

A GOOD WOMAN IS HARD TO FIND: DISCOVERING THE VOICE OF  
THE WOMAN SATIRIST IN  
FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S *WISE BLOOD*

By

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Steven Blakemore, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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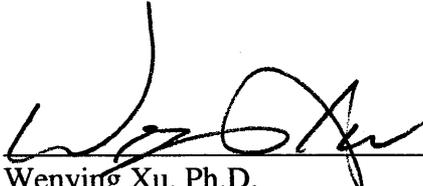
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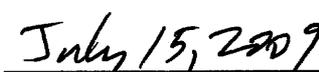
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## ABSTRACT

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While Flannery O'Connor's characters and narrative landscape may share a history with those of other works often labeled "Southern gothic," her heavily judicious narrative voice utilizes the depravity of the South struggling to find its identity as a means to explore her vision of God's mercy and distinguishes her work as satirical criticism. This thesis analyzes her construction of a distinctive satirical narrative voice for *Wise Blood*, particularly as it deviates from how she initially wrote the first chapters as presented in earlier short stories like "The Train" and "The Peeler." Here, the ways in which O'Connor revises her diction and syntax to create a satirical tone will be examined closely. For the purposes of this paper, satire is defined as a literary work aimed at utilizing irony, hyperbole, or sarcasm to reveal, critique, and correct some moral, ethical, or social phenomenon or situation that the author finds reprehensible.

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## INTRODUCTION

When she was twenty-two years old, Flannery O'Connor began composing *Wise Blood*, her first of two novels, as a series of short stories, the first of which she published in *The Sewanee Review* in 1947. At the time, she had almost completed her Master's degree at the prestigious Iowa Writer's Workshop, and she was slowly gaining the attention and respect of her professors and magazine editors, quietly yet firmly establishing her place in the writing community. By the time she obtained her degree, she had already published one story, "The Geranium," and acquired an advance prize for a first novel. She published "the Train," which emerges in Chapter 1 of *Wise Blood*, after she received her Master's degree. When *Wise Blood* was published in May 1952, it had adopted the characters and some of the plot from "The Train" in addition to stories she had published individually, but adapted them to a darker, more grotesque, satirical theme that did not manifest in the initial publications. A close inspection of "The Train" and the other stories that paved the way to *Wise Blood*, all included in *Flannery O'Connor: The Complete Stories*, proves invaluable, as these stories provide an expository background of her earliest conception of the narrative and the characters who inhabit it.

Like many of O'Connor's works, *Wise Blood* details a bizarre and monstrous Dantean pilgrimage toward the realization of a man's faith and the experience of Christian salvation. Hazel Motes, the protagonist, returns home to Eastrod, Tennessee from the army with the newfound conviction that he has no soul, sin does not exist, and,

as he expresses to one disinterested man, “ ‘Jesus is a trick on niggers’ ” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 72). He decides to make a fresh start in another town—Taulkinham—and on his first night there, conveying a sense of calculated purpose, he proceeds to lose his virginity to a prostitute whose number he finds written in a bathroom stall. On his second night, he meets lonely, aimless Enoch Emery, an eighteen-year old orphan desperate for friendship, as well as Asa and Sabbath Hawks, a father-daughter team of scandalous false evangelists. He becomes immediately captivated by the Hawkses and tries unsuccessfully to break away from young Emery as he follows the Hawkses through town. The rest of the novel traces his frantic endeavor to rid himself (and the town of Taulkinham) of the influence of Christianity—which, because of his own personal, convoluted obsession with religion, he imagines to have a much stronger presence than it has—through the creation of his Church of God Without Jesus Christ Crucified. Alongside Motes, Enoch Emery, who stands as a sort of foil to Motes in the novel, grows more spiritually lost until he finally transforms his identity by stealing a gorilla suit from a visiting movie star and adopting the star’s guise.

The plot reverses when Motes murders a man who claims to be a prophet, but only so he can make a living. Motes tells him, “Two things I can’t stand . . . a man that ain’t true and one that mocks what is” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 206). The act of murdering The Prophet propels Motes into a downward spiral of self-mutilation, where he blinds himself, wears barbed wire under his clothes, and walks continuously with rocks and glass in his shoes. This persistent self-mutilation signals a return to his faith, for the narrator reveals earlier in the novel that as a child, he paid silent penance for his sins by stuffing rocks into his shoes. After fleeing the house where he had been renting a

room and wandering the town alone for several days, he is found, lying emaciated in a ditch, by two policemen. The novel ends with Motes' death after one of the policemen, believing that Motes is close enough to dead anyway, strikes him in the head with a club. When they bring him to the house in which he had been living, his landlady's pronouncement, "Well, Mr. Motes . . . I see you've come home" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 235) further implies that he has finally come to his real "home" (not the abandoned one in Eastrod which prompts his journey).

"The Train," written with a greater sense of sympathy and less biting satire than the novel which grows out of it, introduces us to Hazel Wickers, a young man nostalgically fixated on his abandoned home in Eastrod, Tennessee. He has returned to Eastrod from a camp in Georgia to find his old house deserted, ransacked, and haunted by the memory of his mother. Like Motes in *Wise Blood*, Wickers experiences surprise and relief at the discovery that his mother's chifferobe, her only valuable possession, has not been stolen, and, like Motes, he goes to great lengths to tie the chifferobe to the floorboards and attach a note to it that reads, "THIS CHIFFEROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL WICKERS. DO NOT STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED" (O'Connor, "The Train" 62). The story unfolds to follow Wickers as he reluctantly rides the train from Eastrod to join his sister in Taulkinham. Nervous, socially inept, and jumpy—in notable contrast to the Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*—Hazel Wickers determines that the porter on the train comes from his hometown, so he spends the majority of his trip attempting to engage the porter in conversation about Eastrod. Sadly for Wickers, the porter will not acknowledge any ties to Eastrod and claims that his father was a railroad man.

In “Grace and Grotesques: Recent Books on Flannery O’Connor,” Brian Ragen comments, “all studies of [O’Connor’s] work must come to terms with the explanations of her own work that O’Connor offered in her letters and essays” (386). “The Train” should be included among these texts, as it was the first piece of writing she published after she received her prize for a first novel and the setting, characters, and narrative of “The Train” closely resemble those of *Wise Blood*. Additionally, in his introduction to O’Connor’s complete collection of short stories, Robert Giroux reveals that she had written in a letter to a friend, regarding what she planned to do if her present editor rejected her final draft of *Wise Blood*, that “‘other publishers who had read the two printed chapters’ – she was referring to ‘The Train’ and to the publication that winter of ‘The Heart of the Park’—‘[were] interested’” (Giroux, “Introduction” xi). Therefore, while each piece can stand alone as an autonomous piece of fiction, O’Connor herself acknowledged that she initially considered “The Train” as a full chapter of *Wise Blood*. The short story, in this context, should be read as an early draft, possibly even notes, for *Wise Blood*, and hence, it provides us with a glimpse into the psyche of Hazel Motes, which remains highly elusive throughout *Wise Blood*.

The short story lacks the religiosity of *Wise Blood*, but it also lacks the humor inherent to most of O’Connor’s work. O’Connor often cleverly matches serious topics, such as Christian salvation, for example, with humor, and this tactic has invited mixed reactions to her work over the years. Giroux suggests that, in addition to the first publisher to preview her earliest drafts, who commented on the sense of “aloneness in the book, as if she were writing out of her own experience, and consciously limiting this experience” (Giroux, “Introduction” x), those who reviewed *Wise Blood* “all recognized

her power but missed her point” (Giroux, “Introduction” xii). However, Giroux so believed in her work that when *Wise Blood* went out of print in 1960, his firm acquired the book and reissued the second edition in 1962, “the tenth anniversary of the original publication” (Giroux, “Introduction” xiii).

In her editor’s note to the second edition of *Wise Blood*, O’Connor refers to the work as “a comic novel about a Christian *malgre lui*,”—a Christian in spite of himself—“and as such, very serious, for all comic novels that are any good must be about matters of life and death” (1). The tension O’Connor creates by mixing seriousness with humor and violence with salvation has always baffled her readers. Many critics simply cannot figure out how to take her work. Mary Frances Hopkins presents the two main criticisms about O’Connor’s fiction: “First, how can the unrelieved violence be, as [O’Connor] claims, humorous? Second, how can such an avowedly religious author take such an unforgiving view of people and the world in general?” (1). O’Connor offers a response to one of these complaints in *Mystery and Manners*: “The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience” (33-34). Regarding the outward contradiction between violence and humor, Mary Frances Hopkins offers the explanation that, when O’Connor’s text is read aloud, the “irony in the narrative voice and the buffoonery of the characters” (1) become obvious. Furthermore, the appearance of violence in humorous fiction has become more popular over the last three or four decades in the work of satirists such as Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Bret Easton Ellis, and Chuck Palahniuk.

These writers share with O'Connor a penchant for ironic humor and the grotesque which emerges through these sorts of tongue-in-cheek observations made by the narrator, but they also reflect her partiality to violence as a way to invert the humor present in their fiction and vice versa.

The complicated history of the word "grotesque" signals a need for clarification as to how it is being utilized for this argument. In "Sherwood Anderson's Idea of the Grotesque," David Anderson discusses Sherwood Anderson's position, that "grotesques are not curiosities nor are they repulsive as the word usually connotes. They are human beings who epitomize the spiritual deformities of all men, and as such . . . they are worthy of love, of compassion, and of understanding" (12). Through Anderson, William Faulkner has created characters that have been called grotesque, and O'Connor's fiction seems to at least partially allude to Anderson's position on these character types. However, O'Connor's fiction also seems to integrate Bakhtin's as well as Wolfgang Kayser's definition of grotesque as representing a distortion of the world we presently experience. Here, according to Kayser, the grotesque world would "instill fear of life rather than death" (185).

In *Catch-22*, Heller invokes humor to depict the futility (and inherent irony) of violence being used as a means restore peace. More recent satires, such as Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, seem to emulate O'Connor's style through the presence of a running shared dialogue between the narrator and the reader within a seemingly terror-inspiring narrative landscape. While the effect is often unsettling, it works similarly to hyperbole—another common element of satire, evident in more traditional works such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*—by dilating the readers' pupils of perception. The narrator of

*American Psycho* shares his tale in the cold and detached tone of a modern-day, commercialized culture-ridden sociopath, and the reader cannot help but laugh nervously when he finds himself identifying not with the victims in the novel, but with the narrator.

One common critical approach to O'Connor and particularly to *Wise Blood* emerges from a Manichean perspective, where "the God of Goodness has nothing to do with the evil world of matter; matter is merely an encumbrance to be escaped" (Ragen 389). This reading assumes that O'Connor aims to demonstrate through grotesque violence and vulgar humor the depravity of the physical world so that her readers will grasp the importance of salvation. A close reading of the novel suggests that this interpretation grossly oversimplifies the meaning of her work. O'Connor herself addresses another frequent criticism in her editor's note. She states,

That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. For them, Hazel Motes' integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure that moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind. For the author, Motes' integrity lies in his not being able to. (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 1)

Indeed, some readers may find themselves avidly supporting Motes' struggle to free himself from what could be perceived as the painful grip of Christian indoctrination. When he comes full circle and begins paying penance again at the end of the novel, such readers find themselves bewildered and disappointed in his failure to become liberated. These readers do not recognize in Motes' transformation another type of liberation, which O'Connor aims to demonstrate: salvation as it is achieved solely through the grace and mercy of God.

Mark Edelstein argues, “If God does not exist, then there is nothing perverse about man’s rejection of God, and, therefore, no real ground for O’Connor’s satire. But the satire *is* effective, and the reason for this is that quite surprisingly and against our will O’Connor manages to convert us” (140). His reasoning assumes that non-believers will search for the kernel of logic that drives the narrative toward Motes’ failure to succeed as an atheist and find that his death represents peace in God, not enslavement to indoctrination. While Edelstein may have found himself at least temporarily converted, other critics, such as Claire Katz—in an incisive psychoanalytic essay on O’Connor’s work—have maintained a seemingly more sober skepticism toward O’Connor’s vision. Katz notes that “in O’Connor’s world the environment becomes a projection of sadistic impulses and fears so strong that the dissolution of the ego’s power, ultimately death, is the only path to safety. Paradoxically, to be destroyed is to be saved” (Katz 61). While Katz applauds O’Connor’s fictional talent, her essay engages the details of O’Connor’s life to develop an integrative psychoanalytic reading of the author’s work that suggests O’Connor may have written specifically to exorcise her own demons: “Obviously violence is not just a rhetoric demanded by a secularized audience; it expresses the way O’Connor sees” (Katz 56). She implies that readers ought to be wary of the ways in which O’Connor utilizes violence and horror to stimulate humankind’s most primitive fears, and she calls attention to the fact that many of the characters that O’Connor scorns in her stories—rebellious or overgrown, dependent children, atheist intellectuals, and women—“at least partially represent herself” (Katz 66). In spite of this, in light of the consideration that O’Connor uses violence in a similar manner that more traditional satirists, such as Voltaire and Swift, use hyperbole—to stimulate her readers’ sensitivity

to the issues she aims to address—critics need to examine *how* O’Connor’s methods support and deliver her message.

In *Mystery and Manners*, O’Connor claims, "anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic" (40). O’Connor may suggest that her narratives are simply depicting reality as she sees it, but the shock they deliver has been noted time and again by scholars such as Claire Katz, who seek to understand and explain her reasoning. A close examination of her work shows that her narratives consistently create an environment that embodies all that literary scholars have described as meaning “grotesque.” In “The Grotesque in Poetry, Some Thoughts Toward A Theory,” Jeremy Brown writes that “[Bakhtinian grotesque] might be defined as any literary form, which does not hold to a single form, which affirms or allows the possibility for the affirmation of life, and at the same time disjoins the reader from the world he or she is acquainted with personally” (1). *Wise Blood* works as a satire because it portrays a world eerily familiar to the reader, yet exaggerated to such an extent that one would find difficulty feeling the faintest tingle of compassion for most of the characters; the reader becomes forced to examine the character’s plights through the cooler lens of objective detachment. O’Connor’s use of the grotesque emphasizes the sense of lonely solitude, perhaps even horror, experienced by the characters as they find themselves forced to confront one another in social situations. With each dead-end encounter and unresolved obstacle the characters suffer, the narrative depicts a world completely lacking in any shared understanding among its inhabitants, devoid not only of laughter, but also of tears. Readers experience neither sublimity nor catharsis. Humor, on the other hand, does

emerge throughout the story, usually through the most unusual circumstances and character descriptions. Appropriate to a satirical work, as noted earlier, the humor manifests externally through a shared understanding of the fictional world between the narrator and the attentive reader.

For instance, one cannot help but chuckle when envisioning Enoch Emery darting up, down, and through the streets of Taulkinham in the early evening drizzle, attempting desperately to remain inconspicuous while his umbrella pops open and closed and finally breaks, as he tries in his mad, private urgency to hold it open with one arm while carrying the mummified “new Jesus” in his other arm. O’Connor depicts this scene in a way that enables the reader to watch it in the movie theatre of his mind, carefully maintaining his separation from Enoch. Brian Ragen writes,

[O’Connor’s] works demand philosophical, theological, and psychological analysis, as well as purely literary study. They require this level of critical response not, [. . .], because an interesting mind has produced an effusion of the critic to order, but because a great mind has carefully ordered the disparate elements in her work for the reader to find. Finally, and unfortunately, her critics find little to say about the comedy in O’Connor’s works . . . but humor, as much as the anagogical dimension, is the hallmark of O’Connor’s work. (392)

O’Connor’s statement that the book is and *must be* about matters of life and death challenges her readers to reach for a solution to the dilemmas experienced by Motes, Emery, and the rest of the community in *Wise Blood*, for their salvation, as well as that of her readers, just might depend on it.

This paper will examine the construction of the satirical narrative voice of *Wise Blood*, particularly as it diverges from the style in which O'Connor had initially written the first chapters as they were presented in her earlier short stories, "The Train," "The Peeler," and "Enoch and the Gorilla." The analysis will highlight the ways O'Connor revises her diction and syntax to create a satirical tone in which she critiques the secular world and admonishes those who maintain a singular secular perspective, and it will contribute to O'Connor studies by placing the rhetorical choices she makes (as a satirist) under the microscope. Here, satire should be understood as a literary composition aimed at utilizing irony, hyperbole, or sarcasm to reveal, critique, and correct some moral, ethical, or social phenomenon or situation that the author finds lacking in virtue.

Chapter 1, "O'Connor's Vision and The Grotesque Microscope," explores the meaning of the grotesque as it informs O'Connor's approach to *Wise Blood* and shapes her fictional world. I will analyze O'Connor's explanation of the grotesque as a necessary means for preparing her characters for their ultimate right to salvation. This chapter outlines the rhetorical tools that O'Connor uses to generate the grotesque in *Wise Blood*, such as her tendency to constrain the subjectivity of her characters, and closely examines how her methods support the delivery of her message. I also include an analysis of some of the ways she revised her earlier drafts, "The Train" and "The Peeler," for *Wise Blood* to adapt them to the grotesque mode.

In Chapter 2, "O'Connor's Narrative Satirical Voice," I study how O'Connor uses different types of language structures to develop her satirical voice. The first part of the chapter involves a general analysis of the syntax and diction she employs to generate a sense of irony as a means to engage her readers' attention and develop layers of meaning

in the novel. The majority of the chapter builds on an illuminative essay written by Mary Francis Hopkins that invokes Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia as it contributes to the comic novel and particularly as it relates to *Wise Blood*. Here, I contemplate how O'Connor utilizes various dialects, for both her characters and her narrator, to create almost multiple meanings in the text. The often subtle—yet sometimes overt—interaction of dialects in *Wise Blood* effectively serves to devise humor in the novel and construct a bridge of camaraderie between the narrator and the reader.

The third chapter, "Narrative Irony in *Wise Blood*," invariably deals with the different forms of irony that O'Connor uses to enhance the comic virtue of her satire. In this chapter, I closely examine how O'Connor organizes her plot structure to enable a grotesque world, grossly lacking in virtue and seemingly traveling "backwards" rather than progressively forward toward Truth. I also scrutinize the irony arising through the characters and their relations with one another. While this chapter does not provide an analysis of the editorial changes O'Connor makes from the initial published stories, its relevance lies in outlining the contribution of the ironic plot structure to the satiric function of the novel, not immediately apparent in the short stories. Finally, in my conclusion, I will show how O'Connor's rhetorical methods, particularly those employed in *Wise Blood*, distinguish her voice from the voices of other writers of the "Southern Gothic tradition" (a group of writers, including William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, and Eudora Welty, with whom she has almost consistently been lumped together).

Critic Elizabeth M. Kerr has explained that "the cult of the past in the South, as symbolized in its ruins, its preserved glories displayed in spring pilgrimages, its

monuments and graveyards, owes less to cultural climate and imagination than to remembered history” (qtd. in “Southern Gothic Literature – Introduction” 1). In current scholarship of U.S. southern literature, the term “Southern Gothic,” like “grotesque,” has become problematic, as it tends to lump together, and hence oversimplify, any literature emerging during the late nineteenth and twentieth century that incorporates southern characters, problems, and themes that are far more socially, politically, and culturally complicated than a shared “remembered history” would necessarily imply. For the purposes of this paper, I include the term to allude to this oversimplification and demonstrate how O’Connor’s work uses the landscape of the south to create an estranged world in need of god’s mercy. While O’Connor’s characters and landscape may share a history with the characters and landscape of other works too-often labeled “Southern gothic,” her heavily judicious narrative voice classifies her work as a satirical critique that utilizes the “ruins . . . and graveyards” of the South in order to carry out her vision of God’s mercy.

## CHAPTER 1:

### O'CONNOR'S VISION AND THE GROTESQUE MICROSCOPE

The grotesque in *Wise Blood* serves several purposes, the most obvious being a means of shocking the reader with an exaggerated depiction of man's faults, both physical and spiritual. Through the rendering of grotesque stereotypes, O'Connor encourages her readers to re-think their notions of free will as they contemplate the desperation intrinsic to the experiences of the characters. In her editor's note, she writes that "free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 1). O'Connor's grotesque promotes an active contemplation of the possibility of salvation; her characters are so depraved and negligent that they seem doomed for hell. While they are granted a will of their own, they do not use it constructively. None of the characters in *Wise Blood* actually seek or claim God, which, according to O'Connor, is their responsibility. The narrative persistently punctuates the characters' lack of religion with an emphasis on their painful, existential circumstances.

Sabbath Hawks, for example, in describing her parents' relationship at the time she was born, tells Motes, "Him and her wasn't married . . . and that makes me a bastard, but I can't help it. It was what he done to me and not what I done to myself" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 116). Here, she openly acknowledges that she is not responsible for her

parents' sins; her being born a bastard qualifies her as a perfect candidate for the mercy and salvation of God, but, like many other characters in O'Connor's fiction, she chooses the low road. She reveals that she wrote a letter to a newspaper advice columnist seeking counsel on her love life:

I says, 'Dear Mary, I am a bastard and a bastard shall not enter the kingdom of heaven as we all know, but I have this personality that makes boys follow me. Do you think I should neck or not? I shall not enter the kingdom of heaven anyway so I don't see what difference it makes.' (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 117)

Though O'Connor aims to emphasize the notion of free will, she aptly integrates humor into this scene through Sabbath's colloquial language and seemingly innocent concern, which, comically, is meant to disguise her real concern about premarital sex. The columnist responds:

'Dear Sabbath, Light necking is acceptable, but I think your real problem is one of adjustment to the modern world. Perhaps you ought to re-examine your religious values to see if they meet your needs in Life. A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper prespective [*sic*] and do not let it warf you. Read some books on Ethical Culture.' (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 117)

Sabbath's response to the columnist's advice further demonstrates her shallowness in questioning *how* moral behavior is determined. She tells Motes, "Then I wrote her another letter . . . I says, "Dear Mary, What I really want to know is should I go the whole hog or not? That's my real problem. I'm adjusted okay to the modern world" ' ' (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 118). Sabbath's grotesqueness lies both in her being born a

bastard and in her spiritual ignorance. Through Sabbath, O'Connor emphasizes the way people offhandedly discard their right to choose God and act morally according to their own free will. Not only does Sabbath represent spiritual negligence, she determines her moral behavior by the credo of a secular acolyte, regardless of what that credo entails. The manner in which O'Connor presents this particular piece of dialogue contributes to the satirical mode of the novel and reinforces the sustained relationship between the narrator and the reader, which I will discuss in a later chapter.

Similarly, Enoch Emery, whose struggle emerges primarily from his ignorance concerning his free, God-granted will, believes that he does not have the power to shape his own destiny (as he has shown that much has been decided "for him" over the course of his life). His ignorance of free will appears most clearly when he implores an unaffected Motes to accompany him on a night out on the town:

My daddy made me come," he said in a cracked voice. Motes looked at him and saw he was crying, his face seamed and wet and a purple-pink color. "I ain't but eighteen year old," he cried, "an' he made me come and I don't know nobody, nobody here'll have nothing to do with nobody else. They ain't friendly.

(O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 53)

Enoch's desperate cries to convince Motes—who he claims to have the only familiar face he has seen in several months—to be his friend underline his perpetual hopelessness and generate the sense of existential loneliness O'Connor observes in a world without God. He really believes himself to be helpless. Enoch only shows personal initiative in his obsessive determination to deliver the new mummified Jesus to Motes—who is virtually unconcerned with any physical representation for his Church of God Without Jesus Christ

Crucified—and in assuming the identity of Gonga the Gorilla. He moves through his life without volition, “made” to do things against his will (such as coming to Taulkinham in the first place), while Motes, conversely, comes to Taulkinham to “do some things [he] never [has] done before” (29), and he never lets anything deter him from his path.

When Enoch summons the courage to shake the hand of the “gorilla”—who is actually a movie star dressed up like a gorilla and who has made an appearance at a movie theatre to promote his film by shaking hands with all the children lined up for the movie—he stutters his way through an introduction because the gorilla’s hand is “the first hand that had been extended to [him] since he had come to the city. It was warm and soft” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 181). Then, “the star leaned slightly forward and a change came in his eyes: an ugly pair of human ones moved closer and squinted at Enoch from behind the celluloid pair. ‘You go to hell,’ a surly voice inside the ape-suit said, low but distinctly, and the hand was jerked away” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood*, 182). Enoch craves basic kindness, but his dismissal of Christianity as “Jesus business” (40) implies a sort of deep-seated separation from Christianity, a separation that causes him to suffer throughout the novel. That the gorilla tells Enoch to “go to hell” is no accident, for Hell is exactly where Enoch is destined to go if he does not recognize and acknowledge God’s will. His pained and humiliated reaction to the gorilla’s contempt further clarifies O’Connor’s message of salvation. There is no love, life, or friendship without submission to God.

Enoch’s downfall seems to lie in his inability to conceive of God except as some distant figure he learned about in grammar school. When Asa Hawks tells Motes, “‘You can’t run away from Jesus. Jesus is a fact,’” Enoch proclaims, “‘I know a whole heap

about Jesus . . . I attended thisyer Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy that a woman sent me to. If it's anything you want to know about Jesus, just ast me'" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 47). While his understanding of Christianity cannot match that of Motes, he does possess a sort of compassion in his heart that none of the other characters in the novel seem to have. Enoch's attitude reflects the laxity toward religion that O'Connor tries to highlight in the novel: while he does not necessarily walk around falling victim to temptation and sin, his impassive views toward "Jesus" qualify him for O'Connor's critique of the secular world. As O'Connor depicts it, any character trying to engage in acts of love or companionship, without God, will only encounter emptiness and indifference. Sabbath Hawks cannot sustain Motes' interest, and he deserts Mrs. Flood at the end of the novel when she tells him she wants to marry him (although her words and actions suggest that she does not necessarily want to marry him for love, but because she is lonely and believes him to be rich).

Brian Ragen quotes O'Connor stating her opinion that the grotesque writer "[is] looking for one image that will connect or combine or embody two points; one is a point in the concrete, and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye, but believed in him firmly, just as real to him, really, as the one that everybody sees" (O'Connor qtd. in Ragen 387). Hazel Motes, before encountering his arch nemesis Hoover Shoats with the False Prophet, elucidates this point in a sermon:

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? . . . Who is it that says it's your conscience? . . . Your conscience is a trick . . . it don't exist though you may think it does, and if you think it does, you had best get it out in the open and hunt it

down and kill it, because it's no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you. (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 166)

In comparing one's conscience to one's shadow or mirror reflection, Motes illustrates on one hand his belief that the conscience is merely a trick of perception, an illusion. Then again, both the shadow and the mirror-image can only exist as projections of the self, which also indicates that the conscience represents a projection (or reflection) of a Truth that resides somewhere within the individual's heart. Here, he reveals an innate (perhaps subconscious) personal belief that the conscience itself is a projection of Truth, or at least the embodiment of one's self. In O'Connor's vision of the grotesque, the image that connects these two points, Truth and conscience, is the individual as he becomes aware of himself in the light of God.

For O'Connor, the grotesque crystallizes the experience of the individual coming to terms with God's grace because it depicts man in a weakened state, unable to rise from whatever circumstances he suffers without the help of God. He submits his personal will to that of God. While Hazel Motes does not appear to grow spiritually in the novel, his final conversations with Mrs. Flood, his landlady, indicate that he has accepted God's truth as his own and has finally become aware of his sins in the light of Truth. His conscience has returned to him. When Mrs. Flood asks him why he walks on rocks, he answers, "'To pay,' . . . in a harsh voice," and when she asks him, "'Pay for what?'" he answers, "'It don't make any difference for what . . . I'm paying'" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 226). He further demonstrates submission through the painstaking acceptance of his human existence: "He didn't eat much or seem to mind anything she gave him. If she had been blind, she would have sat by the radio all day, eating cake and ice cream, and

soaking her feet. He ate anything and never knew the difference. He kept getting thinner and his cough deepened and he developed a limp” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 221-222). The journey Hazel Motes takes in *Wise Blood* fully embodies the grotesque because it travels backward rather than forward to deliver him to his final revelation, which essentially returns him to the point from which he began the journey. His journey weakens him to the point of death. For O’Connor, his physical death marks his spiritual birth.

Rob Johnson presents an interesting observation in his essay, “Why Flannery O’Connor Scares Me,” concerning Motes’ final perception of man’s self-awareness: When Motes chats with Mrs. Flood toward the end of the novel about her lack of belief in Jesus, he responds to her statement that “[she’s] as good . . . not believing in Jesus as many a one that does” (225) by telling her she is better than any believer simply because she does *not* believe. He leans forward suddenly and tells her, “If you believed in Jesus, you wouldn’t be so good” (225). According to Johnson, Motes intimates the perspective here that a non-believer is better than a believer because those who *believe* in Jesus are aware of their faults, but non-believers are not (8). This perception points to the idea that an individual’s real sense of self-awareness is reflected by his knowledge and vision of God. While the conversation between Motes and Mrs. Flood presents significant implications, O’Connor’s grotesque vision reminds readers again to read between the lines, to search for the inevitable irony behind Motes’ declarations. In Motes’ conversation with Mrs. Flood, the confession that his conscience has returned to him comes to the surface: to believe in Jesus means *not* that one *falsely believes* that he is not good, but that he *knows* he is not good. He realizes that he is incomplete. His perception is Truth. Finally, this revelation expresses the notion that one’s faith determines his

destiny; his realigned perception becomes his Truth, and in relating to Jesus through one's faith, one comes to see his faults clearly.

Motes stumbles down a steep and rocky slope to arrive at his final destination. After making up his mind in the army about *how* he would approach his career as a preacher (for even though he had lost his faith in Jesus, he had always known he would be a preacher), he finds his personal passion, regardless of the position he has taken toward Christianity, not reflected in the outside world. Motes' religious fervor emerges in the manner in which he responds to his "friends" explaining to him that "nobody was interested in his goddam soul unless it was the priest" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 18). He remains impassioned even as he tries to escape his intrinsic Christian beliefs:

He took a long time to believe them because he wanted to believe them. All he wanted was to believe them and get rid of it once and for all, and he saw the opportunity here to get rid of it without corruption, to be converted to nothing instead of to evil . . . He had all the time he could want to study his soul in and assure himself that it was not there. (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 17-18)

The perspective that emerges from his personal reflection surges to the public only because he possesses integrity. He had planned on attacking the foundation of an institution made powerful by what he believed to be lies, but once he begins his personal battle, he discovers that the power of that institution has waned in a society no longer interested in the Truth. His distinction from the other members of his community lies in his not having derived his perspective from the external influences of society, but from within, and for this reason, he manages to sustain his own inherent passion for Truth. However, at this point, he does not understand that the opposite of God's love is not filth

and dirtiness, or sin, but indifference, a quality he simply does not possess. His lack of indifference wins him God's grace in the end.

Pamela Demory suggests that O'Connor does not aim to portray the message of Christianity as one of "peace, love and being kind to one another" (5); rather, her novel expresses the notion that with steadfast faith, loyalty, and, perhaps, as O'Connor suggests in her author's note, integrity, one becomes deserving of God's mercy. All of the characters who portray some indication of exposure to Christianity and, nevertheless, choose to live their lives heedlessly and not embrace it fully, shall suffer intensely. Life has no meaning except through God's grace. O'Connor satirizes secular existentialism by exploiting the futility of man's search for identity in this novel. Though Motes continually remains conflicted in terms of his relation with the world, he has clearly arrived at this point in his personal journey via his own personal will and ultimately comes to terms with God's grace. His journey itself is grotesque, for he does not encounter this grace through steady abidance in Christian teachings, but, paradoxically, through an absolute rejection of God.

As previously indicated, O'Connor specifically applies the grotesque to *Wise Blood* in order to illustrate man's need for God. A careful comparison of "The Train" to the first chapter of *Wise Blood* demonstrates her deliberate employment of the grotesque to better deliver her message of Christian salvation. For example, in both the short story and the first chapter of the novel, Hazel encounters a Southern housewife on the train to Taulkinham. In the short story, Mrs. Hosen (who becomes Mrs. Hitchcock in *Wise Blood*, and to whom I will refer to as Mrs. Hitchcock through the remainder of this paper) is portrayed as a source of comfort to the protagonist rather than a source of irritation: "He

was glad to have someone there talking” (O’Connor, “The Train” 55). She reminds him of his mother, who “had always started up a conversation with the other people on the train” (O’Connor, “The Train” 55). O’Connor shifts this scene into the grotesque mode in *Wise Blood* when she describes Mrs. Hitchcock as a “fat woman, with . . . pear-shaped legs that slanted off the train seat and didn’t reach the floor” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 3). The fact that her legs do not reach the floor suggests a sort of impotence or immaturity in her character, lending a sense of childishness to Mrs. Hitchcock that overrides her ability to engage Motes’ attention in any serious way. This description tells us more about the shift in the protagonist’s perspective than about Mrs. Hitchcock’s character. The shift robs Mrs. Hitchcock of her humanity by reducing her to a talking head to which Motes does not react. Additionally, in the revision, O’Connor completely omits all descriptions of what goes through Hazel Motes’ mind as Mrs. Hitchcock continues to chatter away.

Philip Thomson claims that “the most consistently distinguished characteristic of the grotesque has been the fundamental element of disharmony . . . [which must be] seen not merely in the work of art as such, but also in the reaction it produces” (11). O’Connor uses a blend of positive and negative imagery to heighten the irony inherent in her characters’ destinies and to distance the reader from the characters. For example, at eighteen, Enoch Emery has pimples and blond hair; his physical appearance, while not attractive, is harmless enough. In approaching Motes for the first time, “[he] was smiling. He looked like a friendly hound dog with light mange” (39-40). Claire Katz writes, “One might surmise that O’Connor was a cartoonist, for here her eye is the eye of the caricaturist who, with an economy of aggressive strokes, degrades by unmasking ugliness or weakness, penetrates character in order to ridicule” (Katz 57). In some of O’Connor’s

short stories, such as “Good Country People”—where the atheist protagonist has an amputated leg and a bad attitude— she presents the weaknesses of her characters with seemingly more cruelty, and while these stories overall incorporate her trademark grotesque imagery and ironic narrative structure to develop a sort of tongue-in-cheek humor, they do not necessarily provoke the laughter that *Wise Blood* consistently triggers.

In *Wise Blood*, O’Connor highlights the physical handicaps of her characters to enable laughter from her readers when they observe the predicaments her characters find themselves in when left to their own, non-spiritual devices. If O’Connor had drawn Enoch Emery as a handsome or even physically handicapped young man, the reader’s laughter would be replaced by smug judgment at Emery’s arrogance, or perhaps sympathy for his loneliness. Because he looks like “a friendly hound dog with light mange,” the reader can smile as he observes Emery struggle through his crises, for the warmth in Emery’s image lightens the darkness. Pamela Demory points out that while this gentle adolescent seems friendly, sensitive, and harmless and appears to need love and companionship, he also possesses some sort of repulsive (but not *too* repulsive) quality that encourages readers to keep a safe distance from him (2). This irony seals the lonely, solitary and painful existential struggle that is Enoch’s fate. The humor should serve to unite the reader with the narrator in laughter while together they contemplate the real source of the character’s struggle.

Motes, in contrast, has interesting eyes; most of the people he meets, such as the cab driver who delivers him to Leora Watts, size him up to be a preacher, and some, like Enoch Emery, believe him to be a wealthy man. Sabbath Hawks confesses her physical attraction to him when she exclaims, “From the minute I set eyes on you I said to myself,

that's what I got to have, just give me some of him! I said look at those pee-can eyes and go crazy, girl! That innocent look don't hide a thing, he's just pure filthy right down to the guts, like me" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 169). Here, she also reveals that he has an innocent look, a quality used to describe no other character in the book. On the other hand, the morning Motes sets out to buy his car, the narrator reveals, "His black hat sat on his head with a careful, placed expression and his face had a fragile look as if it might have been broken and stuck together again, or like a gun no one knows is loaded" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 64). O'Connor makes her reader stop for a minute and think about what Motes really looks like in this passage. The suggestion of his face having been broken and "stuck together again" brings to mind an almost Frankenstein-like image, fragile and ugly in a very concrete, tangible way. When the narrator compares his face to a gun no one knows is loaded, she forces us to really consider the implications of this particular image because it involves a murder-inducing weapon. The violence implied by the gun imagery certainly serves to wake the reader up. Here is one instance where the narrator really seems to speak straight to the reader, an uncommon occurrence in the book. With a wink and a half-smile, the narrator invites the reader to share in observation of Motes' activities and contemplate what he is *really* up to. The rhetoric warns the reader to handle with care.

Similarly, the narrator discloses that "Mrs. Watts's grin was as curved and sharp as the blade of a sickle. It was plain that she was so well-adjusted that she didn't have to think any more" (56). In the short story "The Peeler," from which the chapter comparing Mrs. Watts's grin to a sickle emerges, the language O'Connor uses to describe Mrs. Watts is slightly different: "Leora's eyes had narrowed some and her mouth had widened

and got thin as a knife blade” (O’Connor, “The Peeler” 78). While the image remains violent and the character has the same name in both the short story and the novel, the changes O’Connor makes in this short passage sharpen the grotesque imagery through irony. O’Connor creates a matronly quality in Leora Watts by referring to her as Mrs. Watts instead of Leora, emphasizing the age difference between Motes and his lover; this further signifies Motes’ general lack of experience. The revision of the syntactical structure of the sentence, from “Leora’s eyes *had narrowed* and her mouth *had widened*” (emphasis mine) to “Mrs. Watts’s grin was,” characterizes Mrs. Watts’ features as natural rather than having manifested through some action or physical adjustment on her part. This subtle change makes the image of Leora Watts’ expression even more menacing because it requires no effort on her part. The contradictory image of the “grin” resembling a sharp blade is simply part of the landscape that is Leora Watts, as natural to her being as the regular fact of men showing up in her room in search of sex. O’Connor uses a comparable illustration in *Wise Blood* to describe the woman on whom Enoch regularly spies sunbathing at the pool, who “looked up at Hazel Motes . . . grinning through her pointed teeth” (81).

All of these images serve to startle the reader out of his comfortable reverie and urge him to reconsider the implications of the world surrounding him. The gun, sickle, and sharp teeth all insinuate violence lurking behind seemingly innocent facades of fragility and wily feminine grins. The paradoxical language of the images characterizes O’Connor’s perspective as satirical because it casts shadows over lighthearted gestures and renders the underlying humor of the novel dark. In *Comic Visions, Female Voices: Contemporary Women Novelists and Southern Humor*, Barbara Bennett discusses the

philosophical nature of “black humor,” theorizing that women writers have traditionally been excluded from studies of black humor because black humor has been largely considered a “male subject” due to its philosophical nature. She believes O’Connor’s work to represent black humor, but reasons that O’Connor remains largely “[excluded] from studies about black humor” because she seems to objectify her characters and maintain a detachment from them, owing their problems to their isolation/separation from God (as in *Wise Blood*), while other “black humorists . . . include themselves as players in a meaningless world” (62). O’Connor’s tendency to objectify her characters should be recognized as a deliberate rhetorical move to establish the narrative voice in her works as satirical. A close examination of her revision between her initial, published “chapters,” including “The Train,” and *Wise Blood* supports this assertion.

One important change O’Connor makes in the first chapter of *Wise Blood*, which becomes a consistent theme throughout the rest of the novel, and, actually, in a large portion of her body of work, is that she limits the amount of exposition in the narrative; it is almost as if she decides that the most effective method for rendering a grotesque world is to cut the characters off from their thoughts and feelings. When the reader becomes aware of the characters’ feelings, he begins to identify with the characters, placing them within the context of his own world. The narrative voice becomes satirical when it stops translating the interior world of the characters for the reader’s benefit. Yet, later, I will explore how O’Connor utilizes what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as “direct authorial literary artistic narration” (Hopkins 201) to illustrate her fictional world and even, sometimes, her characters’ inner motivations, *without* intervening as the narrator.

In her analysis of the differences between the novel and its 1979 film adaptation, directed by John Huston, Pamela Demory provides a relevant insight regarding the way the film divulges the circumstances—not immediately evident in the novel—that surround Hazel Motes' journey. Her remarks prove applicable to the study of the construction of *Wise Blood* as a satire, a “comedy” even, rather than a “tragedy” (Demory 3). Demory notes,

Huston's decision to dramatize at the outset Hazel's return home establishes a psychological rationale for Hazel's behavior. At this point, viewers have yet to see how odd and unlikeable Hazel is, so their initial response is one of sympathy. This compassion may linger even when Hazel's less likeable self emerges since the viewers know of his loss of family and home. His subsequent behavior can easily be rationalized as that of someone trying to compensate for his losses.

(Demory 4)

Likewise, “The Train,” compared with the first chapter of *Wise Blood*, depicts a young man not laughable or ridiculous at all. In fact, this short story reveals Hazel as a tender, almost vulnerable young man quite sensitive to his surroundings and even more thoughtful about the world, particularly the material world, than the Motes of *Wise Blood*. For instance, in “The Train,” the narrator discloses the thoughts that wander through Hazel's mind while Mrs. Hitchcock attempts conversation:

My mother was a Jackson, Haze said to himself. He had stopped listening to the lady although he was still looking at her and she thought he was listening. My name is Hazel Wickers, he said. I'm nineteen. My mother was a Jackson. I was

raised in Eastrod, Eastrod, Tennessee; he thought about the porter again.

(O'Connor, "The Train" 55)

The repetition—"My mother was a Jackson"—presented here suggests a struggle within Wickers to come to terms with his identity, which is somehow tied to the porter. Unlike in *Wise Blood*, the main character in "The Train" retains his subjectivity within the context of his relationship to Mrs. Hitchcock. His thoughts not only remain active, they embody the characteristically human pursuit of self-identification. In presenting Hazel through the lens of his personal self-identification, O'Connor grants the reader access to the character's internal processes and enables a personal identification between the reader and the character, which makes the reader less able to objectify the character and observe his actions and behavior from a critical standpoint. For *Wise Blood*, however, O'Connor omits most of these sorts of personal self-reflections by the characters in order to help the reader maintain, with the narrator, that critical perspective from which to analyze the narrative. This process represents a crucial prerequisite for the novel's capacity to stand as a satire.

Furthermore, in "The Train," Hazel Wickers stammers through an incoherent response to Mrs. Hitchcock's inquiries about where he comes from; he means to express his frustration about no longer having a home, but his dumbfounded astonishment at this fact renders him unable to communicate, and therefore, vulnerable rather than laughable.

In *Wise Blood*, on the other hand, Hazel Motes chooses to ignore Mrs. Hitchcock.

Pamela Demory remarks that the opening to the novel

thrusts us immediately into O'Connor's world . . . the emphasis is on the peculiarities of character . . . Hazel is rude, nervous, obnoxious, socially inept,

and aggressively promoting his nihilist rejection of Jesus with everyone he meets. The reader is likely to be both fascinated and repelled by his behavior. The opening unsettles us, distances us with its bizarre religiosity, unappealing characters, and the black humor of its imagery. (3)

In *Wise Blood*, the reader gets the impression that Motes chooses to ignore Mrs. Hitchcock because her interests seem shallow, mundane, or even trivial: “Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, who was facing Motes, said that she thought the early evening like this was the prettiest time of day and she asked him if he didn’t think so too . . . He looked at her a second and, without answering, leaned forward and stared down the length of the car again” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 1). Motes then becomes more objectified as Mrs. Hitchcock—taking advantage of the fact that he has focused his attention elsewhere—begins to study him. After observing the military duffel bag at his feet, she surmises that he must be returning home from the army. She also finds herself feeling “irked” at the appearance of his eyes and the way “the outline of a skull under his skin was plain and insistent” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 4). The simple, somewhat crude imagery O’Connor uses to describe Hazel Motes, similar to that which she uses to portray Mrs. Hitchcock, adapts the narrative to the grotesque mode by focusing on the physical traits of the characters, creating an opaque flow of energy within and among them that inhibits the reader’s participation. Even the action Mrs. Hitchcock engages in is limited to simple observation of his physical appearance. All that goes on beneath the surface—in Motes’ mind—remains concealed from the reader’s awareness.

Later in “The Train,” when Mrs. Hitchcock invites Hazel Wickers to go into the diner, the narrator reveals that since “he would never have had the courage to come to the

diner by himself; it was fine he had met Mrs. Hosen” (O’Connor, “The Train” 58). A series of exclamations follows these statements as Haze contemplates how his mother would feel about him having the opportunity to sleep on a berth and how the dining car was “like a city restaurant!” (O’Connor, “The Train” 58). Haze’s appreciation of Mrs. Hitchcock and his dependence on her to lead the way to the dining car signify his humanity, for he responds to the warmth and initiative of others, and his excitement over all the luxurious amenities on the train shows his nostalgia for the times when he used to travel with his mother as well as the fact that he has not experienced it all; he still has room to learn and grow. In contrast, the Hazel Motes of *Wise Blood*, rendered to represent the lost and wandering atheist who *believes* he knows it all, is in the process of convincing himself that he is already clean and “complete,” so he has no place in his mind for excitement or nostalgia. The sentiment of Hazel Motes, as an atheist, embodies the separation from God alluded to earlier by literary critic Barbara Bennett (62).

## CHAPTER 2:

### O'CONNOR'S NARRATIVE SATIRICAL VOICE

Predictably, Motes only faces continual apathy and incredulity in the faces of those he hopes to connect with. In Chapter 1, for instance, he becomes aware that religious fervor has lost its status among the so-called “virtuous” when he is forced to share a table with a group of women in the dining car. The women at the table, “dressed like parrots” (9), have completely captivated the steward, who practically ignores Motes’ attempts to order dinner, and although they *must* be aware of how crowded the dining car is, they still manage to give the impression that Motes has interrupted their private dinner. After Motes takes his seat, they stop talking, and one of them pointedly and repeatedly blows cigarette smoke in his face: “She had a bold game-hen expression and small eyes pointed directly on him” (10). Her boldness smacks of self-righteousness, which Motes, in his provincial naiveté, misconstrues as the smug self-assurance of a born-again Christian.

He tells the woman, “If you’ve been redeemed, [...] I wouldn’t want to be” (10), and one of the other women sitting at their table laughs. The woman’s response to his comment about not believing in Jesus, “Who said you had to?” . . . in a poisonous Eastern voice” (10), suggest an attitude of flippant nonchalance toward what he values most; she, like everyone else, simply does not care. O’Connor emphasizes an underlying danger in indifference by describing the woman’s “Eastern voice” as “poisonous.” Her

remark causes Motes to “[draw] back” (11). The woman puts Motes in his place by subtly deriding his naiveté and his powerlessness; her Eastern accent implies class and privilege, which Motes may recognize but does not share. Furthermore, his intention to demean her by condemning Jesus only serves to reveal his own cultural ignorance and makes him vulnerable to their “poisonous” snobbery. The lack of concern exhibited by the woman in the dining car contrasts sharply with Motes’ compulsive attitude toward Christianity and makes obvious that his subversion just reinforces his complete submission to the power and authority of religion. Notably, this entire scene in the dining car does not appear in “The Train.”

Chapter 1 ends with Haze waking up in a claustrophobic frenzy from a dream where he watches his mother, in the form of a bat, flying from her coffin and darting around his head. The porter, who ignores him even more in the novel than in the short story, watches him from the doorway:

‘I’m sick!’ [Motes] called. ‘I can’t be closed up in this thing. Get me out!’ The porter stood watching him and didn’t move. ‘Jesus,’ Haze said, ‘Jesus.’ The porter didn’t move. ‘Jesus been a long time gone,’ he said in a sour triumphant voice. (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 21)

The scene draws attention to the double *entendre* behind Motes’ calling for Jesus. First, he appears to be using the Lord’s name in vain, but the porter’s response to his frantic pleas implies that he really means to summon help from God. The sour triumph in the porter’s voice confirms that the attitude of the modern world is secular and Motes is the last to know. “The Train,” in contrast, ends with Motes awakening from the same nightmare to find the porter watching him from the doorway, “a white shape in the

darkness, standing there and not moving” (O’Connor, “The Train” 62). The imagery describing the porter standing in the doorway is identical in the short story and the novel, but the dialogue is only present in the novel. The dialogue enhances the satiric function of the novel by emphasizing that different meanings are often perceived when language is shared. The different ways in which each character understands *Jesus* become emphasized here, and this move, on O’Connor’s part, lends confusion and humor to the scene and sets the stage for what unfolds later in the plot.

O’Connor increases the violent undertones of the story through the dialogue exchange between Asa and Sabbath Hawks; the violence renders them grotesque characters, where in “The Peeler,” they appear more innocent and deserving of the reader’s sympathy. In “The Peeler,” when Motes finally catches up to them after following them for several blocks, he tries to give the potato peeler he bought to Sabbath Hawks. As in *Wise Blood*, she says “ ‘I don’t want that thing . . . What you think I want with that thing?’” but unlike in *Wise Blood*, her father tells Motes, “ ‘I take it with thanks for her,’” (O’Connor, “The Peeler” 71). He instructs her to put the peeler in her bag, but she refuses. Sabbath maintains her stubborn stance in both the short story and the novel, but her father, who remains calm and polite in “The Peeler,” demonstrates a more grotesque nature in *Wise Blood*: “‘You take it,’ the blind man said. ‘You put it in your sack and shut up before I hit you’” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 46). O’Connor offsets Motes’ graceful, virtuous gesture of Christian charity by juxtaposing it with the bittersweet and subtly violent nature of the Hawkes’ acceptance of Motes’ “gift.”

O’Connor makes few changes between the short story “The Peeler” and Chapter 3 of *Wise Blood*, but the ones she does make contribute further to her adoption of the

satirical voice for the novel. Most of the changes occur in the narrative exposition, with shorter descriptions and tighter dialogue. For example, when Enoch Emery first asks Hazel Motes why he has decided to follow the blind preacher and his daughter, he says, “ ‘You look like you might be follerin’ them hicks . . . You go in for a lot of Jesus business?’” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 41). In the short story, Enoch’s dialogue stops at “Jesus.” Her decision to add the word “business” to Enoch’s speech helps to establish his position outside of Christianity. The word “business” differentiates Enoch’s dialect from that of a Christian, who would not refer to Jesus as a business. O’Connor’s natural ability to engage different dialects to create underlying meanings enhances her talent as a satirist.

Because the satirist wants to limit the subjectivity of his or her characters, the method of narration becomes a challenge for the novelist. Mary Francis Hopkins provides a significant insight in her essay, “The Rhetoric of Heteroglossia in Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*,” regarding the way O’Connor navigates the difficulty of third-person omniscient narration in a satirical novel. Obviously, O’Connor’s grotesque descriptions unite the reader and narrator in the act of observing the fictional “world” she has created. Additionally, regulating the amount of exposition revealing the characters’ interior motivations hampers the reader’s ability to develop a relationship with the characters. Hopkins examines yet another rhetorical maneuver O’Connor manages to master in *Wise Blood*, “heteroglossia within what [Mikhail] Bakhtin calls ‘direct authorial literary-artistic narration’” (Hopkins 201). Heteroglossia, as defined by Hopkins,

refers to the condition not of co-existing languages but co-existing dialects . . . [it] includes professional jargon, ceremonial speech, religious or Biblical speech, as

well as “languages of generations and age groups”. . . Every utterance . . . affects and is affected by all the language strata against which it is always juxtaposed, with which it is always in dialogue . . . this juxtaposition, this interaction of strata in dialogue with one another, not any single utterance, is the source of meaning. (Hopkins 201)

Hopkins outlines several ways in which O’Connor utilizes heteroglossia in *Wise Blood*. For example, O’Connor will assign, in character dialogue, certain manners of speaking or language that the reader should recognize as alien to the character speaking. Bakhtin calls speeches involving at least two different styles, or manners, of speaking “hybrid constructions” (Bakhtin qtd. in Hopkins 202) and finds them essential in the comic novel; Hopkins applies Bakhtin’s ideas to O’Connor’s narrative voice to demonstrate how O’Connor builds the bridge uniting reader with narrator. She uses the example of Sabbath Hawks declaring, “Take off your hat, king of beasts” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 170) to illustrate a hybrid construction, reasoning that such language does not ordinarily show up in Sabbath’s regular speech. Hopkins believes this to be the only piece of dialogue in the novel that represents this particular type of heteroglossia, but she argues that O’Connor frequently utilizes hybrid constructions in several of her short stories. She argues that these sorts of constructions “invariably create for the reader an ironic involvement with the narrator, sharing the narrator’s superiority to the characters and their view of the world” (Hopkins 202).

A comparison may be helpful here. Alice Walker, another Southern female writer from Georgia (who, in her book, *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden*, describes the impact that O’Connor’s work had on her and praises O’Connor for “[casting] spells and

[working] magic with the written word”) utilizes heteroglossia in a similar manner in her bestselling novel, *The Color Purple*. As the main character—and, significantly, first-person narrator—Celie, learns to read, her spelling and grammar in the narrative become progressively better. Her growth and maturity as a woman become artfully reflected in the language she uses to tell her story. Unfortunately, in the film version, beautifully adapted and directed by Steven Spielberg, this rich and colorful aspect of the novel could not manifest, for, out of self-protection against her violent husband, Celie retains a falsely illiterate voice of ignorance in the dialogue she exchanges with the other characters in the book. The ingenious distinction between dialects in the novel demonstrates Walker’s mastery of language and the layered meanings an author can create with interwoven vernaculars.

Hopkins’s analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin’s “character zones”—“those stretches of narration in which the narrator echoes, imitates, or parodies the speech of a character” (Hopkins 202)—gives form to the way that O’Connor exposes, however briefly, the inner world of her characters without appearing to necessarily support or undermine them from the narrator’s perspective. When the writer presents expository information through a particular character’s speaking style—in the narration rather than through dialogue—she makes the reader aware that the information presented reflects not the commentary or observations of the narrator, but those of the character himself. O’Connor makes frequent use of “character zones” in *Wise Blood*, through language as well as spelling depiction. For instance, Hopkins analyzes the example of Motes’ spelling of *chifferobe* in the first chapter of the novel, referred to earlier in this paper. In *Wise Blood*, Motes writes on the note meant for prospective burglars, “THIS SHIFFER-ROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL

MOTES” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 20). Hopkins fails to note that in “The Train,” Haze, like the narrator, spelled *chifferobe* correctly. O’Connor’s deliberate decision to change the spelling of the word in Motes’ note in the novel signals her awareness of the effect heteroglossia creates in a comic novel. The misspelling speaks for itself, and the reader learns a little about Motes’ level of literacy without the narrator’s input.

Both *Wise Blood* and “The Train” contain several examples of character zones where the narrator’s language mimics, or parodies, that of a character; Bakhtin calls this type of heteroglossia “free indirect discourse” (Hopkins 205). The narrator engages in free indirect discourse when tracing Enoch’s actions on the morning he decides to steal the mummified new Jesus for Motes: “When he realized that today was the day, he decided not to get up. He didn’t want to justify his daddy’s blood, he didn’t want to be always having to do something that something else wanted him to do, that he didn’t know what it was and that was always dangerous” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 75). Hopkins points out how the use of the word “daddy” and the “ungrammatical construction with the subordinate ‘that’ clause” (Hopkins 206) reflect the way Enoch would speak. This particular example may not convey ostensible humor, but it does prepare the reader for any subsequent passages that serve to expose Enoch’s inner world.

The reader becomes acquainted with the character’s impulses without the narrator’s interference in a way that could not necessarily come across through dialogue, which often stands at odds with what the character *really* feels. While too much exposition would reduce the satiric potential of the novel—by virtue of inviting the reader to identify with the character—the irony O’Connor generates by using heteroglossia continues to align the reader with the narrator rather than with the character

because it usually reveals the character's lack of depth rather than his vulnerability. Hopkins uses the example of Enoch deciding to use his landlady's broken umbrella as a cane "because he *realized* it would distinguish him on the sidewalk" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 104, emphasis mine) to accentuate the distinction between the all-knowing "superior" narrator and the seemingly dense Enoch. O'Connor's use of the word *realize* highlights the Absolute, objective truth understood by the narrator by accounting for Enoch's progressive coming-to-terms with that truth through a process of realization. This type of heteroglossia exposes Enoch's inferiority to the narrator and stimulates humor in the passage.

A similar and quite humorous instance of heteroglossia occurs in the exchange of dialogue between Sabbath Hawks and the newspaper columnist, a scene I discussed previously in a different context. As Hopkins notes, O'Connor's decision to insert the actual letters exchanged between Sabbath and the columnist into the narrative provides a comical effect that would otherwise not have occurred. First, Sabbath's colloquial language sets up the contrast between her own dialect, the dialect of religion, and that of the columnist, who reflects the "popular psychology" (Hopkins 207) of the modern secular world: " ' I says, "Dear Mary, I am a bastard and a bastard shall not enter the kingdom of heaven as we all know . . . do you think I should neck or not? I shall not enter the kingdom of heaven anyway so I don't see what difference it makes" ' " (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 117). Sabbath's use of "shall" amidst her own dialect suggests that she is merely reciting something she has heard her whole life, which implies that she has not taken the time to think about what it really means. This observation is important because it tells the reader that Sabbath does not necessarily understand the full workings

of God's grace; in fact, her singsong recitation almost implies that she has taken this statement for fact without considering it within the proper context of Christian ideology. This line of reasoning supports the notion that Sabbath will suffer because of her negligent employment of her free will. Her concerns lie not with the possibility of overcoming her religious limitations, for which she knows she is not responsible, but with whether "necking" is acceptable in the secular world.

The columnist responds, in a formal, non-religious and scholarly vernacular, that Sabbath "ought to re-examine [her] religious values to see if they meet [her] needs in the modern world. A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper perspective and don't let it warf you" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 117). Hopkins observes that "more than gratuitous humor, more than an index to characters, [the letters] offer the dialogic relations that constitute a strong authorial commentary on the value systems they speak. One need not know O'Connor's religious convictions to recognize her ridicule of the 'salvation' found in that kind of popular psychology" (207). I would like to add that Sabbath's response to the columnist's advice supplies a sense of comedy for this exchange and bolsters the relationship between the narrator and the reader. She tells Motes, "'Then I wrote her another letter . . . I says, 'Dear Mary, What I really want to know is should I go the whole hog or not? That's my real problem. I'm adjusted okay to the modern world' ' ' (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 118). Her statements confirm the reader's suspicion that she really wanted to know about whether intercourse was "okay" in the first place; she almost discredits the columnist's longwinded and tedious litany, which directs her toward an intellectual (rather than religious) perspective of her situation, with the statement that she is "adjusted okay to the modern world." Her

referral to intercourse as “the whole hog” reinforces her rejection of the intellectual perspective and almost mocks the ideology to which it subscribes.

O’Connor narrates “The Train” almost completely through free indirect discourse. Her use of this method is particularly effective for the short story because it reveals most of what goes through Hazel’ mind while he pretends to have composure on his way from Eastrod to Taulkinham. The author provides a delightful exposition of his musings in the opening passage of “The Train” as he boards the train and sees the porter for the first time:

They pulled the ceiling down and [his berth] was in there, and you climbed up to it on a ladder. He hadn’t seen any ladders around; he reckoned they kept them in the closet. The closet was up where you came in. When he first got on the train, he had seen the porter standing in front of the closet, putting on his porter’s jacket. Haze stopped right then—right where he was. (O’Connor, “The Train 54)

The insistent presence here of the second-person pronoun “you” encourages the reader to closely consider the voice of the narrator. When the narrator tells the reader that Haze “reckoned” they kept the berths in the closet, she admits her adoption of Haze’s voice. However, only after observing the contrast between Hazel’s short piece of dialogue with the porter and the smooth, articulate voice of the narrator can the reader safely identify a purposeful rhetorical shift in the narration. Mumbling, Haze stutters, “Whu . . . what time do you pull down the beds?” to which the porter efficiently responds, “Long time yet” (O’Connor, “The Train” 54). The distinction between Haze’s strained speech and the casual easiness of the porter serves to reveal Haze’s insecurity and lack of power (as it derives from self-expression).

After Haze takes his seat, the narrator describes the scene through a third-person omniscient point of view, and the shift becomes evident: “Now the train was greyflying past instants of trees and quick spaces of field and a motionless sky that sped darkening away in the opposite direction. Haze leaned his head back on the seat and looked out the window, the yellow light of the train lukewarm on him” (O’Connor, “The Train” 54). The even, lucid language of this passage differentiates the narrative voice from the colloquial character voice presented in the opening of the story. The image, supplied by the narrator, of the way the light shines on Haze’s face serves to further distinguish the narrative voice as being outside the realm of Hazel’s character zone. By presenting Hazel through an image that anyone—besides the character—would witness by observing him, the narrator places Hazel in the object position and confirms her position of omniscience.

In another instance, O’Connor artfully utilizes the first-person pronoun, rather than using free indirect discourse, to show Hazel repeating his name to himself as he ponders his identity: “My mother was a Jackson, Haze said to himself. He had stopped listening to the lady although he was still looking at her . . . My name is Hazel Wickers, he said. I’m nineteen. My mother was a Jackson” (O’Connor, “The Train 55). This example also represents heteroglossia because the narrator enables Hazel to speak for himself, but it does not imply free indirect discourse because the narrator has not assumed Hazel’s speech as her own. The effect gives greater meaning to the action taking place here: Hazel’s understanding of his own identity is a central theme of the story, so the narrative calls greater attention to his musings by incorporating his voice and enabling it to speak for itself. If the narrator had explained this scene, it would have lost its impact for the reader.

Another interesting passage in “The Train” utilizes free indirect discourse without making evident whose voice it has adopted. The same scene shows up in *Wise Blood*, but without all the exposition. When Haze and Mrs. Hitchcock go to the dining car,

Mrs. [Hitchcock] began talking to the lady on the side of her. Haze stared stupidly at the wall . . . If she hadn't been talking, he would have told her intelligently that he had gone there the last time and that the porter was not from there but that he looked near enough like a gulch nigger to be one, near enough like old Cash to be his child. He'd tell her while they were eating. (O'Connor, “The Train” 58)

Almost all of the passage seems to have adopted Hazel's speech and thought pattern, particularly in the way it picks up “there,” meaning Eastrod, from several moments earlier in Hazel's conversation with Mrs. Hitchcock. That Hazel remains fixated on Eastrod, despite whichever direction his conversation with Mrs. Hitchcock has taken, shows the significance of the loss of his home in both “The Train” and *Wise Blood*. Furthermore, the contradiction between the words “stupidly” and “intelligently,” used to describe Hazel's behavior, suggests an inconsistency in his self-awareness and continues to foreshadow the thematic identity crises of *Wise Blood*.

For O'Connor, the grotesque should encourage the reader to search for a deeper meaning behind all that is immediately apparent. She emphasizes the superficiality of our world and our attachment to the material by incorporating synthetic objects that arise through man's existence into the novel. One example is the integration of signs and billboards, such as SLADE'S FOR THE LATEST and ROOMS FOR RENT and even the note written on the bathroom stall advertising Mrs. Leora Watt's services. Hopkins examines the way O'Connor enables the media of the material world to speak for itself in

the same way she utilizes Motes' note about the chifferobe to demonstrate his literacy level. According to Hopkins, O'Connor's persistent use of signs, newspaper headlines, and slogans painted everywhere on buildings and cars establishes "a kind of sustained dialogic relationship between the narrator's language and the language of the materialistic world. It is as if the narrator forces the superficial world to speak itself, and its language exposes its inadequacy" (209). The characters must confront this deficient world and derive some sort of meaning out of their experience of it. The grotesque nature of the characters forces readers to observe the interaction between these characters—with all their deformities—and their world. The reader becomes a participant in the critique of this world as he finds himself struggling to piece together synthetic images; he can rely on his position as critic because he has experience of a world more complete and thus possesses the ability to draw comparisons between the two worlds.

CHAPTER 3:  
SITUATIONAL IRONY IN *WISE BLOOD*

In characteristic grotesque fashion, O'Connor manages to develop irony on several levels. Probably the most recognized and significant feature of traditional satire, irony figures prominently throughout the novel, manifesting through plot structure—primarily in Hazel Motes' struggle and ultimate failure to escape his Christian upbringing—dramatic irony, where the narrator allows the reader privileged glimpses into the characters' real plights, and grotesque character descriptions that continually reinforce the paradoxical nature of human existence.

O'Connor consistently complicates her narrative with inversions of character descriptions and behavior. A comparison between Motes and Enoch reveals two characters' lives traveling in opposite directions. In Enoch's last appearance, he has been deserted by the young, frightened couple in the evening darkness; still wearing the gorilla suit, he sits alone on a rock and stares at the city skyline (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 200). The intrinsic irony of his miserable, lonely existence represents the axis upon which the satiric function of the novel rests. Although he really wants more than anything to make friends, almost everyone he meets despises him immediately. Enoch serves the satiric function of the novel by heightening the irony through which Motes, less pitiful than Enoch, achieves salvation. O'Connor illustrates her concept of God's mercy by allowing

Motes to escape from his existence while Enoch must continue to pay penance in the world. Notably, Motes is released from his existence not by suicide (which may have been the case if Motes had been left alone to continue on his path of self-denial and self-mutilation), but because the policeman strikes him to death.

In the Old Testament, Enoch, who was the seventh from Adam and Noah's great-grandfather, by faith, was taken away so he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him" (Hebrews 11:5). O'Connor's assigning the name *Enoch* to this character lends a greater sense of irony to his confusion; she reverses his destiny and underlines his ignorance through his assertion to possess "wise blood." When Motes leaves him after their first meeting, "[Enoch's] eyes glinted through his tears and his face stretched into a crooked grin. 'You act like you think you got wiser blood than anybody else,' he said, 'but you ain't! I'm the one has it. Not you. *Me*'" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 55). The biblical Enoch was taken from the violent world to walk with God, but in the novel, Enoch appears to have been rather thrust *into* the violent, grotesque world (of Taulkinham) by his father, who "made him come." His inability to conceive of and follow God disables his right to salvation.

Enoch represents the person O'Connor believes the world too often makes excuses for, the lost and weak individual who wanders aimlessly, who—because of his ignorance and vulnerability—seems to need love more so than others, but has very little interest in finding out God's Truth or heeding His will. He resembles a mangy dog, helpless in his condition and in dire need of tender loving care. He remains lost, seemingly forgotten by God, and his figure sort of dissolves into the landscape of the city, watching the uneven skyline, and he never appears again. His tendency to watch

other people, other things, for clues as to what he should do next, implies his reliance upon society rather than God. He lives his life carelessly and devotes his attention to worldly affairs; he lacks a sense of self-integrity and thus cannot achieve salvation. After the movie star tells Enoch to go to hell, he runs, humiliated, through the rain to deliver the mummy he has stolen from the museum, which he believes will represent the “Jesus” that Motes needs for his new church. Enoch’s mummy actually represents the fictional world of *Wise Blood* quite accurately; Enoch’s determination to aid Motes by presenting him with a mummy for his church illustrates the absurdity of what such a church as the Church of Truth Without Jesus Christ represents: preoccupation with the synthetic world, materialism or “false idols,” and an inversion of truth. Motes, founder of the church, is the only character who understands that truth does not rely on material objects. The painful irony of his vision lies in the fact that he believes his understanding emerges from the world he inhabits and that this world will nurture his spiritual realization.

Motes’ active seeking-out of sin and the way he chooses the most painful and deplorable routes to his destinations imply O’Connor’s desire to demonstrate the mystery of man’s free will. Motes almost seems to possess a sort of super-human strength in his struggle to overcome temptation by deliberately pursuing sin and confronting it head on; he also exhibits courage as he conquers his inherent *fear* of temptation, as well as judgment, instilled in him from childhood. One of the first steps Motes takes on his journey to transcendence, a journey of which he may not even be aware, occurs in the loss of his virginity to Mrs. Watts, whom, it should be noted, he learns of while sitting on the toilet in the men’s public restroom: “He had been sitting in the narrow box for some

time, studying the inscriptions on the sides and door, before he noticed one that was to the left over the toilet paper. It was written in a drunken looking hand. It read:

Mrs. Leora Watts!

60 Buckley Road

The friendliest bed in town! Brother (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 26).

O'Connor's careful attention to the concrete details in this passage forces us to acknowledge the tension between Motes' innocence (his virginity) and his confrontation with sin. He chooses to experience sin not through temptation, but careful intent. His association with Mrs. Watts already smells like the men's toilet, yet Motes, to our dismay, heads straight to her den. When he arrives at Mrs. Watts' house, he finds her "cutting her toenails with a large pair of scissors. She was a big woman with very yellow hair and white skin that glistened with greasy preparation . . . There was nothing much in the room but the bed and a bureau and a rocking chair full of dirty clothes" (29).

The additional image of the green speckles on Mrs. Watts' small, pointy teeth and the picture of her gripping Motes' arm, drawling, " 'You huntin' something?'" at which Motes "might have leaped out the window" (30) provokes laughter (and fear) and lends that sense of acidic humor that is O'Connor's trademark. In this description, O'Connor's exposition of the vulgarity of heedless human existence pushes us to consider the possibility of a cleaner, more divine experience. One need not wait for death to experience the divine, however. O'Connor's vision suggests that, by rejecting God, the world becomes vulgar and corrupt, but an individual can transcend the world by taking responsibility for his life and devoting that life to God. Brian Ragen suggests that for O'Connor, the individual's intimate contact with the physical world catalyzes and

signifies his spiritual development: “O’Connor’s sort of grotesque, which shows the anagogical dimension through the distortion and exaggeration of the physical, is only possible in a world where grace is conveyed through physical sign” (Ragen 389). His line of reasoning rejects the argument presented by several critics that O’Connor aims to depict a careful separation between the spiritual and physical world, which is the foundation of dualistic Manichaeism. Nowhere in *Wise Blood* does Hazel Motes try specifically to escape from the world he lives in. In fact, his salvation lies in the fact that he tries to confront the beast (the “grotesque” world) through physical sinfulness and self-mutilation.

On Motes’ third night in Taulkinham, when he goes back to Mrs. Watts’ house for the second time, mostly in order to rid himself of young Emery, the narrative jumps back in time to when Motes was a boy and saw a naked woman for, presumably, the first time in his life. This passage reveals the connection Motes feels between sex, his Christian upbringing, and his penchant for self-punishment. When he was ten, his father had taken him to the carnival and ordered him to go to the monkey tent while he entered the most expensive tent, the most secluded tent, the tent where the voice barking from inside advertised that whatever was *inside* was “SINsational” and “EXclusive” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 56). Curious, young Motes talked the barker into letting him in. Inside, what he first thought was a skinned animal, was a naked woman lying down in a casket: “She was fat and she had a face like an ordinary woman except there was a mole on the corner of her lip, that moved when she grinned, and one on her side” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 58). When Motes recognized the voice of his father making some crude remark, he stole away and went back to his father’s truck.

When he returned home and his mother found him nervously hiding outside by a tree, she immediately knew that he had done something wrong, and she assumed that his misbehavior had particularly to do with something he had *seen*: “ ‘What you seen’? she said” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 58). She asked him the question three times, and he did not answer, so she whipped him with a switch, telling him, “Jesus died to redeem you,” to which young, ten year-old Motes finally replied, “I never ast him” (O’Connor *Wise Blood* 59). When she heard this,

She didn’t hit him again but she stood looking at him, shut mouthed, and he forgot the *guilt of the tent* for the *nameless unplaced guilt* that was in him. In a minute she threw the stick away from her and went back to the washpot, still shut-mouthed . . . The next day he took his shoes in secret out into the woods. He didn’t wear them except for revivals and in the winter. He took them out of the box and filled the bottoms of them with stones and small rocks and then he put them on and walked in them through the woods for what he knew to be a mile, until he came to a creek, and then he sat down and took them off and eased his feet in the wet sand. He thought, that ought to satisfy Him. Nothing happened. If a stone had fallen he would have taken it as a sign . . . and then he put the shoes on again with the rocks still in them and he walked a half-mile back before he took them off. (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 60, emphasis mine)

The distinction here between the “guilt of the tent” and his new, “nameless unplaced guilt” calls attention to the intrinsic innocence of the child as he becomes aware of some connection between the Redemption of Christ and the guilt he ought to feel for having satisfied his curiosity. Motes’ mother emphasizing the sin in his *seeing* shapes the

fundamental ideology that takes root and begins to fester in Motes' soul; it is this ideology which prompts him to blind himself. The passage where he saw the woman lying in the casket does not suggest that he felt sexually stirred or even understood that what he observed was necessarily associated with sin. As in many of O'Connor's other descriptions, what stands out most to the boy is the woman's physical grotesqueness, in this case her differentiation from an animal (rather than a man, which would have suggested a sexual association for the child). He notices *not* his arousal by her womanliness, but that "she was fat and had a face like an ordinary woman." He ran from the tent because he heard his father's voice; he had disobeyed his father's order to go somewhere else, and he did not want to be punished for his defiance. His mother transformed his sin of disobedience into a sin of something he did not understand; he sinned because of what he *saw*, which to the child, was simply a fat woman with moles on her body.

This passage depicts the commencement of a cycle of association for Motes. The manner in which the narrator articulates that the child never wore the particular shoes he chose—except for in the wintertime and church revivals—heavily implies that he had never engaged in such a ritualistic act of self-punishment before this moment, so it is significant that the narrator marks Motes' engaging in the sexual act with Mrs. Watts for the second night in a row with the disclosure of this particular event in his life. It shows *why*, upon arriving in Taulkinham to "do some things [he's] never done before" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 7), he chooses the home of the prostitute to begin his journey as an atheist. Furthermore, this scene foreshadows Motes' return to religion at the end of the novel, where he not only demonstrates his motivations through blinding himself and

putting stones in his shoes, but lives in the home of another woman, Mrs. Flood, who, this time, wants to marry him. Brian Ragen points out, “O’Connor managed to convey . . . the idea that her characters were coming into contact with the divine through the mediation of a grotesque—but sometimes divine—world of matter” (389). The mediation occurs in the scene from Motes’ childhood as he learns one of his first lessons of sin and penance and throughout the novel as he repeatedly chooses to engage in gross, almost crude acts of physicality until he finally experiences God’s mercy.

The narrative sets up an interesting juxtaposition between Mrs. Watts and Mrs. Flood: When Motes arrives at Mrs. Watts’ at the beginning of his journey, she tells him to “make [himself] at home” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 30), and at the end of the novel, when the police bring him to Mrs. Flood’s house already dead, she declares “Why Mr. Motes . . . I see you’ve come home” (O’Connor, *Wise Blood* 235). As suggested earlier in this paper, the irony of this juxtaposition emerges from *home* symbolizing several different things to Motes: First, he goes to Taulkinham because his home in Eastrod—where he grew up with his fanatical mother and preacher grandfather—was abandoned and looted. Home is also the place where he initially escaped from—in entering the service—to begin studying his soul and decided that it did not exist. At the end of the novel, home symbolizes his return to Christianity.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout *Wise Blood*, starting with the first paragraph, the persistently cynical character descriptions communicate the perspective of an individual not only uncomfortable with the images he confronts in his world, but disconnected from the internal source of these images. These sorts of reduced perceptions on the part of Hazel Motes contribute to the sense of isolation that O'Connor wants to invoke in the book. In response to her publisher's comment that he "sensed a kind of aloneness in the book," (Giroux, "Introduction" 10), O'Connor writes, "I feel that whatever virtues the novel may have are very much connected with the limitations you mention. I am not writing a conventional novel, and I think that the *quality* of the novel I write will derive precisely from the peculiarity or aloneness . . . of the experience I write from" (O'Connor qtd. in Giroux, "Introduction" x, emphasis mine). Indeed, it is this "quality" of the novel that makes it a satire; this quality also enables the narrative to provoke laughter when it otherwise may seem inappropriate.

Like Voltaire's *Candide*, O'Connor's first novel is essentially a philosophical tale that consistently utilizes dark humor to finally, ultimately, create a satire. The humorous moments in *Wise Blood*, as well as O'Connor's ample employment of the grotesque, establish the tale as a satire on the human quest for any sort of secular version of Truth. The novel calls attention to the dark drudgery of secular life and, like many of O'Connor's later short stories, depicts a world lacking sincere acknowledgement of

Christ as one not unlike Hell. As Jeremy Brown suggests in “The Grotesque in Poetry,” the grotesque imagery works effectively to highlight the difference between such a world and our own.

As I have mentioned, many critics have applauded O’Connor’s ability to integrate humor into her harshly critical view of the world, but few have recognized her distinctly as a satirist; for this reason, she has usually been regarded most widely within the Southern Gothic subgenre, along with Tennessee Williams, Eudora Welty, William Faulkner, Truman Capote, and Carson McCullers. While she has a great deal in common with most of these writers, particularly in her inclination to utilize irony, focus on Southern culture, and create grotesque stereotype characters, she consistently uses a distinct satirical narrative tone that sets her work apart from that of her cohorts and realigns her work with that of traditional satirists such as Swift, Voltaire, and Pope. O’Connor’s narrative voice is her sharpest tool; with it, she renders the grotesque world that typifies the Southern Gothic tradition and undercuts the rampant violence within the plot with the coolness of a sociopath grown numb from excessive exposure to the elements. One of her first works, *Wise Blood*, in this context, serves as an excellent introduction to the voice we have come to recognize distinctly as O’Connor’s.

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