴

He continues:

"But all the time that I was ready to hang myself or to despair completely, I was sweet inside, like ever'body else, and I only needed something to bring it out. I only needed a little help friends."³⁵

In this brilliant and comic parody of the selling of a product through modern marketing techniques,

O'Connor casts Onnie Jay Holy as a master of the genre. He appeals to his audience's greed: "I'm not selling a thing; I'm giving something away!"³⁶ He allays possible fear and suspicion:

"Now I just want to give you folks a few reasons why you can trust this church," he said. "In the first place, friends, you can rely on it that it's nothing foreign connected with it. You don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it, it ain't true, that's all there is to it. No jokers in the deck, friends...I want to tell you a second reason why you can absolutely trust this church -- it's based on the Bible. Yes sir! It's based on your own personal interpretation of the Bible, friends. You can sit at home and interpret your own Bible however you feel in your heart it ought to be interpreted. That's right," he said, "just the way Jesus would have done it"...

"That ought to be enough reasons, friends," Onnie Jay Holy said, "but I'm going to tell you one more, just to show I can. This church is up-to-date! When you're in this church you can know that there's nothing or nobody ahead of you, nobody knows nothing you don't know, all the cards are on the table, friends, and that's a fact!"³⁷

Thus Onnie Jay artfully sells his product. He makes it sound easy, convenient, and "do-it-yourself." You get quick results -- in two months he is a new man. He cites an authority his audience can trust, the Bible no less, for the product's safety and purity. And most of all it is new. Here he touches on that overriding

secular concern with the latest technology, the best methods, the most recent knowledge.

His audience can identify with him. He is just like them, with his folksy language and his despair. Ironically, Holy/Stoats has tapped a real need, not for his hyped-up product, but for help, for something to really believe in.

All the characters who come to the city are questing for truth. What they get is falsehood, a manufactured, ersatz truth, relayed to them by machine. When Haze accuses Mr. Stoats with the words "You ain't true,"³⁸ Stoats feels his truth is self-evident:

"Friend, how can you say that?" Onnie Jay said. "Why I was on the radio for three years with a program that give real religious experiences to the whole family. Didn't you ever listen to it -- called Soulsease, a quarter hour of Mood, Melody, and Mentality? I'm a real preacher, friend...I'm a preacher and a radio star."³⁹

Unfortunately O'Connor's characters have only technology to turn to for comfort in the city. Characteristically, the preaching done in Wise Blood usually takes place in front of a movie theatre, or some sort of public entertainment. This is where city people find

their religion; they find it in popular culture, relayed by machine. They seem to have no other sort of temple. The only building approximating the description of temple is the hall in front of which Hawks hands out his tracts. The building is described as "a large building with columns and a dome...The steps went all the way across the front, and on either side there were stone lions sitting on pedestals."⁴⁰ When Enoch asks "What's inside theter building?" Hawks replies "A program letting out...My congregation."⁴¹

When Sabbath Lily Hawks seeks guidance, she writes to a lonely hearts, or advice column in the newspaper. The reply she receives is purely secular and does not answer her question. Here Sabbath relates "Mary Brittle's" response, to Haze:

"...I think your real problem is one of adjustment to the modern world...A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper prespective and do not let it warf you. Read some books on Ethical Culture."⁴²

Tanner, in "Judgement Day," is advised by his city-dwelling daughter to consult a machine for answers, and to forget about spiritual concerns:

"The trouble with you is," she said, "you sit in front of that window all the time where there's nothing to look out at. You need some inspiration and an out-let. If you would let me pull your chair around to look at the TV, you would quit thinking about morbid stuff, death and hell and judgement. My Lord."⁴³

All of these characters are literally lost, and directionless. It is important to note that all the characters that go to the city, to escape from something and to search for something else, want desperately to leave it in the end. They want to go home. This going home means going back to their "true home as well as to a new vision of life," according to Diane Tolomeo. She says of Parker's return home from the city, in the story "Parker's Back," "to return home for him means to accept his true nature."⁴⁴

Many of these characters have a Jonah-like experience that shows them that they cannot escape their destiny of prophet or at least believer, by running away; they must return home and accept life and their role in it.

Enoch, in Wise Blood, has this experience in a movie house:

In a few minutes he was up in a high part of

the maw, feeling around, like Jonah, for a seat...When he recovered himself, he was sitting against the wall of the picture show building and he was not thinking any more about escaping his duty.⁴⁵

In between ~~he~~ has experienced, via the medium of film, the horror of machines, and the terror of prisons; also, he has been shown his role as an ape.

Parker, in "Parker's Back," has this experience in a pool hall. He is a character who refuses to accept his role as prophet despite the revelation he has received. He persists in his worldly and frivolous pursuits. He tries to ignore his visions and to deny his double-barrelled prophet's name. The other pool hall players sense that he is a Jonah and cast him out. "Then 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."⁴⁶ Parker, meanwhile, begins to understand that "The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed."⁴⁷ Parker had come to a room full of "gambling machines...and pool tables,"⁴⁸ in order to escape his fate.

Haze, in Wise Blood, has his car to escape in; still, he comes to a dead end. There is no place else

to go. "He had known all along that there was no more country but he didn't know that there was not another city."⁴⁹ His car fails him; but, even before this, he knows he is trapped.

He should have known from the first that the city was a prison. Right from the start a policeman tells him that in the city all people are controlled by flashing lights. "Red is to stop, green is to go -- men and women, white folks and niggers, all go on the same light."⁵⁰

Men have been displaced by machines and then ruled by them in the city. When these characters turn to machines for comfort, they get misinformed or lied to. The city is a dehumanizing experience. Instead of achieving a state of grace, these characters are reduced to something lower than men. They murder and betray each other without compunction.

Enoch Emery's transformation into an ape, in Wise Blood, is symbolic of what the city does to men. Another telling symbol in that novel is the mummy, a reduced man who "was once as tall as you or me."⁵¹ Only the lucky receive revelation and "get home" in time.

Chapter 2

The Country Laid Waste

In the fictions that are set in the country, Flannery O'Connor uses machines to demonstrate a basic fallacy that many of her characters share. This fallacy is the belief in "good country people." Her country characters feel safe in their remoteness from the evils of urban life. In the country they are convinced that they can control "their" land and that they have power over their own little worlds. In other words, they reign godlike over their small dominions, dominating nature and other human beings alike.

The machine disrupts this fantasy by exposing the vulnerability and misguidedness of these would-be gods, and goddesses; it also exposes the transitory nature of the country as they know it. The horror of urbanization is a constant threat in all the fictions because of the way it alters the complacent lives of these characters. The self-righteous country people are forced to come to terms with their true nature, to see themselves as no less lost than city dwellers. They too have sacrificed goodness and humanity to materialistic greed. They have

believed too long in their own virtue and superiority, largely because there was no one powerful enough to contradict them, and no one outside their control; their own word was law in their small world.

In these stories O'Connor strips away the defenses and superfluities of her central characters. They then experience a forced contact with the essentials with persons or incidents that are free of their domination, and who do not rely on machines or on rationalistic ideas for their sense of power and of truth. These characters have a traditional faith in God and in nature, in what is concrete and self-evident. They do not need machines and scientific ideas to hold them up like a crutch. They kick out the foundations from under the pseudo-powers they encounter, and leave behind them mere rubble. The result is usually self-recognition and the realization of truth.

In "Good Country People", Joy/Hulga's artificial leg is the "machine" which keeps her illusions intact. Joy/Hulga enjoys mocking the foolish and dull good country people, and "lords it over them" with her city sophistication and Ph.D. She has it both ways, for while she mocks these country bumpkins, she need not prove her

superiority in a concrete fashion. She hides symbolically behind her artificial leg, and her heart condition, an affliction that prevents her, she says, from going out into the world:

Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about.¹

Joy/Hulga has created an ivory tower existence for herself in the country. Though she lives there, she has no contact with nature at all: "All day Joy sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks, but she didn't like dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men."² She ignores her surroundings to such an extent that she does not recognize her home when she sees it. With her glasses off:

She looked away...off into the hollow sky and then down at a black ridge and then down farther into what appeared to be two green swelling lakes. She didn't realize he [Manley Pointer] had taken her glasses but this landscape could not seem exceptional to her for she seldom paid any close attention to her surroundings."³

She shows the same disdain for people as she does for the country, especially for "good country people."

Hulga mocks the daughters, Glynese and Carramae, of Mrs. Freeman, the hired man's wife; she calls them Glycerin and Caramel.⁴ This shows a great lack of self-recognition, for Hulga is also a bizarre name. She also "looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity."⁵ As it turns out, she is the stupid one; she misjudges people and things by taking their surface appearance, or mask, as truth. Thus her contemptuous assessment of Manley Pointer, the Bible salesman: "Get rid of the salt of the earth...and let's eat,"⁶ she tells her mother. She clearly thinks of herself as superior to Pointer. The night before she is to go out with him "She had lain in bed imagining dialogues for them that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths that no Bible salesman could be aware of."⁷

Joy/Hulga is a totally deluded young woman. Her "conception" of the world and her place in it is completely at odds with the real world around her, and with the way that the other characters see her. Only the shock of the theft of her artificial leg awakens her to a re-assessment of all her preconceptions. Miles Orvell says of this loss of her artificial leg: "Before an incomprehensible evil -- before 'Nothing' --

she is powerless and helpless."⁸ Her proud certainty has gone. Joy/Hulga now has "recognition of her true, broken condition and the recognition as well of the Nothing that is all around her."⁹

There is much irony here, for Joy/Hulga's pride was founded mainly on her sophisticated belief in this same Nothing. As an atheist, she only believes in science and what can be empirically proven. Her mother reads in one of Joy/Hulga's beloved books:

Science on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh and declare that it is concerned solely with what-is. Nothing -- how can it be for science anything but a horror and a phantasm? If science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing.¹⁰

Her mother is quite correct in assuming this to be gibberish. Like Hulga this brand of belief elects to blind itself to what it fears and cannot understand -- what it is powerless to dominate, it ignores. The paradox is that science cannot be concerned with what-is if it does not know what-is, and refuses to investigate it. This leaves a whole area of the inexplicable studiously avoided. Meanwhile, Joy/Hulga

makes mistaken assumptions about the knowable world without even looking at it.

When Hulga's mother makes cliché comments that remark on this same inexplicability, and lack of absolute and measurable knowledge such as "Nothing is perfect...that is life!...well, other people have their opinions too,"¹¹ Joy/Hulga reacts as a true adherent of her materialist faith:

the large hulking Joy, whose constant outrage had obliterated every expression from her face, would stare just a little to the side of her, her eyes icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it.¹²

Joy/Hulga has re-created her own persona based on this rational and unemotional "religion." As in the Christian tradition she re-christened herself when she was reborn by way of her new belief. Her choice of the name Hulga is appropriate she feels:

She had arrived at it first purely on the basis of its ugly sound and then the full genius of its fitness had struck her. She had a vision of the name working like the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called. She saw it as the name of her highest creative act. One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the

greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga.¹³

Hulga's name, she believes, not only gives her control of "her dust," but a godlike power, even over the goddess of love, Venus. That she relates to the god Vulcan who is the blacksmith and maker of machines is significant. She not only regards love as an illusion,¹⁴ and thus feels that she has power over it; she also seeks to turn herself into a purely rational and unemotional machine-like creature -- not into Joy, but into obliviousness. She achieves this in an outward way, but it is only a mask like the con man Manley Pointer's affectations. "When Mrs. Hopewell thought the name, Hulga, she thought of the broad blank hull of a battleship...She continued to call her Joy to which the girl responded but in a purely mechanical way."¹⁵

Hulga persists in emphasizing her joylessness, ugliness, and mechanicalness by drawing attention to the symbol of her state, her mechanical limb: "When Hulga stumped into the kitchen in the morning (she could walk without making the awful noise but she made it -- Mrs. Hopewell was certain -- because it was ugly-sounding), she glanced at them and did not speak."¹⁶

Joy/Hulga is finally unmasked for the innocent and naive child she is on the trite occasion of what is probably her first date. Her mother rightly considers her a child:

It was hard for Mrs. Hopewell to realize that her child was thirty-two now...She thought of her still as a child because it tore her heart to think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any normal good times.¹⁷

She also dresses and acts like a child:

Here she went about all day in a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it. She thought this was funny; Mrs. Hopewell thought it was idiotic and showed simply that she was still a child. She was brilliant but she didn't have a grain of sense.¹⁸

While Joy/Hulga considers herself special and superior because of her intellectual pretensions and her seemingly novel religious philosophy, her pride comes in for a fall. Manley Pointer tells her in parting, as he steals her artificial leg: "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born."¹⁹ What Manley finds interesting about her is her artificial leg. That is the only thing that sets her apart. With the loss of the leg Joy/Hulga is ordinary. Her beliefs and illusions gone, she can begin afresh to

see things more clearly. Her last vision is of Manley's "blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake."²⁰ Though an optical illusion, it is a vision symbolic of faith, or belief in Christ's ability to walk on water. She is no longer ignoring the mysteries of Nothingness; at least she has her eyes open. Outsmarted by seemingly "good country people," she will no longer assume her control and her power. She is vulnerable to evil, and now she is trapped and physically powerless. The loss of her artificial leg turns her from an unfeeling machine into a vulnerable human being. Stripped of the machine-leg, she is stripped of her impassive mask. She can no longer impersonate the rational humanist.

In "A View of the Woods," machines are again the instruments of delusion. Mr. Fortune uses bulldozers, steamshovels, and concrete mixers to prove his power over this world and the next. Material gain is more important to him than the love of his family or the conservation of the beauty and utility of the rural landscape. He calls his wilful desecration of his land progress:

Progress...had always been his ally. He was not one of these old people who fight

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improvement, who object to everything new and cringe at every change. He wanted to see a paved highway in front of his house with plenty of new-model cars on it, he wanted to see a supermarket store across the road from him, he wanted to see a gas station, a motel, a drive-in picture-show within easy distance. Progress had suddenly set all this in motion ...There was talk of their getting a telephone line. There was talk of paving the road that ran in front of the Fortune place. There was talk of an eventual town. He thought this should be called Fortune, Georgia. He was a man of advanced vision, even if he was seventy-nine years old. 21

Mr. Fortune's name connotes his materialistic obsessions. He has confused the term "progress" with "improvement"; and he has succumbed to the notion, encouraged by modern marketing techniques, that newer means better. His ambitions for his rural holdings are a catalogue of almost every urban blight that one can list. Yet he calls himself a man of vision!

O'Connor's scathingly comic description of the vulgarity of Tilman's place enriches the picture of the urban-blight-to-be. Tilman will build a similar place on Mr. Fortune's land. The name Tilman implies the destructive influence such men wreak on nature, which is fine till man comes and never the same after his handiwork is completed:

Tilman operated a combination country store,

filling station, scrap-metal dump, used-car lot and dance hall five miles down the highway...Signs up and down the highway announced that Tilman's was only five miles away, only four, only three, only two, only one; then 'Watch out for Tilman's, Around this bend!' and finally, 'Here it is, Friends, TILMAN'S!' in dazzling red letters.

Tilman's was bordered on either side by a field of old used-car bodies, a kind of ward for incurable automobiles. He also sold outdoor ornaments, such as stone cranes and chickens, urns, jardinieres, whirligigs, and farther back from the road, so as not to depress his dance-hall customers, a line of tombstones and monuments.²²

This description, with its elements of decay and death, foreshadows the outcome of Mr. Fortune's machinations.

This foolish and stubborn old man alienates his family and his beloved granddaughter when he decides "to sell the lot right in front of the house for a gas station."²³ Mary Fortune Pitts, the granddaughter, bemoans the loss of the view of the woods. This commences a fight to the death between the old man and the one person he loves. The theme of this battle is really the fight between love and truth, which are traditional religious values, and secular materialism.

The view of the woods has special significance as a recurring motif in the writings of Flannery O'Connor. Robert Fitzgerald has said that "a fortress wall of

pine woods reappear[s] like a signature in story after story."²⁴ George D. Murphy and Caroline L. Cherry in their essay "Flannery O'Connor and the Integration of Personality" suggest that as in Nathaniel Hawthorne's writings:

the woods are the symbolic locus of natural impulse and feeling. Flannery O'Connor's woods, full of snakes and naked arsonists, the scene of sado-masochistic beatings and of murder, play a...psycho-symbolic role...Old Mr. Fortune of "A View of the Woods" reflects on the treeline bordering his extensively improved property three distinct times the day before he dies. The first two times, the trees strike him simply as woods, but the third time, when they are suffused by the blood-red light of sunset, he sees the tree line as the emblem of an "uncomfortable mystery."

The signatory "fortress wall" of trees in her fiction can be interpreted on one level of meaning as constituting a kind of limina, or a barrier between the rational and irrational, the conscious and unconscious.²⁵

Like Joy/Hulga, Mr. Fortune has turned a blind eye on what he could not control, including all the irrational, mysterious, and emotional elements in his world. He pretends, he even convinces himself, that they do not exist. He controls his family now with his ownership of the land they farm. After death he will still have control over them:

Secretly he had made his will and left

everything in trust to Mary Fortune, naming his lawyer and not Pitts as executor. When he died Mary Fortune could make the rest of them jump; and he didn't doubt for a minute that she would be able to do it.²⁶

What the wilfully blind old man neglects to take into consideration is the love that Mary Fortune Pitts has for her family. When her father beats her she sees it for what it truly is, love and not humiliation, or cruelty, or bullying pride. Her father is concerned that she have a proper sense of values, not those manipulative and materialistic values of her grandfather. Her father is simply fighting her grandfather's influence over her, for her own sake, and Mary Fortune senses this. That is why she denies that he beats her, and it is true in the sense that he does not do it as her grandfather later does -- to prevail in a contest of pride and wills. Her father beats her only for love of his child.

Ultimately her father's beatings do bear fruit, for Mary Fortune cannot be bought or bribed by material goods. Her grandfather uses another machine, a boat, to try to win her love. "He decided it was going to cost him considerable to buy her good humour again and that he had better do it with a boat, since he wanted one too."²⁷

Mr. Fortune has tried to use one type of machine to defeat and banish the irrational and inexplicable forces of nature, symbolized by the woods. He has tried to control his granddaughter with another machine.

To the old man the woods are a threat, as is anything that he cannot control. To his granddaughter, however, they are a positive symbol. The love she bears the woods and nature is as good and right as the obedience and respect she gives to her father. Mr. Fortune's plan for the woods is a distortion of nature, as is his plan for his granddaughter. He is incapable of true love; he must try to mold and alter people and things before he can accept them. His granddaughter, like the woods, must be sacrificed. In their places he seeks monuments to himself: in the case of the woods an urban blight, in the case of the child, his own self-image:

he watched the small robust figure [his granddaughter] stalk across the yellow-dotted field toward the woods, his pride in her, as if it couldn't help itself, returned like the gentle little tide on the new lake -- all except the part of it that had to do with her refusal to stand up to Pitts: that pulled back like an undertow. If he could have taught her to stand up to Pitts the way she stood up to him, she would have been a

perfect child, as fearless and sturdy-minded as anyone could want; but it was her one failure of character. It was the one point on which she did not resemble him. He turned and looked away over the lake to the woods across it and told himself that in five years, instead of woods, there would be houses and stores and parking places and that the credit for it could go largely to him.²⁸

At the end of the story his machines forsake him and he is left to the mercy of nature; this nature includes both the landscape outside himself, and his own emotional nature which he has tried to overrule and ignore:

Then he fell on his back and looked up helplessly along the bare trunks into the tops of the pines and his heart expanded once more with a convulsive motion. It expanded so fast that the old man felt as if he were being pulled after it through the woods, felt as if he were running as fast as he could with the ugly pines toward the lake. He perceived that there would be a little opening there, a little place where he could escape and leave the woods behind him...He realized suddenly that he could not swim and that he had not bought the boat. On both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance. He looked around desperately for someone to help him but the place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was,, gorging itself on clay.²⁹

There is an implied analogy between this yellow monster machine "as stationary as he was" and the old

man. Both are spiritually dead. Both gorge themselves on clay, only he gorges himself on human clay, on others weaker than he. He has just gorged himself on his own granddaughter. Fighting against his own emotional self -- symbolized by the child he loves, who is his mirror image -- he ironically loses control of himself.

Like Joy/Hulga, he is trapped at the end, and vulnerable to the nature he always refused to recognize. His machines are gone and he is on his own. Also, like Joy/Hulga, he is at the mercy of his own weak heart, which signifies his own repressed emotions and fears. He has come face to face with truths that he can no longer deny. All he has to show for his much vaunted progressive outlook is a cruel, unjust, and irrational act -- the murder of a child. That his machine-worship was misguided is supported by the final image of the machine "gorging itself on clay." Ultimately the machine is man's enemy, a barren symbol of death, destruction, and the suppression of human and spiritual forces.

In the story "A Circle in the Fire," Mrs. Cope rules supreme over her pastures and woods, all the

while. mouthing platitudes she does not believe in. Being luckier materially than most people, she feels morally superior as well. She constantly talks of being thankful to those who have little to be thankful for. "Why, think of all those poor Europeans," Mrs. Cope went on, "that they put in boxcars like cattle and rode them to Siberia. Lord," she said, "we ought to spend half our time on our knees."³⁰

Actually, she does not identify with those poor Europeans at all, and feels no love or charitable disposition towards them. What she does feel is that she deserves her good fortune. Rather than being thankful to her Maker, she believes that she owes her bounty entirely to her own efforts, as she tells Mrs. Pritchard, her hired woman:

I have the best kept place in the county and do you know why? Because I work. I've had to work to save this place and work to keep it ...I don't let anything get ahead of me and I'm not always looking for trouble. I take it as it comes.³¹

Clearly, this is a woman who feels, as her name implies, that she is indomitable. She gives no thought to those lesser beings who have worked and yet have nothing to show for it. Of all the people she exhorts

to thankfulness, she is the one who should be most thankful. Her pride is due for its comeuppance.

This comeuppance takes the form of three boys, sent to her farm to test her theories of thankfulness and her ability to cope. In other words, this woman, who believes only in herself and in what she can control, this rational materialist, is about to deal with the irrational and the inexplicable.

Powell, the leader of the three city boys, wears an emblem that bodes ill for Mrs. Cope: "He had on a sweat shirt with a faded destroyer printed on it but his chest was so hollow that the destroyer was broken in the middle and seemed on the point of going under."³²

This destroyer is a symbol of Mrs. Cope's control over land and lives, a control also "on the point of going under." She keeps an iron grip over what goes on on her place, treating her workers like machines. She would rather wear out a man than a machine as we see in this exchange with her Negro worker Culver:

Mrs. Cope turned her head and saw that he had not gone through the gate because he was too lazy to get off and open it. He was going the long way around at her expense...

"Why aren't you going through the gate there?" she asked and waited, her eyes shut and her mouth stretched flat as if she were prepared for any ridiculous answer.

"Got to raise the blade on the mower if we do," he said and his gaze bore just to the left of her. Her Negroes were as destructive and impersonal as the nut grass.

Her eyes, as she opened them, looked as if they would keep on enlarging until they turned her wrongsideout. "Raise it," she said and pointed across the road with the trowel.³³

She sees the workers on her place, not as human beings, but as something she must fight and control as she does the nut grass. She does not even see them because she does not look at them; and her manner is clearly contemptuous.

The three young visitors from the city are Mrs. Cope's chance to redeem herself. Like the Europeans in boxcars, they are herded like cattle into urban "developments." As one of the boys describes these developments: "The only way you can tell your own is by smell...They're four stories high and there's ten of them, one behind the other."³⁴

Powell, whose father used to work for Mrs. Cope, has come back to the farm because he is miserable in Atlanta. As one of his two friends says: "He don't like it in Atlanta...He ain't ever satisfied with where

he's at except this place here."³⁵ He views the farm as a sort of heaven or garden of Eden:

"Listen here," the smallest boy said, "all the time we been knowing him he's been telling us about this here place. Said it was everything here. Said it was horses here. Said he had the best time of his entire life right here on this here place. Talks about it all the time..."

After a minute the little boy said, "Say, lady, you know what he said one time? He said when he died he wanted to come here!"

For a second Mrs. Cope looked blank; then she blushed; then a peculiar look of pain came over her face as she realized that these children were hungry.³⁶

Here is Mrs. Cope's chance to feed the hungry, and share her own good fortune with the unfortunate. However, she fails utterly. The boys' hunger is the spiritual kind. They are displaced persons, seeking a home and a place to belong, symbolically showing them that they don't belong there, Mrs. Cope feeds them junk food, cokes and crackers, which they reject. They will get no nourishment from her.

Mrs. Cope is constantly worried about keeping her own possessions intact rather than sharing. "Mrs. Cope was always afraid someone would get hurt on her place and sue her for everything she had."³⁷ Therefore she does not let the boys ride the horses. Her constant

fear is of fire in her woods. When the boys want to camp out there she objects strenuously:

"In the woods!" she said. "Oh no! The woods are very dry now, I can't have people smoking in my woods. You'll have to camp out in the field, in this field here next to the house, where there aren't any trees."

"Where she can keep her eye on you," the child [Mrs. Cope's daughter] said under her breath.

"Her woods," the large boy muttered and got out of the hammock.³⁸

The boys object to the way Mrs. Cope continuously claims ownership of the land and the woods. As the boys put it "She don't own them woods, '... 'Man, Gawd owns them woods and her too.'"³⁹

The claim for ownership between Mrs. Cope and God (whose claim is represented here by the boys) continues, till finally Mrs. Cope cannot cope anymore:

Two blue veins had come out on either side of Mrs. Cope's forehead and Mrs. Pritchard observed them with satisfaction. "Like I toljer," she said, "there ain't a thing you can do about it."⁴⁰

In the end, Powell and his gang set fire to the woods, showing that if it does not belong to the boys, it does not belong to Mrs. Cope either.

At last Mrs. Cope is put in the position of the dispossessed and the displaced. Finally she perceives that she is one with them, no better and no worse:

The child came to a stop beside her mother and stared up at her face as if she had never seen it before. It was the face of the new misery she felt, but on her mother it looked old and it looked as if it might have belonged to anybody, a Negro or a European or to Powell himself.⁴¹

Through the catalytic powers of the boys, who are compared to the Biblical prophets in the fiery furnace, Mrs. Cope comes to see that she is not all powerful; nor does she have special title to good fortune. The country is being laid waste, perhaps to make room for an eventual parking lot as one of the boys suggests he would like to build.⁴² Destroyed too is Mrs. Cope's secure feeling of escape from those mysteries that she cannot control. She feels constantly pursued by these demons, but in her own little world she rules supreme:

The fortress line of trees was a hard granite blue, the wind had risen overnight and the sun had come up a pale gold. The season was changing. Even a small change in the weather made Mrs. Cope thankful, but when the seasons changed she seemed almost frightened at her good fortune in escaping whatever it was that pursued her.⁴³

As in the case of old Mr. Fortune, the woods are a

threat to the well-being of Mrs. Cope. Nature, like the nut grass, can escape her controlling hand at any time. With the coming of the three boys, she loses control of "her woods." Mrs. Cope is pursued by the real world where she cannot hide behind her possessions and her power. There she would be simply an ordinary, vulnerable person, subject to nature's decrees, and to the mysteries of the universe. Her daughter and the three boys seek to destroy the woods. To them these woods are a symbol of Mrs. Cope's dominating force, her desire to put them in their place and keep them down. Her possessions are her power, and the children subconsciously resent the woods because of this. When she tries to mold her daughter into a class-conscious snob like herself, the response she gets is:

"Leave me be," the child said in a high irritated voice. "Leave me be. Just leave me be. I ain't you," and she went off to the woods as if she were stalking out an enemy, her head thrust forward and each hand gripped on a gun.⁴⁴

In the woods the child continues her tirade against her mother's crushing domination. Whether in a city development or in Mrs. Cope's own farmhouse, everyone in contact with her power is suffocating, imprisoned by her will to have things as she sees fit:

"I'm going to get you one by one and beat you black and blue. Line up. LINE UP!" she [the daughter] said and waved one of the pistols at a cluster of long bare-trunked pines, four times her height, as she passed them. She kept moving, muttering and growling to herself and occasionally hitting out with one of the guns at a branch that got in her way. From time to time she stopped to remove the thorn vine that caught in her shirt and she would say, "Leave me be, I told you. Leave me be," and give it a crack with the pistol and then stalk on.

Presently she sat down on a stump to cool off but she planted both feet carefully and firmly on the ground. She lifted them and put them down several times, grinding them fiercely into the dirt as if she were crushing something under her heels.⁴⁵

Powell is only echoing the child's sentiments when he says "'If this place was not here any more,...you would never have to think of it again.'"⁴⁶

When they set fire to the woods they are fulfilling the child's earlier fantasy, when she says to her mother at the beginning of the story: "'It looks like a fire. You better get up and smell around and see if the woods ain't on fire.'"⁴⁷

The joyous shrieks at the end of the story are the sound of prisoners set free. The space newly cleared of trees is likened to the circle the angel cleared for the Biblical prophets in the fiery furnace. The

powerful Mrs. Cope, so concerned with her possessions and so denying of the rights of individuals, has been symbolically routed at last. While preserving her landscape, she was laying waste human souls.

If such as Mrs. Cope control and spoil the rural experience, it is better that it gives way to parking lots as Powell's friend suggests. Nobody can enjoy it so it might as well be forgotten rather than remain a painful memory.

The suffering of the have-nots of the world can no longer be ignored. Machines and modern technology are putting people into cattle cars and city developments. Now Mrs. Cope sees that she too can be victimized that way, that all of her misguided, mechanized power amounts to nothing. In such a world it is no longer possible to have faith in the rational and in what is produced by man. Mrs. Cope must stop trying to escape from the real world; she must come to terms with powers greater than her own.

This godless world, which we see in "A Circle in the Fire," and in Mrs. Cope's pride, is more fully realized in the story "The Life You Save May Be Your

Own." The central symbol here is the car which is both Mr. Shiftlet's goal and his religion. When he arrives at the old woman's farm he determines to get possession of the car. Being a man with no moral scruples whatsoever, he is willing to do anything in order to achieve his goal. What this involves finally is human sacrifice. He sacrifices an innocent victim, a deaf idiot girl, to his own greed.

This story gives a display of materialism at its most basic level. The old woman wants a son-in-law. Mr. Shiftlet wants the car that she owns. He is willing to take the girl as his wife in order to get the car; and the old woman unwisely uses the car to pay him for this bogus marriage. In letting her daughter be used as a commercial pawn, she is as morally reprehensible as Shiftlet.

The reason behind Shiftlet's total lack of warmth and humanity is that he is a totally alienated being. He lacks faith and all comprehension of right and wrong. As the one-armed Shiftlet puts it himself:

"Lady," he said, jerking his short arm up as if he could point with it to her house and yard and pump, "there ain't a broken thing on this plantation that I couldn't fix for you,

one-arm jackleg or not. I'm a man," he said with a sullen dignity, "even if I ain't a whole one. I got," he said, tapping his knuckles on the floor to emphasize the immensity of what he was going to say, "a moral intelligence!" and his face pierced out of the darkness into a shaft of doorlight and he stared at her as if he were astonished himself at this impossible truth.⁴⁸

Shiftlet lies so much that he almost believes his own inventions, forgetting what the real truth is. His first words in this story are lies: "'Lady,' he said in a firm nasal voice, 'I'd give a fortune to live where I could see me a sun do that every evening.'"⁴⁹ He poses against the sun in the form of a crooked cross. This is the Christlike pose he adopts during his stay in the country. Everything he says and pretends to is the exact opposite of what he believes in. He claims he is not interested only in money:

"'Lady,' he said slowly. 'there's some men that some things mean more to them than money.'...He told the old woman then that all most people were interested in was money, but he asked what a man was made for...He said he had fought and bled in the Arm Service of his country and visited every foreign land and that everywhere he had seen people that didn't care if they did a thing one way or another. He said he hadn't been raised thataway."⁵⁰

The only time Shiftlet speaks the truth is when he is discussing the car. He compares himself to a monk of

old when he is given the car as a place to sleep in, thus revealing its religious significance for him: "Why listen, Lady," he said with a grin of delight, "the monks of old slept in their coffins!"⁵¹ What he fails to perceive in his coffin analogy is the truth that this religion will only lead to spiritual death. He also speaks truthfully of alienation and modern society's ills when he looks at the car:

He had raised the hood and studied the mechanism and he said he could tell that the car had been built in the days when cars were really built. You take now, he said, one man puts in one bolt and another man puts in another bolt and another man puts in another bolt so that it's a man for a bolt. That's why you have to pay so much for a car: you're paying all those men. Now if you didn't have to pay but one man, you could get you a cheaper car and one that had had a personal interest taken in it, and it would be a better car. The old woman agreed with him that this was so.⁵²

The trouble is that he extends this little sermon as a metaphor for his "personal interest" in Lucynell.

When he talks of how man is divided into two parts, body and spirit, he says: "the body, lady, is like a house: it don't go anywhere; but the spirit, lady is like a automobile: always on the move, always...."⁵³ With these words he gives himself away. He sees himself

as a car, "always on the move." His body is incomplete, but his spirit or soul is non-existent; he has the emotional make-up of a machine.

In the end Shiftlet leaves the country, which he hates, behind him, in the same way he leaves his new bride. That he deserts this "angel of Gawd"⁵⁴ proves him truly damned. His "voyage of salvation" takes him to the city, but what awaits him there is not heaven, but hell. After the hitchhiker tells him to go to the devil, "Mr. Shiftlet felt that the rottenness of the world was about to engulf him."⁵⁵ His final prayer for salvation is ironically a prayer for his own extinction: "'Oh Lord!' he prayed. 'Break forth and wash the slime from this earth!'"⁵⁶ When last seen Shiftlet is still heading at breakneck speed in the wrong direction. Lacking the moral intelligence to know right from wrong, he fails to see the sign posts on the road which warn him to take heed: "Drive carefully. The life you save may be your own."⁵⁷

The stories set in the country show that greed and soullessness lurk even in the most Edenic setting. These Edens are despoiled by the calculating greed of those who think only of present gain and not of the

emptiness of the future. The machines which they worship in wonder, and which represent progress to them will not help them escape from the spiritual wasteland they are carving out, for there will be no place else to go. They have sacrificed love and faith for material rewards. The result is hopeless isolation, with no chance for revelation and grace.

Chapter 3

Man as Machine

In many of Flannery O'Connor's stories, characters are portrayed as being more machinelike than human. This is done in various ways, all showing a dangerous lack of humanity and of spiritual values.

The most blatant portrayal of man as machine is the one in which man is literally and physically automaton-like. Hazel Motes, in Wise Blood, is the best example of this. Haze is depicted as "a mechanical toy that is rigid and obsessed. The first sentence of Wise Blood shows him in this pose: "Hazel Motes sat at a forward angle on the green plush train seat, looking one minute at the window as if he might want to jump out of it...."¹ A later description says: "He had the look of being held there, as if by an invisible hand, as if, if the hand lifted up, the figure would spring across the pool in one leap without the expression on his face changing once."²

Haze is also likened to a puppet in the following passage: "Haze got up and hung there a few seconds. He

looked as if he were held by a rope caught in the middle of his back and attached to the train ceiling."³ His actions are those of a robot as well: "His head turned to one side and then the other, first toward one sign, and then another."⁴ Rebecca Roxburgh Butler observes that: "Like a puppet, too, Motes, while possessing a droll resemblance to a human being, is wooden, inflexible, and liable to tie himself in knots when he reverses direction too quickly."⁵ She also observes a resemblance between Haze and his car: "He also buys himself an ancient Essex, which, somewhat like Hazel, has the inexplicable habit of jerking backwards and forwards at the most inappropriate times."⁶ Here she is referring to Haze's constant self-contradictions as when he buys a hat meant to be the opposite of his preacher-style hat, and it turns out to be exactly identical, or when he plans to avoid Jesus by avoiding sin, and then switches to a plan to sin in order to prove that he does not believe in Jesus.

"Gilbert H. Muller, in Nightmares and Visions, describes the grotesque character, (listing Hazel Motes as an example), as "obsessed...automaton-like,... mechanical."⁷

Margaret Peller Feeley, in her essay "Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood: The Negative Way," links his outer appearance to his obsessiveness:

His physical rigidity underscores his obsession with Jesus that is obvious to everyone but himself. He is constantly mistaken for a preacher when he insists he's not, and even Enoch Emery, who is a near-moron understands Haze better than he does himself: "I knew when I first seen you you didn't have nobody nor nothing but Jesus."⁸

Haze displays other machinelike or non-human qualities. He shows no feelings or emotions and dislikes being touched. Love is an alien condition for him, and he rejects all offerers of it, from Sabbath Lily Hawks to Mrs. Flood. Lust, like all other human contact, holds no attractions for him. When he pays a visit to the prostitute Leora Watts, to prove that sin does not exist, he longs to escape from her grasp. "If she had not had him so firmly by the arm, he might have leaped out the window."⁹

In his wish to escape the Christ figure that he identifies with death, and that he fears is constantly hounding him, Haze attempts to convert "to nothing." In so doing he has merely managed to shed his human

attributes, and to adopt in their stead a rigid and monomaniacal exterior. This conversion is only skin deep. His conflict still remains because he cannot escape "the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind."¹⁰ On the surface he seems to be a machine, emotionless and controlled. Inside, the battle rages on, for it is not possible to reject one's humanity without paying a severe price in alienation.

Haze is not alone in these machinelike tendencies. Mrs. Freeman, in the opening lines of "Good Country People," is given the attributes of a truck:

Besides the neutral expression that she wore when she was alone, Mrs. Freeman had two others, forward and reverse, that she used for all her human dealings. Her forward expression was steady and driving, like the advance of a heavy truck. Her eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it. She seldom used the other expression because it was not often necessary for her to retract a statement, but when she did, her face came to a complete stop, there was an almost imperceptible movement of her black eyes, during which they seemed to be receding, and then the observer would see that Mrs. Freeman, though she might stand there as real as several grain sacks thrown on top of each other, was no longer there in spirit.¹¹

Constance Pierce, in "The Mechanical World of 'Good Country People,'" comments that:

It is very apt that O'Connor chooses this opening for her story because the truck metaphor not only characterizes Mrs. Freeman, but also prefigures the duality of each of the story's main characters. Mrs. Hopewell, Hulga, and Manley Pointer all have, like Mrs. Freeman, a mechanistic way of dealing with the world, a façade that covers their underlying "neutrality," or "nothingness," however hard they may try to conceal it.¹²

Another demonstration of the robot-like "nothingness" of O'Connor's characters is their use of clichés or automatic and prescriptive replies or comments. Mrs. Hopewell is the most prominent exponent of the use of clichés, closely followed by Mrs. Freeman, a champion in one-upmanship:

Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs. Hopewell's favorite sayings. Another was: that is life! And still another, the most important, was: well, other people have their opinions too...

When Mrs. Hopewell said to Mrs. Freeman that life was like that, Mrs. Freeman would say, "I always said so myself." Nothing had been arrived at by anyone that had not first been arrived at by her. She was quicker than Mr. Freeman. When Mrs. Hopewell said to her after they had been on the place a while, "You know, you're the wheel behind the wheel," and winked, Mrs. Freeman had said, "I know it. I've always been quick. It's some that are quicker than others."

"Everybody is different," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Yes, most people is," Mrs. Freeman said.

"It takes all kinds to make the world."

"I always said it did myself."¹³

Constance Pierce claims that this disarming and optimistic speech pattern of Mrs. Hopewell is just a mechanical façade to mask a cold, mechanistic and materialistic streak:

But running underneath this "humane" exterior is a hard, dehumanizing practicality. Good country people make good farm hands, and she is anxious to keep the Freemans contented. She has also been quick to notice Pointer's interest in Hulga, who she wishes could have some "normal good times" like the Freeman girls (and perhaps get married and leave?). Her tolerance for people, in some ways, seems directly proportionate to their usefulness; thus she has divided the world into "good country people" who, though they are sometimes irritating, deserve her patience, and "trash" who do not.¹⁴

Thus we have her flattering "wheel behind the wheel" allusion to someone she wants to use as she would a machine.

Another character who favours clichés is Mrs. McIntyre in "The Displaced Person." She is constantly quoting the sayings of her late husband, the judge, such as "'One fellow's misery is the other fellow's gain,'" and "'The devil you know is better than the devil you don't.'"¹⁵ The use of these banalities shows up not only her robot-like response to humanity in general, but also her cold, self-serving and amoral

nature.

Manley Pointer, like Mrs. Hopewell, makes use of a façade to achieve his goal with machinelike relentlessness. He acts out a love scene with Hulga, by rote, spouting lines that are so predictable as to sound pre-recorded:

"You got to say it," he repeated. "You got to say you love."...

The boy was frowning. "you got to say it. I said it and you got to say it," he said...

"I just want to know if you love me or don'tcher?" and he caught her to him and wildly planted her face with kisses until she said, "Yes, yes."

"Okay then," he said, letting her go. "Prove it."¹⁶

Yet another clue to the machinelike nature of these characters is the lack of emotion or human feeling displayed in their philosophies or general approach to life.

Rayber, in The Violent Bear It Away, seeks to banish all emotion and love from his nature. He literally tunes it out or turns it off at the flick of a switch when it threatens him, as it does in the scene when the little girl preaches in the tabernacle:

"Listen you people," she shrieked, "I see a damned soul before my eye! I see a dead man Jesus hasn't raised. His head is in the window but his ear is deaf to the Holy Word!"...

He [Rayber] was groping fiercely about him, slapping at his coat pockets, his head, his chest, not able to find the switch that would cut off the voice. Then his hand touched the button and he snapped it.¹⁷

With this action he also tunes out Tarwater who is now ripe for his guidance and his love. Rayber is indeed damned, and deaf to both the Holy Word and the words of his loved ones:

Rayber's face had the wooden look it wore when his hearing aid was off. He did not see the boy's expression at all...Through his fury he could not discern that for the first time the boy's eyes were submissive.¹⁸

Blind, deaf, wooden, insensitive to others: these are indeed the qualities of a machine and not of a man.

Hulga, in "Good Country People," and Rufus, in "The Lambe Shall Enter First," demonstrate, by contrast, the difference between a machinelike thought process and a natural human one. Hulga adopts an atheistic, existential philosophy in order to keep all sentiment at bay. She clumps her artificial leg to stress the fact that she subscribes to the mechanical and logical school of thought, rather than to the more human and

irrational one. Like the machine she pretends to be, she is blind and insensitive, totally lacking in self-knowledge. As Constance Pierce says:

Hulga, for all her degrees and intellect, has not (as her mother observes earlier) "a grain of sense" about people, herself, and the general nature of things...Hulga's identity lies in her name, in her artificial leg, and in her existential philosophy. Ultimately Pointer's hoodwinking divests her of all...At the end of the story, Pointer leaves her with her face "churning" like the mechanical engine she is. Without her leg and her philosophy, "Hulga" is just an empty name. She has no identity, and when she finally must really confront Nothingness, it is in herself.¹⁹

Rufus, on the other hand, does not use his affliction, a club foot, as an excuse to become a machine. He rejects the new orthopedic shoe he is offered, thus rejecting modern technology and the faith in logic alone. He refuses to put his faith in that which is artificial. The shoe is described as "a black slick shapeless object, shining hideously. It looked like a blunt weapon, highly polished."²⁰ It is further described by the proud clerk as an instrument of delusion. "'With this shoe...you won't know you're walking. You'll think you're riding!...'In that shoe...he won't know he don't have a normal foot."²¹ Rufus will have none of this. He opts for reality; he does

not believe in weapons that can fail him. Both the clerk and Sheppard, meanwhile, are revolted by the reality of Johnson's deformity, which they quickly mask in the new shoe.

Rufus believes in the old time religion. If he is evil, he says that his actions are influenced by Satan. Because he is clear-seeing and knows reality from illusion, no fast-talking social worker or psychologist is going to hoodwink him into mistaking wrong for right. He tells Norton that the boy's guidance counselor father Sheppard is not right: "'Listen here,' he hissed, 'I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't right!'"²² According to Henry Taylor in his essay "The Halt Shall Be Gathered Together: Physical Deformity in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor":

Johnson is not good either, but his actions are in accord with the nature of his soul, and he knows this. In that sense he is right... He is self-reliant, aware of the evil in his nature, and closer than Sheppard is to a realization of how to exorcise his demon... Johnson knows that he is alienated, and he knows that his redemption may be brought about by the kind of miracle in which he believes, the kind of miracle that Sheppard could never conceive of.²³

Thus it is not the "perfected," machinelike person, but the fallible, human one who is closer to achieving

redemption. The latter type of person has not turned himself off, literally and figuratively, to the possibility of miracles. He is still open to them and to faith and so can be saved.

In Flannery O'Connor's fictions, glasses are one of the most common of all the mechanical props or devices which show a physical lack, and which according to Josephine Hendin²⁴ and Henry Taylor,²⁵ represent a spiritual lack and emptiness. In almost every story, one, or all of the main characters wear eyeglasses to signal their spiritual blindness. As William V. Davis puts it:

Hers [Flannery O'Connor's] is a world in which most of the characters, like O.E. Parker, live with their "vision...so blurred that for an instant he thought he had been attacked by some creature from above, a giant hawk-eyed angel wielding a hoary weapon."²⁶

Hazel Motes has his vision blurred when he puts on his mother's glasses. This means that the machine or artificial accoutrement that he is using keeps him from reality, rather than revealing it to him. The only vision he does achieve, with the aid of this technology of the eyes, is a mockery of religion. Reflected in a mirror he sees Sabbath Lily Hawks and the new Jesus.

They are superimposed over his blurred vision of his mother's face in his own; he now sees himself as the new Jesus with his mother, and makes the connection of an image of mother and child. This mock Holy Family is a falsehood, with a slattern as the Virgin Mary, and a shrunken man full of trash as Christ. Haze rejects this false vision and the glasses that produced it.

There are other instances of glasses that distort. In "Judgement Day" Tanner gives the Negro Coleman a pair of carved wooden glasses. These distort Coleman's vision. Rather than seeing himself as an equal and a threat to the white man, Tanner, he sees himself as inferior when he has the glasses on; he sees the white man as his boss. It is ironically Tanner, the bestower of the glasses, who without them begins to have a vision of reality, and of humility rather than pride:

And then he [Coleman] looked directly at Tanner and grinned or grimaced, Tanner could not tell which, but he had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot.²⁷

Tarwater, in The Violent Bear It Away, repeatedly questions Rayber's humanity, wondering whether his uncle is a man or a machine. A real man would have

rescued him from the old man, gun or no gun; or he would have come back for him at some later date:

The glint in the boy's eyes followed the wires of the hearing aid down to the metal box stuck in his belt. "What you wired for?" he drawled. "Does your head light up?"...

The boy continued to study the machine. His uncle's face might have been only an appendage to it...He gazed briefly at the pained eyes behind his uncle's glasses, appearing to abandon a search for something that could not possibly be there. The glint in his eye fell on the metal box half-sticking out of Rayber's shirt. "Do you think in the box," he asked, "or do you think in your head?"...

Rayber heard his own heart, magnified by the hearing aid, suddenly begin to pound like the works of a gigantic machine in his chest.²⁸

Rayber is indeed an example of a machine-man, all thought and little or no emotion. In the end, like Hulga, he is left with Nothingness. Apart from his machine-identity, there is nothing else.

In "The Artificial Nigger" we have a real artificial man as a symbol. The miserable-looking machine-made statue represents what man is evolving into, as well as the tawdriness of the end-result of human technology. The machine age has ended by putting man in thrall and into a position of degradation. So much for human pride and wrongheadedness. According to

Henry Taylor:

The reconciliation between Nelson and Mr. Head is brought about when they share a sense of wonder at the most remarkable thing they have seen all day, an object which...seems an ultimate parody of the man of parts who is partly there...

Both Nelson and Mr. Head are given revelations at the end of the story, revelations brought about by their encounter with the artificial Negro. Mr. Head feels an understanding of God's mercy, and Nelson feels the rightness of his grandfather's judgment. What they have both seen is themselves as they are, for the city has tried them both beyond their limitations.²⁹

When Mr. Head denies his grandson, and when Nelson refuses to forgive him, they have both shed their humanity. They are becoming robots or artificial humans.

The automobile is Flannery O'Connor's most important symbol of the metamorphosis of man into machine. Hazel Motes, in Wise Blood, provides the most complete example of this form of identification with a man-made object, but there are other examples.

Shiftlet, in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," compares his spirit or soul to an automobile.³⁰ He too identifies more with things metal and manufactured than with those physical and created by a higher power.

Josephine Hendin says of this identification:

His loathing of his own body is so great that he can love only a machine, a car that can carry a woman who is an "angel of Gaud" but permits him to run away before she becomes a sexual being. By seeing his wife and mother as angels who cannot and should not be touched, he evades his own sexual fear, justifying it as a sign of his moral sense and spiritual bias.³¹

At the end of the story Shiftlet flees in a storm. Hendin describes his escape in terms of his flight from the physical world and toward a metallic universe:

Shiftlet feels the rottenness of the world lies in its physicality -- in both its vegetable and animal life. He resents that even clouds can be the color of a boy's hat, that some human element can put the lid on him and the world, and that he is cosmically confined in his own mortality. As the turnip-cloud descends he appeals to God to help him, to "break forth and wash the slime from this earth!" He is answered not by a human God but by a kind of eternal machine that guffaws, explodes in thunder, and lets a shower of metal fall. "Fantastic raindrops, like tin-can tops, crashed over the rear of Mr. Shiftlet's car." Shiftlet is restored. He sticks his stump out the window of the car, touching the only substance he can touch: rain like tin, rain like part of the metallic world. Racing toward Mobile, the only city in the state looking out on the open sea, he drives toward motion unlimited by clay.³²

It is interesting to note that rain and tin are also encountered in conjunction by Hazel Motes, in Wise

Blood, who is subject to the same fear of the physical world, and of mortality: "The rain fell on his hat with loud splatters as if it were falling on tin."³³ This time, however, Motes is the tin man; he is already metamorphosed into a car.

Another character in Flannery O'Connor's fiction who establishes some sort of identification with an automobile is the molester, in The Violent Bear It Away. His vehicle is described as "a lavender and cream-colored car."³⁴ This car matches and defines the driver who:

had on a lavender shirt and a thin black suit and a panama hat. His lips were as white as the cigaret that hung limply from one side of his mouth. His eyes were the same color as his shirt and were ringed with heavy black lashes.³⁵

The culmination of this trend of man as machine occurs in the story "The Displaced Person." Here we have a human being, imported as one would import a new type of machine. He is a solely commercial venture. As Robert Coles puts it in his book Flannery O'Connor's South, the Displaced Person,

is...someone whose life has suffered at the hands of a civilization, a modern industrial-

ism, a Western, secular materialism, gone viciously berserk -- and now come South, full of promises, and ready to deliver immediate satisfactions: efficiency, reliability, productive mechanization, a kind of silent, impersonal competence and skill.³⁶

This person, or product as the case may be, is tested, found wanting, and rejected, like so many pieces of cold metal. He was efficient and money-saving, but he had an unforeseen side effect. As Mrs. McIntyre, who ordered the man in the first place, tells Father Flynn: "He's extra, '... 'He doesn't fit in.' I have to have somebody who fits in,"³⁷ and again "He's extra and he's upset the balance around here."³⁸

Mrs. McIntyre wants to send him back, or at least away, but, inconveniently, it is harder to get rid of a man and his family, than of an object. So she kills him. Not aggressively but passively, by not warning him of his danger. By letting one machine be destroyed by another machine, she believes that she can feel guilt-free.

What Mrs. McIntyre takes issue with is a cultural difference, and the threat of alien values. Mr. Guizac, the D.P., wants to marry his cousin to the only man

available to her, a half-witted negro; that way she can come to the United States. Mrs. McIntyre will not have the social order of her isolated world disrupted. She does not care what is happening to people in Europe for she feels that this has nothing to do with her. She is of a much more advanced race of person:

"She in camp three year," he [Mr. Guizac] said.

"Your cousin," she said in a positive voice, "cannot come over here and marry one of my Negroes."

"She six-ten year," he said. "From Poland. Mamma die, pappa die. She wait in camp. Three camp." He pulled a wallet from his pocket and fingered through it and took out another picture of the same girl, a few years older, dressed in something dark and shapeless. She was standing against a wall with a short woman who apparently had no teeth. "She mamma," he said, pointing to the woman. "She die in two camp."...

"I cannot understand how a man who calls himself a Christian," she said, "could bring a poor innocent girl over here and marry her to something like that."...

After a second he shrugged and let his arm drop as if he were tired. "She no care black," he said. "She in camp three year."...

"I am not responsible for the world's misery," she said as an afterthought. 39

All Mrs. McIntyre can perceive from this discussion is that her machine part Guizac does not fit in with her machine parts Astor and Sulk. Here we have a woman who would call herself a Christian, doing some very unchristian things. First she denies a girl life over a

question of race, and then she commits murder by omission. But is she indeed a Christian? That is the crucial question for Flannery O'Connor, who implies that she is neither a Christian nor a good woman, though she may not know it. In a conversation with Father Flynn, while he watches the peacock display its tail, she displays her lack of faith:

"Christ will come like that!" he [Father Flynn] said in a loud gay voice and wiped his hand over his mouth and stood there, gaping.

Mrs. McIntyre's face assumed a set puritanical expression and she reddened. Christ in the conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother. "It is not my responsibility that Mr. Guizac has nowhere to go," she said. "I don't find myself responsible for all the extra people in the world."

The old man didn't seem to hear her. His attention was fixed on the cock who was taking minute steps backward, his head against the spread tail. "The Transfiguration," he murmured.

She had no idea what he was talking about. "Mr. Guizac didn't have to come here in the first place," she said, giving him a hard look.

The cock lowered his tail and began to pick grass.

"He didn't have to come in the first place," she repeated, emphasizing each word.

The old man smiled absently. "He came to redeem us," he said...⁴⁰

Mrs. McIntyre protests her innocence too much. The Displaced Person and Christ begin to take on the same identity as she rejects them both. Both are an

embarrassment to her, that she wants to avoid. The truth finally comes out when she tells the priest, "As far as I'm concerned, ... Christ was just another D.P." 41

Mrs. McIntyre feels that Christ should never have come. Like Hazel Motes, she has rejected her humanity. She has rejected Christ and human values with the result that she becomes, on the surface, emotionless, controlled, machinelike, and inhuman. Her rejection, like Haze's, stems from a fear of Christ. Christ is an embarrassment who gets in the way; He threatens her total control over her world and her life. The result of this rejection is the inhumane treatment of Guizac, whom she uses as an object or as a machine. She is continuing the torture that he endured in Europe. Inside, however, there are cracks in Mrs. McIntyre's armour. These cracks, which are her sense of alienation, surface in the end.

Outwardly, Mrs. McIntyre has already converted to another faith: money is her religion and her salvation:

"But at last I'm saved!" Mrs. McIntyre said. "One fellow's misery is the other fellow's gain. That man there," and she pointed where the Displaced Person had disappeared, "-- he

has to work! He wants to work!" She turned to Mrs. Shortley with her bright wrinkled face. "That man is my salvation!" she said.⁴²

This statement occurs before the D.P. becomes a threat to her little world. What good is the money he makes for her then? At that point she sees him as a monster, but he seems to be a monster that is man-made like Frankenstein's monster:

Monster! she said to herself and looked at him as if she were seeing him for the first time. His forehead and skull were white where they had been protected by his cap but the rest of his face was red and bristled with short yellow hairs. His eyes were like two bright nails behind his gold-rimmed spectacles that had been mended over the nose with haywire. His whole face looked as if it might have been patched together out of several others.⁴³

Mr. Guizac can be compared to other machines in the story, to the "pieced-together trucks"⁴⁴ that drive up to the McIntyre yard on various business errands. Mrs. McIntyre's view of him here echoes Mrs. McIntyre's view of those other "bloodsuckers'" vehicles.

O'Connor uses the violent act in this story, and in others, to make her characters aware of their guilt and of their need for redemption, i.e. their displacement. The rape of Tarwater in The Violent Bear It Away, the

gratuitous destruction of Haze's car in Wise Blood, the suicide of Norton in "The Lame Shall Enter First," the killings of Tanner and of the little girl in "Judgement Day" and in "A View of the Woods," the tractor crash in "Parker's Back," the arson in "A Circle in the Fire," even the forcible seizure of Hulga's artificial limb in "Good Country People" are all examples of these violent acts. John F. Desmond, in his article "Flannery O'Connor's Sense of Place," defines displacement as:

a wrenching away of the person from his self-contained state, whether internal or external. She [Flannery O'Connor] breaks open the "closed world" and the "closure of the soul" ...by a violent shock, one that opens the "possibility" of being so that it may suffer penetration by the divine. Which is to say that her violence reestablishes the mystery of being, making it palpable...So while firmly rooted in a concrete place, these scenes depict a pulverizing of the character's relation to the world, and a recognition of his true identity as homo viator, man journeying toward the "true country."⁴⁵

In the end Mrs. McIntyre finds that she is responsible for the world's misery because she shares it, both cause and effect. The boxcar scenes that Mrs. Shortley saw in a newsreel are no longer restricted to Europe "where they had not advanced as in this country."⁴⁶ Mrs. McIntyre too, had created a monster when she turned a man into a machine. After the death

of Guizac, Mrs. McIntyre becomes displaced as well:

She felt she was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives, and she watched like a stranger while the dead man was carried away in the ambulance.⁴⁷

Mrs. McIntyre's help, who are in guilty collusion with her, all leave her. She herself comes down with a nervous affliction and has to give up her farm. Thus the displacement spreads. Those who worship machines and material gain, and put them above humanity in importance, end up being ruled by machines. The same horror that they create backfires on them, when they have to live in the world of their creation. The effect on humanity of a world without love or faith, a world with only logic is that all people suffer the horror of incompleteness, of displaced parts. They have murdered the hearts and spirits within themselves; and they too become empty shells and automatons. Only an act of earthshattering violence can wake these walking dead from their moral slumbers.

Chapter 4
Towards Redemption

Gilbert H. Muller, in Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque, says that:

Revelation of the true kingdom -- or, as Miss O'Connor called it, the true country -- is a primary concern in her fiction, and it is for this reason that she utilized motifs of violence to get at the incongruous nature of reality and to reveal the vitality of the grotesque as technique and vision.

He goes on to quote O'Connor's classic statement on the use of violence and shock to get an unpopular point of view across to an audience:

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

O'Connor has an unpopular point of view and strongly Christian concerns. She believes that redemption is all important; this earthly life is to be used primarily as a preparation for a proper Christian death. O'Connor has stated that "the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that."³ She also states, in the introduction to "A Memoir of Mary Ann," that "the creative action of the Christian's life is to prepare his death in Christ."⁴

I believe that her use of violence is strongly coupled with a use of technology in many instances. In a great number of her works the moment of revelation occurs when there is a malfunction of a faulty machine, or when she depicts the machine performing acts that shockingly explode the illusion of technology as the saviour of mankind.

To this end I will cite the three major examples of those revelations. I will conclude with a summary of recognitions achieved through mechanical failures in her other fictions.

Wise Blood is probably the strongest example of

misplaced faith in mechanization. I have spoken earlier of Hazel Motes's car-worship. David Eggenchwiler, in his article "Flannery O'Connor's True and False Prophets," states that:

It has become a sociological platitude that the automobile is a symbol of potency and aggressiveness for the emasculated man, and intellectual historians such as Norman O. Brown and William Barrett have claimed that the use of technology to symbolize power has been an important means of man's flight from death. (Technology often has this significance in Miss O'Connor's works.)⁵

Haze is in constant flight from death or the death of the self, which is his conception of being saved by Christ. David Eggenchwiler says of Haze:

Having been influenced by his circuit-preacher grandfather, Haze conceived of salvation as self-destruction, as a consummation with God not possible within this life. In a manner that suggests the Freudian death wish and the "fatal passion" which Denis de Rougemont has attributed to medieval mystics and passionate lovers, Haze repeatedly associated salvation with death -- being eaten, drowned, or drawn into a dark forest. Thus, terrified by such an annihilation, he feared "soul-hungry Jesus" as the Saviour as well as the judge. His rebellion, then, can be seen partially as an attempt to assert the claims of life and the individual self by transforming his death-wish into aggression.⁶

Haze, however, does not get anywhere at all.

Frederick Asals, in his book Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity, makes note of his feckless efforts:

...he [Haze] is surrounded by images defining his helpless and comic immobility. For despite his energetic efforts, despite his angry assertions that he is "going places," he absurdly gets nowhere...in...chapter [1] he is described as hanging: "He looked as if he were held by a rope caught in the middle of his back and attached to the train ceiling" (p. 12). Chapter 2 opens with him trying simultaneously to catch his hat and the train and so being left stranded; chapter 3 with his "neck...thrust forward" but his shadow "walking backward" (p. 37); and variations are rung on the image until, late in the novel, as he drives out of the city he feels that "the road was really slipping back under him" (p. 207). At this moment the patrolman appears who will force him to resolve his dilemma by leaving him naked to the "blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space" (p. 209).

It is this final important confrontation with his helplessness that reveals his misplaced faith and misdirection to Haze. This is evinced in his subsequent conversation with the patrolman:

The patrolman stood staring at him. "Could I give you a lift to where you was going?" he asked.

After a minute he came a little closer and said, "Where was you going?"

He leaned on down with his hands on his knees and said in an anxious voice, "Was you going anywheres?"

"No," Haze said.

The patrolman squatted down and put his hand on Haze's shoulder. "You hadn't planned to go anywheres?" he asked anxiously.

Haze shook his head. His face didn't change and he didn't turn it toward the patrolman. It seemed to be concentrated on space.

Haze finally admits that he was not going anywhere, at least not in the earthly sense. In another sense he has refocused his sights and is now concentrating on space or the "true country."

The failure of his car to take him anywhere is perceived by Haze as the failure of man to outrun death. Here he capitulates. He realizes his false pride in his man-made powers. He sees himself as the pitiful and helpless sinner that he is, one of the least of the least, in the face of the infinite horizon. He goes home to blind himself and to do penance for his sins of pride.

At this point the earthbound Hazel Motes has died in effigy. After the death of the car, Haze himself is just waiting to be buried. The old Haze has disappeared. Spiritually and mentally he is a new man, with a completely opposite outlook. Physically, he is a shadow of his former self. Sick, enfeebled, blind, he is old before his time:

He didn't eat much or seem to mind anything she [Mrs. Flood] gave him...He ate anything and never knew the difference. He kept getting thinner and his cough deepened and he developed a limp. During the first cold months, he took the virus, but he walked out every day in spite of that...He could have been dead and get all he got out of life but the exercise.

He is further compared to the living dead when Mrs. Flood observes that "anyone who saw her from the sidewalk would think she was being courted by a corpse."¹⁰

When he does die, he dies in a ditch like his car "died," falling over the edge into another dimension. His last words are "I want to go on where I'm going."¹¹ At last Hazel Motes has found his direction, and he is making progress on the road to redemption. With a blow from the Policeman's new billy he is, physically and spiritually, taken home.

In the story "Parker's Back," a machine acts as a catalyst for a profound religious experience. "O.E. Parker is a very ordinary person. "He was a boy whose mouth habitually hung open. He was heavy and earnest, as ordinary as a loaf of bread."¹² His gaping mouth is a sign of spiritual and mental emptiness, according to

Preston Browning, in his article "'Parker's Back': Flannery O'Connor's Iconography of Salvation by Profanity."¹³

This young man, however, is soon to experience a sign or a mystical call of Biblical proportions, a sign which summons him back from his worldly preoccupations:

As he circled the field his mind was on a suitable design for his back. The sun, the size of a gold ball, began to switch regularly from in front to behind him, but he appeared to see it both places as if he had eyes in the back of his head. All at once he saw the tree reaching out to grasp him. 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 the tree and burst into flame. The first thing Parker saw were his shoes, quickly being eaten by the fire; one was caught under the tractor, the other was some distance away, burning by itself. He was not in them. He could feel the hot breath of the burning tree on his face. He scrambled backwards, still sitting, his eyes cavernous, and if he had known how to cross himself he would have done it.¹⁴

William V. Davis, in his essay "'Large and Startling Figures': The Place of 'Parker's Back' in Flannery O'Connor's Canon," says of Parker's experience:

Here Parker's vision is specifically

paralleled with the call and vision of Moses. In Exodus God appears to Moses in the guise of a burning bush and tells him, "put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." After Parker has yelled, "GOD ABOVE!", "the first thing Parker saw were his shoes, quickly being eaten by the fire."¹⁵

As in Wise Blood, it is the destruction of a machine that marks a turning point in the life of the protagonist. The explosion of the machine is the explosion of the myth of the value of worldly power and concerns. These vanities and idolatries are as nothing compared to the mysterious unseen power that produces miracles.

Formerly, Parker had been much like the machines he worked on. He is identified as being part of a machine, or as being like a machine, twice in the course of the story. His present employer looks at him this way: "this old woman looked at him the same way she looked at her old tractor."¹⁶ He was so much an extension of a machine that while in the navy he "seemed a natural part of the grey mechanical ship."¹⁷

The only thing that sets Parker apart is his tattoos. Yet these are merely symbols for a mundane materialism. His collection of tattoos is symbolic of

an acquisitive sense that ultimately fails to satisfy, because it is a meaningless activity. Unlike the tattoos of the man he once saw at the fair, his tattoos form no pattern. They fail to cure his frustration and to make sense out of his life. In fact, the more tattoos he acquires, the more frustrated he gets:

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.¹⁸

Preston Browning says that:

In this respect a prototype of modern man, Parker derives his [transient] sense of identity from external properties acquired at random, things that by their very nature cannot produce a pattern; and hence he is doomed to a ceaseless ever-frustrated quest. As the tattoos refuse to make a pattern, to cohere, so Parker's life refuses to cohere.¹⁹

His miraculous revelation by means of the tractor sets him on the track of redemption. As if fated, he goes directly into the city and has a tattoo of Christ put on his back. Thus he is transformed into a prophet with a mission, though he does not yet understand his transformation. As William V. Davis explains it:

...we are told that the tattoo artist Parker goes to for his final tattoo "was about Parker's own age -- twenty-eight." This is the first time we have any reference to Parker's age and it is significant in that his age, at twenty-eight, would coincide with the age of Christ at his baptism and just previous to the beginning of his ministry, according to one theory of working out the dates of Christ's life. O'Connor seems to be alluding to the fact that Parker is to be considered, after his vision and conversion in the field when he sees the tree "burst into flame," as something more than a prophet. Indeed, he is, by name, first Obadiah, the prophet who has a vision, and then Elijah, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Finally, his calling becomes complete when he goes for the tattoo and, literally, takes Christ upon his back. If anyone in modern literature becomes a Christ figure, Parker does.²⁰

It remains only for Parker to understand and to accept his true identity. Up until now he identified with external things. As Henry Taylor observes in his essay "The Halt Shall Be Gathered Together: Physical Deformity in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor": "The point which this story illustrates is that some men consider artificial additions to their bodies to be improvements."²¹

Parker's obsession with external and material things has kept him from seeing who he really is, and from accepting his identity. Up until now he concentrated on his body, rather than on his soul. He

looked for a pattern and a meaning in the wrong place. In the same way, he was ashamed of his two first names; he refused to admit to his true identity.

When he does finally accept his true identity, he finds the pattern and the meaning he is looking for:

"Who's there?" the voice from inside said and there was a quality about it now that seemed final. The knob rattled and the voice said peremptorily, "Who's there, I ast you?"

Parker bent down and put his mouth near the stuffed key-hole. "Obadiah," he whispered and all at once he felt the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts.

"Obadiah Elihue!" he whispered.
The door opened and he stumbled in.²²

The story does not end there, however. Like Hazel Motes, Parker ignores his calling of prophet and immerses himself in worldly concerns, until he is identified with machines and with external accoutrements. Like Haze he is violently shown that he cannot outrun his destiny; he is likewise shown this by the destruction of a machine, which symbolizes the futility and weakness of external and worldly pursuits. These are pursuits Parker follows both in his work and in his leisure time. Like Hazel again, Parker must now do penance for his pride in external manifestations. Now

that he realizes his error he must pay. While his wife thrashes him as an idolater:

Parker was too stunned to resist. He sat there and let her beat him until she had nearly knocked him senseless and large welts had formed on the face of the tattooed Christ. Then he staggered up and made for the door... There he was -- who called himself Obadiah Elihue -- leaning against the tree, crying like a baby.²³

Here Parker symbolically re-enacts the suffering of Christ on the cross. The large welts on the face of his Christ tattoo, and the fact that he is propped against a tree make of Parker a sort of Christ figure. At last he recognizes his errors and atones for them through his suffering.

In "The Displaced Person," we have the paradox of a machine that fails in the role of saviour because it is too efficient. In Mystery and Manners Flannery O'Connor warns that:

In the absence of this faith, now, we govern by tenderness. It is a tenderness which, long since cut-off from the person of Christ, is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber.²⁴

Mrs. McIntyre is "good country people," but not religious in the strict sense of the word. "Christ in the conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother."²⁵ She sees machines in the modern role of saviour; and her hobby is collecting them. She is never happier than when she has secured a newer and more powerful one:

"...Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortley drove to the cane bottom to see Mr. Guizac start to operate the silage cutter, a new machine that Mrs. McIntyre had just bought because she said, for the first time, she had somebody who could operate it."²⁶

Mrs. McIntyre bought a new drag harrow and a tractor with a power lift because she said, for the first time, she had someone who could handle machinery. She and Mrs. Shortley had driven to the back field to inspect what he had harrowed the day before. "That's been done beautifully!" Mrs. McIntyre said, looking out over the red undulating ground.²⁷

Unfortunately Mrs. McIntyre kills her golden goose. The progression from Mr. Guizac her saviour who can handle all kinds of machines to Mr. Guizac the monster who is ruining her world is gradual and logical. In fact, it seems quite reasonable to commit murder, when one is ruled only by theories of tenderness. What is just can be shifted as easily as the object of one's tenderness can. Today it is Mr. Guizac, and tomorrow it

is Mr. Shortley who becomes the worthy and deserving laborer.

Murder by machine is not the same thing as real murder, it can be argued. It is by remote control. And Mrs. McIntyre and her accomplices do not even act; they just neglect to act. This is what happens when one has machines to do one's dirty work.

It is unfortunate (or ultimately fortunate) that Mrs. McIntyre fails to preserve her innocence. The violence of the murder by machine puts her into a state of shock. The shock takes the form of displacement. In her displaced state she is like a foreigner, looking at her familiar world for the first time. She has a new perception of the world, and of herself. She is no longer strong and proud, but humbled, vulnerable, and guilty. She is now open to the experience of revelation and of redemption.

As Gilbert H. Muller explains it in Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque:

In "The Displaced Person," for example, the violence is formulated in terms of a basic social opposition between relatively established individuals like Mrs. McIntyre

and Mrs. Shortley, and Guizac, who possesses no distinct social identity but who nevertheless threatens the conservative communal patterns of southern farm life. Guizac's own basic rights can be thwarted only by violent death, yet once this is perpetrated, the world loses its formerly sharp outlines and is transformed into something amorphous and terrifying for those who assumed complicity in Guizac's death...One act of violence reduces him to a thing, to an object which the farm's inhabitants can observe clinically. This remarkable detachment, a form of the destructive intellect which we have observed in many of O'Connor's less laudable characters, reveals these individuals as fallen creatures, for the violence which they cause illuminates the corruption of their souls.²⁸

Muller further defines the purpose and importance of violence in this and other stories:

The entire strategy of violence in Flannery O'Connor's stories of the grotesque is to reveal how complicity in destruction carries men away from God, away from that center of mystery which she was constantly trying to define and which Catholics term grace; This is why violent death is the one act of paramount importance in O'Connor's fiction; it serves to define evil in society.²⁹

The fact that O'Connor's characters worship and emulate machines is the cause of their violent behavior, their "complicity in destruction." In deserting God and mankind they have abandoned the concept of grace. Their violence is a machinelike violence, automatic and cruelly indifferent. It is

opposed to the indefinable and the tender qualities of grace.

Mrs. McIntyre and her accomplices see themselves as fallen creatures. The illusion of technology as the saviour of mankind is gone. It is the very violence of the machine's act that wakes these people up to how far they have fallen from grace. Nothing less would do it.

The shock has plunged them all into twentieth century reality, where cattle cars and concentration camp furnaces are not just the stuff of newsreel entertainment, but an everpresent possibility. The perpetrators are not foreign monsters, but ordinary everyday folks like these good country people. This is the world that man has wrought; O'Connor's warning is that it can happen here if we drift towards machine-worship.

These three stories, which deal with the risks inherent in modern secular life, are not unique in the O'Connor canon. In "Good Country People" Hulga discovers that she cannot depend on her mechanical leg. Like her philosophy, it gives her no leg to stand on when she is confronted by true evil. Manley Pointer

gives Hulga a glimpse of the horror of true corruption. Realizing where she is headed she draws back from the brink in time to save herself. Her leg, like her philosophy, is only artificial after all. She has to face the fact that this is no substitute for that which is real. Hulga has to come to terms with who and what she is. She is not special, but ordinary. She experiences displacement and the beginning of revelation when her leg is stolen: "When she turned her churning face toward the opening, she saw his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake."³⁰ That she sees a lake where there is none is a sign of her displacement, and of her imminent new perception of the world and of her role in it. That she moves towards the opening is a sign of her openness to grace; formerly she believed that she had all the answers already, and paid little attention to her surroundings or to the words of others. Finally, her vision is one of Christ walking on water; she is turning away from the mechanical and logical world.

In "The Lame Shall Enter First," the telescope is a symbol for all Sheppard fails to see. Though he might gaze at the stars, it takes the violent death of his son to bring him down to earth and to reality. Norton

looks through the telescope to find a spiritual truth. He finds his mother whom he hopes to join; this is because he sees with the eyes of faith. Sheppard can only see what a machine shows him; and this is not enough. His revelation comes too late for him to save his son. Rufus Johnson is the catalyst for this insight. He is behind the violent death of Norton; also he plays a cruel prank on Sheppard:

"I have nothing to reproach myself with," he [Sheppard] began again. "I did more for him [Rufus Johnson] than I did for my own child." He heard his voice as if it were the voice of his accuser. He repeated the sentence silently.

Slowly his face drained of color. It became almost grey beneath the white halo of his hair. The sentence echoed in his mind, each syllable like a dull blow. His mouth twisted and he closed his eyes against the revelation. Norton's face rose before him, empty, forlorn, his left eye listing almost imperceptibly toward the outer rim as if it could not bear a full view of grief. He heart constricted with a repulsion for himself so clear and intense that he gasped for breath. He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. He saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts, leering at him from the eyes of Johnson. His image of himself shrivelled until everything was black before him. He sat there paralyzed, aghast.

He saw Norton at the telescope, all back and ears, saw his arm shoot up and wave frantically. A rush of agonizing love for the child rushed over him like a transfusion of life. The little boy's face appeared to him transformed; the image of his salvation; all light. He groaned with joy. He would make

everything up to him. He would never let him suffer again. He would be mother and father. He jumped up and ran to his room, to kiss him, to tell him that he loved him, that he would never fail him again.

Sheppard has closed his heart to his own child; instead of following his instincts and his faith, he has followed a theoretical and mechanical path to what he considered "good works." This is the "tenderness wrapped in theory" that O'Connor warns of. It kills rather than heals. The orthopedic shoe is the symbol of Sheppard's misguided "tenderness." This machine or artificial accoutrement was supposed to be a support to Rufus Johnson. Johnson, however, does not need the support, and Norton does. Sheppard's mechanical path, his faith in a machine and in textbook theories alone does indeed kill his son Norton. His good works are evil works. Grace is absent from his vision of himself. Isolation, the opposite of grace, is his achievement for deserting God.

Though it is tragically late, this is a genuine revelation complete with a new view of himself and of his guilt, and a recognition of evil. He is now ready to do penance and to suffer. Sheppard finally learns to know right from wrong and reality from fantasy.

In "A View of the Woods," the grandfather realizes too late his misplaced faith in mechanical inventions. Although he is able for a time to control the landscape, he has no control over the inner landscape, which is the one that counts. This is the fact that he remains ignorant of for too long. When he discovers that he can neither control his granddaughter nor himself, the results are tragic. Machines cannot help him now. He experiences revelation just at the end when he is displaced from all his old beliefs, seeing clearly for the first time. The world does begin to look different:

He perceived that there would be a little opening there, a little place where he could escape and leave the woods behind him. He could see it in the distance already, a little opening where the white sky was reflected in the water. It grew as he ran toward it until suddenly the whole lake opened up before him, riding majestically in little corrugated folds toward his feet...On both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance.³²

Like Hulga in "Good Country People," he is headed towards the opening; he is open to the experience of grace. When he comes to it, the lake like the whole of life's truth opens up before him, and he perceives the infinite mystery of the universe for the first time. At

last he learns that machines cannot help him. He is compared to a machine himself in the last sentence; but his faith in machines is dead, just as the machine is now a symbol of powerlessness and destruction: "He looked around desperately for someone to help him but the place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was, gorging itself on clay."³³

In "The Artificial Nigger," the artificial Negro is the catalyst that makes Nelson and Mr. Head aware of their degraded state. He is the sum total and end product of the mechanized society that persecutes them during their journey to the city. By identifying with him, they are not worshipping technology, however. They are aware, for the first time, of what their journey represents. They realize the evil inherent in a godless society that turns men into something inhuman, so that men turn against each other. They see how low they have sunk, and how miserable they can get; if they continue on this quest, they will end by losing their souls. Already they are deadened:

The child [Nelson] was standing about ten feet away, his face bloodless under the gray hat. His eyes were triumphantly cold. There was no light in them, no feeling, no

interest. He was merely there, a small figure, waiting. Home was nothing to him.

Mr. Head turned slowly. He felt he knew now what time would be like without seasons and what heat would be like without light and what man would be like without salvation. He didn't care if he never made the train...

It was not possible to tell if the artificial Negro were meant to be young or old; he looked too miserable to be either. He was meant to look happy because his mouth was stretched up at the corners but the chipped eye and the angle he was cocked at gave him a wild look of misery instead... They stood gazing at the artificial Negro as if they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat. They could both feel it, dissolving their differences like an action of mercy.³⁴

Thus they perceive the mystery, and the world is transformed for them. They have a revelation of truth, and of what is important. Nelson sums it up for Flannery O'Connor and for all of her characters:

"Let's go home before we get ourselves lost again."³⁵

Home is the true country; it is the revelation of grace as a result of faith. Flannery O'Connor has shown that the enticements of modern technology are a dangerous detour. One could too easily get eternally lost in their everlasting darkness.

Conclusion

In her novels and short stories Flannery O'Connor seeks to hold up a mirror to modern man. That this mirror is of the fun house variety makes it none the less a serious reflection of our times. As O'Connor herself says in her introductory note to the second edition of Wise Blood: "It is a comic novel about a Christian malgré lui, and as such, very serious, for all comic novels that are any good must be about matters of life and death."¹

There is indeed something comic about men worshipping machines. It has, in effect, the same hilarity as the vision of man worshipping his own image in a looking-glass. For with machine-worship, man has created a religion and a manner of life in which he himself is the hero and saviour of mankind, the source of all good things.

The important point that O'Connor makes in her fictions is that the comedy does not stop here. The true matter of mirth is that we, the secular readers, are so far gone that we do not see the joke in all of

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this. What should strike us as way out of line, and totally misdirected in these human comedies, simply seems a private human dilemma of a somewhat obsessive and ironic nature.

For Flannery O'Connor this was a comedy of tragic dimensions. Having both a great concern for the spiritual fate of humankind, as well as a great comic gift, she used them both to good advantage. She provided in her stories and novels a source of entertainment and of enlightenment. And what better way to be enlightened than to laugh as you learn?

Spiritual enlightenment was for Flannery O'Connor the most important of her two goals. Repeatedly she tells the same tale and sounds the same theme, though the characters and situations differ. Violence is her means of making her readers sit up and take notice. She strikes a loud note because a soft one will not awaken us from our materialistic and mechanistic mode of living.

What she hoped would develop from all this is a new perception of what is important and of what is true. To O'Connor's way of thinking these things remain

constant. From ancient times to now she sees the important thing as being the final destination of the soul. The truth lies in our ability to recognize this fact, and to know right from wrong, trusting to faith when personal knowledge fails. It is not important to know all the answers. What is important is to perceive that there is a pattern and a meaning to life, and to have faith that it will reveal itself when the time comes.

For this reason, perhaps her most successful telling of her story is "Parker's Back," one of her very last. Here she employs tattoos as symbols. When viewed in a misinformed and ignorant way they are mere objects with no meaning or relationship to each other. They are acquisitions, miraculously produced by man's artistic and mechanical genius, but finally unsatisfying. For without meaning there is just frustration. There is continual hunger to fill the void of purposelessness, a hunger that can never be satisfied.

The effect of Parker's tattoos is "of something haphazard and botched."² This is also an apt description of his life so far. When Parker finally

does perceive the true meaning and mystery of life, and his role in it the image is quite different. It is that of "a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts...The door opened and he stumbled in."³

Parker has seen the pattern that resides in all things if we only know how to look at them. It is right in front of us if we can only see. It is made up of natural images, not machines. That machines do not fit into this pattern may be the final revelation of grace. Mrs. McIntyre, in "The Displaced Person," finds to her frustration that neither man nor God can fit into her mechanical vision of the world. And machines fit into a design with no meaning. Deserting God for machines and mechanical, logical theories only leads to defeat. Find the right key and the pattern is revealed; the door is opened. Flannery O'Connor presented us with that key.

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Conclusion

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