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CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL ANALOGUES IN THE FICTION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AND FLANNERY O'CONNOR

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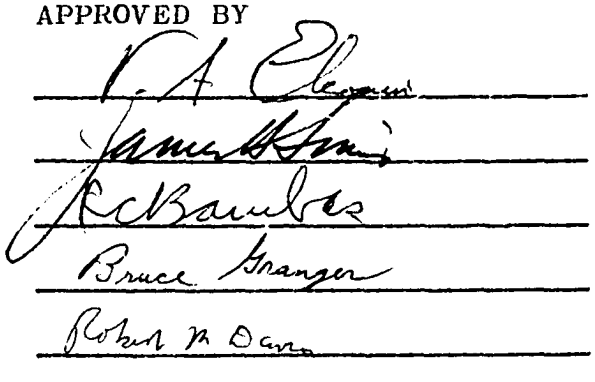
Norman, Oklahoma

1971

CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL ANALOGUES IN THE FICTION OF

WILLIAM FAULKNER AND FLANNERY O'CONNOR

APPROVED BY



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INTRODUCTION

Almost all critical studies of Southern literature have been quick to point out the acute historical consciousness which informs the work of most Southern writers. This study is an attempt to explore some of the implications of a particular kind of historical consciousness--which I will call "Christian"--in the fictional art of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, to see what dimensions and values it adds to their work. It is based upon the premise that the historical sense plays a crucial role in the artist's decision making process at every stage in his work.

My initial concern in this study will be to discuss certain themes which I believe are at the core of a Christian conception of history, and which I feel are present typologically in the work of these two Southern writers. It is generally acknowledged that the Christian tradition plays a central part in the work of both Faulkner and O'Connor. My first particular point of focus will be to try to show how both writers accept a Christian interpretation of the historical process at work around them, a process which goes

back through Southern and American history into Biblical revelation of the history of the race itself. Secondly, I want to explore how their acceptance of this particular interpretation of history makes itself felt in the creative act itself; that is, what impact this historical sense has on the way their fiction actually is shaped. It is not just a matter of calling them "Christian" writers, and then ignoring what such a term can actually mean. The acceptance of that particular interpretation of history will, it seems to me, greatly determine how history is actually "realized" in their fiction from an artistic standpoint.

Many valuable studies have already been done on the Christian influence upon both these writers--critical treatments which show the thematic links between their various works and the Christian as well as non-Christian sources. In fact, it has become almost a critical cliché to identify the South as the Bible Belt, and then claim this as the essential part of the writer's inherited tradition which then crops up automatically in his fiction. Or in more academic terms, the Christian tradition is frequently described as a "mythic background" which functions as a theological and moral framework of values for the action represented in the particular story. This is undoubtedly true, and critical studies which show these thematic links are of the highest importance. Yet often such studies, it seems

to me, do not fully pursue the problem of how this material from tradition actually "works" to create value and meaning in the story; critics accept the material and proceed as though somehow the formal aspect of the work were separable from the thematic. Thus for example, one can show the thematic ties between the Christ story as it is evoked in a Faulkner tale, and the same material as it is present in a story by Carson McCullers. But the material is obviously not "present" in the same way in both works. One is tempted to dismiss the problem by saying that one is a greater writer than the other, but this merely begs the question. The true complexity of the issue lies in the fact that the way in which the material is rendered will not only affect the aesthetic value of the work. It also affects the ontological truth of the history itself being presented in the work, to which it is organically linked both within and outside the fiction.

The complicated nature of this problem shows one limitation of the strictly thematic approach. Writers have complex and varying attitudes toward the "history" they evoke in fiction--realistic, sentimental, ironic, nostalgic, comic, and so on. The purely thematic approach often slights the question of how it is rendered dramatic and made "to live" through the artistic decisions of the writer. Since the historical sense is intrinsically part of the creative act, it makes a crucial difference how precisely the material is "there."

In the case of many writers, Southern and otherwise, the "history" is present in their work in a kind of residual way, part of the cultural milieu they have inherited and transmitted in their fiction. We have all read Southern fiction of this type. Usually it presents a romantic and idealized "Past," sometimes ante-bellum and nominally invoking "Christian" values, and more often than not suffused with an aura of nostalgia for the pre-lapsarian state. Such works, I believe, tend to be dishonest not only because of the distortions of history they usually contain, but also because from an artistic standpoint they show us a writer who has abnegated the tough decision-making processes in art in favor of letting a particular "historical" or "religious" view do the seeing and evaluating for him. The result is almost always a partially dead and repetitive work; the historical sense has somehow become detached from the creative faculty, and though such works are popularly called "historical," they are I believe quite the opposite. For if we conceive of the historical sense, as I believe Eliot correctly does, as an act of genuine "self-awareness" of history functioning within the creative act, then such works are guilty of an "unconscious" or dissociated use of history which is not dynamic and generative of the work's values--and there only in a passive, inert, and artistically unrealized manner.

Faulkner himself did not help the cause of clarity by statements he sometimes made to the effect that the Christian tradition was a framework he just happened to inherit and therefore used in his fiction. Such statements tended to slight the focal point where "history" becomes operative in art, that is, in the particularized creative act where the writer must first of all make a choice about the possible validity of a particular view of history, and then continually incarnate that choice in a series of dramatic artistic options. This seems to me a more accurate way of describing how Faulkner experienced Christian history in the act of writing (as opposed to talking about "mythic background" or "usable past"), and equally important, a more accurate way of describing how the reader experiences that material when he reads the work. In fact, Faulkner's statement that the writer tries to "write the whole history of the human heart on the head of a pin" is more to the point, because it is metaphysically true, if we conceive of the head of the pin as the relatively few moments of time in the individual work. Faulkner, like Eliot, saw the problem of the historical sense in art in the widest metaphysical context when he stated that history was not "was" but "is"--a dynamic organism and ongoing process in which past is present and continually altering and being altered by the created work.

How then, in the case of Faulkner and O'Connor, can we attack the problem of how history becomes dramatically "alive" and generative of value in the work? How is it possible to describe the particular creative act which embodies a Christian interpretation of history in a living way--which in a single creative movement brings to life several layers of "historical" meaning as though they were one and indivisible in the present, experienced simultaneously by the reader? The most meaningful approach, it seems to me, is to see the operation of the historical sense in terms of the metaphysical doctrine of analogy, and call the "history" evoked in the work an analogical dimension of the action being presented, rather than using the vague historicism of terms like "mythic background" and "traditional Christianity." In Chapter Three of this study, where the historical sense will be discussed in relation to formal problems, I shall try to explore this doctrine of analogy more fully. For the moment, let me simply note that the doctrine of analogy is a metaphysical answer to the problem of how being can be both everywhere alike and different at the same time in existence. It states that each existing thing receives existence in proportion to (ana-lagon--according to the measure) the possibility of being possessed by that thing. The principle of proportionality of being is alike in all things, yet each is

different in the proportionality of being they possess.[1]

In his brilliant study of the literary imagination, Christ and Apollo, Fr. William F. Lynch has demonstrated convincingly the relation between the doctrine of analogy and the creative act, showing how the analogical view of being gave foundation to the medieval practice of four-fold meanings in scriptural exegesis. My own emphasis in this study will be upon the historical vision of Faulkner and O'Connor as an analogical dimension in their fiction, and it is greatly indebted to Fr. Lynch's work. However, I have also repeated stressed in this introduction the inextricably organic relationship between the thematic elements of a particular view of history--in this case a Christian view--and the formal manner of presenting that view fictionally, so that it is interpenetratively dramatic and evaluative of the action. This leads to a final problem for speculation in this study: namely, whether the Christian view of history incarnated in their fiction is rooted in both manner and form in a historical incarnation which, as Fr. Lynch suggests, can be conceived of as the prototype of completely realized analogical action, something which writers like Faulkner and O'Connor attempt to approximate humanly in their art. In conclusion, I wish to assert my belief that the creative act

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[1]Gerald B. Phelan, St. Thomas and Analogy (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1948), pp. 15-22. See also William F. Lynch, Christ and Apollo (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), VI.

is finally mysterious, but also that its mysteries can be reflected upon meaningfully in such a way that we can bring ourselves closer into step with the creative motions of the artist's mind.

CHAPTER ONE

Before attempting to characterize the major themes in a Christian conception of history--which is the object of this chapter--I wish to stress one point which seems to me fundamental to this entire study. That is, the absolutely central importance of the particular decisions which the writer makes in the act of writing concerning the "history" he evokes typologically. How he chooses to render the material creates its validity and value, as was noted in the introduction. The philosopher Michael Novak has illustrated in another context how a man's philosophical "horizon" is largely defined by his initial starting point, what he will or will not choose to allow as possible truth concerning the matter under consideration.[1] This does not seem to me to imply a rigid dogmatism. Rather, the willingness to accept and explore "possibility"--to remain open and flexible before the facts--is a necessary ingredient in deciding how a certain perspective can be regarded as meaningful. It seems to me that in a broad sense Christianity is present in Faulkner and O'Connor's works in precisely this way--as a

[1]Michael Novak, Belief and Unbelief (New York: McMillan Co., 1965), Chapter III.

"possibility," an option which may often be rejected by characters but which is nevertheless made vitally and viably real in the work by the authors. Given experience as it is, this is all that can justifiably be demanded of the writer. To evoke Christianity in this way, as "possibility," does not contradict the assertion made that these writers choose and manifest a Christian interpretation of history. Later in this chapter, I shall try to show that the very essence of the Christian viewpoint of the historical process is openness and possibility, free and truly creative human action. The claim which some critics make that the writer's choice of a particular interpretation of events is somehow a limitation or barrier to truth seems unfounded if the core of that interpretation rests upon an absolute doctrine of freedom to explore as many dimensions of the real as can be conceived.

This initial historical "horizon" chosen operates in the particular artistic decisions of the writer, of course, in a continuing way, though not automatically. If the historical sense is vital to the act, the horizon is not one that he can accept and then ignore, but one which must be incarnated again and again creatively. It need not be conscious to the writer at each moment; Faulkner is right here in pleading a certain "unawareness" of artistic strategems, and indeed his art would not be free and vital otherwise. However, this does not imply that the historical

view comes into the creative act passively. Perhaps the best explanation is that the writer develops what Maritain called the "habit of art," which in regard to history means a habit of seeing it actively typological. Miss O'Connor once stressed that young writers needed most to learn to "read" events in the manner of the medieval exegetes--with four levels of meaning. This is the kind of active, creative historical sense which gave added dimension to her and Faulkner's writing.

In the works of these two writers, the three dominant strains in this added dimension to which the literal action is linked are classical mythology, Old Testament and New Testament revelation. For example, in Faulkner's "The Bear," there are evocations of classical myth--reference to Priam, to pagan rituals and primitive forces of Fate, and the Greek gesture of Boon Hoggenback killing old Sam Fathers. There are also evocations of Old Testament myth--the story of Abraham and Isaac--as well as the New Testament analogue--Ike the carpenter making his act of atonement. These three strains are, of course, transmuted through a history of the South which germinates from the literal level of the story. We know that the "history" evoked as corresponding thematic parallels serves as an evaluative norm for the action presented. But these added questions arise: What, if any, typological relationship exists between the various levels of "history" for the action of the story? The thematic

question is inseparable from the formal, but for the moment we shall view the problem strictly from the standpoint of historical vision. For example, is there significance in the fact that as the history of Ike's maturation develops he moves from the primitive arena of Force and Fate to the more Christianized one involving growing self-consciousness of his place in history, of the actual dimensions of his freedom, and a knowledge of his own redemption? It seems clear that there is a definite plan, a strategy of historical interpretation, being presented typologically by Faulkner in "The Bear." Another example is Miss O'Connor's story "Greenleaf," where the central character Mrs. May, a Southern farm woman, is associated symbolically with Hera. The stray bull in the story is associated with Zeus in his seduction of Europa, only to have the typology transformed later in the action so that Mrs. May's death by goring becomes a violent encounter with Christ. Again, the typological levels suggest a particular historical interpretation, so much so that both stories seem to be experienced by the reader as prophetic "continuing revelations"--dramatizations of the historical-ontological links that exist between these evoked parallels and the particular literal action being presented, which "realizes" the typology.

There is the possibility, of course, that these writers may be randomly drawing symbolic parallels to the action, but the particularly strong historical sense that

seems to be operating would argue otherwise. And if a continuous and patterned historical vision is being rendered, then an attempt to briefly characterize the three strains--classical, Old Testament, and New Testament--would seem fruitful for investigating the nature and dimensions of the themes they encompass.

First of all, the classical world has been characterized as one in which man saw the universe as a circumscribed, limited whole that contained all of reality. Even the workings of the gods or fate, however inscrutable to man, were nevertheless a part of that self-enclosed world. The effects of this vision have been described by Romano Guardini as follows:

> From his religious convictions he knew of a 'highest father of the gods and men,' but this father belonged to his own world just as did the vaults of heaven; in truth he was their very spirit. Classical man knew the power of a Fate which commanded his world; he knew of a governing justice and a reasonable order for all things. These forces, all powerful though they were, did not stand beyond the world but formed within its ultimate order.[2]

> Classical man knew nothing of a being existing beyond the world; as a result he was neither able to view or shape his world from a vantage point which transcended it. With his feelings and imagination, in his actions and all his endeavors, he lived within his cosmos. Every project that he undertook, even when he dared to go to the farthest bounds, ran its course within the arc of his world.[3]

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[2]Romano Guardini, The End of the Modern World (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), p. 18.

[3]Ibid., p. 19.

One project which he undertook, of course, was mythologizing the spiritual mysteries he encountered in his experience. But even here, he was limited (imaginatively) to natural mystery, circumscribed within the knowledge of his own world. Consequently, classical myth and a classical view of history is "limited," not just in the sense of being outdated by the advances of learning and technology, but limited ontologically in the very possibilities of being, and of the dimensions of human freedom it could conceptualize and actuate. It will take a breakthrough of a new and higher kind of knowledge, that of divine revelation, to make possible man's knowing participation in supernatural mystery.[4] This does not suggest, however, that classical mythology is false, or that a necessary antagonism exists between it and revelation. Christian scholars of the Middle Ages viewed classical literature as expressions of natural truth, whose content was further developed and amplified by Christianity. Revelation added a deeper layer of meaning to the action; one reason why Christian writers like Dante or Milton or O'Connor found it possible to develop an imaginative situation with both classical and Christian parallels operating in a thematically meaningful way.

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[4]Miss O'Connor strongly insisted upon this distinction. In reply to a friend who saw parallels between Oedipus at Colonus and Christ, she said that the words of Oedipus involve natural mystery, whereas Christ's were of a different order entirely--supernatural mystery--and hence not fully knowable by man.

Given the self-enclosed, limited classical position, one can see the totally revolutionary character of the Christian revelation. First, the notion of a completely transcendent God, creator and sustainer of the universe but completely separate from it, radically redefined man's position in the world. Now he was free to conceptualize himself from a standpoint outside his world, to see his eternal destiny, and to direct or refuse to direct his energies in the light of that special knowledge. No longer was he bound within the notion of time and the simplistic idea of eternity-as-timelessness which characterized the classical view; eternity in revelation was revealed as "here" and "now," a dimension of the present which gives it its true meaning. Secondly, revelation as voiced by the prophets was God's designated plan for the race of mankind in totality, one which gave clear direction and aim to the whole historical process. Human history has a definite beginning in time (the Creation), a factual point of transforming apothesis (Christ's Incarnation), and a fixed end (the Final Judgment). Third, in sharp contrast to the relatively static classical view of creation, existence, and man's relation to the divine--theories of "imitation," of Platonic participation in the One, or creation by dispersion into multiplicity--revelation insisted that creation was a positive, ongoing act of genesis in time, in which reality is in the process of being created throughout all of history. Thus St. Augustine spoke of the

various "stages" of history in the drive toward final realization, the last stage beginning with the Incarnation, which nullified the effects of the Fall and introduced a new freedom, a new potentiality of being into human experience. Twentieth century apologists like Teilhard de Chardin found evidence of this intuition of ongoing genesis in the modern phenomena of biological and psychological evolution, seeing it as a universal drive toward union directed by love. Fourth, Christian revelation introduced the idea of one, universal, corporate and transcendent destiny for mankind--spiritual salvation. This salvific destiny was manifested in Old Testament revelation in God's personal dialogue with man, in words and actions interpreted prophetically and typologically, so that each event really and symbolically prefigured its consummation in Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection, which itself points toward the apocalypse at the end of history.

Christ's coming begins a new stage in universal history, distinct from the classical and Old Testament epochs, more revolutionary. The new era brought the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and the mysterious and irrevocable linking of time and eternity in the Incarnation by complete submission of the Word to human limitation in order to finally transcend it. This process of Christ's Incarnation is revealed as "the way" of historical process toward final transcendence, for paradoxically, as Fr. William

Lynch has shown, Christ took time itself as His instrument and, rather than averting it, He explored it to the fullest limits of potentiality, and more.[5] Thus in the New Testament, human history becomes the history of Christ's penetration of the world of fact, time, and space--in a process of genesis moved forward by humanity's willing participation. At the core of this process is the new freedom generated by the Redemption, which nurtures the divine life of man. This freedom is inconceivable outside the corporate destiny of man and the race, a fact which accounts for the "scandal" of Christ's ministry, for against the classical and secular tendency to view freedom as a mode of transcending the limited physical plane of existence, the factual and the concrete, Christ constantly upends these visionary expectations by naming the humble, the temporal, the mundane and the unspectacular as the free road to salvation.

In later chapters we shall have to look closely at the work of Faulkner and O'Connor to see if their treatment of history reveals a patterned relationship between the classical, Old Testament and New Testament strains. The point which should be stressed at this stage, nonetheless, is that, whether either writer is fully aware of it or not, the facts and effects of revelation exist as part of their historical consciousness, present as an option of vision and action. Even without being formally acknowledged, this

[5]William F. Lynch, Christ and Apollo (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1960). See especially Chapters II and VIII.

revelation is part of the writer's awareness by a process of historical absorption, and it decisively influences the creative act. Such is, I think, the case in Faulkner's "Barn Burning," where distinct "stages" in the level of consciousness can be observed operating as possibilities of human freedom within the action, and this "rising" consciousness is cast in the universal terms of a struggle between different historical epochs.

In a narrow sense this is an initiation story, in which the boy Sarty chooses to break the paternal bond with his barn-burning father and follow the truer dictates of his conscience. It is a difficult choice, one which severs him irrevocably from the family and sets him alone on the road to independent manhood. At the same time, however, the story's action and the boy's final choice for freedom is set by Faulkner within a larger universal framework. Everything about Sarty's father and home (mental and physical) point to a primitive mode of life: the nomadic existence of the family, the unquestioned authority of the tribal leader, the code of blood loyalty, the torpid, bovine sister and older brother, Abner's primordial worship of fire and horses, his ruthless anti-social independence, and the primitive moral code by which Abner lives--an eye for an eye. Against this is set a higher, more civilized life: communal society with an ethos of mutual responsibility, with appeals to conscience and reason to settle differences (the courts

Abner scorns), rather than by brute force; the respect for human rights, at least nominally, and the general sense of "civilization" symbolized by Major deSpain's mansion, the valuable rug Abner deliberately stains, and the law courts, which view actions from the standpoint of a community larger than the family and its narrow blood loyalties. In this context, Sarty's choice of freedom appears as almost a kind of universal human and racial option, as he elects to follow the "higher" mode of life based on reason and conscience rather than the more primitive, which would have obliterated his identity as a free person as much as it already has his older brother, who has become his father's stooge. Significantly, Sarty is only able to do this after witnessing that higher life concretized in Major deSpain's mansion, which gave him an awareness of life beyond the nomadic existence that made him despair until that time. Faulkner's universalizing of the boy's choice is made possible by the writer's vital historical consciousness working in the creative act, so that there is a dramatic ontological progression within the story based upon a vision of human freedom unable to be contained in the primitive mode. It should be added that, how Sarty actually finds his identity and freedom is revealed by Faulkner to be a mystery in the story.

In an ontological sense, then, classical myth prefigured revelation, and the Old Testament typologically prefigured the history of man fulfilled in the New Testament.

Since creation is seen as an ongoing process, still incomplete, the historiographic role of the artist is the prophetic one of revealing the significance of events in the light of ultimate transcendent destiny. The question now arises: what crucial themes germinate from this Christian historical vision, and how do they affect the artist both in his way of seeing experience and his creative practice? Such an expansive question can be dealt with only partially here. For purposes of discussion in this study, a few central themes that derive from this historical vision must be characterized. They are: (1) the belief in mystery; (2) the incarnational view of spirit and matter, the word and the act; (3) the theme of time and eternity; (4) the theme of grace--"spiritual motion"; (5) the concept of <u>place</u>; and (6) the theme of "community."

The life and dimensions of man's being are an ontological mystery, rooted in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation and Redemption. Mystery, here, is used not in the sense of "unknown," but of "unknowable" by human means. The source of the mystery of human identity is therefore supernatural, a fact assured by Christ's hypostatic union with the race. Acceptance of such a profoundly fundamental view has a crucial impact on the writer's creative acts. Paradoxically, it does not limit his field of observation because experience is mysterious; rather, it opens the writer to further and further possibilities of exploration by guaranteeing the

supernatural dimension of reality in such a way that he is not given to rest in simplistic, reductive explanations, but able to push his fiction toward the invisible frontiers of mystery. Hawthorne, an avowed enemy of reductionists, staunchly believed in this principle, and it is a position that Miss O'Connor frequently espoused. Faulkner also concurred in this belief, stating that the "worst sin" he could think of was "violation of the human heart." From the Christian standpoint, this doctrine of the inviolability of human being-ness stems from the mystery embodied perfectly in the Incarnation, imperfectly in man--the mysterious union of spirit and matter.

In a general philosophical sense, the incarnational view of spirit and matter holds that the two are not separable or separate existing entities, but rather are incarnated in such a way that each being possesses its unique act of existence. A contrary view is some form of dualism or dissociation of spirit and matter (usually the manichean form which relegates matter to inferiority or perversity), a position which is theologically impossible from the standpoint of the Incarnation, and which also is philosophically antagonistic to the doctrine of analogy as an explanation of being. The exact relationship between spirit and matter remains a mystery because, as has been pointed out, the Incarnation broadened immeasurably the possible dimensions of human existence--the potential New Man is radically

different from his classical and Old Testament forefathers. As Fr. Lynch notes: "The form of a mouse can receive only so much. No one yet knows how much the form of a man can hold."[6] Nor is the relationship between spirit and matter static; it is linked to time, genesis and change, growth and decay, and most importantly, human freedom. Looking at the theme of spirit and matter from an evolutionary standpoint, Teilhard de Chardin saw the historical process as one of a gradual spiritualization of matter, of "Christianization" of the material world. The key to the mystery of freedom in the incarnational view of spirit and matter seems to be bound up with the mystery of suffering, not necessarily in the sense of undergoing intense, unremitting anguish because of the fallen condition, but rather of accepting the meaning of suffering and loss offered in the Incarnation, an acknowledgment which then paradoxically acts as a liberating force upon reality by lifting the burden of guilt. This, of course, is the essence of the Redemption, that the debt which man could not pay has already been paid. With freedom, rejection is always a possibility, and as will be shown later, in Faulkner and O'Connor such a refusal (which is essentially a refusal of the concrete, limited demands of love) frequently takes the form of a retreat into some spiritual and psychological dualism--spirit

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[6] Christ and Apollo, p. 174.

disembodied from matter. A poignant example is the case of Quentin Compson, who cannot accept the blemished concrete factuality of his historical situation since it does not match the ideological spiritual principles of behavior he holds, principles which in fact betoken a state of innocence whose immunity he thinks to achieve by suicide. Quentin's anguished dualism is a matter of degree, however; since there was only one absolutely perfect incarnation of spirit and matter--Christ--all humanity suffers from "incompletion" in this respect. Thus grotesque, violent, and bizarre manifestations in fiction are, as Miss O'Connor noted, only dramatically heightened examples of the grotesque in everyone. Nevertheless, in the Christian view "incompletion" is not taken as a norm or absolute condition; the drive is toward some interpenetrating reconciliation based on love, perhaps best exemplified by Dilsey, who seems to be whole and at one with herself.

The verbal equivalent of the incarnational view of spirit and matter is, of course, the theme of the Word and the Act. Here, the Son of Man is the Word, God's most perfect communication of Himself, and Christ's own words are the most perfectly concretized incarnation of mystery--the Spirit descending into creation analogically, and transforming it by its divine character. This perfect union of word and act occurs in Christ because He is the Word <u>which is</u> Act; that is, his message incarnates Truth in a single

movement (in what the Christian would call a motion of grace). This of course is what the writer tries to approximate in his struggle to create dramatic, spiritual "motion" with language in sequential time. In the incarnational view of creativity the concept of verbal motion in time is thus lined with the theological idea of grace, "spiritual motion," because grace illuminates the creative faculty to see and bring to life essential truths incarnated in reality, not by escapist tactics of romantic transcendence outside time, but by the writer committing himself to the spirit-in-factuality of existence. Eudora Welty described her task as trying to show the "spirit" of concrete things, that which makes them dramatically moving; in a similar vein Miss O'Connor once described the act of fiction writing as an attempt to "draw the lines which create spiritual motion." It seems to me that Faulkner's judgment that his works were all "failures" should be read in exactly this light, the artist's humble recognition that any human verbal creation was doomed to fall short of his consciousness of a perfectly realized union.

What then, would constitute artistic fidelity to the incarnational view of spirit and matter, the word and the act, when the writer sees around him a "broken world"--spirit unrealized in matter, the word separated from the act, yet a world also in genesis? In the light of his own spiritual vision and the world he sees, his particular redemptive-creative act is to "name" that which is, as truly and

movingly as possible. True creative freedom here involves avoiding the blurring, vague extremes of dualism--of spirit disembodied; one dualistic extreme results in the false effect of didacticism, redeeming experience quickly and abstractly, while the other imparts evil to creation in the manner of Manicheanism. In short, this creative freedom consists in revealing the "essence" of the thing or action being rendered through the physical, to free it from its "brokenness" through language and show that it is simultaneously fallen but redeemed, limited but possessed of absolute integrity. This type of imagination attempts to show the thing's utter uniqueness, its inviolable spiritual wholeness, that which makes it essentially what it is and no other thing. St. Thomas Aquinas perceived the intrinsic relationship between such an imagination and the aesthetic sense when he set three conditions for beauty: wholeness, harmony, and radiance. The first (integritas) demands that the aesthetic image be a discreet object, apprehended in time and space but separated from everything around it; the second (consonantia) perceives the object in its complex and variant harmony of relationship between parts and whole; and the third (quidditas), as Joyce perceived, presents the object "so that you see that thing which it is and no other thing."[7] It is not, therefore, some vague chimera of essence which is shown, but the real thing itself. Jacques Maritain,

[7]James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), p. 213.

in his discourse on Aquinian aesthetics, has explained the precise relationship between the beauty of form of a work, its intelligibility, and mystery as follows:

> By 'radiance of the form' must be understood an ontological splendor which is in one way or other revealed to our mind, not a conceptual clarity. We must avoid all misunderstanding here: the words clarity, intelligibility, light which we use to characterize the role of 'form' at the heart of things, do not necessarily designate something clear and intelligible for us, but rather something clear and luminous in itself, intelligible in itself, and which often remains obscure to our eyes, either because the matter in which the form in question is buried, or because of the transcendence of the form itself in the things of the spirit. The more substantial and the more profound this secret sense is, the more hidden it is from us; so that, in truth, to say with the Schoolmen that the form is in things the proper principle of intelligibility, is to say at the same time that it is the proper principle of mystery. (There is in fact no mystery where there is nothing to know: mystery exists where there is more to be known than is given for our comprehension.) To define the beauty by the radiance of the form is in reality to define it by the radiance of a mystery.[8]

A fourth vital theme effected by the Christian historical vision is the mysterious relationship between time and eternity, part of the writer's internal sense which is reflected thematically in fiction. Briefly, the Christian perspective holds that man exists and acts both in time and in an eternal "present," a dimension outside time which gives it its essential meaning. Human actions derive their deepest spiritual meaning from this immutable "now"; the sub species aeternitatis in which every act is irrevocable, objective, and absolute. If the notion of time is cut off

[8]Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1962), p. 28.

from the eternal dimension, then the present loses its ultimate significance. The historical fact of Christ's Redemption *is* the mystery of time and the eternal, since in this mystery, for man, both the fact of the fallen condition and redemptive freedom exist *simultaneously* in the present. To accept this mystery fully is to accept time, the Christic paradox that the way to eternal transcendence is Christ's way of exploring all the modes of a free being acting in and through time. As we shall see later, a familiar spiritual malaise in Faulkner and O'Connor's work is man's unwillingness to accept this mystery, particularly the fact of the fallen condition (which implicitly witnesses to the *need* for redemption), so that much violent energy is expended trying to achieve some mock state of personal innocence and immunity. The effect of the Fall was to place man completely within time and subject to it--subject to corruption and death; not simply physical death, but spiritual, *eternal* death. The Incarnation reunited the dimensions of time and the eternal, and the Resurrection overcame the effects of time mysteriously, not by Christ's abandoning time, but by fulfilling it in the light of the eternal. Yet the mystery of the relationship between the Fall and Redemption remains partially hidden in the veil of time, to be lived through concretely. This precludes any notion of Platonic dualism, or of escape into the mock ethereal realms of infinity.

How does this theme of time and eternity relate to the historical sense and the creative faculty? Fr. Claude Tresmontant has pointed out that Biblical metaphysics held that God created gratuitously in one act which is still going on--creation is still in the process of being made, in time. Man participates in this process of genesis creatively, especially the prophetic artist, whose historical sense generates intuitive perceptions or revelations of the direction and meaning of history. To quote Tresmontant: "Time denotes the act of creation. Eternity is the point of view of the creator."[9] Fr. Tresmontant shows how fundamental is this historical sense in the Judeo-Christian heritage.

> In Platonism the sensible participates in the Idea by a degradation....In the Biblical universe, the sensible participates in the intelligible by creation ...it is at one time being and sign....The Platonic symbol for representing and signifying a metaphysical or theological reality appeals to a myth, to the unreal. The symbol is disincarnated. The sensible, the concrete, is not suitable to carry the message. It is necessary to construct a chimera.
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> On the contrary, the Hebrew uses daily things, communal reality, history, to signify and teach the mysteries which are the proper nourishment of the spirit ....The advantage of the Hebrew method of teaching metaphysics and theology by the maschal and the parable of concrete fact is its capacity for universality. The maschal grows from the concrete, the most common, the most universally human....In the Biblical mode of expression, it is enough to be human to understand that which is proposed. The Biblical parable is as intelligible for the Galilean peasant as for the Corinthian docker

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[9]Claude Tresmontant, Essai sur la Pensee Biblique, quoted in Christ and Apollo, pp. 211-12.

> in the time of St. Paul, as it is for the worker in the factories of Paris in our time. A Greco-Latin culture is often an impediment to an understanding of these parables, which imply a sense of the real and of work, and such a love of the concrete element as seems a defect to the Platonic mentality; the latter is more or less unconsciously dualist, and too aristocratic to prove the depth and richness of the mystical content of these daily realities of working with the elemental.... The particular is the existant. Hebrew thought springs from the particular existant; the particular in the Biblical universe is neither negligible nor insignificant. It is a vehicle of sense.[10]

Thus from the artist's standpoint, the consciousness of an eternal dimension, paradoxically "working" in and through the sensible concrete particular, allows him to reveal history is a truly creative way. It is not just a matter of revealing a history which unravels in time according to some pre-existing plan; this would be Platonic imitation rather than creation. The Christian idea of time is synonymous with the concept of human (and thus artistic) freedom, of authentically creating the universe in all its material factuality and the spiritual reality at the heart of it. Fr. Tresmontant raises a question which seems to me to epitomize the artist's sense of this mystery. "Isn't it precisely the tension of duration of a knowing being that measures his power to act, the quantity of free and creative activity that he is able to introduce into the world?"[11]

The paradoxical biblical view of the artist's stance--measuring experience from an eternal fixed

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[10] Ibid., p. 211.

[11] Ibid., p. 210.

standpoint, yet conscious of genesis going on--seems akin to Faulkner's own conception. Tresmontant points out that the biblical notion of intelligence is "a dynamic intuition of Being in genesis"; Faulkner frequently stated that "life is change, motion," and that being must adapt or die. He has also stated that the artist's task is to arrest motion when he creates, and this views the genesis from the fixed point of eternity. On the other hand, the actual experience of the work for the writer and reader is not one of stasis, but of dramatic movement in time. Faulkner's "arrested motion" seems more accurately a description of the absolute concrete image which struck in an eternal flash the chord of creative vision; as for example, the image of a young girl with muddy drawers climbing on a tree, which germinated The Sound and the Fury.[12] Yet Faulkner grappled to embody that image in a dramatic and sequential continuum of language and action, and this is the "time" which writer and reader proceed through experientially.

When we look within fiction itself, there are frequently "signs"--actions--denoting the Christian mystery of

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[12]In an interview with Cynthia Grenier, Faulkner verified this sense: "There's always a moment in experience --a thought--an incident--that's there. Then all I do is work up to that moment. I figure what must have happened before to lead people to that particular point, and I work away from it, finding out how people act after that moment. That's how all my books and stories come." Quoted in The Lion in the Garden, James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, ed. (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 220.

time and eternity, of supernatural grace operating in nature and through time. These are what can be called acts of "spiritual motion"; that is, some crucial act or insight achieved by a character which witnesses to the existence of the eternal and the character's ontological relationship to it. It has nothing especial to do with physical motion in time and space, or with any romantic idea of transcendence of the limited world. Frequently it comes in the form of a mental recognition by the character, who is "moved" by the action of grace to see and accept it. Mysteriously, he sees himself in the light of dimension beyond time, and consequently, sees his own meaning and destiny incarnated in this particular situation and in this "place"--which in the Christian view constitutes a truly historical insight. For example, the grandmother in Miss O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" travels a long way, physically, to meet death at the hands of the Misfit. But the essential "spiritual motion" occurs in a small gesture--touching the Misfit's arm--a movement of grace which acknowledges her essential relation to him: "Why, you're one of my own babies!" In this motion of grace she accepts her true place in relation to him, and there is no story without this free act. Similar "spiritual motions" of recognition occur in "The Displaced Person," when before her death Mrs. Shortley perceives the "true country," eternal and invisible, from which she comes, and in "The Artificial Nigger," "Revelation," and in fact

every other major story by O'Connor. In Faulkner, the concept is best exemplified in Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury, a character who seems to live and move always in the light of the eternal, yet completely immersed in time. In Part IV, she makes a spiritual movement during Rev. Shegog's sermon, a historical insight that connects and reveals the mysterious union between Christ and the thirty-three year old idiot Benjy standing next to her in the pew.

None of these "motions" indicate spatial movement especially, a change of place, in the popular sense. In fact, spatial movement frequently betokens an attempt to escape the judgment and "presence" of the eternal. In Wise Blood Hazel Motes only truly sees himself sub species aeternitatis after his means of physical locomotion--his rat-colored car--is destroyed. Joe Christmas is another notable example of a character who is existentially "lost," without a place, and therefore driven on an anguished journey to escape himself. Thus "spiritual motion" is connected to time and an acceptance of the eternal, and this acceptance is an act of historical-ontological consciousness which involves accepting one's place in the immediate situation (temporally and spatially), and in relation to the total human community and its single spiritual destiny, as the Grandmother does with the Misfit, or Dilsey with Benjy. It is an awareness of "place" which begins in the immediate and the physical and then stretches outward to the invisible

and mysterious roots of being. Some characters carry "place" within them as an interior condition, like Lena Grove, who fits into any community and seems to act as a catalyst for the possibilities of grace no matter where she is. Viewed in this light, Faulkner's description of Joe Christmas' self-eviction from the human race as "the worst tragedy that can happen to a man" seems to point--not to the fact that he can't fit in society (as the sociologists might claim), since obviously he can--but to the kind of existential loss of place that seems particularly prevalent in contemporary American experience.

"Place," then, metaphysically felt, is the intersection of time and the eternal, and the Christian central place is the Crucifixion. Materially it is rooted in the concrete location and time; ontologically it stretches into the invisible and the infinite. In her essay "Place in Modern Fiction," Eudora Welty expertly defined this concept's significance in fiction as the ground root of value, and the disastrous effects of its loss. Perhaps because of their unique cultural position, Southern writers seem to intuit this more profoundly than others. Viewing the matter ontologically, Romano Guardini has pointed out that medieval man possessed a rather firmly defined sense of place--in society, in his cosmological sense of God ruling from the Empyreum, and in his sense of the "other place" of perdition --albeit a finite view, but one which found support in the

structure of life everywhere. In addition, there was the sense of "inner finiteness," a sense within man of a frontier beyond which lay the mystery of his being, known completely only by God. This guaranteed a respect for individual inviolability and the mystery of personality, a concept, needless to say, which is antinomous to modern reductive and rationalistic explorations of the psyche--"violations of the heart"--the inner place.

The security of the medieval framework passed with the Renaissance, with the revolutionary new cosmology supported by new scientific discoveries, with critical reappraisal and rejection of biblical revelation, and with the social and psychological revolution. These phenomena sundered Western man from his old secure place, with profound psychic repercussions on the fundamental matter of man's attempt to locate his identity in being. Since the Renaissance we have witnessed, historically, an increasingly intense sense of rootlessness, exhibited positively in the quest for discovery in intellectual life, in scientific and geographic explorations, and in the area of human freedom. But these have been coupled with negative effects as well--the increasing sense of alienation from self, of wandering, and of the extreme fragility of man's position in the universe.[13] The concern of much modern writing with this problem shows

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[13]The End of the Modern World, pp. 61-67.

the writer's sense of this loss, partly because he shares it, but also, if he is a truly significant writer, because he stands in a definite place metaphysically which assures his own identity in being. I do not mean to suggest that writers like O'Connor and Faulkner share the medieval view of a fixed cosmology from which to judge contemporary experience. Miss O'Connor once remarked that the modern writer's landscape was no longer fairly evenly divided between heaven, hell, and purgatory, as Dante's was, but that he had to seek for "balance" in confronting modern experience by searching within himself for a position from which to truly see the distortions of contemporary life. Curiously, that found balance is often reflected in fiction by the willingness to use surface distortion--the grotesque--to dramatize the depth of modern value disorientation. For the writer who shares the Christian historical vision, the felt place of axiological balance is the Redemption, the point of hope in the writer's basic commitment against futility and despair.

Another theme which is closely related to that of "place" is the concept of community. In the Christian historical vision the "community" is the total, universal mass of humanity, since the aim of the Redemption in historical terms is the single corporate salvation of the race. This includes the dead as well as those living and yet unborn--the "mystical body" of humanity linked by Christ's entrance into and transformation of history. The dead also have

their place in existence--a point worth considering in relation to As I Lay Dying or The Violent Bear It Away. The drive of the Redemption is toward union by love, on the human level within the community of men; a community characterized ideally by freedom and openness. The redemptive process is slow, painful, but inexorable. Still, the option of withdrawal implies a fate which is worse: it may temporarily soothe the anguish of commitment and change, but it also cuts the individual off from the concrete sources of growth--human love in mutuality. Cases of this are repeatedly evident in Faulkner's work, and in each case he makes it clear that, because of the inescapable bond of humanity, disaffection only incurs spiritual sterility, and, a retreat from history--usually into the false immunity of a romanticized past. We need only think of Reverend Hightower and Quentin Compson to see this tragic option at work, each curiously "outside" history out of some desperate urge to dissociate themselves from its evil forces. Each is reluctant to accept "place" in relation to the community around them, and each can rarely manage to accept the grace of the moment, to "move" by acknowledging a link with the human community. Hightower does, of course, manage this on occasion (notably in helping Lena Grove in childbirth), but then he finally disengages himself from involvement. In contrast, Byron Bunch makes his commitment to "move," acting out of love in spite of risk. Dilsey, of course, is the best

example: a center of love and union who is perfectly at home with her spiritual self in the broken, obsession-ridden world around her, a world held together inwardly and outwardly by her sense of responsibility to a "community."

There is another view of "community" which is obnoxious to the Christian concept, yet also depicted in Faulkner and O'Connor. It is characterized by a sense of enclosure rather than openness, of fixity rather than spiritual growth, and of a rigid provincialism based on exclusion and moralism, such as the "town" reaction to Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden in Light in August. It is familiar in fiction as the over-simplified stereotype of Southern society, and with many ostensible Christian members. Yet it must be judged in the light of the invisible, universal community within which the writer measures it by the typological action of the novel. This is not to say judged in the light of the universal contemporary community in America or the West, for one complicating factor in Southern fiction is that the "true" community may be enclosing to defend itself against more pernicious intrusions from a largely secular culture. As Miss O'Connor once noted, anguish in the South was not due to the fact that it is different from the rest of America, but because it is not different enough.

II.

There is a vision of history which is antinomous to the Christian view also represented in Faulkner and O'Connor's works, which both see as very operative universally and increasingly within the South. This view can be labeled the secular modernist or progressivist, though neither writer is especially anti-progressive. The differences between the two views are fundamental and irreconcilable--concerning the nature and direction of the universe, the essential character of man and his relation to a Divine Being, and a responsible use of freedom and power. The secular modernist is the dominant sensibility of contemporary American culture; and both writers see it making significant headway within the South, even though the biblical tradition still persists with more evident tenacity than elsewhere. The South today, as Miss O'Connor observed, may not be "Christ-centered," but it is nevertheless still "Christ-haunted." Southern fiction has provided a dramatic battleground for the clash of these opposing views of history's "progress" for the past hundred years.

As historians of culture have noted, the modernist secular viewpoint emerged from the dissolution of the Church-centered medieval world and the concomitant revolution in all areas of life which has proceeded since the Renaissance. The complex view of God, man, and human destiny propounded by Christian revelation suffered attrition under the wave

of enlightenment brought by new freedom in every dimension of life--intellectual, social, political, religious, and psychological. Most importantly, the recognition of the person of Christ as the focal point of history became blunted and obscured; the prevailing sense came to be that human destiny, individual and collective, could fulfill itself by human means alone--by intelligence, by mutual understanding, and by power. The sense of the supernatural diminished; the problem of evil seemed humanly soluble, or as Eliot noted, a sense of the supernatural power of evil became diluted in this rising new sensibility. This assumption of "solubility" was based upon a secularized view of man's potential as being unlimited; in direct contradiction of the biblical emphasis on human limitation and the need for divine grace and direction. In short, very little need for a Redemption was acknowledged; one could after all be "self-redeemed."

It is possible, of course, to elaborate endlessly upon the different manifestations of the secular progressive spirit in the past four centuries. What I wish to call attention to here are those central themes which run counter to the Christian historical vision under discussion. These are the negative counterparts reflected dramatically in Faulkner and O'Connor's fiction.

The first primary difference which should be noted is the view of man simply as a being. Christian revelation posits the basic unknowable mystery of existence and experience, centered in the Incarnation. In contrast, secular

modernism rejects this belief wholeheartedly; man and his experience are regarded as capable of being conformed to human intellectual understanding. Prime examples of this impulse are the various forms of rationalism which try to eliminate mystery by formulaic analysis, a temper of mind that invades all areas of life. Perhaps its most destructive effect is that by trying to reduce supernatural mystery in personality and "solve" human limitation, it invariably cuts down the potentiality of growth and good as well. Miss O'Connor remarked that the "Aylmers in our society have multiplied since Hawthorne's day," and her fiction offers ample evidence of this widespread sensibility at work: Rayber, Shephard, old Mr. Fortune, Mrs. Cope and Mrs. McIntyre. Another form of this reductive sensibility manifests itself in the ruthless pragmatic materialism by which characters try to enforce their will upon experience. Faulkner's works abound with these types: Jason Compson, insanely obsessed with order and logic, yet irrational in all his responses; the "mechanical" men like Abner Snopes, Popeye, and Thomas Sutpen; and the religious rationalists like Mr. McEachern and Doc Hines--all driven by a simplistic view of experience, and all, I should add, finally defeated by the mysterious flow of history they rebel against. Understandably, none of these characters can come to terms with time or place, or accept "the moment" gracefully; eternity and the supernatural having been discarded, they are driven

by some obsessive quest for salvation through self-redemption that inevitably ends in despair or destruction.

As we have seen, in the Christian perspective a valid historical sense involves a sense of the ontological relationship between past and present, which implies an awareness of the relationship between time and eternity. The loss or fragmentation of this sense is evident throughout the modernist perspective. Revelation preached a limited and definitive span of history, linked to and purposed by the eternal dimension; secular modernism views history as open-ended, an end in itself, with man completely autonomous to direct its course. And yet it is a curious paradox of history that the various doctrines of determinism grew up with this sense of human autonomy. The concept of man governed by a Divine Plan to which he responds with limited freedom was largely abandoned. But after an initial exhilarating sense of freedom from the burden of revelation, the modernist sensibility increasingly found difficulty in dealing with the anguish of time, boredom, and the feeling of ennui. The sense of the absolute eternal importance of the single human act diminished proportionately. The sundering of the ontological tie between time and eternity produces, among other effects, two logical extremes. The first is historicism: the obsession with past-as-past which appears in many literary forms (Proust, for example), and in many characters in Southern fiction as a nostalgic escape. The second effect

is an opposite extreme: obsession with the present moment of the type seen in pure existentialism, or in the actions of someone like Jason Compson or Rayber, both of whom cannot relax their hold on the present, and whose fanaticism is defeated again and again by time.

The loss of historical sense, as Eliot noted, is part of the larger problem which he described as a "dissociation of sensibility," a dissociation which effects every central theme of the Christian view of history. For dissociation means "dis-incarnation," a movement away from the kind of ontological unity exemplified perfectly in Christ and to which man naturally aspires. There is the dissociation of time from eternity, in which time becomes simply progression rather than genesis and growth toward consummating a redemptive history; and in which eternity is removed "out there" and seen as "after time," not as a dimension of the present now which gives value to time so that man can immerse in it creatively, not burdensomely. There is the dissociation or disincarnation of spirit and matter, where the former is viewed abstractly as pure essence, and matter as slightly or wholly despiritualized, inert, or in the Manichean extreme, evil. There is the dissociation of word from act, partly fated since only one perfect incarnation has occurred, but gravely aggravated to the point where language has become an instrument of manipulation--of power for its own sake--rather than as a vehicle for truth. One

form of the malaise produced searches for lofty essences--for verbal "redemption"--by dissociation from the concrete. One need only point to Quentin Compson, drowning in a deluge of words cut off from concrete value, or Addie Bundren's insight that "words rise up, thoughts go along the ground" to see Faulkner's awareness of this problem. Indeed it was one which he struggled desperately with in his own work, sometimes only with limited success. And as we shall see later, the degree of dissociation directly affects the degree of dramatic "motion"--of revelation through word as act--engendered within the creative process itself.

There is the dissociation of "place"--the phenomena of displacement already mentioned. Now in the Christian perspective a certain form of this is natural--the sense of alienation from God brought by the Fall, and the longing for paradise and return to the innocent state, as Dante felt in the Divine Comedy. Yet coupled with that, through the Redemption, is the belief in the fundamental goodness of man's free immersion in "this place"--the concrete, limited, narrow physical world which is the gate through time to salvific transcendence. In the modernist dissociation of place, however, there is the sense of man's fundamental alienation from his own being in the world--cut off in time and space from the eternal. This displacement also induces an anxious striving to conquer "infinite space" (inner and outer), a sense of rootlessness and wandering, and an inability to accept "here" with its roots pushing downward

through the concrete to the eternal. Theologically, this sense of rootless striving is directly linked to a rejection of the Fall, of limitation and connection, and of the kind of redemptive freedom which holds that one can effect action within an eternal framework without moving an inch, through various forms of prayer. As Miss O'Connor and Eudora Welty and others have pointed out, rootless questing (for the novelist also) is indeed a way of refusing to feel, of remaining in place long enough to experience the real sense of loss that brings with it a truly redeeming sense of human community.

Finally, there is the form of dissociation which is opposite to the Christian concept of community--the drive toward immunity. This term signifies any motion or movement away from recognition of the Fall, of personal communal responsibility (again, the total mystical body including the dead), or refusal of grace. The term "motion" is appropriate because theologically it constitutes a counter-movement to the unifying agency of grace, which as we saw, was bound up with acceptance of time-place in "the moment." Frequently in characters (Hazel Motes, for example), the drive toward immunity is an attempt to preserve a false state of innocence, which if admitted as lost would incur the responsibility of redemptive freedom. So the character chooses to extricate himself from the web of concrete duplicity--escaping in space like Hazel Motes, or in time like the

Grandmother and Mrs. Compson, to recapture another place which seems better to live in, even as in the case of Quentin where it is a "hell" where he and Caddie can live immune from the fact of her "fall." The effect is to place the character outside "history" in the concrete, present fluid situation--the exact axiological point where grace can only be operative--and generative of growth. Or sometimes immunity takes the form of a retreat behind language itself, behind verbosity or rhetoric or cliché or self-justificative palaver, a kind of "self-redeeming" mechanism, as in Jason Compson or his father. In any of these cases, immunity is "achieved" only at a terrific price to the individual, usually a loss of freedom. It often requires the action of grace working <u>through</u> violence to wrench the character from their fixed (innocent) obsession, forcing them to "be" within this moment with all its terrifying possibilities, as in the case of Rev. Hightower when he tries desperately to save Joe Christmas by insisting Joe was with him on the night of the murder. In fact, it is the prevalence of the smug imperturbability of the modernist temper which forces much of the "holy" violence in Faulkner and O'Connor.

I have tried to sketch the above historical perspectives to give some philosophical and theological dimension to the historical sense operating in Faulkner and O'Connor, and to try to demonstrate the ramifying issues at stake for a writer choosing to reveal in fiction a historical vision

of experience close at hand. Now it is necessary to sketch in more detail the particularly close-at-hand history through which the biblical historical vision is transmuted--the American framework and the South's relation to it.

CHAPTER TWO

I have tried without much reference to the history of institutionalized Christianity to sketch some basic themes and counterthemes which emanate from an authentically Christian historical vision. This seemed the best approach because it is precisely that "spirit" of the Christian vision which the writer responds to; the historical sense is a felt psychic condition rather than a conscious intellectual stance taken. The fact of the matter, of course, is that institutionalized Christianity has shown itself again and again throughout history to be marked with innumerable human distortions--with perversity and self-deception perpetrated in the name of the highest "moral" goals, with exploitation and debasement of man, with self-righteous provincialism and despicable folk worship, and always with a strain of pharisaical religiosity that works to diminish human freedom and responsibility. But the distortions are human, not Christian. Writers like Faulkner frequently exposed these perversions, and did so I think in the name of that true spirit which they saw adulterated to the point that the only conscionable alternative was to depict this so-called "Christian" ethos in all its stultifying negativity and to identify

sympathetically with its victims. For to the novelist the victim's situation is like that of the whore vindicated by Jesus before her pharisaical accusers; it is a situation which cries out for a witness to the true spirit in the face of the deformed, sterile de-humanized imitation of it offered by self-righteous moralists.

All this is to say that manifestations of authentic Christian historical vision are hardly confined to the institutionalized forms which the world has known. Aware of this, some critics, John Edward Hardy for example, argue that Faulkner's spiritual foundation is actually "ahistorical," that he takes his stand on the side of certain universal "eternal verities" and against a narrow and debased institutionalized Christianity.[1] This is to a certain extent true, but to call his position "ahistorical" is to accept a misapprehension about the authentic Christian historical vision, one that frequently occurs. It is to identify universal Christianity exclusively with the West, to narrow its history only to Europe and America, and to judge its ebb and flow only within that limited framework. In a recent discussion of the concept of a "post-Christian" world, Fr. Walter Ong, S.J. has convincingly exposed the cultural provincialism of those who judge Christianity only in terms

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[1] John Edward Hardy, "Faulkner: The Legend Behind the Legend," in Man in the Modern Novel (Seattle: Univ. of Wash. Press, 1964). Mr. Hardy's essay offers a provocative interpretation of Faulkner's use of Christian materials, one which shows clearly the theological analogues in Faulkner's writings.

of its history in Western culture, and ignore both its universal character and the factual history of its continuing global growth--in Africa, the Far East and all areas outside the West.[2] Faulkner constantly identified with this universalist "spirit," as evidenced by his insistence that he wrote as a "member of the human race" or one of the "family of mankind." This historical sense of the total, single race was a constant verity which enabled him to penetrate the facade of debased forms of "Christianity" in the South that were in fact elitist and exclusionist, religiously pretentious, and antithetical to the true redemptive spirit.

It is this universalist Christian historical sense, I would argue, which imbued the vision of Faulkner and O'Connor when they interpreted the history of American experience, the specific "foreground" linked analogically to classical and redemption history. What constitutes this "foreground" wherein the historical sense operates? Specifically, what particular Christian and secular strains can be found in the American vision of its experience, where contending views of history and ultimate values take shape? Here again, we shall try to probe beneath the complicated nexus of political, social, economic and religious forces that go to make up the "American experience" in order to distinguish certain vital and opposing differences in the

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[2]Walter Ong, S.J., In the Human Grain (New York: MacMillan Co., 1967).

ontological sense of "our situation," differences which shape the view of man and direction of history in this country.

It is common among cultural historians to point out similarities between post-colonial New England and the South as fertile grounds for their respective literary flowerings. There is common to both a distinctive regional cohesiveness; a sense of regional historical self-consciousness; a spirit of individualism and ethical sensitivity; a vital rhetorical tradition; diversified ethnic, social, and religious groups yet all cognizant of a certain regional identity; and finally, a kind of inner tension of warring values that spurs vital creative activity. Looked at in this light the two cultures share a great many similarities, as well as many obvious differences. However, when we begin to examine historical sense as a felt, psychic condition, there is such a radical difference between the two that, for all their intellectual similarities, they are in fact worlds apart. This radical difference can be accounted for primarily by one historical fact--the Civil War and its aftermath in the South. Broadly speaking, the New England culture from its inception possessed ideologically the same basic Christian tradition that existed in the South, but with certain exceptions, this belief has not been experientially confirmed in American experience outside the South, a fact borne out by the gradual declension of the rigorous, theological-centered

Puritan culture that occurred in the face of optimistic progressivism.

The Providential conception of history, as an avowed "policy," was of course the motivating power behind the Puritan settlement in America in both its inception and institutionalized government. William Bradford, John Winthrop, William Hooker, the Mathers, and the successive waves of Puritan settlers ventured to America specifically to erect "a city on a hill," charged with the conviction that Divine Providence guided their efforts to build a "New Jerusalem" in the new world. Heirs of both the classical and Hebraic intellectual traditions, disciples of revelation but also imbued with rationalism, the early Puritans set about fervidly to fulfill their appointed role in the evolution of Christianity in America. It is important to recall here the Puritan idea of its own "providential" history, for oddly enough it contained the seed of the gradual declension of the vital faith which sustained the early settlers amid the distresses of the early decades, as well as the seed of justification for the kind of secular progressivism and moral benevolence that evolved. Puritan theocracy was based upon a rationalistic and legalistic "covenant of grace," whereby God deliberately bound Himself to a contractual agreement of salvation if the elected saints fulfilled His laws on earth. One effect of this doctrine was to radically diminish, both individually and in terms of the

whole society, the concept of supernatural mystery as it existed at the center of the Hebraic tradition. It is no accident, for example, that slightly more than a hundred years later, Benjamin Franklin read the story of Job, one of whose central theses is Job's renewed sense of divine mystery, and found the following moral: "Remember Job, who suffered, and was afterwards rewarded!" (italics mine). Secondly, the Puritan providential conception of its history was in fact built upon an act of separation from the Past, from history, if not literally then at least psychically, an act of dissociation which on the one hand allowed them to identify analogically with the exodus of the "chosen people" of the Old Testament, but which also tended to diminish any universalist sense of redemption by exalting their unique moral destiny above the Past they left behind.

Perry Miller has thoroughly documented the subtle transformation and declension that occurred in the Puritan theocracy when placed paradoxically amidst the bountiful prospects offered in the new continent. The "covenant of grace" reinforced the sense of moral rectitude, yet the injunction upon each saint to labor in God's vineyard--this world--coincided perfectly with the opportunities for progress and wealth offered in the frontier colonies. With increasing alarm religious elders issued jeremiads against worldliness and secularism, reminding men of the God of wrath and damnation, but everywhere the rigorous Puritan view suffered

gradual attrition. Even while attacking the effects of progress, these elders rarely attacked progress itself.[3] It was not that men were abandoning the providential view in wholesale numbers; rather, they felt themselves to be interpreting and designing and fulfilling it in a continent whose resources were direct evidence of God's abundant blessing upon their works. Miller records how in the course of a century the wrathful God of the Puritans was slowly translated into a benevolent and rewarding Deity, whose material benefices implicitly testified to His approval of the secular aspects of the covenant alliance. As the decades wore on, the federal theology of New England covenanters was diluted into a kind of buoyant nationalism that saw God as a co-architect of American aspiration. Even Jonathan Edwards, for all his desperate attempts in the 1740's to revive the Puritan spirit, finally acknowledged a God who disposed His providence in this world with disinterested benevolence. By the time of the Revolution, the theology of biblical revelation was intellectually and experientially largely discredited, replaced by a doctrine of prosperity and secularized moral idealism.

> Bit by bit, almost imperceptibly, the benevolent God who led the Americans to independence was interpreted as a Being who shepherded this whole community into a

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[3]Perry Miller, Nature's Nation (Cambridge: The Belkamp Press, 1967), p. 33. See also the last chapter of Perry Miller's The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1964).

> heritage of social prosperity. Sinners might remain, but they were no longer in the hands of an angry God; they were in the midst of an ebullient America, before which extended the prospect of infinite expansion, unprecedented wealth. In this reach of vision, no creatures, not even spiders, were any longer poisonous by nature.[4]

It is not difficult to perceive the variances between the redemptive view of history and the new progressivism that came to prevail in America. Through attrition the biblical sense of sin evolved largely into a new ethic of pietistical "do-good-ism" and benevolence, and social reform. The sense of limitation and spiritual dependence eroded in favor of a doctrine of independent self-reliance, more agreeable to the enterprising New Man in America. Against the mysterious paradox of Christic time in relation to eternity, we can measure Benjamin Franklin's opportunistic view of time; and space, as R.W.B. Lewis has pointed out, was seen as a limitless frontier against which the New Adam projected an identity of infinite potential. This "progressive" vision, moving away from the Past, effaced its link with the central, factual event in scriptural history--Christ and His Redemption--so much so that in the "Divinity School Address" Emerson completely absolved Christianity from its concrete, historical foundation by making Christ into an abstract "essence" of the divine in man. There were, of course, writers like Hawthorne and Melville

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[4] Nature's Nation, p. 285.

who argued pessimistically against this progressive metaphysic, but the audience at large was listening to the sound of different drummers, who preached a gospel of rational or intuitive self-redemption by following the promptings of one's inner being. Perry Miller found this ethos prevailing into the 20th century, a condition he termed the crisis of "well-intentioned American benevolence."

> This is not to say that the American experience through the 19th century was all beer and skittles. Life on the frontier was hard; the building of the West cost health and lives; many were defeated and turned their faces to the wall. Then there was the mighty blood-purge of the Civil War, and the anguish of a defeated South. By the end of the century there were ominous rumblings in the city, strikes and violence, and the Chicago anarchists. Still, the generalization may stand, that American society subscribed to--and on the whole vindicated--the benevolent thesis of Revolutionary patriotism. Emerson seemed to demonstrate that, even when traditional Protestant theology could be dispensed with, the economy of the universe was such that traditional morality was undisturbed. By trusting himself, Huck Finn comes out morally inviolate. Despite the ordeal of rude pioneering and civil strife, the steady progression of this society toward the goals of benevolence was unmistakable.[5]

Given this progressive view, it is easy to understand Henry James' charge that America possessed "no history" vital enough for fiction. As much as anything else James implied in that observation, he was pointing to a lack of "historical sense" in the culture and most of her writers, for what kind of ontological links were to be admitted in a culture which turned its back upon the Past and clung to the belief in its utter uniqueness in global experience? James sensed the

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[5] Ibid., pp. 285-6.

lack of an added dimension, of "thickness" derived from struggling with, without trying to level, the paradoxes of history and "the moment," and the etiology of guilt and atonement. And might we not also add: that James intuited that such a progressive view was ultimately the enemy of that freedom essential to art, its monomyth capable only of sterile recapitulation, since it tended to ignore the depth and density of being where freedom exists as generative of moral awareness in experience.

It is clear from our present standpoint how much 20th century America has suffered the consequences of the gospel of benevolent moral idealism and progress--the rapacious exploitations of environment and natural resources, the fact of human displacement in a burgeoning technocracy, and the destructive consequences of pursuing our curiously provincial "manifest destiny" on a worldwide scale. It is not clear, however, whether these "setbacks" have engrained in us a sufficiently critical historical awareness to judge this progressive ethos in terms of larger, universal patterns of human experience. In our recent past the kind of effusive self-righteousness characteristic of the American progressive vision has frequently made us particularly blind to "other" histories than our own, unless they are made over in our own image, a feat we also continue to attempt.

In lesser degrees of intensity and success, segments of the South have shared this progressive vision. Circumstances and temperament have at the same time produced vast

cultural differences: the facts of widespread poverty, a basically agrarian economy, and the position of the Negro have produced problems and responses distinctly "Southern." This regional history alone was no doubt enough to produce a distinct historical consciousness, but it is the combined facts of the Civil War with its trauma of Reconstruction, and the strong biblical tradition, which have implanted and reinforced a theological dimension in that historical consciousness that linked it with the universal. These combined forces have not of necessity resulted in a univocal "Southern sensibility," but they have created a historical situation which at every turn reinforced the kind of concrete "Christian" ontology discussed in the preceding chapter--the respect for mystery, for the concrete, for the power of evil, for the integrity of place and time, and a healthy suspicion of abstract and problematic solutions to human mysteries. This vastly different "psychic condition" experienced by the Southerner in contrast to his non-Southern neighbors has been described by historian Richard Weaver as follows:

> If we look at the typical American against the background of his experience, his folklore, and his social aspirations, we are forced to admit that he represents, more than any other type in the world, victorious man. He has surpassed the people of every other country in amassing wealth, in rearing institutions, and in getting his values recognized, for better or worse, throughout the world. While he is often chided for his complacent belief in progress, it must be confessed that events have conspired to encourage that belief, and to make progress appear the central theme of his history. In all sorts of senses he has never ceased to go forward; and to much of the world America has come to symbolize

that future in which man will be invariably successful both in combat with nature and in his struggle with the problems of human organization. This adds up to saying that in the eyes of the world as well as in his own eyes the typical American stands for unlimited success.

But this is the point where the Southerner ceases to be classifiable as American. He has had to taste a bitter cup which no American is supposed to know anything about, the cup of defeat. Thus in a world where the American is supposed to be uniformly successful, he exists as an anomalous American. Much of the Southerner's nonconformity and intransigence results from the real difficulty of adjusting a psychology which has been nourished upon this experience to the predominating national psychology, which has been nourished upon uninterrupted success.

The effects of this adverse history upon the Southern mentality have never been candidly appraised. For example, it cannot be without significance that the Southerner today is the only involuntary tenant of the American Union. I am not suggesting that there exists at present a mass feeling of political independence, as there did at one time; but the record of American history, which he has to read along with his Northern brother, says that he is where he is as the result of a settlement of force against him. To argue that the resulting condition is economically or otherwise to his advantage is beside the point; the book continues to say that a supreme act of his will was frustrated, and that as a consequence of that defeat he had to accommodate himself to an unwanted circumstance. And that, of course, is the meaning of failure. Therefore in the national legend the typical American owes his position to a virtuous and effective act of his will; but the Southerner owes his to the fact that his will was denied; and this leaves a kind of inequality which no amount of political blandishment can remove entirely. Although there appears today no lively awareness of this frustration, it none the less lies deep in his psychology, a subdued but ingrown reminder that at one time his all was not enough--a reminder, furthermore, that Americans too can fail. Probably this explains why his presence sometimes irks his fellow Americans. He cannot sit in conclave with their unspoiled innocence, for he brings, along with a certain outward exuberance, these sardonic memories.[6]

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[6]Richard M. Weaver, "Aspects of the Southern Philosophy," Southern Renaissance, ed. Louis Rubin and Robert Jacobs (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), pp. 24-25.

Thus as Weaver suggests, the fact of the South's defeat strengthened the sense of human limitation as a fundamental condition of life. It is a situation which, coupled with the biblical tradition, finds strong parallels in Old Testament history.[7] This does not mean to suggest that the South's defeat necessarily produced a sense of corresponding identity with the scriptural tradition. Negative reactions are also evident in various impulses toward retrenchment: the romantic (and essentially non-Christian) worship of Southern "Past" (a kind of cultural necrophilia), bigoted provincialism and defensiveness, and "modernizing" the South through secular progress. Nevertheless, for the writer of deep religious-historical instinct, the defeat situation provided an immediate, concrete analogue of the essential fallen condition of mankind. To Miss O'Connor this constitutes a vital link between the Southern situation and the universal.

> When Walker Percy won the National Book Award, newsmen asked him why there were so many good Southern writers and he said, 'Because we lost the war.' He didn't mean by that simply that a lost war makes good subject matter. What he was saying was that we have had our Fall. We have gone into the modern world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and with a sense of mystery which could not have developed in our first state of innocence--

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[7]Faulkner, for example, preferred the Old Testament to the New. The latter, he felt, was "about ideas," whereas the Old Testament recorded concrete human struggles like those he saw around him. However, the fact that he again and again returned to New Testament revelation in his fiction indicates his fascination with the analogical possibilities inherent in that "idea."

> as it has not sufficiently developed in the rest of our country.
>
> Not every lost war would have this effect on every society, but we were doubly blessed, not only in our Fall, but in having the means to interpret it. Behind our own history, deepening it at every point, has been another history. Mencken called the South the Bible Belt, in scorn and thus in incredible innocence. In the South we have, in however attenuated a form, a vision of Moses' face as he pulverized our idols. This knowledge is what makes the Georgia writer different from the writer from Hollywood or New York. It is the knowledge that the novelist finds in his community.[8]

The striking feature of this historical sense is its fundamentally religious base; its very nature is antinomous to a secular "progressive" view of man. The latter tends to shrink or diminish the ontological depths of being into categorizable molds. Paradoxically, the sense of loss, of defeat, viewed in the biblical context continually reaffirms and widens the mystery of man's being, because this loss and sense of limitation brings with it a felt perception of the "wholeness" of being which has been denied man by the Fall. This is one reason for the preoccupation in much Southern literature with grotesque characters and violent actions; it is a preoccupation rooted in the metaphysical sense of the wholeness of being, and should not be interpreted sentimentally as simply the writer's anguished, romantic identification with modern man's "plight." Southern preoccupation with the freak in literature, as Miss O'Connor noted, is possible

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[8] Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969), p. 59.

because of the writer's felt awareness of "the whole man," and the whole man given in revelation is Christ.

> Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one. To be able to recognize a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological.... approaching the subject from the standpoint of the writer, I think it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner, who is not convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows, particularly in our literature. In any case, it is when the freak can be sensed as a figure of our essential displacement that he attains some depth in literature.[9]

The Southern history of defeat, then, provided an analogue for the universal Fall, and Bible history gave the writer dimensionality for interpreting contemporary experience in a universal light. This is both a thematic and technical advantage, because while biblical history provided a living record by which to sound and evaluate the depths of Southern history, it also provided "distance" from that contemporary history, and "distance" is related formally to point of view and the question of aesthetic and moral proportionality. Surely one reason for Southern writers' seemingly "dispassionate" depiction of violence and grotesquerie is the precedent for such treatment in the Bible--in both judgment and technical handling of point of view. Moral distance and aesthetic distance are finally interdependent, of course,

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[9] Ibid., pp. 44-45.

and here aesthetic distance is an evaluative as well as representational instrument in fiction. The Bible offers the same "perspective"--particular action rendered in proper dramatic proportion within a vision of the whole--that one finds frequently in the best Southern fiction.

Since the Civil War, and increasingly in the last few decades, the South has felt the pressure of the "modernist" spirit in all aspects of its life. "Modernism," here, is not equatable with simple change, since obviously the South has undergone constructive alterations that have not in themselves eroded the religious sensibility of the region. Rather, the term implies that progressive secular spirit whose basis is the idea of human perfectability, an unqualified projection toward the future and dissociation from the past, and the abandonment of "historical sense" in the ontological conception of the term. In short, there are Southerners everywhere, many of them writers, who are turning away from the ambiguous burden of their "history" by an immersion in progressivism. Yet because the South is still less "modern" and more traditional, the traumatic clash of these two opposing philosophies and value systems makes itself especially felt in the region's fiction. What will be the outcome of this clash, both in terms of belief and culturally in terms of fiction, is as yet undecided. It may be that the South will be unable to resist the erosion of historical sense and the stultifying of independence under the large

trends toward massification operating in America today. Whatever the outcome, Southern literature with its strong scriptural base has provided a most penetrating and enduring critique of the progressive secular spirit. For one of the paradoxical effects of this pervasive spirit in America has been to drive Southern fiction writers toward more violent and bizarre modes of creation, modes whose freedom, originality and mystery continually deny the reductive impulse at every turn.

CHAPTER THREE

In the introduction to this study I stressed the interpenetrative relationship between theme and form in the Christian historical vision, arguing that the manner in which "history" is realized in the fictional work determines its aesthetic and ontological validity. This fundamental problem must be approached more closely now: how is "history" made to live in the created work, so that it is dramatically generative of values within the work and in relation to the history it interprets through fiction? This question cannot be answered solely by thematic analysis. Some fictional works, as I have noted, intentionally present Christian history allegorically as an evaluative norm for the literal action of the story, but it is done in such a way that the history is "dead" or static within the work, a kind of constant (I use the term perjoratively) norm to which author and reader make mental leaps to discover the significance of a particular action. In short, the history evoked is actually dissociated from the concrete level of the action, imposed like an over-riding schema of values, and not generated dramatically from within the action itself. In other cases we find Christian history evoked in such a way that its full complexity and meaning is "shrunken" to fit the

demands of a particular viewpoint of the writer--who presents an "allegory" which in the process distorts and diminishes that history; one thinks of Carson McCullers' "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" and William Golding's "Lord of the Flies" in this respect. To view a work simply in terms of the thematic parallels drawn between the literal action and the Christian history evoked does not satisfactorily explain the aesthetic and ontological value of the work. This problem, I have argued, can best be approached by an analysis of form: seeing the "history" as an analogical dimension of the literal action being presented, achieved by the historical sense operating within the creative act in the manner of the metaphysical doctrine of the analogy of being. Through this doctrine of analogy the historical is everywhere "present," though it evokes past, and it is dynamically created by and in turn creative of the density of value carved into the work.

In its popular sense the term "analogy" may denote simply the practice of making metaphorical associations, drawing likenesses between different objects or actions. The simple metaphor "my love is a rose" illustrates this, pointing implicitly to the beautiful qualities which both objects possess. This kind of analogizing, of course, is indispensible to the symbolical writer. However, "analogy" used in the metaphysical sense conveys a more important type of comparison than simply metaphor-making. The latter tends

to suggest parallels which are extrinsic to the objects or actions being linked, whereas in the philosophical sense analogy attempts to describe an intrinsic relationship between the nature of the objects or actions themselves. This means that an inherent similarity of form, or structure of being, exists between two objects or actions, or between, say, the actions of the life of a thirty-three-year-old idiot named Benjy Compson and a Nazarene carpenter.[1] Analogy in the sense of metaphor-making, however valuable, is simply not adequate to explain the kind of qualitative and dynamic relationship that exists between the literal and "historical" levels in a created work. Only by an intrinsic, analogical identification of the two is the historical truly made alive, generating step by step its own vitality and that of the action through which it is evoked in a continuous dramatic movement.

The doctrine of the analogy of being is a metaphysical answer to the problem of how being can be everywhere both alike and different.[2] Consequently, it attempts to explain the structure of all existence, avoiding the two extremes of viewing existence in a univocal way (everywhere

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[1] "Analogy," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings (New York: Chas. Scribners Sons) I. Hastings traces this commonly held distinction to Suarez.

[2] Throughout this discussion I am immeasurably indebted to the discussion of the analogical and the Christological in chapters from Fr. Lynch's Christ and Apollo.

the same) or in an equivocal way (everywhere different). According to the analogical principle, the act of existence descends or is realized "according to a proportion" (analagon) in which the degree of existence is always in proportion to the degree of possibility of being inherent in the form of the thing receiving it. This proportion is invariable throughout all being; it is always "existence according to possibility." As a consequence, being is everywhere alike, one and the same in its structural principle. However, this does not mean that existent things are simply the same (the univocal view). Although existence descends and is realized analogously, it is never the same act of existence. Each thing, idea, action, is new, as existence adapts itself to each new possibility of being. So it is not just "chair," but it is <u>that</u> "chair," in all its unique specificity. The structural, formal proportion remains the same--"existence according to possibility"--but the two parts of the proportion change as existence adapts itself to each new possibility, and so the act of existence is always different. In other words, every existing thing, formally speaking, is the same and different.

Before proceeding to examine the implications of this doctrine more fully, let me state that this seems to me exactly how a certain "historical" dimension--classical, biblical, or otherwise--is "present" in an authentically creative way within the literal level of a story. It is

part of the "act of existence" descending and being realized proportionately "according to the possibility" of being within the concrete literal action. What is important to note here is that the historical analogue is not attached to the literal in a simply metaphorical way, though sometimes this occurs too. Rather, there is an intrinsic similarity of structural form between the two levels, in order for them to be properly interpenetrative and mutually illuminating. When this is not so, the two levels are related in a kind of univocal way, similarities being drawn between them which are insightful but arbitrarily imposed, and which do not develop dramatically from within the concrete. The historical or moral analogue seems to be "tacked on," and this causes a "dis-proportion" between the two levels. Heavily didactic works are an example of this situation, where the meaning "hangs over" rather than germinates from the concrete level. Perhaps the distinction can best be illustrated by two examples from Faulkner, one in which the Christian historical level is presented in a rather dissociated, univocal way, and the other in which it seems to me to germinate dramatically from the literal level. In the first, a "temptation" scene from A Fable, the priest draws an analogy to the historical Christ while trying to talk the doomed corporal out of his sacrificial gesture.

> 'The Book,' the priest said. The corporal looked at him.
> 'You mean you don't even know it?'
> 'I can't read,' the corporal said.

'Then I'll cite for you, plead for you,' the priest said. 'It wasn't He with his humility and pity and sacrifice that converted the world; it was pagan and bloody Rome which did it with His martyrdom; furious and intractable dreamers had been bringing that same dream out of Asia Minor for three hundred years until at last one found a caesar foolish enough to crucify him. And you are right. But then so is he (I don't mean Him now, I mean the old man in that white room yonder onto whose shoulders you are trying to slough and shirk your right and duty for free will and decision.) Because only Rome could have done it, accomplished it, and even He (I do mean Him now) knew it, felt and sensed this, furious and intractable dreamer though he was. Because He even said it Himself: On this Rock I found My Church, even while He didn't--and never would--realize the true significance of what He was saying, believing still that he was speaking poetic metaphor, synonym, parable--that rock meant unstable inconstant heart, and church meant airy faith. It wasn't even his first and favored sycophant who read that significance, who was also ignorant and intractable like Him and even in the end got himself also electrocuted by the dreamers intractable fire, like Him. It was Paul, who was a Roman first and then a man and only then a dreamer and so of all of them was able to read the dream correctly and to realize that, to endure, it could not be a nebulous and airy faith but instead it must be a church, an establishment, a morality of behavior inside which man could exercise his right and duty for free will and decision, not for a reward resembling the bedtime tale which soothes the child into darkness, but the reward of being able to cope peacefully, to hold his own, with the hard durable world in which (whether he would ever know why or not wouldn't matter because now he could cope with that too) he found himself. Not snared in that frail web of hopes and fears and aspirations which man calls his heart, but fixed, established, to endure, on that rock whose synonym was the seeded capitol of that hard durable enduring earth which man must cope with somehow, by some means, or perish. So you see, he is right. It wasn't He nor Peter, but Paul who, being only one-third dreamer, was two-thirds man and half of that a Roman, could cope with Rome. Who did more; who, rendering unto Caesar, conquered Rome. More: destroyed it, because where is that Rome now? Until what remains but that rock, that citadel. Render unto Chaulnesmont. Why should you die?'[3]

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[3]William Faulkner, A Fable (New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 364-5.

This passage, although rhetorically effective and resonant with several important themes, does not contain the kind of dramatic analogical movement of the literal and historical together, interpenetratively, which a fully realized passage would achieve. It bears the earmark of added explanation, of thematic embellishment which helps "explain" the potential depth of the act, but does so by temporarily drawing our eye away from the concrete situation. We sense a disproportion between the two levels. Contrast it with the following passage from The Sound and the Fury, in which we see a historical level fully embodied in proportion to the concrete dramatic movement within the scene. It occurs when Dilsey takes Benjy to the Easter church service, and the Reverend Shegog begins his sermon.

> Then a voice said, 'Brethren.'
> The preacher had not moved. His arm lay yet across the desk, and he still held that pose while the voice died in sonorous echoes between the walls. It was as different as day and dark from his former tone, with a sad timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes.
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> 'Brethren and sistern,' it said again. The preacher removed his arm and he began to walk back and forth before the desk, his hands clasped behind him, a meager figure, hunched over upon itself like that of one long immured in striving with the implacable earth. 'I got the recollection and the Blood of the Lamb!' He tramped steadily back and forth beneath the twisted paper and the Christmas bell, hunched, his hands clasped behind him. He was like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voice. With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth into him. And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for

> words, so that when he came to rest against the reading desk, his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment, a long moaning expulsion of breath rose from them, and a woman's single soprano: 'Yes, Jesus!'
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> As the scudding day passed overhead the dingy windows glowed and faded in ghostly retrograde. A car passed along the road outside, laboring in the sand, died away. Dilsey sat bolt upright, her hand on Ben's knee. Two tears slid down her fallen cheeks, in and out of the myriad coruscations of immolation and abnegation and time.[4]

The reader experiencing this passage senses a deeper degree of "realization" than in the passage from A Fable. As the scene unfolds the action proceeds with a point-by-point interpenetrating correspondence between the literal level and the "history" evoked through it without jumping off from the concrete. We have a fully concretized dramatic movement with the preacher's voice being incarnated with the audience in this specific place and moment of communion of spirit, and within that same movement, evoked through it analogically, an image of the historical Christian incarnation--of flesh and spirit, Word and Act--signified by the text: the "recollection and Blood of the Lamb." Moreover, unlike the passage from A Fable, here the historical analogue seems so fully concretized that it both gives greater validity to and receives validity from the literal level, in the present. There is an active dynamism of reciprocal insight between the two levels. One reads the words and the literal is both

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[4]William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: Random House, 1929), pp. 310-11.

"same" and "different" from the historical analogue, and the reader experiences the two levels analogously, because of the intrinsic unity of structural form between the two--the "spirit" of divinity being realized in Christ's incarnation (idea moving into act), and the "spirit" of incarnation being realized in Shegog's physical movements and voice--though on a lesser level. Here we have the same principle of proportion--existence according to possibility--operating both within the historical and literal levels, and in relation to each other analogously. When the historical is presented in this manner, it seems to achieve Eliot's ideal of the proper relationship between "past" and "present," creative and vital. In the passage from A Fable, however, the reader does not experience the same unified, concrete dramatic movement of the historical and the literal. Their relationship is more extrinsically and univocally rendered. It might perhaps be objected that the two scenes use different fictional techniques: one is primarily dialogue, while the other is scene depicted by an outside narrator. However, one can find similar "dis-embodied" historical analogues in Faulkner's objective narration also (especially in A Fable), just as one can find fully "realized" analogues presented by way of monologue or dialogue, as for example, Shegog's actual sermon and its subsequent effect on Dilsey.

The question of how the historical dimension is realized in an authentically analogical way in a work is a

mystery within the creative decision-making process, bound up with the historical sense, the incarnational sensibility, and the nature of the free act itself. Nevertheless, the principle of analogy gives several important clues to the dynamics of this process. First of all, if "history" is realized validly in an analogical manner in a work, there can be no question of simply a metaphorical, extrinsic, or statis relationship between the historical level and the concrete. Since analogy of being is based upon a law of proportionality between the energy of existence descending into act and the possibility inherent in the form it actuates, the same intrinsic relationship must exist between the historical and the literal it descends into. The same formal structure must be common to the nature of both parts--though each is really a different thing. It is not a question of "fitting" the historical analogue to the concrete, nor even of "heightening" the concrete to match the dimensions of the historical analogue. The concrete is narrow, limited, and one might think not large enough to "contain" the many movements and meanings of the historical which are being evoked--or in philosophical terms, to contain the act of existence descending into it. But as we shall see in discussing the Christological idea, one mystery of analogy is that the power of possibility of being within the concrete is never exhausted by the act of existence, and that paradoxically, it is only through fidelity to the concrete

literal that complex analogical vision can be fully realized.[5] Attempts to "fit" the historical to the literal, or to heighten the concrete, invariably are ontologically distorting to both, creating a kind of romantic aura through the use of language. Faulkner frequently indulged in this, of course, and it seems to me that it was his sense of analogical action which often saved him from the abuses of his own rhetorical power.

A second important characteristic of the analogical observed is that the relationship between the historical and the literal levels in a work is not static or passive. The heart of analogical movement, as Fr. Lynch notes, is action, dynamic and dramatic. That is why, in the Reverend Shegog passage quoted, the reader is not just intellectually observing the passage unfold different levels of meaning (as in the passage from A Fable), but is actually experiencing through the language the same structural movement of incarnation Reverend Shegog embodied in front of the congregation. History descends into the literal in all its possibilities, the literal in turn "validates" that history because of their intrinsic identity of structural form, and the two levels interact dynamically. Or to state it differently, their relationship is one of mutual and continuing revelation,

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[5]Miss O'Connor, discussing the creative process, once expressed this idea as follows: "It seems to be a paradox that the larger and more complex the personal view, the easier it is to compress it into fiction."

each incarnating and authenticating the form and meaning of the other in a dramatic and ongoing manner. It is important to recall, in this respect, the Hebraic-Christian notion of creation as a process of continuing genesis cited in Chapter I. This relationship of continuing revelation between the literal and the historical levels is, it seems to me, the essence of "discovery" within the creative act, and the core of an incarnational sensibility. It also helps explain, I think, why so many works which invoke a Christian or classical historical level to the literal action fail to dramatically generate the values intended to be created in the work by invoking those parallels; the relationship between the levels is static and fixed, to the diminishment of both. Understandably, it is in these works that the historical level tends to exist only as "past," a dated norm used to impose value on a work rather than discover it creatively through the concrete. Faulkner's A Fable, for example, seems to me aesthetically unsatisfactory for one reason because there is a disproportion between the various levels, between insight and action, so that it is not realized and moving with a simultaneity of revelations on all levels.

The kind of dynamic interaction and mutual revelation in analogy is best exemplified by the practice of fourfold exegesis common in scriptural analysis. For example, in the Old Testament narrative of the Jews' liberation from Egypt, there is first of all the literal text which points

to a historical fact, and the allegorical levels which it contains by an intrinsic identity of form.

> The Jews of the Old Testament are liberated from Egypt and from the waters of the Red Sea. This is more than just a word, it is also an historical fact. Yet without becoming less of a fact, it is also a sign, a type, of another reality to come, the liberation of Christ from the dead. Yet it is more than an historical metaphor, or an artificial sign implanted in a fact, chosen at random to be related to something else. For it has the same concrete structure, though on a poorer and less important level, as that greater thing toward which it points. And the deeper one goes into the whole historical concretion of the earlier reality, the more insight there is into that which is to come....But the reverse is also true. If one brings the Resurrection back over against the liberation of this ancient people from the waters, that first act of liberation is illuminated as never before. There is a mutuality of forces for insight operating between the two events. Each is borrowing light from the other....[6]

To these levels may also be added the tropological (moral), wherein the liberation story is a type of man's being freed from the bondage of sin, and the analogical, where the story points to mankind's final resurrection at the Last Judgment. It should be noted, however, that the four levels of meaning are not held by scriptural scholars to be operating in every case in the Bible. Sometimes only one is intended, the literal, sometimes two or three, and so on, depending upon the specific text. This also seems to me to be the case in Faulkner and, to a lesser extent, O'Connor's fiction, where sometimes only one or two levels can be demonstrated without unjustifiably overextending the literal text, which is to

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[6]Lynch, Christ and Apollo, p. 184.

say of adding meanings extrinsically which do not grow analogically from the concrete level. But in the best symbolical fiction of Faulkner and O'Connor, we have a similar process of mutual illumination going on. There is the literal level of the story, and presented through it analogically is the moral history of the South and American society past and present; there is also classical and redemption history evoked, which themselves possess a literal level with allegorical dimensions that evoke the universal life of man (past, present, and future)--and all giving and gaining insight by their mutual dynamic interaction. Not every story contains this many levels; some, like "A Rose for Emily," simply do not convey that density of historical meaning. But such is the vital functioning of the historical sense in the analogical creative act that all dimensions of possibility should be explored so as not to diminish the various levels at which the work can be experienced.

One problem which the doctrine of analogy helps clarify is that of the relationship between classical, Old Testament, and New Testament analogues in a particular work. They are history which is "made present" within the action as it unfolds sequentially, but this does not mean that they need be rigidly arranged in a temporal order, with classical analogues first, followed by Old and New Testament. Rather, under analogy they exist simultaneously as "levels of being" possible of receiving and giving insight, and <u>each level</u>

has its appropriate intrinsic structure. The classical mold can only "contain" so much within its limited ontological structure, as illustrated by the quote from Romano Guardini in Chapter I, whereas the divine revelation considerably widened the possibility of being. In "The Bear," for example, ancient pagan ritual illuminates the hunting initiation of Ike McCaslin, but then the Christian level of initiation into redemptive freedom and historical consciousness is added to the concrete action, deepening its meaning in ways the pagan mold simply could not. And further, by referring the analogues of Revelation in the story back to the pagan primitive mold, we illuminate and further clarify the dimensions and possibilities of insight contained in each level.

The problem which now confronts us for consideration is what radical effect on the structure of being, with its analogical principle of "existence according to possibility," is caused by the immersion of Christ into human history? We have seen that in analogy there is a proportionality between the act of existence and the form it actuates, an intrinsic relationship between the two parts. But in the case of Christ's Incarnation--divine existence actuating human form--the proportion, or "possibility" of being, is radically altered. What new "level of being" is introduced, and what new intrinsic structural identity can be seen to exist between the human and the divine nature? Furthermore, how does this change in the formal structure

of being relate to those themes which I have outlined in Chapter I as central to a Christian historical vision? I have argued that the two writers under consideration employ a Christian interpretation of history in their fiction. Now we shall have to examine what that phrase can mean: by trying to discover the intrinsic relationship between the formal and the thematic in the Christian viewpoint, how the meaning of those themes is created by the way in which they are presented. Fr. Lynch states the problem of the Christological dimension in the following manner:

> In our chapter on analogy, we saw that it was an act called existence which was descending deeper and deeper into the possibilities of the world to take on the proportions of these possibilities while retaining an identity. Nothing stopped it from remaining the same; no difference was lost through being organized by it. This is the action of creation, and of the endless dynamisms set in motion within the created world....
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> Yet there has been a second and new creation. And now the form which shapes it is no longer an existence which becomes different in everything it touches, leaving only the proportion the same, the proportion between the act of existence and the possibility of the essence. Now the action is Christ, rigidly one person, born in that place, at that time, with all those specificities, with this body. How energetic (and esemplastic) will he be, how malleable to him will the world be?... It is now demanded of a new imagination that it use this 'hopelessly rigid' form as a new analogical instrument with which to enter into the shapes of all things without canceling them out.
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> .....
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> ....For Christ, we have said, is not another item of the first creation, to be used as any other item by the old imagination. The real point is ever so much more crucial. For he has subverted the whole order of the old imagination. Nor is this said in the sense that he replaces or cancels the old; rather, he illuminates it, and is a new level, identical in structure with, but

> higher in energy than, every form or possibility of the old.[7]

As Fr. Lynch points out, a new dimension is added to the analogical because of the immersion of Christ in human history. There is still the proportion of "existence according to possibility," but because the act of existence descending is greater--the divine Christ--the possibilities of being are immeasurably increased. No one knows how much. The relationship between Christ and human history is an analogical one: he descends as the energy of existence to fulfill perfectly all the possibilities of being within history. With respect to creation and history, he himself is an analogical instrument reshaping it and giving it its deepest meaning. However, the uniqueness of Christ as an analogical instrument is that he is a single, concrete, historical person who claims to be the new shape of all things, yet he does not change by being realized in different things in creation, nor are they obliterated.[8] Rather, the different elements and acts in creation and history are "gathered up" in him and linked together meaningfully. And his analogical union with creation is complete; it fulfills all the possibilities in existence, such as time, death,

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[7] Ibid., pp. 185-87 passim.

[8] This idea is analogous to the Catholic idea of transubstantiation in the Mass--the substance of bread and wine changed into Christ's body and blood while retaining its physical appearances.

rebirth, mystery, identity, the hypostatic union of spirit and matter, etc. This is the mystery of the Incarnation. Because of this total analogical identity of a specifically historical Christ and specific human history, things and acts in creation are raised to a new level of meaning, and the precise meaning of the concept of Providence becomes clear: that everything in existence "counts," and that in Christology nothing is to be neglected. We have already seen the respect for concrete detail in the Hebraic intellectual tradition. Now the significance of the novelist's task of grounding meaning in the specific becomes abundantly clear. His creative act is analogically like Christ's in "redeeming" the concrete, the importance of which is immeasurably heightened spiritually by Christ's total union with it. This is the "sacredness" of creation, or the "integrity of things" which I have tried to explain in another context in Chapter I. "Thus Christ is water, gold, butter, food, a harp, light, medicine, oil, bread, arrow, salt, turtle, risen sun, way, and many things besides."[9] This is not a metaphorical expression; it proclaims the intrinsic metaphysical identity between Christ and creation brought about by his incarnation into history.

A second important point which should be noted here is that, just as in analogy, the relationship between Christ as energy descending and the new creation he shapes is not

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[9]Lynch, Christ and Apollo, p. 188.

static and fixed. The relationship, although rooted in a temporally fixed event, is a dynamic and ongoing process, so it is possible to speak of the evolution of Christ in the world throughout history, directing and shaping its course, or of the "Christianization" of matter and consciousness through grace; or contrarily, of a devolution of the spirituality of "things" through debasement. We have seen that because there is more energy (Christ) descending into existence, each existant is charged with more "possibility" of being. In the theologian's terms this increased possibility would be called redemptive freedom, or the action of grace within nature. But this does not mean that the existant simply transcends its limited form; the effect of Christ's incarnation is the opposite under analogy. Rather than subsume or obliterate the unique identity of existing things, it allows them to be deepened more fully in self-identification, to be "recovered" from the effects of the Fall by gradual process on the concrete historical level. Consequently, this new creation within history is characterized by "openness" and "possibility," including as well the possibility of rejection of freedom.

We are now in a position to see, I think, the vital intrinsic connection between the central themes of a Christian historical vision and the formal method of their "presence" in a work of fiction. I have argued that the historical level in Faulkner and O'Connor, when authentically

realized, is present as an analogical dimension of the concrete, mutually illuminating each other in a dramatic, unfolding action. In addition, I have also argued that some works of both writers embody a specifically Christian interpretation of the historical process. Our discussion of analogy showed that there is an intrinsic structural correspondence between the act of existence and the material it descends into--in this case the historical and the concrete, so that both levels are formally proportionate and dynamically interacting. However, now Christ's Incarnation into human history alters the formal proportion of "existence according to possibility." His union with history is the perfectly realized analogical action--the greatest energy producing the greatest "possibility"--and those Christian themes enumerated (spirit and matter, time and eternity, mystery, community, ontological place, word and act, history "redeemed") are themselves the highest expressions of that perfect analogical union. To state it differently, they are the fullest "possibilities" opened by Christ's Incarnation, against which their fractured, diminished reality on the human level--dissociated but struggling toward union--can be absolutely identified and measured. Since there is an intrinsic structural similarity between the new energy of existence (Christ) and actual history, these themes express the perfect possibilities of identity between the two as form and content. These themes can only be embodied fully

in fiction through the analogical form of Christ wedded to human history, for when they are not implicitly "brought to life" in this way, there cannot exist the kind of intrinsic, dramatic relationship between the concrete and the historical which gives mutual illumination. Then the themes are not "alive" in the work.

A brief example may help clarify this difficult problem. In the Quentin section of The Sound and the Fury Faulkner has presented us with a compelling portrayal of dissociation--of word from act, of time, of thought from concrete reality--in the life of Quentin before his suicide. We recognize this as the madness of dissociation as the action unfolds, but, and this is the crucial question, how do we recognize this for what it is? We recognize this as dissociation, it seems to me, because of our consciousness as we read of its opposite analogue which informs and illuminates it for what it is. Even the most uninitiated reader says, "He is mad." But we only know this because in the work dissociation is realized as dissociation, possible because Faulkner measures it analogically against the invisible but everywhere "present" possibility of perfect union of word and act, thought and the concrete. There is, then, a "historical" framework for the action, rooted in the historical analogue of perfectly realized union and action. He could not do this if he himself as author were indulging in an act of dissociation as he wrote (though I think Faulkner

sometimes did this too). No, the value and meaning of the Quentin experience is illuminated for the reader by the fact that Faulkner stands implicitly committed here to a perfectly realized analogue of those themes, against which he dramatizes and measures this particular diminished, flattened "history." We see this focus especially clear in Faulkner's handling of the concrete world outside, the world which Quentin cannot keep a grip on; point by point that world illuminates and judges the distortions of his warped inner world. The same is true of each of the other counterthemes--dissociation, false innocence, reductivism, immunity, etc.--all are movements away from the Christian analogical, yet all are illuminated by it for what they really are--sterile and fixed denials of the actual.

The central themes enumerated as the core of a Christian interpretation of history, then, themselves express and embody the maximum "possibility" wrought by Christ's immersion into history. They are the historical actualization of which Christ is the form or energy, and there is an intrinsic analogical movement, one in which he took on all the "forms" of history and fulfilled them ontologically. These "Christian" themes can be presented in a passive, diminished or univocal way in fiction (as in falsely pietistical passages), but then the history is not "continuing," realized. In order for them to be dramatically generative of values, even if frequently by showing their negation in contemporary experience, as in the case of Quentin, there must be the intrinsic

identity of structure between the act descending (Christ) and the concrete literal, and when this analogical action occurs, history "lives" in the work and dynamically carves out the spiritual value of the concrete.

CHAPTER FOUR

From our discussion of the metaphysics of analogy, we see the extreme difficulty of classifying a writer as "Christian" in any meaningful way. Indeed, if the Christian metaphysic is nurtured in mystery--the Incarnation--then it seems to me we can only finally approximate to what degree a single work reveals such a metaphysic. This is certainly true of so complex and various a writer as William Faulkner, and this chapter merely offers some reflections on Faulkner's historical consciousness at work analogically in several important writings.

Faulkner's own statements about Christianity in essays and interviews tended to be casual and misleading. Occasionally he acknowledged traditional Christianity as his inherited past--part of the "lumber room" of collective experience he used in fiction. He preferred the Old Testament of the New, and remarked at least once about Christianity, echoing Chesterton, that "we haven't tried it yet." Nevertheless, I believe his major fiction, in both theme and technique, reveals history in an incarnational and redemptive way, in creating and treating those themes I have tried to define in Chapter I. At its best Faulkner's work realizes those themes analogically,

so that they simultaneously inform and are informed by the literal action of the story. But this is not always the case; we can also find works in which some dissociation between historical vision and the dramatic concrete occurs, to the diminishment of both.

One difficulty in analyzing Faulkner's historical vision at work in a novel is the fact that he involves the reader so dramatically in a particular character's heroic struggle to come to terms with his history--witness, for example, Gail Hightower or Quentin Compson or Isaac McCaslin. One apparent reason for this strategy lies in Faulkner's ontology of time: "...time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as was, only is. If was existed, there would be no grief or sorrow." But the avatars of individual characters stretch back into time and history as know and understand it at that particular moment of revelation; the avatar is, in fact, a revelation of one's place in history. And most importantly, how the character sees himself in relation to that history becomes the touchstone of his moral choices in the present, especially in those crucial acts which form identity. Much of the struggle for viable identity, then, among Faulkner's major characters involves their coming to terms with history in a creative, non-destructive way, and this implies both understanding and acceptance. In fact, acceptance of one's "place" (in history and in being) seems a necessary pre-condition

for the free act, that gratuitous acceptance of "the moment" found in characters like Lena Grove and Dilsey. Contrariwise, charaters like Quentin Compson and Hightower show us the tragic failure to achieve this identity, and as a consequence the burden of their history threatens them with extinction at every turn.

There is a natural tendency for the reader to become mesmerized by the internal drama of a particular character's struggle with his history, partly because of the grandiloquent rhetoric used by Faulkner to evoke their situation. Grandiloquence itself can become an indulgence, as Faulkner astutely perceived in the cases of Rev. Hightower or Ike McCaslin's Uncle Hubert Beauchamp, for example. Thus while intensifying through language the drama of a character's struggle with history, Faulkner himself created the corresponding problem of having to somehow balance and evaluate this internal drama he immersed the reader in, so that some overall perspective might be conveyed. This he achieved partly by the ever-present, authorial voice, partly by action external to the character which implicitly or explicitly measures that internal struggle. In this way Faulkner created a total perspective for the work from many limited ones, as for example in Light in August, where the final comic chapter with the furniture dealer implicitly measures and objectifies the struggle in Hightower's consciousness which precedes it. This total perspective in Faulkner's major works derives, I believe, from his commitment

to a metaphysics of analogy, which enabled him to "create" history vital and ongoing in the present.

We begin our discussion with "The Bear" because it is Faulkner's most explicit treatment of redemption history, rendered through Ike McCaslin's growth to manhood. As I have already noted in Chapter I, Faulkner created specific analogues of classical, Old Testament and New Testament history within the history of Ike's growth to maturity. There is the classical, primitive ritual of the hunt in the wilderness, whose spiritual meaning is amplified by Ike's link with the sacrificial Isaac of the Old Testament. This analogue is deepened by Ike's identification with the Christ redeemer--the Nazarene carpenter whose trade he follows in manhood. Furthermore, these analogues are rendered dramatic within the moral history of America and the South, so that the total effect is a modern retelling--a dramatic revelation--of the history of the Fall and the quest for redemption. As the story unfolds Ike becomes more and more aware of his position, his "place," vis-a-vis history, and the initiation process culminates when, fully aware of his past heritage, he must choose what his relationship to it is going to be. It is a crucial choice which determines his identity, and in it Faulkner reveals the whole history of the redemptive process at work.

In the long debate that runs throughout Part Four, Ike and his cousin Cass Edmonds review the McCaslin heritage and the history of the South and America in the light of the

biblical history of the Creation and Fall. Throughout their discussion, there is no dispute between them over the moral, analogical nature of history; both explicitly reject any notion of secular progressivism. Ike identifies the sin and guilt in his own past with the universal fallen condition of man, and while disavowing that he can ever "repudiate" it, he does choose to sever himself from the tainted legacy. In his experience in the wilderness he has undergone a series of temptations which teach him the humility and sacrifice necessary for spiritual freedom. And so now he is capable of making that free act of renunciation: "Sam Fathers set me free." By this act of atonement Ike both divests himself of the guilt-stained farm and also sacrifices his marriage and chance for a son.

Throughout Part Four Faulkner makes it clear that Ike's decisive act of renunciation is inseparable from his historical consciousness of his "place" vis-a-vis both his heritage and universal history. Pushing beyond the bounds of his own personal, immediate situation, Ike chooses finally to see his "place" and the root of his identity in the Redemption, linking his own decision and freedom to Christ's sacrificial act. So although Ike accepts man's fallen condition, in a way for example that Quentin Compson never can, he nevertheless chooses to transform the burden of guilt by an act of spiritual freedom. This is the fulfillment of the destiny which has prepared him throughout a lifetime to accept

this role and identity. However, Faulkner obviously brooded long over the implications of Ike's decision, and through the "voice" of Cass Edmonds, we see him deepening the mystery of Ike's moral predicament.

Against Ike's stance his cousin Cass raises the crucial question of responisibility--and "escape." He argues that Ike's renunciation is in effect a refusal of responsibility, a withdrawal from the tainted human community on the basis of some absolute, idealistic principle, and an "inhuman" grasping for innocence. Is not Ike actually trying to absolve himself from the fallen human community, in pursuit of some gnostic personal perfection? Doesn't his decision place him effectively outside the community, so that when we meet him as an old man in Delta Autumn he seems an anachronism, caught out of time and doomed to relive the now-empty rituals of his youth? In connection with this, Faulkner implicitly raises the question of whether Ike's renunciation might be an act of dissociation from humanity which atrophies his moral potential and denies him full opportunity to exert some positive spiritual influence on the community. If so, isn't this a denial of the process of redemption in its concrete reality? Faulkner himself seemed to suggest such a view in his famous "triun of conscience" statement concerning Ike.

> Q. Mr. Faulkner, Isaac McCaslin in "The Bear" relinquishes his heredity. Do you think he may be in the same predicament as modern man, under the same conditions that he can't find a humanity to fit in with?

> A. Well, there are some people in any time and age that cannot face and cope with the problems. There seems to be three stages: The first says, This is rotten, I don't like it, I will take death first. The second says, This is rotten, I don't like it, I can't do anything about it, but at least I will not participate in it myself, I will go off into a cave or climb a pillar to sit on. The third says, This stinks and I'm going to do something about it. McCaslin is in the second, He says, This is bad, and I will withdraw from it. What we need are people who will say, This is bad and I'm going to do something about it. I'm going to change it.[1]

In considering this critical view of Ike's decision, we should keep in mind that it was expressed by the "social-minded" Faulkner of the later interviews, when often he seems consciously trying to instruct as well as entertain his audiences. This criticism of Ike's renunciation stresses only one aspect--the humanistic--of his choice, and should be balanced I think by the story itself, where not only the author's emotional loyalties but also the spirit of his interpretation of history are weighted on the side of the resigning hero.

If we view the story typologically, which I think we must, Ike's decision must be placed in relation to Christ and redemption history. In this light, rather than dissociating himself from humanity, Ike is acting <u>creatively</u> upon his knowledge of history, and in so doing he widens the possible dimensions of humanity, specifically, by demonstrating a new role and attitude toward the "Southern" history, and by extension all moral history. He chooses not to follow the sterile forms of the past by passive acceptance of his heritage, but instead

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[1] <u>Faulkner in the University</u>, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (New York: Random House, 1959), pp. 245-6.

he rises above historical necessity by free choice. On the metaphysical level, he introduces a new possibility of being and action into the situation, that of the redeemed New Man following the form of Christ. He may not be able to change the community in a sociological sense, but he exists in its midst as an exemplum who has transfigured its history by his life, showing forth the possibilities of moral redemption. Ike's life is an analogue of Christianity because, unlike say Jason or Quentin Compson, he can accept history and truly act in a free way. In the Christian metaphysic freedom and action are, paradoxically, much a matter of reception and acceptance--the gratuitous gift of insight--and thus tied to historical consciousness. With this insight into history, Ike acts selflessly out of a center of peace and contemplation, and so he achieves serenity.

> Q. Mr. Faulkner, do you look on Ike McCaslin as having fulfilled his destiny, the things that he learned from Sam Fathers and from the other men as he did--when he was 12 to 16? Do you feel that they stood him in good stead all the way through his life?
> A. I do, yes. They didn't give him success but they gave him something a lot more important, even in this country. They gave him serenity, they gave him what would pass for wisdom--I mean wisdom as contradistinct from the schoolman's wisdom of education. They gave him that.[2]

In The Picaresque Saint, R. W. B. Lewis has commented brilliantly on the aptness of form in Part Four of "The Bear," arguing that "its mode of existence is as important

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[2] Ibid., p. 54.

as its content." Lewis points out that Part Four is presented not so much as a narrative of events, but as "an intense, translucent vision of the future," allowing us to suppose that it is "a dream," a "true prophecy" destined to occur but presented now as it exists "only in a state of possibility." And this is fitting, he argues, because of the transcendent, visionary character of Ike's nature and decision. In this Lewis sees Faulkner as dangerously close to overstepping the line between prophetic vision and literary credibility.

> The transcendence enacted in "The Bear," to put it differently, was if anything too successful and complete. It carried Ike out of the quicksand of history, but at the same time it nearly carried him out of the company of mortal men. He has moved dangerously close to the person of the savior-God, to the person of Jesus: dangerously close, at least, for the purposes of fiction. It is worth insisting that the life of Christ is not under any circumstances a fit subject for literature: not because such a subject would be irreverent, but because within the limits of literature it would be impossible; or, what is the same thing, it would be too easy. And this is exactly why the quality of the fourth section of "The Bear"--its mode of existence--is so uncannily appropriate to its content. It was perhaps Faulkner's most extraordinary poetic intuition to present the affinities between a human being and a divine--a Mississippi hunter and the figure of Christ--not as an actuality, but as a foggily seen prophetic possibility: something longed for and even implicit in the present circumstances and character, but something that has decidedly never yet happened. "The Bear," Reaching to the edge of human limits, does the most that literature may with propriety attempt to do. (Italics mine).[3]

Lewis' remark is not an atypical response to Part Four of "The Bear," and it is worth examination. In the

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[3]R. W. B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint (New York: J. B. Lippencott Co., 1961), p. 209.

first place, what are we to make of his assertion that Faulkner managed to "present the affinities between a human being and a divine"? Lewis seems to make a dualistic separation here, when in the light of the Incarnation Christ is the God-Man, and human nature is interpenetrated with and transformed by this union with the divine. There is no manichean separation; the union of divine and human and the mystery of redemptive freedom and grace <u>is</u> the essence of the redemption. And it seems to me precisely <u>that</u> mystery that Faulkner is struggling to present in "The Bear." Furthermore, to argue that these affinities between Ike and Christ should not be seen as "actuality, but as a foggily seen prophetic possibility...something that has decidedly never yet happened," seems too ingenious a reading. Either Ike renounces his legacy or he does not. Either Faulkner and Ike present as justification for that decision a redemptive conception of history and spiritual freedom or they do not, and to deny their actuality seems to me to deny much of the meaning of the whole story itself.

Lewis is correct in pointing to a certain translucent quality in Part Four of the story. But what gives part of that section its "visionary" quality, it seems to me, is that Faulkner perhaps too directly and explicitly tried to yoke together the historical analogues of redemption and the literal level of the story. Rather than being satisfied to just let the historical analogues <u>work</u> dramatically through

the concrete action, Faulkner achieves the "transcendence" by heightened rhetorical skill and a dazzling virtuosity of language, which tends at times to detach itself from dramatic action. Thus the sense of it being "too successful and complete," to use Lewis' phrase. Paradoxically, Faulkner seemed to render such a vision more successfully, I think, in treating themes and situations which do not directly evoke that vision and its redemptive analogues, and which in fact are often antinomous to its values. Such themes and situations demanded more forcibly that the act of fictional creation itself be a redemptive act implicitly achieved, so that the redemptive vision might be the analogical form which shines through and illuminates those situations. This is the case in Light in August.

In the story of Joe Christmas Faulkner set out to depict "the most tragic condition a man could find himself in--not to know what he is and to know that he will never know."[4] Born possibly a mulatto and orphaned at birth, Joe finds it impossible to accept an identity in either the white or Negro race, and so chooses to "deliberately evict(ed) himself from the human race." He is without any place in being, and Faulkner emphasizes that this is an ontological rather than just a social condition by the fact that although Joe once thinks "even God loves you," he cannot accept it,

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[4] Faulkner in the University, p. 72.

and so becomes a "ghost" and "a phantom" strayed out of a lost world. His tragic displacement is manifested overtly in his anguished, restless movement in space, always on the fringes of society--down "the road that was to run for fifteen years." Yet for Joe the road also becomes an image of time which circles back on itself, bringing him back in the end just before his death to the exact point, metaphysically, from which he started his career. Through this image Faulkner shows us that, in the deepest sense, Joe has "gone nowhere" in trying to solve the paradox of his identity.

Having evicted himself from the human community, Joe Christmas can define himself--create an identity--only by vehement reaction against all those natural forms and bonds of humanity signified by the concept of community--an acceptance of limitation and mutual dependence, of time and change, and the mystery of human relationships. In other words, he is driven on an inhuman quest for innocence, for immunity from natural limitations and dependencies, and most importantly, driven by a desire for reprieve from the mystery and ambiguity of himself and experience.[5] Basically, Joe's manner of usurping time and the natural order and

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[5]I am using the terms "innocence" and "immunity" interchangeably to describe that drive to absolve oneself from all the natural limiting realities of the fallen human condition. To acknowledge that situation fully is to be sensitive to the moral claims of the communal situation, and to history. As we shall see, various Faulkner characters choose different means to try to escape full acceptance of the basic human condition.

ambiguity, none of which he can rest in, is by violence, yet since he has chosen to evict himself from humanity, he must repeat violence again and again in order to "guarantee" his identity.

Thus throughout the novel patterns of rebellion and usurpation of the natural order serve as emblems of Joe's desperate quest for innocence, outside history and community. These are depicted clearly in his violent reactions to women (and food and religion when they are associated with women), particularly in those matters related to sex and the rhythm of time, all of which he comes to regard as "traps" which he must repudiate in order to preserve his inviolability and demonstrate no dependencies on the weakness of human nature. As a child at the orphanage he vomits on toothpaste while observing the dietician making love. Although Joe does not understand what they are doing, the subsequent terrorizing of him creates a sense of revulsion in connection with the incident which reoccurs several times throughout the novel, and is symptomatic of his violent attempts to reject the natural. Later, while living with the McEacherns, an older boy explains the menstrual cycle to him, and Joe's "denial" of this mystery of nature drives him to sodomy as a way of violently immunizing himself against its ambiguity.

> He was not three miles from home when in the later afternoon he shot a sheep. He found the flock in a hidden valley and stalked and killed one with a gun. Then he knelt, his hands in the yet warm blood of the dying

> beast, trembling, dry-mouthed, back-glaring. Then he got over it, recovered. (Italics mine)[6]

Joe tries to repudiate the bonds of nature by acts of violence which, paradoxically, are intended to assert his own inviolable identity and insulate him against involvement in ambiguous experience. After the episode with the sheep he can now tolerate the knowledge of sexuality, but not accept it, as seen when the waitress Bobbi Allen explains the menstrual cycle to him.

> 'I made a mistake tonight. I forgot something.' Perhaps she was waiting for him to ask her what it was. But he did not. He just stood there, with a still, downspeaking voice dying somewhere about his ears. He had forgot about the shot sheep. He had lived with the fact the older boy had told him too long now. With the slain sheep he had bought immunity from it for too long now for it to be alive....
>
> She told him, halting, clumsily, using the only words which she knew perhaps. But he had heard it before. He had already fled backward, past the slain sheep, the price paid for immunity, to the afternoon when, sitting on a bank creek, he had not been hurt or astonished so much as outraged. (Italics mine)[7]

Nevertheless, immediately after Bobbi's departure Joe vomits again, revulsed by the "trap" of nature and human frailty he despises and fears. A similar reaction occurs with Joanna Burden, especially when, nearing menopause, she attempts to trap him into marriage by insisting she is pregnant. Joe's rejection of food, another ingratiating "kindness" offered

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[6] William Faulkner, Light in August (New York: Random House, 1932), p. 174.

[7] Ibid., pp. 176-7.

by women, notably Joanna Burden and Mrs. McEachern, is part of the same pattern of violence. To Joe it signifies natural dependency, and a threatening "soft" relationship with women, which he cannot abide. This fear of mystery underlies his preference for the strict, simplified, though harsh "justice" of Mr. McEachern, and of men in general. Immunity sought through violence, violence as a means to assert inviolable identity: this paradox amounts to a drive for self-redemption in Joe that can only end in destruction.

And yet Joe Christmas wishes for peace, some sense of interior solidity with his own being and with the world that can only come, Faulkner implies, by an acceptance of time and place, and the mysterious natural order. Early in the novel Joe watches a group of white people casually playing cards on a screened porch, and observes: "'That's all I wanted,' he thought. 'That don't seem like a whole lot to ask.'" Such a feeling of peace comes to Joe only once, during the week of his fugitive running, just before his return to Mottstown and capture. Significantly, he feels momentarily at one with himself, accepting time and nature without violence.

> It was just dawn, daylight: that gray and lonely suspension filled with the peaceful and tentative waking of birds. The air, inbreathed, is like spring water. He breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. 'That was all I wanted,' he thinks, in a quiet and slow amazement. 'That was all, for thirty years. That didn't

seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years.'[8]

But Joe cannot abide in the peace of the moment; he is driven back onto the "street which ran for thirty years," which has now become a circle of the past trapping him in time. "'And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years,' he thinks. 'But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo,' he thinks quietly...."

The immunity sought by Reverend Gail Hightower assumes a different form and direction than that of Joe Christmas, but it is no less intense and ultimately self-destructive. Like Joe, Hightower's displacement seems already a fait accompli at birth, dooming him to non-identity, "as though the seed which his grandfather had transmitted to him had been on the horse too that night and had been killed too and time had stopped there and then for the seed and nothing had happened in time since, not even him." What has happened to Hightower in time, his marriage failure and career as a preacher, both of which he used to evoke the memory of his "heroic" grandfather, has caused him so much suffering that he has willfully evicted himself from the community. When Byron Bunch tries to involve him in the present difficulties of Lena Grove and Joe Christmas, Hightower protests: "I won't! I won't! I have bought immunity. I have paid. I have paid....I paid for it. I didn't quibble about the price. No man can say that. I just wanted peace; I paid

them their price without quibbling." (p. 293) We recognize in Hightower the same cry for peace voiced by Joe, but it is the "peace" of immunity from time and change, suffering and nature--the "death" of anonymity. Hightower's means of capturing this immunity and reprieve from the present is by escape into time, the past, where his identity is subsumed in the image of his grandfather.[9]

Hightower's escape into time, of course, depicts the most violent and radical dissociation of past from present in Light in August. One result of this is that the past which he identifies with is a romantic illusion--his vision of his grandfather's heroism in the Civil War so glorified in memory that the fact of his ludicrous death--shot from behind while stealing chickens--becomes totally obscured. This distortion of history has profound effects on Hightower's identity and sense of the world in the present, for he sees it through manichean eyes as a world so saturated with suffering and defeat that action is unredeeming and unredeemable. Nevertheless, through his friendship with Byron Bunch he is forced out of his shell of immunity and into involvement.

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[9]I am arguing here and elsewhere that the desire for annihilation, or immolation, of identity is in fact a desire for innocence, for reprieve from ambiguity. Joe Christmas strives for this through violence, as in a sense Joanna Burden finally does. Her extreme dualism causes her to see herself and Joe as finally unredeemable, and suicide the only "logical" alternative. Similarly, Quentin Compson uses alleged incest and finally suicide as a way to immunize himself against the fact of Caddie's loss of virginity.

Against his instincts (he was already once accused of miscegenation and child-murder by the gossiping town for aiding a Negro woman in labor), Hightower helps deliver Lena Grove's baby, and the effect on him is a resurrection into life again.

> 'I ought to feel worse than I do,' he thinks. But he has to admit that he does not. And as he stands, tall, misshapen, lonely in his lonely and illkept kitchen, holding in his hand an iron skillet in which yesterday's old grease is bleakly caked, there goes through him a glow, a wave, a surge of something almost hot, almost triumphant. 'I showed them,' he thinks. 'Life comes to the old man yet, while they get there too late. They get there for his leavings, as Byron would say....
> .....
> He goes to the study. He moves like a man with a purpose now, who for twenty-five years has been doing nothing at all between the time to wake and the time to sleep again....[10]

Like Joe Christmas, Hightower has come to a brief acceptance of "the moment," of his place and identity in the present, through a recognition of his fundamental link with humanity. His discovery is like that which Ike McCaslin made: that in spite of the past of suffering and evil, history is not irrevocably fixed, because he can act in a new way here and now. In his creative response to the situation he momentarily becomes the new man. Yet even though Hightower is able on one other occasion to creatively "match the moment," in his belated attempt to save Joe Christmas by lying to Percy Grimm, in the end he sinks back into the past, and in

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[10] Light in August, pp. 382-3.

Faulkner's eyes "destroyed himself." When we last see him the possibilities of hope and creative action seem to have completely atrophied, as he sits helplessly in the twilight glow before his window, waiting for the vision of his grandfather's gallant ride into Jefferson.

In answer to the question whether Light in August argues for the acceptance of an inevitably tragic view of life, Faulkner once replied: "I wouldn't think so. That the only person in that book that accepted a tragic view of life was Christmas because he didn't know what he was and so he deliberately repudiated man. The others seemed to me to have a very fine belief in life, in the basic possibility for happiness and goodness--Byron Bunch and Lena Grove, to have gone to all that trouble."[11] Perhaps Faulkner is overlooking Hightower here, but the remark does point to the positive redemptive forces at work throughout the story in Lena Grove and Byron Bunch. Lena, a primitive earth mother linked symbolically to the world of antiquity and eternity (evidenced, for example, in Faulkner's opening description of her on the road), lives completely at peace with herself and the world. She seeks no self-redemption or immunity by retreat into the past or by violence, as Hightower and Joe do. Instead, she completely accepts her place and acts in the present through a simple faith in providence and humankind. Early in the novel she assures the world-wise Mrs. Armstid that God will see to it that the family is together

[11] Faulkner in the University, pp. 96-7.

when "a chap is born," and comically enough, her prophecy is fulfilled. Although she is naive, Lena's particular grace is her total trust in the present situation, and thus she is never "time-haunted" like Joe or Hightower or Miss Burden. Faulkner has conveyed this technically by the fact that the stories of Lena and Byron are almost completely told in a continuous "present," with only necessary brief informational excursions into their pasts, in contrast to the fractured narratives of Joe and Hightower, shifting back and forth in time.

In contrast to Joe's lack of identity, Lena's spiritual strength of character comes from her sure sense of identity, her acceptance of her place in being. Consequently, though like Joe she is traveling and superficially an outsider, Lena is actually at home in the human community, no matter where she is. Not only does she "fit in," but by her situation Lena witnesses to the fact of communal dependence, and seems to exercise a redeeming influence on the community, drawing out the essential kindness of those she encounters. There is no question of isolation in Lena Grove, or displacement, because of her fundamental acceptance of life, a quality which itself awakens Byron Bunch to a new life. Through his involvement with Lena Grove--through love--Byron moves from the backward-looking, isolated world of Hightower, his sole friend in Jefferson, to the doubtful but nevertheless "creative" world of Lena and the future. In danger

himself of becoming another Hightower, Byron acts against reason and prudence in choosing to follow Lena, and Faulkner makes very clear the significance of that choice when Byron tries to stop Brown's escape. For Byron, it is a choice either of anonymity and "death" by retreat into the past, or of further involvement with Lena, possible failure, but real existence nonetheless. And Byron acts.

> The hill rises, cresting. He has never seen the sea, and so he thinks, 'It is like the edge of nothing. Like once I passed it I would just ride right off into nothing. Where trees would look like and be called by something else except trees, and men would look like and be called by something else except folks. And Byron Bunch he wouldn't even have to be or not be Byron Bunch....[12]

Byron looks back to see Brown escaping again from Lena out the back door of the cabin.

> Then a cold, hard wind seems to blow through him. It is at once violent and peaceful, blowing hard away like chaff or trash or dead leaves all the desire and the despair and the hopelessness and the tragic and vain imagining too. With the very blast of it he seems to feel himself rush back and empty again, without anything in him now which had not been there two weeks ago, before he ever saw her. The desire of this moment is more than desire: it is conviction quiet and assured; before he is aware that his brain has telegraphed his hand he has turned the mule from the road and is galloping along the ridge which parallels the running man's course when he entered the woods. He has not even named the man's name to himself. He does not speculate at all upon where the man is going, and why. It does not enter his head that Brown is fleeing again, as he himself had predicted. If he thought about it at all, he probably believed that Brown was engaged, after his own peculiar fashion, in some thoroughly legitimate business having to do with his and Lena's departure. But he was not thinking about that at all; he was not thinking about

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[12] Light in August, p. 401.

> Lena at all; she was as completely out of his mind as if he had never seen her face nor heard her name. He is thinking: 'I took care of his woman for him and I borned his child for him. And now there is one more thing I can do for him. I can't marry them, because I aint a minister. And I may not can catch him, because he's got a start on me. And I may not can whip him if I do, because he's bigger than me. But I can try it. I can try to do it.'[13]

Thus, as Cleanth Brooks has illustrated, if there is an essential redeeming force in Light in August it lies in the condition of community, exemplified by Lena Grove and Byron Bunch. For in spite of viciousness, hostility, and mob action, in spite of the suffering it inflicts on the individual, the community continues to abide, and it heals those who accept it. Faulkner's belief in this is demonstrated by the magnificent comic ending of the novel, where life and history are ongoing and full of possibility, while the tragic alternatives of isolation and withdrawal seem to diminish into memory.

That vision of history which informs the action of Light in August is present in a far more complicated and oblique way in Absalom, Absalom, mainly because the sheer technical virtuosity of the novel exceeds--by demanding more--that used to tell the story of Joe, Lena, and Hightower. To tell the story of Thomas Sutpen Faulkner elected to use four main "voices"--Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, Quentin Compson, and Shreve McCannon--all committed in various

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[13] Ibid., pp. 402-3.

degrees to reconstructing the meaning of Sutpen's history. Consequently, the reader must consider not only those themes evoked in the story itself, but the fact that Faulkner is also primarily concerned with the act of imagination whereby history is recreated, or "how we know the past," as Cleanth Brooks has suggested.[14] As we shall see, there is a complicated and dynamic relationship between those themes created within Sutpen's story and the particular "voice" imaginating them, but for the moment we can isolate the dominant thematic strains before turning to the difficult thematic problems.

"Sutpen's trouble was innocence," says Mr. Compson, and throughout the novel we discover Faulkner's conception of this: a sense of immunity from nature and history, a blindness to moral ambiguity and complicity, and a belief in the limitless, independent assertion of personal will. Like Joe Christmas, Sutpen is both outsider and usurper of the natural order, ruthlessly and innocently pursuing his dream of a dynasty without regard for the humanity around him. Throughout his career Sutpen is a "foreigner" who enters the South and imposes his will upon it, but this in turn is an analogue of his fundamental isolation, because of his "innocence," from the human community itself. To Faulkner this is the same pitiable condition as Joe Christmas's. "He (Sutpen) was not a (sic) depraved--he was amoral, he was

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[14] Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapawtapha County (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

ruthless, completely self-centered. To me he is to be pitied, as anyone who ignores man is to be pitied, who does not believe that he belongs as a member of a human family, of the human family, is to be pitied."[15]

Sutpen's isolation precludes any historical consciousness on his part, since time "stopped" for him during that one unendurable moment in the past when he was first turned away from the front door of the mansion. In essence, his life is an attempt to "correct," rather than accept, that moment--his Fall--and so time is inured for him and everything is seen in relation to that moment.[16] Thus he acts in a vacuum of immunity without consciousness of place or history. In creating Sutpen's Hundred, he apes the manners of aristocratic respectability without concern for the moral and social underpinnings of that order. His marriage and begetting of Judith and Henry are necessary, incidental facts to the achievement of his "design," as is his outrageous suggestion later of a "trial" marriage with Rosa Coldfield. Similarly, Sutpen regards the Civil War as an unfortunate

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[15] Faulkner in the University, p. 80.

[16] The same problem of identity is at work here in Sutpen as in Christmas, Hightower, and Quentin Compson. Rather than accept the fact of the fall, they try to deny or correct it by cutting off from its effects, but this only leads to a spiritual "freeze" in time. Like many Faulkner characters, they become fixed on a moment in the past, and hence doomed to recapitulative attempts to escape or correct it in some way. As a result, their whole "inviolable" identity becomes fragilely dependent on that single point of time; they refuse to "fall."

interruption of his personal plan to establish a dynasty, and after the war he returns to begin resurrection of the "Hundred" as though the history of 1861-65 had almost never occurred. It is as though time itself were meaningless to Sutpen; he seems as detached from it as he is impervious to "place"--the actual condition of the fallen South at this time, which for him holds no more ties of human values than his brutal pragmatism chooses to accept in order to achieve his dream. Even in old age he continues to usurp the natural order, begetting a daughter by Milly Jones, but it is the figure of Time itself in the person of Wash Jones with his scythe which finally cuts Sutpen down.

Sutpen's ruthless quest for self-redemption, to redress the moment of the "fall" in his past he cannot accept, causes him also to deny complicity in ambiguous guilt as well. We recall in Light in August how Joe Christmas preferred his relationship with Mr. McEachern--one of hard but unequivocal "justice" in reward and punishment--to the warmth and sympathy of Mrs. McEachern. Sutpen holds to a similar kind of "justice"--an exact, pragmatic balance sheet of "mistakes" which can be corrected by him, and this impulse is seen especially in his attitude toward Bon. Having repudiated him and his mother as not fitting into his design, Sutpen nevertheless regards the mistake as "paid for" because of his support for them, as he tells Mr. Compson.

> 'And yet after more than thirty years, more than thirty years after my conscience had finally assured me that if I had done an injustice, I had done what I could to rectify it--' and grandfather not saying 'Wait' now but saying, hollering maybe even: 'Conscience? Conscience? Good God, man, what else did you expect?....what conscience to trade with which would have warranted you in the belief that you could have bought immunity from her for no other coin but justice?'[17]

Still, Sutpen admits no complicity in his denial of Charles Bon, and though it ultimately destroys him and his design, he dies innocent, without self-knowledge, and the meaning of his history is only finally discovered through the narrative "voices" who recreate his life.

How do we arrive at the "total" truth about Sutpen's story? Faulkner in one stroke both complicated the matter and brought it vitally to life by using four narrative "voices" who remember and recreate the history from fragments of facts. This device allowed him to dramatize, rather than simply present by recollection, the relationship of each narrator to Sutpen's career. For example, there is the "identification" between Henry Sutpen and Quentin, both doomed by chivalric codes of honor relating to sisters, and at least partially between Shreve and Mr. Compson, for although Shreve is a Canadian and outside the history of the South, both he and Mr. Compson tend to take a detached, somewhat ironic view of Sutpen's history. However, in recreating the story each narrator tends to "verify" its

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[17]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom (New York: Random House, 1936), p. 265.

meaning only in terms of his or her own particular reading of the events, and while this may help to partially enlighten the tale, it also imposes all the limitations of their own particular viewpoint. There is a tendency on the part of each narrator to try to "contain" the actual mystery of Sutpen's history, depending on their degree of involvement in that history and the particular sense of values they bring to bear when interpreting it. For example, to Rosa Coldfield Sutpen is a "demon," while to Shreve he is at times a tawdry buffoon and serio-comic opportunist (to some extent Mr. Compson holds this view, too), and both are reductive views which do not represent the final "tragic" Sutpen Faulkner makes the reader see. As Cleanth Brooks suggested, Faulkner's concern in Absalom, Absalom may be equally on Sutpen and "how we know the past," but regarding the latter he shows the single imagination to be limited and subject to distortion when "recreating" history, as in the case of Gail Hightower's "historizing" imagination in Light in August.

In Hightower Faulkner was concerned with the dissociating historical imagination, one in which the ontological balance between past and present, sensibility and action, insight and fact had somehow become tipped, and this seems true in the case of each of the narrators in Absalom, Absalom too. Sutpen's outrageous suggestion to her has become Rosa Coldfield's idée fixe; she cannot "get beyond" that moment in her past to see him in any larger perspective of history.

Quentin Compson's identification with the past (as he "imagines" it) is so close and complete that it produces romantic distortion similar to Hightower's, a destructive obsession which Faulkner described as Quentin's "ophthalmia." Mr. Compson and Shreve, both interested in and involved in Sutpen's history, tend to "contain" it within their larger cosmic viewpoint of sardonic, somewhat world-weary fatalism.

How does Faulkner, then, create perspective in Absalom, Absalom which both presents the mysterious truth of Sutpen's career and at the same time implicitly measures the distortions and limitations of the narrating "voices"? It is by his own authorial voice woven in and through the various voices of the narrators, a voice which creates Sutpen's mystery by revealing its dynamic relationship to the character "voice" trying to explain and understand it. In each case Sutpen's history cannot be "contained" by the single narrator voice, and the sense of overflowing, onrushing truth is conveyed by the heightened rhetoric and style of the novel. In addition, Faulkner uses the explicit analogue of Kings II, the story of Absalom, and the classical pattern of revenge, the great man brought down by the retributive hand of Fate, whose canons he has violated. These analogues serve to measure the action of Sutpen's history, as distinct from the interpreting narrators, and also serve as a formal touchstone to correct the distortions of their particular voices. Thus through Faulkner's use of analogical techniques

and rhetoric, we are finally left with the abiding mystery of Sutpen, multifarious, dramatic and "ongoing" because it resists the categorizing impulses of its various interpreters.

Absalom, Absalom is perhaps the "darkest" of Faulkner's major novels; it is as though in it history were circumscribed and turned inward upon itself paralytically. There is a certain amount of redeeming action in the novel, as Brooks has shown, particularly in the long-suffering humanity of Judith, who lives through, understands, and acts compassionately in time and history. But the weight is upon the forces of destructive innocence and dissociation throughout the novel, and they are intensified by Faulkner's own rhetorical flights and immersions. In The Sound and the Fury, however, the forces of destruction are more "balanced" by positive, redemptive energies at work, in particular the spiritual power exerted by Dilsey. Moreover, speaking from the standpoint of the analogical aesthetic, it seems to me that the historical vision informing The Sound and the Fury focuses the positive and negative themes upon one another in a more concrete, dramatic, mutually-revealing way. We recall that the essence of the analogical involves "incarnating" vision dramatically in the concrete, and evolving meaning in the concrete through evolving action. Of Faulkner's major novels The Sound and the Fury seems to achieve this most successfully, and for this reason it actually seems more Christian in its rendering of history than the overtly

allegorized A Fable, whose vision of history suffers, I think, in exact proportion to its failure to dramatically embody that vision in the concrete. It is also, curiously, more "dated" than The Sound and the Fury, I think because at times the vital historical sense fails to work in the creative act. Thus its over-riding allegorical vision seems partly unrealized, whereas The Sound and the Fury possesses the fresh dramatic power which enriches its vision again and again. In other words, The Sound and the Fury formally embodies mystery, whereas A Fable is about the mystery of the Incarnation in history, and the latter is no guarantee of values that must be discovered and created within the work.

The story of the decline of the Compson family, a decline epitomized by the tragedies of Caddie and Quentin, is an analogue of the fallen condition itself, and Faulkner's vision is worked out brilliantly in the way each character responds to that condition. The touchstone of their response is the idiot Benjy, for in one sense he is the living emblem of their decline. At the same time, however, he embodies redemptive possibility in the sense that his very presence is a demand upon the deepest spiritual caapcities of the other characters, and how they "see" and respond to him is the gauge of their own humanity. He is the crucible in which the meaning of human "being-ness" is tested, and by extension, the meaning of human history. For some Benjy becomes a medium of grace, of acceptance of the mystery of

suffering, of time, of the idea of spiritual community linking all creatures in the redemptive process. For others, he embodies all the irrational absurdity of existence, of history, and unable to live with this, they try to deny or escape it, but in so doing they relinquish the redemptive possibilities as well.

With the exception of Caddie, each of the Compsons takes measures to immunize themselves from the fact of their fall, centered in Benjy. This is the same quest for innocence and self-redemption seen in Joe Christmas and Hightower and Sutpen, the same denial of history and spiritual community, and it produces much the same forms of dissociation, only perhaps more intensely extreme. Caddie, the "girl brave enough to climb that tree" and look in the forbidden window--that is, to stare at death--accepts both her individual and the family's collective fall, and she along with Dilsey are the ones most caring for Benjy throughout the novel. But the other Compsons try to deny this reality, and to project themselves out of this historical "present" and achieve insularity from its suffering. To Mrs. Compson Benjy is a judgment and an affliction, and so she retreats neurosthenically into the past, the romantic memory of her high-born family, and into complete self-pity. She participates in bringing about Benjy's name change, a fact which reveals her denial of him, and in a similar impulse, she denies the fallen Caddie by refusing to allow mention of her name in the

Compson household. Having retreated into the past, she has relinquished any capacity for action in the present; Jason completely runs the family affairs, and Dilsey manages the house. Nevertheless, Mrs. Compson talks continually about her suffering, but in fact she has cut herself off from even that, retreating to her room whenever some crisis is imminent. For Mrs. Compson, as well as her husband and sons, time is only an emblem of dissolution, and they all remain time-obsessed in their inability to accept the "fall" in their history gracefully (in the theological sense), and act with some degree of effectiveness in the present moment. The idea of actually suffering through time, the present "here," is largely inconceivable to them, and yet this is where redemptive grace is actually operative, as Dilsey demonstrates. To the Compsons time is unredeemable, and since they cannot escape its flow, time becomes meaningless progression, as Mr. Compson informs Quentin with the gift of his father's watch.

> I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; its rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the reductio absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.[18]

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[18] The Sound and the Fury, p. 95.

For Mr. Compson, in addition to a retreat into the past, the quest for immunity preeminently takes the form of a retreat behind language itself. Through talk--words--he effects his dissociation. Gifted with eloquence and morbid sense of irony, Mr. Compson uses it to construct his own despairing, manichean vision of history, and yet this is a "safe" Olympian posture which he uses, along with drink, to detach himself from the real ambiguities of history, and most importantly, from the personal demands and responsibilities it places before him in the present. Since the world is totally corrupt to Mr. Compson, he is not called upon to act, since action is now largely meaningless. Language becomes the act of self-hypnosis by which he convinces himself of this. Yet it is language dissociated from fact--the antithesis of the incarnational ideal which implicitly informs and judges his dissociating speech--and this condition similarly haunts Quentin throughout Section II, where we see him actually drowning in a deluge of disembodied language and insight he cannot effectively handle.

For Quentin, language, time, and the concrete present reality of the fallen Compson state becomes an unbearable burden of unremitting suffering and loss. Yet he too unsuccessfully seeks immunity from history, specifically from the fact of Caddie's loss of virginity, by trying to project himself and Caddie into a state of mock damnation by incest. In Quentin's mind, this would, not so much give meaning to

her affair with Dalton Ames (his father assures him it is meaningless), but preserve them together in a state of frozen inviolability before her "fall," and thus keep them immune. This is the familiar quest for innocence in Faulkner (paradoxically sought through damnation, like Joe Christmas), but given the fact of the fall it now becomes the death of spiritual fixity that Quentin desires.[19]

> It was a while before the last stroke ceased vibrating. It stayed in the air, more felt than heard, for a long time. Like all the bells that ever rang still ringing in the long dying light-rays and Jesus and St. Francis talking about his sister. Because if it were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else but her and me. If we could have just done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us. (Italics mine.) I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames And when he put Dalton Ames Dalton Ames Dalton Ames when he put the pistol in my hands I didn't. That's why I didn't. He would be there and she would and I would.[20]

This innocence-by-damnation, the sought-for reprieve from suffering, time and change, is the essence of the manichean temper, and it leads "logically" to Quentin's suicide.

Yet Quentin's tale of incest is also an attempt to give some rational, ethical meaning to human behavior, by constructing a personal code of ethics and "justice" with

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[19]This idea of fixity is the antithesis of the notion of grace as "spiritual motion" outlined in Chapter I. This spiritual motion, as noted, often takes the form of a new insight into the meaning of history, and accepting it, as Dilsey does in Part IV.

[20]The Sound and the Fury, pp. 98-99.

which to "balance out" action on a clear scale of sin and retribution. In this respect it is like Joe Christmas' preference for the unambiguous "justice" of Mr. McEachern or Hightower's plea for a clear balancing of his relationship with the community by saying: "I have paid. I have bought immunity." But all these attempts at personal ethic are doomed to fail, because they are essentially reductive--attempts to eliminate the fundamental mystery of human experience. To reject that is to attempt to live "outside" that mystery (a subtle form of immunity), but the price of this isolation from ongoing history is spiritual paralysis and inevitable defeat. On the other hand, accepting the mystery involves accepting the paradox of inequity, suffering, and loss in experience and at the same time responding actively to the working of grace within ongoing, changing fallen nature. Faulkner's phrase "to endure" implies this kind of acceptance and spiritual adaptability, rather than just passive stoicism. Quentin Compson cannot accept this; characters like Dilsey, Lena Grove and Judith Sutpen do.

Jason Compson's lust for immunity from history is as intense as his parents' and brother Quentin's, only manifested in different ways. There is the same ontological dissociation of past from present, but Jason tries to manage time and events not by retreat into the past, but by immersing himself totally in the present. To Jason history and the past are irrelevant except as they relate to his immediate

pragmatic concerns in the present. That his view of matters is strictly functional is evidenced by his readiness to commit Benjy to the Jackson asylum. He admits no spiritual, or even familial, ties with the idiot, nor that Benjy has any identity within the community. And yet ironically, Jason's desire to repudiate his connection with the Compson fall is manifested by his obsessive concern with their "place" in the community, and how he appears in the public eye. This is of course the real reason for his concern with Quentin II's behavior, and Benjy's also.

Jason's relationship with Benjy is symptomatic of another destructive trait he shares with Quentin: the attempt to create a rational personal ethic that will serve as a bulwark against forces of mystery, the unpredictable, and ambiguity. He regards it as "just" that he steals from Quentin II as payment for the bank position he lost, his idée fixe in the past. By this kind of narrow rationalism he tries to control events immediately around him, from Quentin II's misbehavior to Benjy's desperate howl in the final scene of the novel. Jason feels justified in his "ethic" and asserts "I can take care of myself," a remark which reveals that he sees himself as morally independent, immune to history and loss, and thus not in any need of redemption outside himself. Yet throughout his section of the novel Jason is defeated again and again by those mysterious forces of life he cannot control; and yet he learns

nothing from these defeats, remaining "innocent" like Sutpen to the end. His logical scheme to rob Caddie's daughter is defeated by his own misreading of her daring, capricious nature; he can no more control her rationally than he can his stock market investments. The image of the breakdown of his control is his frenzied inability to keep up with time. And it is time without any supernatural construction; the providential sparrows of the Quentin section have now become the pestering pigeons Jason cannot control or destroy.

It is Dilsey, of course, who embodies most of the positive redemptive forces in the novel. Perhaps the most important thing that can be said about her initially is that she lives <u>through</u> all the anguished moments of the Compson history, unlike the members of the family, who retreat or escape in the various ways I have indicated. This is to say, then, that Dilsey accepts the fact of their fall, of <u>the</u> fall, accepts time and place realistically, and exhibits none of the forms of dissociation so evident in the Compsons. Her strong sense of <u>place</u> goes beyond social context or immediate historical situation to its eternal ontological roots. She knows her name is in "de Book," as she tells Caddie, and she intends to answer for herself at the Final Judgment. Dilsey's universal and eternal sense of community derives from this faith. Her sense of community is not drawn in upon itself narcissistically and made exclusive, like the Compsons'; her community

is truly universal, a fact revealed by her view of Benjy as one of God's creatures and her inclusion of him in the Negro Easter service. The center of her view of history is Christ's Redemption, and her faith in it enables her to accept and act constructively in and through time, through suffering and loss, to bring about some measure of good. Time does not haunt her as it does the Compsons. The clock strikes inaccurately but Dilsey knows what time it is; likewise, when the children are curious about Damuddy's death, she tells them they will know "in de Lord's own time." Because her acceptance of time and history is not manichean or detached, like Mr. Compson's, she can act "gracefully" in the present. Her presence in the Compson midst, analogically, is a vital, dramatic and informing counterpoint to their negative dissociation from history as meaningless, redemption-less, and absurd. Her faith in an ongoing spiritual community, centered in Christ, and her actions continually testify to redemptive possibilities.

Dilsey's acceptance of the redemptive ideal of history, and of her concrete place in it, is demonstrated most clearly in her relationship with the idiot Benjy. Unlike the Compsons, she will not leave him out of the human family; she is aware of his place--the place of all irrational suffering--in a divine plan. She knows intuitively that to deny him is to deny "the least" in the kingdom, and so the focal point of irrationality and menainglessness for others

becomes for Dilsey a medium of grace, the "vision" she achieves next to Benjy in church. Thus she refuses to participate in the various Compson "denials" of him: she will not refer to him as "the baby," as Mrs. Compson does; she opposes his name change from Maury; she organizes his birthday party, a fact revealing her total acceptance of their condition in time.[21] To Dilsey Benjy is not an "affliction" or a non-functional dependent, but a soul, and to him she attributes the kind of divine prescience familiarly attributed to idiots--"precious" in the sight of the Lord.

Dilsey's acceptance of their condition, then, is neither stoical nor passive. The Compsons seem condemned to being able only to react dissociatively from their historical fall, but she acts creatively and in so doing transforms the meaning of their experience. Her ability to do this demonstrates one of the central paradoxes of redemption history: that complete acceptance of the fall, of limitation--of <u>this</u> time and <u>this</u> place linked to Christ and eternity--is a liberating gift of freedom, and that her spiritual transcendence grows out of fidelity to the present and the limited concrete. Thus Dilsey is most free of anyone in the novel, not burdened by time, nor deluged by language, nor driven by a desire for personal immunity and self-redemption. She accepts suffering creatively without desire for reprieve, believing that it has already been paid for, already redeemed.

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[21] Similarly, Dilsey refuses to deny Caddie's existence after she is gone.

As she stands next to Benjy in church, listening to the Reverend Shegog's Easter sermon, she experiences one of those spiritual "motions" of grace, and it comes in the form of a historical insight into their true condition. She "sees" the connecting link between the historical Christ and His living image in the idiot standing next to her, and the meaning of human suffering. "I've seed de first en de last," she tells Frony later. It may likely be a reference to the first and the last of the Compsons. But her freshly illuminated sense of history stretches beyond that. We recall that Reverend Shegog's sermon topic was "the recollection and the Blood of the Lamb," and as he incarnated that vision into the Negro dialect, Dilsey also experiences that re-collection--the "gathering together" of all the suffering, idiocy, and loss in history in the person of Christ. The grace of this insight makes history profoundly clear to her, so that she can accept it, "endure," and continue to act with freedom and faith to justify that perception.

CHAPTER FIVE

I.

The vision of Flannery O'Connor was that of an allegorist who saw human history as a commedia divina centered in Christ's Redemption, a mystery which she accepted as literal truth and then proceeded to explore in such a way that the form and meaning of her stories evolved inseparably from the fundamental mystery of Christ's continuing presence in human affairs. The Christian doctrinal interpretation of history which she accepted wholeheartedly led her to see all things in creation "linked together" by the Redemption, and given that vision, she set about the task of dramatizing its themes and counterthemes as she saw them reflected in contemporary experience. Her doctrinal viewpoint, her historical sense, and her aesthetic sense were all "of one substance:" a firm belief in the analogical nature of reality, a reality extended to infinite depth by the "added dimension" of supernatural mystery incarnated in Christ. To an audience largely indifferent or even hostile to this added dimension of mystery in human reality, an audience imbued with rationalism, the action in Miss O'Connor's stories often

seems bizarre, grotesque, and absurd. But beneath the surface discrepancies lies an awesome wholeness of vision and form, an artistic integrity that derives, I believe, from the fact that both her vision and the act of writing grew from the same source: the analogical mystery of Christ. Thus, the subject matter of her best fiction and her method of penetrating it became indivisible: an "identity" exists between them which gives the stories the inviolable character of living mysteries. They are comedies in the deepest sense because, unlike some of her fellow contemporary writers who chose to focus upon the absurdity of man's condition in itself, she chose to examine the "absurd" mystery of the divine incarnating Himself in human form, which creates a higher perspective for irrationality, violence, suffering, and death--a perspective in which the stakes of human action are ultimate and eternal.

From the outset of her career Miss O'Connor made plain the doctrinal foundation of her vision. "I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that."[1] "We lost our innocence in the fall of our first parents, and our return to it is through the

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[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," The Living Novel, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 161-2.

redemption which was brought about by Christ's death and by our slow participation in it."[2] All of the central themes of her fiction--the Fall, the quest for innocence, the acceptance or rejection of redemptive grace, judgment--are focused by the historical fact of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. It is the light which shines through the immediate context of the contemporary South in her work to link it with the universal struggle of man for redemption represented in the Old and New Testament. To illuminate this meaning through fiction posed tremendous problems for her as an artist, for she well recognized that her audience--indeed, much of the modern western world--possessed attitudes inimical to her own beliefs. She recognized that "moral vision" was not enough, that for her the artist's spiritual views must also coincide with his "dramatic sense" and his "vision of what is" in the creative act, else both the moral and the dramatic would suffer diminution. To achieve this identity of vision and dramatic immediacy meant to create a "violent" fiction. Thus, she fused together in a radical way (in the manner of a metaphysical poet, I believe) many different elements: classical analogues and Biblical history, the allegorical tradition of Dante, Hawthorne, and the American romance, the regional

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[2]Flannery O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," America, XCVI (March 30, 1957), pp. 733-4.

traditions of the comic and the grotesque, and the prophetic tradition of continuing revelation. But what makes these elements work dramatically and concretely, what fuses them creatively, is her doctrinal belief in Christ's redemption, which centers her aesthetic as well as theological vision: they are one.

Miss O'Connor insisted upon the identity in the concrete between theological vision and artistic practice again and again in her essays, lectures, and interviews.

> If you shy away from sense experience, you will not be able to read fiction; but you will not be able to apprehend anything else in the world either, because every mystery that enters the human mind, except in the final stages of contemplative prayer, does so by way of the senses. Christ didn't redeem us by a direct intellectual act, but became incarnate in human form, and He speaks to us now through the mediation of a visible Church. All this may seem a long way from the subject of fiction, but it is not, for the main concern of the fiction writer is with mystery as it is incarnated in human life.[3]

> The Manicheans separated spirit and matter. To them all material things were evil. They sought pure spirit and tried to approach it without any mediation of matter. This is pretty much the modern spirit, and for the sensibility infected with it, fiction is hard if not impossible to write because fiction is so very much an incarnational art.[4]

For Miss O'Connor, the incarnational aesthetic and the revelation of mystery through the concrete in fiction was linked to the Incarnation of Christ in history. We recall

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[3]Flannery O'Connor, "Catholic Novelists and their Readers," Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1969), p. 176.

[4]Flannery O'Connor, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1969), p. 68.

from Chapters One and Three that in the Christian view of history, Christ's Incarnation is an analogical action which continues to occur through the mysterious operation of grace in nature. Miss O'Connor believed in this ongoing process, its concrete "possibility," both as a person and as an artist. It accounts for the peculiar intensity of her stories. Critic Robert Drake has said that Christ is the hero of all her stories, and this is profoundly true, because all her fiction embodies one central theme: the encounter with Christ and the "possibility" of grace, a violent encounter which is often brought about paradoxically through the agency of the devil. And at its best, her fiction is not only <u>about</u> the mysterious encounter with Christ; rather, it <u>is</u> that shocking encounter which the reader experiences, because of the identity that exists between form and vision in her work. Only by this unity could she avoid what for her was the greatest danger in "religious" writing; that the moral sense of the artist become detached from the dramatic in the act of creation. She knew that when dissociation occurred it produced a Manichean and un-incarnated fiction: falsely pietistic on the one hand, or falsely demeaning of physical reality on the other.

Like Joseph Conrad, she believed the highest task of the writer was to render justice to the created universe, and for her this included mystery and the "added

dimension" of the supernatural. The question then became: how to render justice to mystery. Miss O'Connor recalled with admiration Henry James' way of dealing with unsolicited, inferior manuscripts. James would return them with the remark that the writer had chosen a good subject and had treated it in a direct, straightforward way. While this perhaps flattered the author, the truth, as Miss O'Connor noted, was that it was probably the worst thing James could have said about the manuscript, since a direct, straightforward approach was the least capable of revealing the mysteries of concrete reality. What she understood, then, was the need for <u>indirection</u> as a means of creating density and depth in her fiction, of rendering justice to mystery. But this was not to be a strategy for looking beyond or around the concrete; rather, one of penetrating through it to the larger, invisible realities it embodied. Grounding the vision of mystery in the concrete was ultimately a matter of trust and faith, made possible by her belief that physical creation is redeemed, good in itself and revelatory of something of the absolute and the eternal, like Blake's infinitesimal grain of sand. Metaphysically, this belief is grounded in the analogical principle of being, through which the widest possible vision can be contained in a concrete, narrow, limited reality. Belief in the analogical nature of reality led her naturally to typological vision in fiction as a way of dramatizing

"history" and the universal through the concrete present.

> The kind of vision the writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is called anagogical vision, and that is the kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or one situation. The medieval commentators on Scripture found three kinds of meaning in the literal level of the sacred text: one they called allegorical, in which one fact pointed to another; one they called tropological, or moral, which had to do with what should be done; and one they called anagogical, which had to do with the Divine life and our participation in it. Although this was a method applied to biblical exegesis, it also was an attitude toward all of creation, and a way of reading nature that included most possibilities, and I think it is this enlarged view of the human scene that the fiction writer has to cultivate if he is ever going to write stories that have any chance of becoming a permanent part of our literature. It seems to be a paradox that the larger and more complex the personal view, the easier it is to compress into fiction.[5]

Following the manner of the typological, prophetic creator, Miss O'Connor made her stories abound with scriptural and literary allusions, classical motifs, and the allegorical structuring of actions--to "compress" the larger and more complex personal vision of history. She recognized early in her career that these devices could not be used merely to serve as extrinsic points of reference for illuminating meaning in the story. To work truly within and through the literal level--to be truly typological--there had to be an intrinsic identity of form between the various levels of the story, which is the essence of

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[5]Flannery O'Connor, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1969), pp. 72-3.

the analogical mode.

Because her stories center in the encounter with Christ, the acceptance or rejection of supernatural grace working in nature, they necessarily presuppose violence. As a technical means she used violence as a means--not as an end in itself--to shock an audience which she felt was impervious to the deepest mysteries of the religious experience.

> The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make them appear as distortions to an audience which is used to accepting them as natural; and he may well be forced to take even more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs that 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 pictures.[6]

The most important justification for her use of violence, however--the theological one--lay in the very nature of the incarnational vision itself. Due to the intractability of human nature, the presence of grace is forced to make itself known in bizarre and "grotesque" ways (grotesque, that is, to non-believers). Violence occurs often as a prelude to the shock of confrontation with the Divine in human experience, burning away pride and self-will, as in the case of Mr. Head in "The Artificial Nigger." On

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[6]Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," pp. 162-3.

the other hand, there is also the violence produced by a rejection of grace, such as Rayber's violent, self-destructive rationalism and refusal to love. Thus the mystery of violence is part of the mystery of Christ Himself: it could lead creatively to an acceptance of grace as in Tarwater's final acceptance of his vocation as a prophet, or contrarily, it could be the destructive violence of the Misfit's refusal of redemption when he shoots the Grandmother.

The critic Marion Montgomery has suggested that one fundamental identifying point of true Southern fiction is a "sense of violation"--an ingrained metaphysical awareness of incompleteness and limitation.[7] Miss O'Connor's Christian perspective would attribute this to all creation--the mystery that, on the one hand, persons and things ("precious objects") in creation are sacramental and redeemed, and on the other hand, marked with incompleteness by the radical violation that occurred in the Fall, the initial "violence" done to true spiritual character. But what if, like many of Miss O'Connor's characters, one chooses to deny this reality of metaphysical limitation and incompleteness? What if one presumes to personal "wholeness," a spiritual self-sufficiency without the need for outside "help" (i.e., grace), or if one

[7]Marion Montgomery, "A Sense of Violation: Notes Toward a Definition of Southern Fiction," Georgia Review XIX (1965), pp. 278-87.

chooses to see physical creation as strictly material, without sacramental value? Then what occurs again and again in her stories is the "holy violence" of Christ penetrating the false sense of wholeness and self-sufficiency, grace violently pulverizing the false sanctuaries, exposing man's radical limitation and need for redemption. The ambiguous agents of violence in her fiction also bring with them paradoxically, the possibilities of grace. Christ then is the violator-redeemer, shattering the illusions of Natural Man, who thinks he is whole unto himself and at one with his world. In this violent encounter, man is made to see the divine potentiality won for him by Christ and his true place in the eternal kingdom.

Taking the Christian conception of history as her touchstone, then, and the analogical mode of bringing it "to life" in her work, Miss O'Connor used classical, Old Testament, and New Testament analogues to depict the universal struggle over the Fall and Redemption. Like Faulkner, she saw the modern South as a battleground for contending philosophies of history, the one essentially Christian and redemptive, the other secular and anti-theological. She shared with Faulkner and other Southerners the same spiritual "temper" about their immediate history and its universal implications. Speaking of the role of the Catholic novelist in the Protestant South, she

remarked:

> I think that Catholic novelists in the future will be able to reinforce the vital strength of Southern literature, for they will know that what has given the South her identity are those beliefs and qualities which she has absorbed from the Scriptures and from her own history of defeat and violation: a distrust of the abstract, a sense of human dependence upon the grace of God, and a knowledge that evil is not simply a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured.[8]

She chose, however, to represent the Southern situation from a different artistic perspective than that of Faulkner, informed as hers was by the doctrinal acceptance of Christian orthodoxy. Her perspective is that of a conscious and deliberate ordering of allegorical patterns in the manner of Dante and Hawthorne, though certainly with more attention to surface realism than the latter romancer. Consequently, in her stories the South appears as the concrete historical "place," whose extensions stretch into the "true country" of the eternal and the divine which man is destined for. All humanity suffers displacement from it. Faulkner's South is similarly rooted in the eternal, his characters are likewise displaced and dispossessed, but the focal point each writer uses to present that vision is different.

One reason for the difference in perspective has been suggested, correctly I think, by Marion Montgomery, who has pointed out that Faulkner's affinities were

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[8]Flannery O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," Mystery and Manners, p. 209.

essentially with the Old Testament, whereas Miss O'Connor's were rooted in the gospels of Christ.[9] In Faulkner's works, the Christian analogues seem to be "present" as an invisible spiritual form which envelopes and illuminates the action, but more as an aspiration he strives to concretize rather than an accomplished fact. This may partially account for this straining the limits of language and rhetorical form to plumb meaning from the concrete action. His stance as a writer is with man, on "the inside," struggling with tragicomic dignity. Miss O'Connor's starting point, however, is the accomplished fact of Christ's Redemption, and her perspective is the "comic-divine" one which illuminates human folly with harsh clarity, unsentimentally, but with mercy too. There is no straining of language or rhetorical form in her fiction. This is due, I think, to her belief in the Incarnation and Redemption. which prompted her as an artist to try to approximate that mysterious union of Word and Act of which Christ is the most perfect analogue. Hence there is little rhetorical embellishment in her fiction, but there is concern for the mysteries language can evoke; her prose possesses the fierce lucidity of a metaphysical poem. Her theology made her fearful of manipulating the word (she expressed strong distaste for

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[9]Marion Montgomery, "Flannery O'Connor and the Natural Man," Mississippi Quarterly, XXI (Fall, 1968), pp. 235-42.

"experimental" fiction), knowing full well the dangers of its separation from concrete act. Consequently, her emphasis is totally upon the action--the spiritual motion--within the piece, achieved through concrete language, bringing the reader into encounter with mystery. She knew that without this proper analogical action no amount of rhetorical skill could make the story work.

It is not surprising, then, given her vision, that the theme of the "Word" is a central one in her fiction. Language was the concrete instrument for revealing mystery, and fidelity to it constituted a theological as well as an artistic principle. The Bible and the Hebraic intellectual tradition of revelation through concrete language were for her a central source of vision and technique. In a similar vein, she was preoccupied with the theme of silence as a mystery co-equal with the mystery of language, especially in The Violent Bear It Away. Silence mysteriously suggested both the invisible, divine Presence and the void wherein spiritual choice must be struggled over and created. It becomes the shadowy "emptiness" which Hazel Motes and young Tarwater try to fill up with their loud denials. The test of commitment is the word united in the act, and Motes and Tarwater must act, at the risk of their souls.

The task which Miss O'Connor set for herself as an artist, then, was the creation of the mystery of human

experience. She wanted her fiction to illuminate contemporary history with perspective and depth both spiritually and artistically. In other words, she wished her fiction to be "prophetic"--and in her sense of the term this meant fiction which revealed "things close at hand" with all their mysterious "extensions" of meaning, through time and history to their ultimate source in the eternal dimension.

II.

Miss O'Connor's first novel, Wise Blood, bristles with all of the major motifs of the redemptive conception of history, and though successfully comic, it nevertheless suffers from a certain straining for effects. In the story of Hazel Motes she presented the quest of a "Christian malgre lui" for innocence and immunity from the past, guilt, and history, but the quest leads ironically to his final acceptance of the Fall and the need for redemption. The central action, then, is Hazel's constant encounters with the paradox of Christ, the "shadow" he tries with great integrity to escape, but this action is not always rendered with complete dramatic success. The action is at times episodic and truncated, especially regarding minor characters like Enoch Emery and the false preacher Asa Hawks, and the story of Hazel Motes is told with such relentless persistence that it produces a single, rather strident tone throughout the novel. It is almost as though Miss O'Connor were pursuing her subject too directly, generating an overabundance of

dramatic energy which is not artistically measured and paced throughout the story. Furthermore, the language does not always create mystery in the concrete in Wise Blood, a skill that was to become a mark of her maturer writings.

Hazel Motes begins his quest by repudiating his past history of sin, Christ, and redemption--the legacy of his believing mother and grandfather, a circuit preacher. His repudiation takes the form of a denial of "place," both physical and ontological. While in the army Hazel insists that he will return home after his discharge and mind his own business, but upon returning he finds his home abandoned; there is to be no safe retreat from the spiritual struggle with his destiny. As he rides the train to Taulkingham Hazel informs the Negro porter that "you can't go back" to a former place and condition. In his own case, Hazel's denial of his past place is a crucial part of his self-redemptive agnosticism, since to admit that past would be to acknowledge a link with the redemption preached by his mother and grandfather. To avoid this he adopts a pure existentialism that in effect tries to deny history.

> 'Nothing outside you can give you any place,' he said. 'You needn't to look at the sky because its not going to open up and show no place behind it. You needn't to search for any hole in the ground to look through into somewhere else. You can't go neither forward nor backwards into your daddy's time nor your children's if you got them. In yourself right now is all the place you've got. If there was any Fall, look there, if there was any Redemption, look there, and if you expect any Judgment, look there, because they all three will have to be in your time and your body and where in your time and your body can they be?

> 'Where in your time and your body has Jesus redeemed you?' he cried. 'Show me where because I don't see the place. If there was a place where Jesus had redeemed you that would be the place for you to be, but which of you can find it?'[10]

There is an important truth couched in Hazel's words, though at this point he is unaware of it. Hazel is reacting against those tepid, nominal "believers" who accept Christ's Redemption as only a historical event in the past and then ignore its immediate relevance in their present lives, characters like the Mrs. Hitchcock he meets on the train. For Hazel, the Fall and the Redemption must have concrete meaning in the present, and since he denies this, he goes to the opposite extreme of denying connection with any historical-ontological "place" outside the present self. He is a modern "doubting Thomas," a pure existentialist who believes in "creating" his own identity through freedom of action in a present situation, but in fact he is haunted by the past at every turn of the road in his quest.

Hazel's goal is to escape the moral history of the Fall and redeem himself by absolute fidelity to his own personal integrity. Thus he denies the existence of the soul and sin, for to admit the latter would be to acknowledge implicitly the need for the grace of redemption.

> 'Listen, you people, I'm going to take the truth with me wherever I go,' Haze called. 'I'm going to preach it to whoever'll listen at whatever place. I'm going

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[10] Flannery O'Connor, Wise Blood, in Three by Flannery O'Connor (New York: Signet Books, 1964), p. 90.

> to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar.'[11]

When his quest for self-redemption begins to falter in contradiction, Hazel shifts to total nihilism, only to discover, ironically, that even to hold this stance with integrity requires the existence of an opposite belief to give validity to his denial. This is the reason for his obsession with the "blind" preacher Asa Hawks, and when Haze discovers that Hawks has not blinded himself in testimony to Jesus, his own non-belief--the "innocence" of his nihilism--is undermined as well.

Haze's integrity, then, derives from his desire for meaningful commitment to whatever position he takes--preferably disbelief. The integrity of his fierce commitment is focused, significantly, in the union of word and act, even in his denial of Christianity. Throughout his progress Haze continually meets people whose verbal commitment to Christianity is separated from action: Mrs. Hitchcock, Asa and Sabbath Lily Hawks, his landlady Mrs. Flood. His own "Church Without Christ" is based upon <u>living out</u> his denial, as opposed to the parody of belief he recognizes in Onnie Jay Holy's "Church of Christ Without Christ," which grafts the husk of nominal Christianity onto a false doctrine of salvation by "natural sweetness" (i.e. a belief in the

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[11] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 60.

personal innocence of "natural" man). Haze sees that the Prophet of Onnie Jay Holy's church, Solace Layfield, "ain't true," that his words do not match his actions; in fact, only after being run over by Haze's Essex does Layfield admit personal guilt and the falsity of his doctrine of innocence, and he dies asking God for forgiveness. For Hazel Motes, commitment must be totally consummated in action, a belief which leads ultimately to his own act of blinding.

Hazel Motes' attempted denial of the Fall and Redemption also includes a complete rejection of mystery. His self-proclaimed Church Without Christ is to be one in which all belief is "clear," where no one is obliged to accept what he "can't see." "He said it was not right to believe anything you couldn't see or hold in your hands or test with your teeth. He said he only a few days ago believed in blasphemy as the way to salvation, but that you couldn't even believe in that because then you were believing in something to blaspheme." His denial of mystery is part of his attempt to repudiate the history of "unnamed guilt" he has inherited, for to admit that would be to acknowledge that he suffers the effects of a condition he inherited and which are therefore beyond his control--that is, the condition of original sin. Haze will not accept the mystery of the redemptive process going on beyond him in time and space, with himself as part of it. Nevertheless, he is constantly faced with the presence of Christ in oblique ways throughout his

progress: in the used car lot boy's habitual swearing "Christ nailed," in Asa Hawks, and in the irreconcilable contradictions of his own agnosticism. Hints of the universal redemptive process at work mysteriously confront Haze wherever he goes. When he first arrives in Taulkingham, however, he is impervious to it. "His second night in Taulkingham, Hazel Motes walked along downtown close to the store fronts but not looking in them. The black sky was underpinned with long silver streaks that looked like scaffolding and depth on depth behind it were thousands of stars that all seemed to be moving slowlt as if they were about some vast construction work that involved the whole order of the universe and would take all time to complete." (Italics mine) Haze ignores this now, as he does the familiar "Jesus Saves" roadsigns he passes while trying to escape in the out-moded Essex, but by the end of the novel he has accepted his "place" in this cosmic process, and he dies, significantly, near a construction site.

Throughout Wise Blood, the antithesis of the doctrine of the Fall and the need for Redemption is the idea of "natural man"; that is, of man being good in his "natural" state, and consequently without the need of supernatural grace. This idea is best depicted in Onnie Jay Holy's sentimental doctrine of "natural sweetness"--man originally innocent in childhood and "corrupted" by maturity (in direct opposition to the Christian doctrine of original sin, of

course). "Natural" man is parodied throughout the novel in the pervasive animal imagery and especially in the moronic Enoch Emery, who acts mindlessly according to "his blood" and finally reverts to the natural state by donning the ape-suit. The concept of "blood knowledge," the instinctive "wisdom" which Enoch follows without thinking in his actions, is opposed to the higher, supernatural mystery of Christ's redemptive sacrifice of blood--a source of grace which acts as enlightenment and enables man to transcend the natural order and participate in the divine life. Though Haze can not accept this throughout most of the novel, he is wise enough to reject the reversion to the "natural" state signified by the shrunken "new-jesus" ape-man which Enoch worships. And finally, when Haze does come to accept the blood of Christ's Redemption and begin his own life of purifying penance, he informs Mrs. Flood that <u>this</u> is "natural" and "normal," the true condition of man.

The primary symbol of Haze Motes' unsuccessful quest for moral immunity is his outmoded Essex, and only when this means of physical locomotion is destroyed does he accept the inescapability of personal guilt. "No one with a good car needs to be justified," he has proclaimed, but when the Essex is demolished, the authentic "spiritual motion" of grace begins to operate. Paradoxically, the grace and "insight" Haze gains of personal evil and his place in redemption history leads to his act of physical blinding. Miss O'Connor

invokes the classical analogue of Oedipus, but with a new and greater meaning, since Haze's act of blinding is linked to the mysterious process of supernatural redemption.[12] The classical analogue is thus widened by the Christian, just as the natural concept of "blood knowledge" is widened by the mystery of Christ's redemptive blood. In blinding himself, Haze externally acknowledges (in the manner of a sacramental sign) his own "fall." "You have to pay," he tells the unseeing Mrs. Flood, whose "reasonable" mind cannot grasp the mystery of his penance. Thus in the end Haze comes to accept the very history preached by his grandfather and mother which he set out to repudiate at the beginning of the novel. He now sees and accepts his place in the eternal, beyond the immediate physical world, and it is this journey (which Mrs. Flood imagines as a journey to Bethlehem) that Haze is beginning when he is finally killed.

In most of the stories in her first collection, A Good Man Is Hard To Find, "nine stories about original sin" she called them, Miss O'Connor displayed a deeper and more subtle art of dramatic typology than in Wise Blood. The analogical dimensions of reality she was pursuing are rendered more skillfully; there is an increased use of classical mythology and Biblical analogues, literary and philosophical

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[12] In his introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, Robert Fitzgerald has indicated her reading of the Sophocles trilogy at this time.

motifs. The short story form allowed for greater concentration and impact; at the same time, she was developing greater precision in grounding the mysterious dimensions of meaning more organically in the concrete action. Thus while her essential vision of history remained unchanged, her art in representing it developed consistently. As she remarked to Robert Fitzgerald, "I keep going deeper"--deeper, that is, into the mystery of her art and the faith that illuminated it.

In "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," the Misfit resembles Hazel Motes in that he too cannot accept either the historical Christ or redemption outside himself. He is burdened by a consciousness of guilt which he cannot eradicate, but since he cannot accept Christ, the Incarnate Mystery who has "thown (sic) everything off balance," the Misfit tries to live by a rationalistic code of human "justice" (much like Thomas Sutpen and Jason Compson), where he can hold up the crime to the punishment and "balance out" his actions. But he is nevertheless aware of personal guilt beyond this, and since he refuses Jesus' "hep," he is forced to adopt the manichean position of unredeemable evil. "Ain't no pleasure but meanness." The Misfit accepts the Fall, but he cannot accept Redemption. "Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead," the Misfit continued, "and He shouldn't have done it. He thown everything off balance." When the Grandmother suggests that perhaps Christ didn't raise the dead, the

Misfit becomes the doubting Thomas who will not accept the historical fact of the redemption without proof, devoid of mystery. "I wasn't there so I can't say He didn't," the Misfit said. "'I wisht I had of been there,' he said, hitting the ground with his fist. 'It ain't right I wasn't there because if I had of been there I would of known.'"

The real mysterious action incarnated in the story, however, is centered in the Grandmother. A nominal Christian, she actually believes in a sentimental innocence ("goodness") which she identifies with the romantic past and gentility. History for her is the happy illusion of a time and place where people were "good," and by dissociation she tries to retreat into a glorified past through memory, away from moral involvement in the present. The "mistake" in her memory about the plantation brings about their fall. Her encounter with the Misfit shockingly returns her to her true place in the present, where she comes to acknowledge her complicity with a fallen humanity. Though the Grandmother's historical sense is warped, she nevertheless does possess "conscience." In contrast, her son Bailey and his family are modern secularists who are impervious to time, history, the past, and the mysteries of the spiritual; they die without ever comprehending the meaning of their encounter with the Misfit.

The meeting with the Misfit immediately destroys the Grandmother's false innocence, a necessary prelude to her acceptance of her true identity in the present fallen world.

This acceptance constitutes the central action of the story--the motion of grace within her that erupts in the insight: "Why you're one of my own babies!" The price she pays for this acknowledgment is life itself, for the Misfit, still violently refusing the bond of human complicity outside himself, reacts instantaneously by shooting her. Even in this violent renunciation, however, there is the glimmer of hope that a troubled conscience may ultimately lead him to admit the need for outside "hep." He concludes the episode with sour dissatisfaction and the abiding moral insight that "She would have been a good woman if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."

While "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" depicts the state of false innocence and immunity largely in terms of the dissociation of time, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" treats the same theme in terms of the dissociation of spirit and matter, the Manichean dichotomy. Mrs. Crater, the farm wife of the story, is a completely pragmatic materialist who sees her "place," her idiot daughter Lucynell, and the one-armed carpenter Mr. Shiftlet only as objects to be manipulated. She disavows any spiritual element in creation; when Shiftlet marvels at the glorious sunset, she remarks laconically that it "does it ever evening." Shiftlet, on the other hand, asserts the existence of mystery, particularly the mystery of the incarnation of matter and spirit. He tells her that an Atlanta physician who has operated on

the human heart "don't know more about it that you or me." Shiftlet thus proclaims the ambiguity of good and evil in the human heart, hinting at his own mysterious character, which "shifts" as the story progresses from that of a potential Christ-figure--resurrecting the automobile, replenishing the farm, teaching the idiot to say "bird"--to that of a satanic agent who undermines Mrs. Crater's haven of materialistic "innocence."

Though he acknowledges the existence of mystery, Shiftlet does not really have faith in the actual, long-suffering incarnational process, in which matter and spirit interpenetrate. Faced with Mrs. Crater's intractable materialism, he reveals himself to be a Manichean questing for uncontaminated spirit, pure innocence dissociated from matter. When Mrs. Crater continually denies spirit by her scheming manipulations, Shiftlet turns to evil in revenge. He informs Mrs. Crater that he wants an "innocent" wife, but his marriage to the idiot daughter Lucynell does not satisfy his desire for pure essence. He expresses the Manichean dichotomy succinctly: "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."[13]

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[13]The opposite theme--the incarnation of spirit and matter--is conveyed in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," where the carnival hermaphrodite symbolizes the "grotesque" union of the physical and the divine. The freak proclaims that God has made him that way, and he honors God by accepting his condition without "dispute," an analogue of the Incarnation which the young girl in the story recognizes in the image of the sun as a blood-drenched Host at the end of the story.

Shiftlet's "faith," then, is a sentimental, abstractly vague desire for innocence which does not suffer incarnation in a concrete situation. Its prime symbol is his nostalgic view of his "dear old mother" as an "angel of Gawd," an illusion which is rudely shattered by the mean, realistic hitchhiker who calls his mother a "stiniing pole cat." This violent denial of "pure spirit" finally leads Shiftlet to the manichean rejection of matter as evil. In the end he attempts to escape it by spatial movement in the car, like Hazel Motes. As he races toward Mobile under a threatening sky he asks God to break forth and wash the slime from the "evil" world, a plea which presumes his own innocent detachment from it, of course. His position is much like that of Young Goodman Brown at the end of Hawthorne's tale: his token faith has been pulverized by concrete evil, and so he retreats to the opposite hardened extreme of viewing all the world as corrupt.

That Miss O'Connor was concerned about false perspectives on history, particularly the tendency toward romantic idealizing of the Southern past, and that she regarded this as a form of escapist search for moral immunity is evident from the comedies "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" and "The Partridge Festival." "A Late Encounter..." was perhaps partly intended to correct the inflated glorification of Southern past created by "Gone with the Wind" (particularly in the story's satire of the movie premiere), with its

grandiose history of the Civil War packaged by Hollywood image-makers. But beneath that level, there is a deeper concern with the spiritual malaise of the dissociation of past from present, and how it affects the ontological relationship between time, history, suffering, and true identity. Once again, it is human pride which causes man to detach himself in an idealized way from the harsh, limiting realities of time and concrete historical process.

General Poker Sash, a one-hundred-and-four year old Civil War veteran, does not "have any use for history because he never expected to meet it again." He ignores the past of suffering and personal guilt in favor of a timeless, adolescent basking in the present. "The past and the future were the same thing to him, one forgotten and the other not remembered; he had no more notion of dying than a cat." He prefers movie premieres with "pretty guls" to processions because the latter are connected with history and the past. But the price of his detachment (his "dead" feet do not touch ground) from history is a loss of a sense of reality, of true identity and place: he cannot remember any of his actual career in the Civil War, he cannot recall anything concrete about his family, and he allows himself to be "made" into a General by his granddaughter, though in fact he was only an infantryman in the war. His granddaughter Sally Poker is herself drawn toward romanticizing an idealized past against a crass modern world; General Sash is the

abstract symbol of "what was behind her." She manipulates him to feed her own prideful illusion. Ironically, it is her plan to use him at her graduation as evidence of her "heritage" which brings about General Sash's harrowing encounter with the realities of time and history he has avoided.

General Sash's attempted escape from the "dead past," from history and the ontological relationship between past and present, is destroyed when the graduation speaker begins. History rises up to assert its living reality in the present, and it is through the mysterious power of language that General Sash is forced to acknowledge it.

> The words began to come toward him and he said, Dammit! I ain't going to have it! and he started edging backward to get out of the way...He couldn't protect himself from the words and attend to the procession too and the words were coming at him fast. He felt that he was running backwards and the words were coming at him like musket fire, just escaping him but getting nearer and nearer. He turned around and began to run as fast as he could but he found himself running toward the words. He was running into a regular volley of them and meeting them with quick curses. As the music swelled toward him, the entire past opened up on him out of nowhere and he felt his body riddled in a hundred places with sharp stabs of pain and he fell down, returning a curse for every hit. He saw his wife's narrow face looking at him critically through her round gold-rimmed glasses; he saw one of his squinting bald-headed sons; and his mother ran toward him with an anxious look; then a succession of places--Chickamauga, Shiloh, Marthasville--rushed at him as if the past were the only future now and he had to endure it. Then suddenly he saw that the black procession was almost on him. He recognized it, for it had been dogging all his days. He made such a desperate effort to see over it and find out what comes after the past that his hand clenched the sword until the blade touched bone.[14]

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[14] Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 241.

In short, all of the concrete realities of history he has escaped--suffering, memory of the past, his true identity, place, death, and language as a "living" incarnation of truth --rise up to make their claim upon General Sash, and he is overwhelmed and dies in a final desperate attempt to escape history.

Miss O'Connor's treatment of history in "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" places the Southern experience directly in the foreground. This is not the case in "A Circle in the Fire," which in many ways can be seen as a prototype of her complex typological vision of the modern situation. The story is based upon the Old Testament analogue of the three prophets cast into the pit of fire by King Nebuchadnezzar, but this analogue is widened to the point of mystery by her Christian, post-Redemption point of view. As a result, the story becomes a true "continuing revelation": modern experience is "informed" by analogical ties that link together Old Testament history, the redemption by Christ, and at the same time point anagogically forward to the apocalypse of death and final judgment.

As in many O'Connor stories, the protagonist Mrs. Cope is a typical modernist who has created a private, self-enclosed "kingdom" on her farm. Like Nebuchadnezzar she is idolatrously materialistic; she wages a constant battle to obliterate evil from experience, and to immunize herself and her daughter from the universal history of suffering, represented by

experience outside the farm. She speaks often with pietistic fervor of the poor, suffering Europeans, but that this is only a sentimental verbal gesture is borne out by her actual self-exclusion from the larger human community outside. Her "wall" against the ambiguous world outside, against the process of history and the threatening knowledge that she is not morally self-sufficient, is her fortress line of trees. Typologically, the story depicts the necessary destruction of this false, protective "kingdom" of innocence which she has created before Mrs. Cope can truly feel the human condition of derpivation and limitation. When this illusion of self-sufficiency is destroyed, she is implicitly united to universal humanity in its need for redemption. Loss of innocence through violence is the spiritual motion of the story that provides her with this beginning "grace" of knowledge.

Mrs. Cope's farm, then, is a physical embodiment of a false ontological place--an isolated Eden--and her belief in innocence is reflected also in her protective attitude toward her daughter Sally Virginia. She does not want the child to "confront" the three destroyers from the outside world--the city, yet it is through Sally Virginia's eyes that the final insight of the story is presented, suggesting her moral initiation. The three boys--Powell, Garfield, and Harper--have also come back to the farm in search of the lost "state of innocence," seen particularly in Powell's

nostalgia about his earlier life there. Initially, the farm represents for them that longed-for time and place before the Fall; yet they are also conscious of the Fall and its irrevocable effects. Powell has experienced evil in the outside world, the "development," and with this knowledge burnt into him, he sees now that a return to innocence is impossible, that Mrs. Cope's evil-excluding "kingdom" is false and unhuman, and that it must be destroyed. "If this place was not here anymore," he said, "you would never have to think of it anymore." The false lust for innocence must be shattered to attain more "balanced" moral vision and make moral growth possible.

Through the analogical action, then, the story actually creates the mystery of the role of evil in the divine plan of redemption. Powell and his two friends are agents of destruction, but at the same time divine scourges who, like the prophets, bring wrathful vengeance against the Nebuchadnezzer-like Mrs. Cope, idolatrously fixated in her belief that she owns and rules the material world ("her woods"). And of course her belief implies her own power of self-redemption and ability to "cope" with evil without divine grace. In disrupting her kingdom, then, the three boys also destroy her false sense of moral immunity from fallen mankind, and she is forced to see her true place in the larger community of universal suffering humanity, dispossessed of Eden and longing for redemption. The "grace"

of violence, paradoxically, brings about a purging of her belief in self-salvation. When her woods burn at the end of the story, Mrs. Cope is rudely united with the reality of history she has desperately tried to escape. "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."

The theme of displacement is the focal point of one of Miss O'Connor's most complex typological allegories of history--"The Displaced Person." Literally a story of the modern South, the tale brilliantly telescopes classical pagan and Christian redemptive analogues to depict a compelling drama of the universal struggle of the fall and redemption. As in "A Circle in the Fire," the farm run by Mrs. McIntyre and her employee Mrs. Shortley is an idolatrous kingdom of materialism, a false Eden which is self-enclosed against the ambiguity and guilt of history and the true human condition. The authentic human condition--fallen yet redeemed--is identified in the story with Europe (as opposed to their American innocence), which Mrs. Shortley sees as "evil," "the devil's experiment station," a view epitomized by her vision of a war newsreel showing European bodies heaped in piles. Mrs. Shortley's view, of course, implies her own self-righteous innocence; indeed, she sees herself

as a hovering "angel" chosen to save the Negroes from the corruption of the Polish family. Only in death is this false vision of herself apocalyptically destroyed, when her true identity and place is revealed to her.

Viewed ontologically, then, Mrs. McIntyre's farm is a haven of immunity from history, one in which she is the ruling deity who controls matters by the rigorous efforts of her own will. She is practical and apparently self-sufficient--in short, a "self-redeemer." Her true condition, however, like Mrs. Shortley's, is one of sterile fixity and moral blindness to history, and the arrival of the displaced person Mr. Guizac brings the possibility of a new openness, growth, and redemptive grace, of acknowledging their link with history--in other words, of Christ. But this can only occur after a disruption of their self-sufficient kingdom, and when faced with this possibility, Mrs. McIntyre reacts with violence to "preserve" her ordered place.

In Part I of the story, centered on Mrs. Shortley, Miss O'Connor develops the typological structure that makes the story a universal vision of human history. In the opening scene Mrs. Shortley is identified with the pagan goddess Hera, the "giant wife of the countryside," who, we recall, was outwitted by Europa for the love of Zeus. The "outwitting" suggests the Guizac's displacement of the Shortleys as workers on the farm, and perhaps typologically the partial or temporary "displacement" of pagan idolatry by redemptive Christianity. At any rate, they are established

as antagonistic, contending visions of history. Mrs. Shortley is also stalked throughout the story by a peacock, a complex symbol which to Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortley's materialistic eyes represents just another "peachicken" to be fed, but which to the priest is a symbol of Christ and the Transfiguration of the material world by the spiritual, and thus linked to the transforming "presence" of Mr. Guizac. The farm, then, is an analogue of classical paganism, but in its modernist form of secular materialism, denying the need for Christ's redemption. Mrs. McIntyre speaks of the displaced person Guizac as her "salvation," but she is referring only to his practical economic value. Part I of the story depicts the gradual displacement of Mrs. Shortley from her illusions of personal innocence and self-sufficiency (she feels that religion is necessary for those people not smart enough to avoid evil), and with that displacement her bond with fallen humanity is revealed to her. This is the "true country" whose frontiers she sees only at the moment of death, after being symbolically "linked" with the heaped bodies in the newsreel of European history. She achieves this moment of grace--and the insight is a perception of her <u>place</u> in history--when she begins to violently disrupt the car during their departure, "clutching everything she could get her hands on and hugging it to herself, Mr. Shortley's head, Sarah Mae's leg, the cat, a wad of white bedding, her own big moon-like knee...." Displaced from

the farm by the Guizacs, Mrs. Shortley in death sees that she is not "above" history goddess-like, but one of all mankind, suffering the essential displacement from that spiritual kingdom that can only be gained through faith in Christ's redemption.

As Part I of the story depicts Mrs. Shortley's recognition of her true place, Part II shows a contrary analogical movement--the violent and sacrificial "displacement" of Christ-Guizac from Mrs. McIntyre's secular world, where he is "extra," a "DP" who has upset her order and control.[15] The Guizacs' arrival from "guilty" Europe links Mrs. McIntyre with true universal history; he brings with him the redemptive possibility for destruction of false, self-enclosed innocence. She has hired him for strictly material benefits, and unlike the Shortleys he is an "advanced" worker with technical proficiency. However, like Christ, Guizac upsets the order of "her" place by planning a marriage between a cousin in Poland and one of the Negroes. This act is so "advanced" it threatens to undermine her control of the Negroes, and ironically, it is an act which suggests a truly universal Christian concept of the community of men, one that might possibly advance the redemptive process. But Mrs. McIntyre cannot abide this threatening "opening" in

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[15]A similar displacement occurs in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," when at the end of the story the hermaphrodite-Christ figure is driven out of town by the "righteous" community.

her kingdom; instead, she chooses moral retrenchment by trying to withdraw into immunity behind her self-willed "order."

Guizac's crucifixion by death under the tractor ostensibly restores Mrs. McIntyre's control of her ordered kingdom, but in fact, her complicity in his death destroys forever her false sense of innocence by placing her in the condition of guilt, her true condition. Now she is personally and irrevocably linked to history, just as Mrs. Shortley was just before her death, for in the moment of Guizac's death her eyes and Mr. Shortley's and the Negro's "come together in one look that froze them in collusion together..." She too is united with the poor, the suffering, and the displaced in history, and the ravages of guilt Mrs. McIntyre now experiences are seen in the gradual demise of her "kingdom" and in her own declining health. She has been displaced from her material Eden, but still she does not acknowledge the need for redemption. Yet the possibility of repentance and acceptance of grace remains in her demolished world, for in the end there is still the beautiful peacock and Fr. Flynn, who comes every week to explain the doctrines of Christianity to her.

In what Miss O'Connor considered her best story, "The Artificial Nigger," the pride of self-redemption exhibited in Mrs. McIntyre takes the form of intellectual rationalism and the attempt to deny mystery in Mr. Head.

But unlike Mrs. McIntyre, Mr. Head completely accepts his "fall" and the grace of mercy that is finally bestowed upon him. He has come to the big city confident that he is morally capable of directing his grandson Nelson's initiation into the knowledge of evil, but the experience becomes an initiation for Mr. Head himself, one that destroys his rationalistic pride. This "development" is treated in such a way by Miss O'Connor as to suggest the universal spiritual life of man. At every step the action is linked to the Old Testament analogue of the story of Tobias--who cured his father's blindness after a trip to the city of Rages, much as Mr. Head's blindness is cured; and most importantly, linked to the complex analogue of Dante's Divine Comedy. Thus Mr. Head and Nelson's trip is a journey through the Inferno and Purgatorio toward the Earthly Paradise, and as in the Divine Comedy, the figure of natural man reliant only on natural wisdom (Vergil-Mr. Head) must finally be led by divine direction--grace (Dante-Nelson, and the "artificial nigger") in order to transcend the natural state and arrive at spiritual salvation. Miss O'Connor's working out of the allegory is not this schematic; these analogical dimensions nevertheless serve to deepen the mystery of the redemptive process.

At the beginning of the story Mr. Head thinks himself "equal to" the task of the journey; in short, he suffers from the prideful rationalism (suggested by his name) that

denies mystery, particularly the concrete mystery of evil and suffering in redemption, a condition he comes to accept as a mystery in the presence of the "artificial nigger." The truth of the matter is that Mr. Head suffers spiritually from manichean dissociation, suggested in several ways throughout the story. First of all, his existence in the country topologically suggests a state of moral self-righteousness, blind belief in personal innocence, and immunity; in contrast, the city represents the actual fallen condition (Nelson wisely asserts that he was born there), that state which Mr. Head has spiritually denied for himself. Secondly, Mr. Head dissociates from the real, concrete mysteries of existence by intellectual abstracting: seen particularly in his fearful "arms-length" approach to the city and the Negro, as on the train when he remarks righteously concerning Negroes that "they rope them off." Thirdly, Mr. Head suffers the dissociation of intellect from instinct and the concrete physical, revealed in his shock at seeing the half-dressed woman in the apartment window, and especially in his refusal to encounter the large black woman who gives Nelson directions when they are lost. In addition, Mr. Head's manicheanism is evidenced by his view of the city as Hell, whereas Nelson views it as Purgatory, a painful place, but one where a person is not doomed to failure if he seeks help (grace), as he does in asking the Negro woman

for directions.[16]

The slow, painful process of the journey--their getting lost, their "fall" due to mutual pride--brings both Mr. Head and Nelson to a recognition and acceptance of their mutual dependence, not simply upon each other, but upon the mysterious forces of redemptive grace which covers all human suffering and loss. Mr. Head and Nelson are united as universal man in his fallen, real condition, a condition they recognize in the symbol of mystery in the story--the artificial nigger. The "artificial: statue in the all-white suburb is like Mr. Head's abstracting and "roping off" of the Negroes earlier on the train, but now he and Nelson recognize their true link with the condition of misery and limitation, which their recent experience of betrayal brought home to them. With this recognition, Mr. Head now can accept the "grace" of insight of seeing his true identity in an eternal perspective, one that fully illuminates the fall and redemption and divine mercy.

> Mr. Head stood very still and felt the action of mercy touch him again but this time he knew that there were no words in the world that could name it. He understood that it grew out of agony, which is not denied to any man and which is given in strange ways to children. He understood it was all a man could carry into death to give his Maker and he suddenly burned with shame

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[16]Similar forms of Manichean dissociation are evident in Mr. Shiftlet in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" and Hulga in "Good Country People." It indicates, of course, Mr. Head's attempt to "preserve" what he envisions as a state of personal innocence.

> that he had so little of it to take with him. He stood appalled, judging himself with the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed it. He had never thought himself a great sinner before but he saw now that his true depravity had been hidden from him lest it cause him despair. He realized that he was forgiven for sins from the beginning of time, when he had conceived in his own heart the sin of Adam, until the present, when he had denied poor Nelson. He saw that no sin was too monstrous for him to claim as his own, and since God loved in proportion as He forgave, he felt ready at that instant to enter Paradise.[17]

Miss O'Connor's increasing skill in using the analogical method to create a complicated vision of redemption history is perhaps best exemplified in "Greenleaf." In this story the analogue of redemption is set in opposition to that of secular materialism and insular moral "innocence," as in "The Displaced Person," but here the framework of Christian and classical typology is dramatized in a unique way. The Mrs. May of "Greenleaf" is at once recognized as the modernist who struggles to keep her insular domain--her place--intact against the forces which threaten to disrupt it. Typologically, she is linked with the pagan goddess Hera, with her herd of "sacred" cows, now being threatened by the Greenleafs "scrub" bull. In addition, she exhibits the appolonian traits of rigid order and control by force of will; in contrast, the bull and the Greenleafs, as their name suggests, represent those dionysian forces of vegetation, fertility, change and creativity which finally defeat

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[17] Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 213-14.

her. Like the displaced person--like Christ--the Greenleafs bull makes everything "off balance"--upsetting the "old order" as the Redeemer did by His Incarnation. The classical analogues of Hera and dionysianism are deepened by Christian typology, the redemptive vision of the New Testament. Initially the uncontrollable bull is associated with Zeus, with a possible parallel of his "seduction" of Mrs. May to Zeus' seduction of Europa, disguised as a bull. But as a "suitor" the bull is also clearly linked to Christ, with his "wreathed" horns in the opening scene, so that the classical analogue is transformed to the redemptive one of Christ the "lover" trying to violently upset and penetrate Mrs. May's false order and idolatrous control.

The fact that the bull belongs to the Greenleafs, and the subsequent action of the story, presents analogically a profound universal vision of history. The Greenleafs in microcosm show the "rise" of those who openly involve themselves creatively in the process of history, the forces of change and true progress, which Mrs. May is trying to preserve her farm from. Mrs. Greenleaf indulges in what seem to be pagan, vegetal prayer-healings in the woods, but she has redemptive vision in recognizing the power of evil and asking for "Jesus, Jesus." Mrs. May, on the other hand, rejects this vital religion in Mrs. Greenleaf as being "unreasonable" and unrespectable, but as she encounters her in the woods, the connection between the erupting forces

represented by the bull and Christ is clearly made, for Mrs. May feels "as if some violent unleashed force had broken out of the ground and was charging toward her."

In contrast to Mrs. May's stagnant attempts to hold the line against the decay of her farm, the Greenleafs have "advanced" by their immersion in history. Both boys served in Europe during World War II, both have married French women, both have profited by change and "openness" so that their farm is more progressive than Mrs. May's. In contrast, her two sons, who have not "gone outside" their local world, are unmarried and spiritually sterile, cynically detached from their mother's affairs. What we are clearly presented with, then, typologically, is an opposition of historical views--the one self-enclosed, spiritually sterile, and auguring of false innocence (Mrs. May attempts to keep her place "pure" of scrub bulls and Greenleafs), the other open and creative, subject to violent forces of change, yet associated with Christ in the universal process of communal redemption. It is this force of genuine union which Mrs. May attempts to stifle and deny, but in death she is violently brought to recognize it. The bull, like Christ, has "upset the balance" of nature--the natural order of the world. This is the mystery of change (including the mystery of violence and "evil") which Mrs. May repudiates by trying to "control" it willfully, until her death. Then, after the bull has gored her "like a wild tormented lover," she "continued to stare straight ahead but the entire scene in front

of her had changed--the tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky--and she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable."

In her introduction to A Memory of Mary Ann, Miss O'Connor explicitly attacked the "Aylmers" of the modern world--characters like Mrs. May, Mrs. McIntyre, and Rayber--who in trying to "contain" or eliminate evil are guilty of attempting to reduce spiritual mystery. To "eliminate" evil, she affirmed, is to cut down on the possibility of redemption and moral growth, the "good under construction" in the divine plan, and this impulse tends to lead, paradoxically, only to further evil and destruction. Such is the case in "A View of the Woods," where the modernist old Mr. Fortune identifies himself with "progress" in an attempt to order the good of the future by cutting down the forces of mystery. Specifically, he intends to sell the lot in front of his son-in-law Pitts' house as a site for a future gas station, which would obscure their "view of the woods"--the symbol of the mysterious ambiguity of good and evil and growth, seen particularly in the final death scene in the woods. To Mr. Fortune, however, "a pine trunk is a pine trunk"; that is, his view of reality is purely materialistic, something to be manipulated without concern for its spiritual

significance.[18]

The conflict between the mysterious vision of reality and the pragmatic-reductionist centers in Mr. Fortune's granddaughter Mary Fortune Pitts. To the old man she is a "fortune," a "perfect" child, and an "angel"; that is, he believes in and sees only her innocence. Her supposed innocence, of course, is simply a projection of his own, and the sentimental-nostalgic basis for this belief is revealed by the fact that he identifies "innocence" with his mother, like another dualist, Shiftlet. Mr. Fortune intends to guarantee the future by leaving his money and lands to his granddaughter, and the "future" he tries to order really betokens his own desire for childhood innocence, without ambiguity, since he is determined to reduce his granddaughter to "pure" Fortune. However, she is also a "Pitts"--marked with imperfection. The essential mystery of her character is demonstrated by the fact that she submits naturally to her father's whippings in the woods, which are punishment for her pride (the "fortune" in her). However, since he sees only her "pure" goodness, her submission to her father is inexplicable to old Mr. Fortune, an "ugly mystery," the "one flaw" in her character. Consequently, when he tries to punish her in

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[18]His view is opposed to the sacramental view of reality, the view that matter is spiritualized. Thus the pragmatic materialists are also spiritual reductionists, trying to reduce things and acts to a strictly practical level, denying mystery.

the woods, after her defiance against him for selling the "view of the woods," she resists violently. Since he has believed, dualistically, only in her as "pure" Fortune, denying the mystery of evil, she now asserts herself as "pure" Pitts--the eruption of evil caused, paradoxically, by his attempt to reduce and deny it. And it is also the evil in himself, long denied, which he now confronts, for he sees "his own image" in the kicking, screaming child. Ironically, in killing the child he has also destroyed the future, for though he declares "There's not an ounce of Pitts in me," he is now faced with his own evil act, his heart failing--alone in the woods.[19]

Though old Mr. Fortune is destructive, he nevertheless can and does act. In many of Miss O'Connor's stories, the particular malaise of dissociation characterized by rationalism and intellectualism brings with it an inability to act meaningfully "in the world." It is exemplified by characters like Hulga in "Good Country People," Tom in "The Comforts of Home," Rayber, the son Julian in "Everything That Rises Must Converge," and Asbury Fox in "The Enduring Chill." Male characters seem to suffer from it especially. For these characters the mind is a separated "place" they

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[19]The murder of the child here--of ambiguity--like Tarwater's drowning of Bishop or Joe Christmas' violence, is of course an attempt to absolve oneself from mystery, from lived ambiguity. This Aylmer-impulse implies personal innocence and self-redemption.

have constructed from which to view the world abstractly, a shell of "innocence" which is as real for them as the physical shell of innocence that Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Cope try to build on their farms. "Mind" for them is a private kingdom of immunity, a condition of idealized isolation from the concrete community; intellectualism is their way of self-redemption. But in fact their condition constitutes another and more subtle type of manicheanism--of "mind" separated from the world, of idea separated from factuality, and of intellectual formula set up in opposition to living, concrete mystery. And it is a condition of spiritual sterility and impotence; these characters find it difficult to break out of the circle of abstraction to act with a totally unified being "in the world." There is an inner division of self, of mind separated from will, a kind of interior displacement in which they are cut off from their own roots of active, creative existence in the world. What each must undergo is "the fall," a destruction of the wall of rationalism, something which can reunite them with themselves and with the concrete world. The "fall" involves a violent destruction of their abstract, isolated mental "world"--Hulga's loss of her wooden leg, her "crutch" of intellectual nihilism--but it also opens them to grace if they will accept it, which in most of these cases means to accept their true "place" in the world as a fallen creature. Some, like Rayber, refuse to fall, and though for others the loss of their intellectual

innocence is painful, they are redeemed from their own divisive, destructive rationalism and restored to their own true roots of being, cleansed of illusion. This movement of grace is perhaps best represented by "The Enduring Chill."

Asbury Fox, a failure intellectual aesthete, has returned home, he believes, "to die," having relinquished a life in New York where he has unsuccessfully tried to become a writer. Physically ill, he is also stricken with despair over his failures, but in fact he is romantically enamored with both his spiritual despair and the death he believes will soon overtake him. His concept of his condition--physical and spiritual--is the abstract mental "shell" into which he self-indulgently and innocently retreats from the concrete and common levels of human existence. The "common" in the story is identified with his mother, whom he blames for his own failure and whom he now plans to "enlighten" with a vicious post-mortem letter (his only act of "creative" writing) blaming her; the "common" is also represented by the persistent Dr. Block, whom Asbury regards as a simple-minded country fool. Asbury also detests the mundane affairs of his mother's farm, and the comic irony of his "fall" is underscored in the fact that he suffers from undulant fever, "like Bangs in a cow." Asbury's abstract intellectualism is particularly demonstrated by his "cultivated" spiritual interests: he asks to speak to a Jesuit while bedridden because he desires an intellectual priest with

whom he can discuss abstract concepts like the "New Man" and "the myth of the dying God." What he gets, ironically, is the gruff, blunt, earthy Fr. Finn, who scolds him for laziness, for self-pity, and for neglecting his prayers, and who informs him that he must ask God humbly to send the Holy Ghost. The final shattering of Asbury's intellectual innocence comes with Dr. Block's discovery of the fact and the mystery of his malady--a fever recurrent but not fatal--for now the romantic illusion of his own "death" is destroyed. With this discovery Asbury is "brought down" to reality, and forced to see his own self-inflated egotism. His is to be the common lot of lingering imperfection, an "enduring chill," not escape or release from mystery through a self-glorified death. The "grace" of this shattering insight comes in the descent of the Holy Ghost, a true intellectual illumination that reveals his condition to him. In accepting this common human lot, Asbury sees with terrifying clarity the "new life" opening to him.

> The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of the new. It was then that he felt the beginning of a chill, a chill so peculiar, so light, that it was like a warm ripple across a deeper sea of cold. His breath came short. The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was borne as if by a worldwind from his eyes. He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying terror. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him.

> But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacably, to descend.[20]

In Miss O'Connor's second novel, The Violent Bear It Away, the contending visions of history--Christian and secular modernist--are dramatically embodied as opposing forces in the spiritual growth of young Francis Marion Tarwater.[21] The legacy left by his great-uncle Mason Tarwater, a backwoods prophet, is belief in the Fall and the redemption by Christ, belief in the mystery of personality, human freedom, and grace, and the strong sense that he must answer God's call to his personal mission as a prophet, to begin with the baptism of the idiot Bishop. In contrast to old Tarwater, the schoolteacher Rayber embodies rational secularism. He rejects Christ's redemption in favor of self-redemption by intellectual control of "compulsions" (violent, irrational love); he regards baptism as a meaningless act in a world whose "irrationality" can only be transcended by intellect; he is the enemy of mystery, freedom, and grace, for as old Tarwater says, "He don't know its anything he can't know." Rayber's animosity to living mystery is seen especially in his attempt to reduce old Tarwater to a "type" by psychological analysis, to "correct" young Tarwater's

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[20]Flannery O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York: Signet Books, 1967), p. 110. Miss O'Connor's story is obviously indebted to Flaubert's "A Simple Heart."

[21]Similar opposing visions operate in "The Lame Shall Enter First." Sheppard is the apostle of secularism, while Johnson (son of John) believes only Jesus can redeem him. Unlike Tarwater, however, Johnson freely acknowledges "the devil" in himself, and will not permit his "evil"--lameness--to be "straightened" by the modernist Sheppard.

aberrant personality traits (i.e. to eliminate "evil" in him), and to rationally control the spontaneous movements of the spirit both within himself and young Tarwater. For Rayber himself loves both old Tarwater and Bishop, a love which to him is the "seed" of irrationality he struggles desperately to control. Thus as in The Sound and the Fury, the touchstone of spiritual vision in the novel becomes the idiot, Bishop. To Rayber he is "an X signifying the general hideousness of Fate," a living exemplum of the irrational mystery of existence, with its implicit demands of love and faith, forces he must control against violent outbreak. To Mason Tarwater Bishop is a divine soul, "precious in the sight of the Lord," one who embodies the mystery of irrationality in God's divine plan and who therefore "counts"--in need of redeeming baptism like any other creature. The baptism of Bishop, then, is the focal point for young Tarwater's struggle between the contending "visions" of Rayber and old Tarwater, a struggle which dramatizes the real mystery of his spiritual growth.

Each of the major themes of the Christian historical vision--and their refracted counterthemes--is present in The Violent Bear It Away, but the heart of the novel's drama, depicted brilliantly, is the mystery of the Word and the Act. And fittingly so, since this is the heart of Christ's Incarnation. Young Tarwater's vocation, transmitted by his great-uncle, is to become a Christian prophet, and this

identity is the mysterious union of word and act which he finally comes to accept as part of his own struggle with redemptive freedom. Old Mason Tarwater has both the word of divine truth and the power to "act," whereas Rayber, whom old Tarwater accuses of trying to reduce him to the "dead words" of a magazine article, continually fails to "take action" throughout the novel. Frozen in spiritual impotency, Rayber failed to rescue young Tarwater from his great-uncle, and again failed in his attempt to drown Bishop; in contrast, old Tarwater always has the strength to "carry out" his vision with deeds. In effect, old Tarwater is the analogue of the concrete, mysterious union of word and act, whereas Rayber shows the opposite condition of dissociation, filled with the "dead words" of analysis, but severed from any spiritual source of action.

This form of dissociation also plagues young Tarwater throughout the novel, a condition that is concretely suggested by the "stranger's voice" which begins within him after old Tarwater's death, a voice of "reason" linked with Rayber and the homosexual seducer of Tarwater later in the novel. The conflict of "voices" within him--old Tarwater's and the rational--underscores the divisiveness in young Tarwater's identity early in the novel, his wavering in the struggle to resolve the tension of word and act. Before the death of his great-uncle he did want to become a prophet, but his notion of this role was "dis-incarnated," abstract,

romantic, and idealized. He wants the power of miracles, but not "the sweat and stink of the cross." His manicheanism at this point is reflected by a word-spirit "split."

> He tried when possible to pass over these thoughts, to keep his vision located on an even level, to see no more than what was in front of his face and to let his eyes stop at the surface of that. It was as if he were afraid that if he let his eye rest for an instant longer than was needed to place something--a spade, a hoe, the mule's hind quarters before his plow, the red furrow under him--that the thing would suddenly stand before him, strange and terrifying, demanding that he name it and name it justly and be judged for the name he gave it. He did all he could to avoid this threatened intimacy of creation. When the Lord's call came, he wished it to be a voice from out of a clear and empty sky, the trumpet of the Lord God Almighty, untouched by any fleshy hand or breath. (Italics mine)[22]

Tarwater's romantic vision of the prophet's role, seen here, is destroyed forever when he first meets the idiot Bishop; he is given the revelation of his mission to baptize the idiot, and then sees "his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, until at last he received his reward, a broken fish, a multiplied loaf."

Throughout much of the novel, Tarwater tries to silence the voice of true conscience within him by denying the "Word" of his great-uncle's legacy. In reaction against this, he decides to test and find out for himself, through action, "how much of it is true." This is a necessary step in his spiritual growth, for he is to be no blind follower

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[22]Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 315-6.

of old Tarwater--he must knowingly experience his own "fall" before accepting his true vocation. However, in denying the "word" of his great-uncle and his true conscience Tarwater falls to the opposite extreme of trying to destroy conscience and his link with the "word" of the past, of history, through decisive action. In effect, he adopts the pure existentialism of action seen in Hazel Motes--action used as a means to immunize oneself from history, to "redeem" oneself from mystery with one decisive, severing action. Rayber can "think" and "talk" in abstract intellectual formulae, but he is impotent to act. Young Tarwater, on the other hand, can "act"; he insists that: "You can't just say NO.... You got to do NO. You got to show it. You got to show you mean it by doing it. You got to show you're not going to do one thing by doing another. You got to make an end of it. One way or another." But to "make an end of it" means to act as a means of escaping the threatening burden of the mystery of the Word in Act, and Tarwater here suffers dissociation in trying to absolve himself from "the word"--from reflective conscience and moral ambiguity.

The critical action in Tarwater's attempt to exorcize the mystery of the inherited "Word" is the drowning-baptism of Bishop. By drowning the idiot he employs violent action, like Joe Christmas, as a way to immunize himself from moral ambiguity, but though Tarwater sees it as a way to "free" himself from the past, the truth is that it only deepens the mystery of redemptive freedom. For in the act of drowning

Bishop he is not freed from the Word--the words of baptism mysteriously pour forth from him. Hoping to redeem himself by this act and "keep himself inviolate," Tarwater has in fact steeped himself in guilt and further separation from his true identity. After the murder, he intends to return to Powderhead and "mind his bidnis" (that is, withdraw into an Edenic haven and protect his "innocent" inviolability, from history), but his inability to escape the consequences of the past is made apparent at once by his condition of dissociation. His first ride is with a truckdriver who, ironically, insists that Tarwater "talk" to keep him awake, and the youth's troubled conscience begins to assert itself immediately as he tries to deny that the words of baptism have any meaning. He protests his innocence, but his own words belie him, especially when he meets a familiar Negro woman along the road and uncontrollably utters obscenities at her. Tarwater is now "possessed" demoniacally by words he cannot control, just as he cannot refrain from trying to "justify" his act of drowning Bishop by words, a desperate attempt to "balance" word and act meaningfully.

Tarwater's condition of dissociation can only be "resolved" by recognition and acceptance of his own fallen state, the human condition of violation, and this occurs dramatically in his seduction by the homosexual, when his illusion of personal inviolability is destroyed. Following this act of violation, Tarwater now recognizes that a return

to Powderhead--to immunity--is impossible. The knowledge of personal contamination is burned into him, but he also acknowledges the cleansing divine fire of grace that burned away his romantic illusions of escape and innocence. Seeing this, Tarwater's spirit is reunited with the Word, for he now accepts the mystery of his identity in the prophetic calling. In a vision he sees beyond Powderhead to the "true" country where the Word is perfectly incarnated in Christ--"that violent country where the silence is never broken except to shout the truth." Chastened, he turns back to the city to preach his vision--"GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY"--and thus accepts his true place in history, in the long line of prophets whose redemptive mission he now assumes.[23]

The cost of refusing this struggle by the denial of mystery, and by attempting to save oneself through "reason," is witnessed in the spiritual death Rayber undergoes in the novel. Rejecting Christ's Redemption, Rayber believes in "natural" man. "There are certain laws that determine every man's conduct," he tells young Tarwater, and he believes

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[23]Throughout the novel patters of imagery suggest the living mystery of experience. All major symbols are two-edged: there is the water which cleanses and that which drowns, the fire which purifies and that which destroys, the Word which is Truth and that which falsely tries to "contain" and limit mystery, the hunger and food of the body and unquenchable spiritual hunger, the violence which is "holy" and that which is perverse, the silence which is divine presence and that which is the void.

that humanity's greatest dignity lies in his intelligent struggle to control the irrational, the mysterious, to face the "compulsive" forces of love and hate in order to "balance" one's life. He preaches a gospel of moderation, of avoiding extremes, but this balanced ethic is "upset" by Tarwater's violence and his failure to control his own mysterious drives. Like Tarwater, Rayber tries to sever his link with the past--old Mason Tarwater--but he is continually brought back to it "irrationally"--by reverie and memory, by reflection, and by uncontrollable outbursts of love or vehement hate. These undeniable spiritual links with history are conveyed brilliantly by the technical structure of the novel, with "scenes" modulating between past and present, so that the structure points thematically to the ontological balance between past and present, history and conscious action in "the moment," which has become disjointed in Rayber. In short, Rayber suffers from every manifested form of dissociation: he tries to abstract himself from an "irrational" world and from history; his words are frequently disconnected from his thoughts and actions ("I'm not always myself," he mutters). He comes to see himself as divided into a "rational" and a "violent" self, and willfully forces control over the violent self by centering it in the idiot Bishop.

> The little boy was part of a simple equation that required no further solution, except at the moments when with little or no warning he would feel himself overwhelmed by the horrifying love. Anything he looked at too long could bring it on. Bishop did not have to be around. It could be a stick or a stone, the line of

> a shadow, the absurd old man's walk of a starling crossing the sidewalk. If, without thinking, he lent himself to it, he would feel suddenly a morbid surge of the love that terrified him--powerful enough to throw him to the ground in an act of idiot praise. It was completely irrational and abnormal.
>
> He was not afraid of love in general. He knew the value of it and how it could be used. He had seen it transform in cases where nothing else had worked, such as with his poor sister. None of this had the least bearing on his situation. The love that would overcome him was of a different order entirely. It was not the kind that could be used for the child's improvement or his own. It was love without reason, love for something futureless, love that appeared to exist only to be itself, imperious and all-demanding, the kind that would cause him to make a fool of himself in an instant. And it only began with Bishop. It began with Bishop and then like an avalanche covered everything his reason hated. He always felt with it a rush of longing to have the old man's eyes--insane, fish-colored, violent with their impossible vision of a world transfigured--turned on him once again. The longing was like an undertow in his blood dragging him backwards to what he knew to be madness.[24]

Rayber sees his rational control of these impulses as a "heroic" life, yet in fact it is a parody of that authentic human struggle with mystery and redemptive freedom, a struggle he ruthlessly denied. In the process of denial he has committed a worse "violence" to human being-ness and personal identity. The "logical" result of his immunization from concrete mystery is spiritual suicide, and it comes to him at the moment his vessel of "containment," the idiot, is destroyed by Tarwater.

> All he would be was an observer. He waited with serenity. Life had never been good enough to him for him to wince at its destruction. He told himself that

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[24] Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 372-3.

> he was indifferent even to his own dissolution....To feel nothing was peace.
> -
> The quiet was broken by an unmistakable bellow....He did not move. He remained absolutely still, wooden, expressionless, as the machine picked up the sounds of some fierce sustained struggle in the distance....He set his jaw. No cry must escape him....
> -
> He stood waiting for the raging pain, the intolerable hurt that was his due, to begin, so that he could ignore it, but he continued to feel nothing. He stood light-headed at the window and it was not until he realized that there would be no pain that he collapsed.[25]

In the stories published by Miss O'Connor after The Violent Bear It Away, her stress is upon the process of redemption in history as a process of "convergence," signified by the title of her second collection, Everything That Rises Must Converge. "Convergence" means the universal drive toward spiritual union among men, through love. However, Miss O'Connor shows this drive as one which is everywhere resisted, by characters who choose various forms of isolation and "innocent" immunity--retreat into abstract intellectualism or into a romanticized past--to escape the demands of concrete union and growth. For redemption includes the total, corporate community of humankind, and through pride these characters implicitly and explicitly try to deny their place in this process. Consequently, they resist "convergence," and because of this the initial action which must occur is the destruction of their false, illusory, detached "place" of immunity. Because of their hardened

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[25] Ibid., pp. 421-23, passim.

isolation, it takes an apocalyptic-like violence to penetrate their "shell," but this violent encounter can, though not necessarily, work mysteriously to "open" the character to see and accept his true place and identity in redemption history. Some retreat from this terrible knowledge, but even these are chastened so that they cannot go back to their former self-serving "innocent" state.

In "Everything That Rises Must Converge," the violent convergence occurs between a stout Negress and an aristocratically-inclined white woman, whose son Julian witnesses the impact. The title of the story (taken from the Catholic evolutionist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin), the name "Julian," and the remark uttered by his mother in defense of his laziness: "Well, Rome wasn't built in a day"--all suggest that the action typologically dramatizes the struggle in the universal redemptive process.[26] The son Julian is an "apostate" modernist who lives in a "mental bubble," a pseudo-liberal intellectual who dissociates himself from the concrete world and its demands for redemptive action. He appears to be an advanced "progressive" of social change, but his real dissociating impulse is evident in the fact that he desires to live in the country, at least "three miles" from any people.

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[26]Julian the Apostate, Roman emperor whose mother died shortly after his birth, tried to return the kingdom from Christianity to the old pagan culture. He issued edicts of universal "toleration", using this as a guise to spread paganism through sympathetic philosophers and teachers.

Moreover, he ostensibly has liberated himself from his mother's outmoded, regressive social views, but in fact his own theoretic progressivism is akin to her aristocratic, elitist pretensions. This true condition is made clear at the end of the story, when Julian must face the "void" caused by her detah.

Julian's mother's dissociation from concrete history takes the form of nostalgia for an idealized past, the aristocratic South of her youth. Formerly a "GodHigh," she now lives in the "reduced" circumstances of a decaying city neighborhood. She believes the world is now in "a mess," and her view of social progress--human convergence through integration--is one of retrenchment and isolation. "It's simply not realistic. They should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence." This view is also shared implicitly by the Negro woman on the bus; their mutual prideful isolation is symbolized by the identical purple and green hats they wear. It is this pride, linked with sentimental nostalgia for the past, which moves Julian's mother to her patronizing gesture of offering the Negro child a penny, and the Negro woman's violent, answering blow shatters the mother's exalted position of aristocratic condescension. The effect of this real "convergence," however, is to drive her further into the past, for as she wanders stunned down the street, she mutters "Tell Grandpa to come get me," "Tell Caroline (her childhood Negro maid) to come get me." The apocalypse is complete

when she falls dead of a heart attack. In addition, her fall is as much an apocalypse for her son Julian. In one of the masterful ironies of the story, we discover that this "progressive," allegedly liberated from his mother's archaic social views, actually has used her as an abstract symbol of all he supposedly repudiates, one which his own theoretic progressivism depended upon as a foil. His identity as a liberal has been merely a reactionary posture. Mother and son shared the same prideful impulse of idealizing, which both have used to immunize themselves from real convergence, and in her death his true dependence upon her is revealed to Julian. "The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow."

Whereas violent convergence destroys Julian's isolation with a terrifying revelation of false identity, convergence with the real mystery of love leads to an acceptance of true identity and place in "Parker's Back." Obadiah Elihue Parker is linked by name and by his marriage to Sarah Ruth to Old Testament history, but it is an identity he has attempted to escape throughout all the years of his life. He will not use the biblical names, and in his wandering travels he has covered his body with tattoos, emblems of his own self-idolatry and profane love. However, he is unable to "seduce" Sarah Ruth to this profane love; she rejects his tattoos as "vanity of vanities," "idolatry," and warns him

that he must answer for his deeds at the Last Judgment. Sarah Ruth embodies responsible moral action in the present, and the concrete, unromanticized demands of love, the "spiritualization" of their relationship which Parker adolescently spurns. His search for a tattoo which will "bring Sarah Ruth to heel," and the fact that he chooses a Byzantine Christ tattoo indicates both his retreat into a past he romanticizes and his idolatrous love of the emblem as a pictorial representation of himself. Parker's act betokens the prideful self-redemption of Adam. "A man can't save his self from whatever it is don't deserve none of my sympathy," he tells the tattooist, and later in the pool hall a friend says admiringly of the work: "An o-riginal way to do it if I ever saw one." However, the tattoo fails to "seduce" Sarah Ruth; she will not admit him to the house until he uses his complete biblical name. "'Idolatry!' Sarah Ruth screamed. 'Idolatry! Explaining yourself with idols under every green tree! I can put up with lies and vanities but I don't want no idolator in this house!'" Defeated, Parker is driven from the house at the end of the story, driven "back" to the real, childish moral adolescence he has chosen by his deeds. "There he was--who called himself Obadiah Elihue--leaning against the tree, crying like a baby."

In "Revelation," the mystery of grace operating through human imperfection brings the self-righteous Mrs. Turpin to accept her true place in the universal

redemptive process of history. Though she is surrounded by evidence of a flawed humanity--sitting in a doctor's waiting room--Mrs. Turpin reveals herself in conversation to be a blind, proud, self-satisfying believer in her own inherent goodness. She hypocritically "thanks Jesus" for her well-being, at the same time gloating over her "superiority" to the Negroes and the "white trash" in the office. In her false innocence, "good" means cleansed of imperfection, evidenced by her conversation with the "white trash" woman when she reveals that she has built a concrete "pig-parlor" for her hogs and cleans them daily. What Mrs. Turpin is blind to is the mysterious workings of grace <u>through</u> human imperfection. This mystery "hits" her in the form of a violent convergence with Mary Grace, an ugly girl who first strikes Mrs. Turpin with a book entitled <u>Human Development</u>, and then assaults her, screaming, "Go back to Hell where you came from, you old wart hog." The attack is a severe blow to Mrs. Turpin's isolated pride and moral self-assurance, but one which finally leads her to a vision of her true identity. Unable to rid herself of the memory of the obnoxious girl, she "questions" God that evening while cleaning her hogs. "Occasionally she raised her fist and made a small stabbing motion over her chest as if she was defending her innocence to invisible guests who were like the comforters of Job, reasonable-seeming but wrong." Finally she harangues God with satanic insistence: "Who do you think you are."

The "answer" returns in the grace of a chastening vision, one which shows Mrs. Turpin her own true "diminished" place, as well as the role of imperfection in the divine plan for redeeming the universal community.

> A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away.[27]

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[27] Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 186.

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