

EVANGELICALISM AND EPIPHANIES OF GRACE
IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S SHORT FICTION

by

KARISSA A. EUBANKS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in English Literature
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in The Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term 2011

Thesis Chair: Dr. Kathryn Seidel

© 2011 Karissa A. Eubanks

ABSTRACT

The majority of critics interested in the religious elements of Flannery O'Connor's fiction argue that her texts illustrate her professed Catholic faith. For many of these scholars, the author's nonfiction figures predominately in their interpretations of her fiction. This thesis highlights the presence of Evangelical theology in O'Connor's short fiction by utilizing an approach that is underrepresented in scholarly examinations of her works: reading O'Connor's texts without considering the author's personal beliefs. Through this approach, the Evangelical dimensions of O'Connor's short stories become apparent. This thesis contends that each of the six short stories discussed exemplifies Evangelical theology as they emphasize the fallen nature of humanity, depict the action of grace as transformative, and suggest that willful cooperation is not necessary to salvation. By demonstrating that O'Connor's short fiction reproduces Evangelical theology, this thesis aims to provide scholars with a basis for reconsidering the relationship of her works to the literary tradition of the largely Protestant South.

DEDICATION

For my wonderful family

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Kathryn Seidel, Dr. Anna Lillios, and Dr. Joan Morris for their feedback and for their willingness to serve as committee members so that I could have this opportunity. I am especially grateful to my thesis chair, Dr. Seidel. Her consideration made this task delightful, her guidance was enlightening, and her insight proved invaluable throughout the process.

I would also like to thank Clare Malloy for first introducing me to Flannery O'Connor and for helping me develop this work. To my grandparents, I wish to express my deepest gratitude for their financial support, their advice, and their unfaltering willingness to listen. I am eternally grateful to my mother for continually putting my needs before her own and for always reminding me where my help comes from. I would also like to thank my brothers, T.J. and Josh, for their encouragement and their humorous reminders to not take myself too seriously. Finally, I want to thank my husband, Jason, for helping me every day in every possible way, from providing feedback on drafts to cooking dinner, and for never wavering in his faith in me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: O’CONNOR AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY	8
CHAPTER THREE: “A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND”	13
CHAPTER FOUR: “THE RIVER”	23
CHAPTER FIVE: “GOOD COUNTRY PEOPLE”	33
CHAPTER SIX: “THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST”	43
CHAPTER SEVEN: “REVELATION”	60
CHAPTER EIGHT: “PARKER’S BACK”	71
CONCLUSION.....	81
WORKS CITED	84

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A preacher who urges people to be baptized in Christ's blood, a juvenile delinquent who eats a page from the Bible, and a woman who beats sin out of her husband are just a few of the Evangelical characters who people Flannery O'Connor's short fiction. Such backwoods southern characters may be the object of the protagonists' derision, but they play a significant role in O'Connor's texts as, however fanatical, warped, or artificial their Evangelicalism is, they direct the protagonists toward spiritual salvation. Evangelicalism in O'Connor's short fiction is not simply represented in the form of grotesque characters, though. As this examination of six of O'Connor's stories will show, O'Connor's short fiction also reproduces Evangelical theology. First, however, it is necessary to discuss scholarly interpretations of O'Connor's work in order to understand the significance of conceiving of her texts as expressions of Evangelicalism.

The majority of existing scholarship on religion in O'Connor's fiction maintains that it reflects Catholic beliefs. Part of the reason for this widespread critical view is that many critics look to O'Connor for direction when attempting to analyze her fictional texts. In "Region, Idolatry, and Catholic Irony: Flannery O'Connor's Modest Literary Vision," Robert Jackson, for example, uses O'Connor's essay on being a Catholic writer to form and justify his textual analysis of "Parker's Back," arguing that "O'Connor's Catholic background provides a bit of insight into her narrative approach" and "a frame" for understanding idolatry in the story (29). Jackson offers a broad outline of O'Connor's Catholic faith in his article, but critics who incorporate O'Connor's nonfictional writings in their explications of her fiction generally focus on her opinions of specific Catholic doctrines. In "Flannery O'Connor and the Symbol," John

Desmond, for example, contends that O'Connor's belief in the literal transformation of the Eucharist into the body of Christ led her to create literary symbols that rely on the "literal . . . to reveal the essence of a thing or action" (148). The approaches of Jackson and Desmond are problematic because they effectively exclude interpretations that her texts invite but her professed faith does not endorse. As Roland Barthes's notes in his essay "The Death of the Author," "To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text" (315). Essentially, in basing their textual analysis on O'Connor's Catholic beliefs rather than on her fictional works, these critics must have concluded that O'Connor's fiction, like its author, is Catholic.

Another common approach to investigating religion in O'Connor's fiction uses books she read and annotated as guides for analyzing her works. In this approach, critics reference O'Connor's personal book collection to determine her religious influences and seek to locate these influences in her fiction. George Kilcourse's *Flannery O'Connor's Religious Imagination: A World with Everything Off Balance* is a particularly apt example of a work employing this approach as his entire book aims to illustrate how O'Connor's readings of contemporary Catholic theologians shaped her fiction. Kilcourse's approach is problematic because it necessarily involves several assumptions. In order for O'Connor's personal library to be relevant to his analysis of her fiction, Kilcourse must suppose that O'Connor's readings had a profound impact on her Catholic beliefs and that her fiction is a controlled expression of her Catholic faith. Additionally, Kilcourse's approach, like the approaches utilized by Jackson and Desmond, essentially compels him to label O'Connor's fiction Catholic as he bases his textual analysis on the author's personal faith.

While their approaches inevitably lead the majority of critics to link O'Connor's fiction to her Catholic faith, her texts do not clearly evidence this link, for, with the exception of three short stories, they do not contain overtly Catholic elements. Some critics attempt to overcome this problem by identifying subtle indications of O'Connor's Catholic faith in her fiction. Alan Babich, for instance, seeks to highlight similarities between her fiction and the ritual of Mass, noting that "like the Mass, every O'Connor narrative is a movement to epiphany" (58). John May also endeavors to explain how O'Connor subtly communicates her Catholic faith by examining her "literary analogues" of Catholicism's "principle theological foci of *sacramentality, mediation, and communion*" (212, 215). Primarily concerned with illuminating unobvious manifestations of Catholicism in O'Connor's fiction, Babich and May neglect what is clearly and overwhelmingly represented in her texts—Evangelicalism. Overlooking the Evangelical elements of O'Connor's fiction, such as Evangelical characters, greatly undermines these critics' arguments, for, without an explanation of how they fit into her Catholic vision, these elements remain a significant obstacle to considering O'Connor's fiction Catholic.

Of course, not all critics who argue that Catholicism informs O'Connor's fiction ignore her depiction of Evangelicalism. In *The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor*, Robert Brinkmeyer asserts that O'Connor's fiction reflects her Catholic vision, but he deals extensively with fundamentalism in arguing that O'Connor's texts exemplify a dialogic struggle between her Catholic and Protestant voices. Brinkmeyer's seminal work assigns greater authority to the Evangelical elements of O'Connor's fiction than more recent scholarship does; like more recent critics, however, he subordinates these Evangelical elements to O'Connor's Catholic vision,

which he ascertains in her nonfictional writings. More contemporary critics, such as Jessica Riedmueller, tend to reduce O'Connor's Evangelical elements to a vehicle for conveying her Catholic faith. Riedmueller maintains that O'Connor employs Evangelical characters to communicate her "Catholic voice" (30). Similarly, John Sykes contends that, in O'Connor's stories, the "faithful Protestant witness leads to the Roman way" (77). For Peter Smith, O'Connor's Protestant characters are devices that she uses to "satirize anti-Catholic sentiment" and the fundamentalist "doctrine of direct, unmediated communication with God" (34). Although they do evidence an awareness of Evangelicalism in O'Connor's texts, Riedmueller, Sykes, and Smith reduce O'Connor's Evangelical characters to an artistic device, and, in so doing, they fail to adequately grapple with the characters' textual significance, which is problematic since Evangelicals occupy a central place in O'Connor's fiction.

While the majority of critics consider O'Connor's fiction Catholic, a few do not. Timothy Caron, for instance, argues that it is Evangelical in his book *Struggles over the Word: Race and Religion in O'Connor, Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright*. Like those who maintain that Catholic theology determines the shape and subject of O'Connor's fiction, Caron quotes from O'Connor's nonfictional writings to establish her religious beliefs; significantly, however, he references only her declarations of sympathy for Evangelicals, ignoring her explanations of how Catholics and Evangelicals differ. Caron also fails to sufficiently engage theological differences as he cites basic similarities between the religious beliefs of O'Connor and Evangelicals. Unlike Caron, Joanne Halleran McMullen contends that O'Connor's fiction is Christian rather than Catholic. McMullen does not actually prove that O'Connor's texts are Christian, though; rather, she

focuses on why they should not be considered Catholic, claiming that the baptism in O'Connor's "The River" does not "comply with . . . Catholic baptismal doctrine and ceremony" (176).

The majority of critics who focus exclusively on grace in O'Connor's fiction assert that her texts reflect a Christian perspective; unlike McMullen, however, they generally do not concern themselves with theological differences. Doug Davis, for example, explores how O'Connor uses technology to lead her characters to grace, but he does not differentiate between Catholic and Protestant conceptions of it. Similarly, Mary Neff Shaw ignores theological distinctions in her examination of the responses of O'Connor's characters to their epiphanies. In "Flannery O'Connor's Art: A Gesture of Grace," Lila Meeks investigates the relationship between violence and Christian (not specifically Catholic or Protestant) grace in O'Connor's works. Although they do not offer insight into O'Connor's specific theological conception of grace, the works of these critics are useful for understanding her techniques for representing grace as they offer more detailed explanations of her techniques than the works of critics who are concerned with theological differences do. In "Grace in the Machine: Technology and Transfiguration in Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction," Davis, for instance, explores the relationship between grace and specific examples of "transfigurative technological imagery" in four of O'Connor's short stories (18). Kilcourse also discusses O'Connor's presentation of grace in his book *Flannery O'Connor's Religious Imagination: A World with Everything Off Balance*, but, unlike Davis, he does not examine the specific techniques she uses to communicate it. The scope of Kilcourse's work, of course, contributes to his rather superficial analysis of grace in O'Connor's fiction, for, in analyzing all of her stories and both of her novels, he cannot engage

all the particular devices she uses to depict the redemption of her characters; however, Kilcourse's focus on Catholic theology does more to restrict his analysis as it leads him to concentrate more on the Catholic nature of O'Connor's representation of grace than on her literary techniques.

Recent scholarship on the religious aspects of O'Connor's fiction is clearly dominated by critics who, allowing O'Connor's professed intentions to guide their textual analysis, maintain that it is informed by Catholic theology. This thesis will offer a counter-response to these critics as it will show that Evangelicalism is the predominant theology in O'Connor's short fiction. Furthermore, this thesis offers a fresh approach to O'Connor's stories since only her fictional texts, not her nonfiction or personal library, have been used to guide this textual analysis. In examining epiphanies in O'Connor's short stories, this thesis will build on criticism that discusses the specific techniques she employs to depict grace. It will also fill a gap in discourse on grace in O'Connor's fiction as it will relate her literary techniques for communicating grace to a specific theology.

The primary objective of this thesis is to help critics better understand the position of O'Connor's texts within the southern literary tradition. Conceiving of O'Connor's works as embodiments of her Catholic beliefs places them in a religious conflict with the largely Protestant South. Viewing her stories as religiously opposed to the Protestant South, in turn, can significantly affect how scholars understand her representation of Southerners. Thinking that O'Connor injects primarily Catholic beliefs into her texts, for example, can lead to the interpretation that the texts express disapproval of the Evangelical Southerners she often depicts.

In showing that Evangelical theology informs O'Connor's stories, this thesis will give scholars a basis for reconsidering the portrayal of Southerners in her texts and, consequently, the position of her texts within the southern literary tradition.

Scope and Methodology

Six of O'Connor's short stories were chosen for this thesis. In selecting which stories to use, the main criterion was that the story explicitly mentions religion; this criterion was used to ensure that the stories can be regarded as commenting on religion without consulting O'Connor's interpretations of them. The three stories that contain overtly Catholic elements—namely, priests or nuns—were not included in this thesis because this thesis is intended to provide insight into O'Connor's short fiction as a whole, and those three stories constitute a relatively minor portion of O'Connor's writing. Future research may seek to apply this thesis to the Catholic stories. Considering the formulaic nature of O'Connor's stories (discussed in the next chapter), these three stories would likely uphold Evangelical theology as the others do.

What follows is a discussion of Evangelical theology and how it is generally related to O'Connor's short fiction. The analyses of individual stories are ordered chronologically according to publication dates of her short story collections. This order was chosen in order to highlight how O'Connor's short fiction retains three major components throughout the author's career, even though some character types are reimagined and the typical plot sequence is somewhat altered in the later stories.

CHAPTER TWO: O'CONNOR AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

O'Connor's short stories are formulaic in nature as they generally consist of three main components: a protagonist who is clearly flawed, an epiphany, and at least one violent act. Each of these three elements is closely linked to an understanding of how O'Connor's short fiction embodies Evangelical theology. It should be noted that, in this thesis, Evangelicalism denotes a Christian theology that initially grew out of Protestantism. That is, Evangelicalism in the context of this thesis is not a dimension of a theology, such as evangelical Catholicism, but a denomination in its own right that is essentially synonymous with fundamentalism. O'Connor's short fiction, then, reproduces Evangelical doctrines in its emphasis on humanity's fallen state, its demonstration of the transformative power of grace, and its suggestion that individuals' willful cooperation is not necessary to their salvation.

Most of O'Connor's protagonists subscribe to a worldview that is divorced from spiritual concerns, and this worldview encourages their sinful natures. This depiction of the protagonists as individuals whose secular worldviews produce sinful behavior reflects Evangelicalism's emphasis on the fallenness of creation. Like other Christian denominations, Evangelicalism recognizes the inherent sinfulness of humanity, but it places especial emphasis on the vast separation between humanity and God. Evangelicals insist that, due to the Fall, individuals and the world they inhabit are corrupted by sin. This corruption, they maintain, produces a gulf between God and humanity that can only be overcome by an act of God's grace, which works to reconcile individuals with God. Roger E. Olson, author of *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, offers insight into Evangelicalism's emphasis on the utter corruption of

humanity due to the Fall. Olson notes that Evangelicals believe that, “[b]ecause of bondage to sin, human persons apart from supernatural empowering and regenerating grace cannot and will not exercise even the beginning of a good will toward God” (194). According to Evangelical theology, then, the inherent sinfulness of individuals separates them from God and renders them incapable of surmounting the chasm that divides them from God.

In O’Connor’s short fiction, the fallen protagonists usually experience an epiphany. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, an epiphany is a “term used in Christian theology for a manifestation of God’s presence in the world” (Baldick 84). James Joyce employed this term “to denote secular revelation in the everyday world” (Baldick 84). Critics of O’Connor’s work often regard her epiphanies as communicating insight into one’s self or the world. Robert Brinkmeyer, for example, frequently uses the terms “self-awareness” and “self-knowledge” in discussing O’Connor’s epiphanies (71, 96). In *Risen Sons: Flannery O’Connor’s Vision of History*, John Desmond conceives of O’Connor’s epiphanies as visions that contain a better understanding of one’s self and humanity. This thesis draws on both the literary definition of “epiphany” and the definitions constructed by critics of O’Connor’s texts. Specifically, this thesis will emphasize the revelatory nature of O’Connor’s epiphanies and the spiritual knowledge they provide the protagonists. Furthermore, this thesis posits O’Connor’s epiphanies as figurative representations of God’s conference of grace on an individual, for they offer the protagonists knowledge that is readily apparent before their epiphanic moments. The protagonists’ sudden awareness of truths that have been apparent throughout the story suggests that their epiphanies are acts of grace intended to enable them to perceive their sinful natures and

overcome their separation from God.

Understanding O'Connor's epiphanies as representations of the action of grace further illuminates the relationship between O'Connor's short fiction and Evangelicalism, for her epiphanies, in transforming the protagonists, uphold the Evangelical view of grace. Since humanity is inherently sinful and cannot overcome its vast separation from God without supernatural assistance, God, Evangelicals believe, must freely bestow grace on individuals and transform their natures in order to reconcile them with Himself. Evangelicalism insists that an individual can be "saved" only if "God's prevenient grace called, convicted, enlightened, and enabled him or her to receive Christ by faith" (Olson 194). The act of grace, in the Evangelical view, is therefore an act of enlightenment, an epiphanic moment in which an individual, due to God's grace, becomes capable of discerning the saving power of Christ. God's grace, according to Evangelicalism, not only makes salvation possible but also transforms the individual. In his seminal work *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Donald E. Bloesch, discussing salvation, observes, "In Evangelical Christianity the key word is *crisis*. The old man must die. He must be crucified and buried. He cannot evolve into the new" (2: 9). For Evangelicals, then grace does not reform an individual's nature; grace transforms it (Bloesch 2: 8).

O'Connor's epiphanies are often accompanied by violence. In his article "Violence and the Christian Mystery: A Way to Read Flannery O'Connor," critic John Desmond describes "the action of grace" in O'Connor's stories as a "wrenching" process, insisting that violence in the stories works "to wrench human beings out of their 'natural' existence and into the 'unnatural' world of Christian commitment" (131). Indeed, violence in O'Connor's short fiction tears the

protagonists away from their focus on earthly concerns, but violence does more than simply shock the protagonists into concentrating on spiritual matters. Accompanying epiphanies of grace, violence in O'Connor's stories suggests that salvation is an act that occurs unaided by an individual's will as its suddenness works to draw the protagonists into a state of grace before they have the opportunity to reject it. Violence is not explicitly connected to Evangelicalism, but it is implicitly linked to Evangelicalism as it does pervade the Bible. In the Old Testament, unbelievers and Israelites are punished for their disobedience. The New Testament, of course, features Christ's violent death as the means to salvation; it also includes many references to the need to subdue one's flesh in order to secure spiritual salvation (*Holy Bible*, Gal. 5:24-25, 2 Cor. 10:5). Since the Bible contains many examples of violence and the Bible occupies a central place in Evangelical theology, then, violence does inform Evangelicalism.

More explicit than the relationship between Evangelicalism and violence is the relationship between violence in O'Connor's stories and Evangelical doctrines concerning grace. In suggesting that salvation can occur without an individual's willful cooperation, violence in O'Connor's short fiction illustrates the Evangelical belief that grace is conferred without the assistance of an individual's will. Evangelicals uphold "the doctrine of *sola gratia*, salvation by grace alone," which "consequently entails *solus Christus*, salvation by the work of Christ alone" (Bloesch 2: 250). For Evangelicals, salvation is an action that occurs outside of the individual as it is an act that only God can initiate and perform (Bloesch 2: 250). Additionally, as Olson notes, "evangelical theology holds that God is sovereign in salvation; God chooses to save and initiates salvation" (168).

Although an O'Connor's story typically contains a fallen protagonist, an epiphany, and at least one violent act, her short fiction, of course, cannot be reduced to these three elements, for these elements often work together differently in individual stories. Additionally, as the following chapters will show, many of her stories reimagine her character types, such as the proud intellectual or the prejudicial country woman, and she frequently repurposes imagery and symbols that she employed in previous works. Even the placement of violence changes in her later works as, in those stories, it does not always simply follow the protagonists' epiphanies. Still, the Evangelical doctrines outlined in this chapter and their relationship to O'Connor's short fiction in general provides a basic framework for understanding Evangelicalism in her stories.

CHAPTER THREE: “A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND”

As one of O’Connor’s earliest works, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” is not explicit in its relationship to Evangelicalism. The grandmother’s secularism is subtly depicted, The Misfit’s Evangelicalism is hinted at, and the grandmother’s epiphany is implied rather than stated. Although O’Connor’s later works are more direct in their commentary on religion, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” like her other stories, upholds Evangelical theology as it emphasizes humanity’s fallen state, evidences the transformative power of grace, and suggests individuals’ willful cooperation is not necessary to their salvation.

The protagonist in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” the grandmother, represents a fallen individual as she defines goodness in worldly, rather than spiritual, terms. The grandmother conceives of good people as those who are polite and respectful of their heritage. One of the earliest examples of the grandmother’s definition of good occurs shortly after the family has begun traveling to Florida. While passing through Georgia, John Wesley expresses his desire that the family would ““go through Georgia fast so we don’t have to look at it much”” (119). The grandmother, disapproving of John Wesley’s remark, chastises him for talking about his ““native state that way,”” but her rebuke only intensifies John Wesley’s condemnation of the South; he promptly labels Georgia ““a lousy state”” and Tennessee ““a hillbilly dumping ground”” (119). In response to John Wesley’s disparaging remarks about Georgia and Tennessee, the grandmother notes that, during her childhood, ““children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else,”” adding that ““[p]eople did right then”” (119). Although the grandmother does not explicitly define respect for one’s heritage as a manifestation of goodness,

in commenting on respect and goodness simultaneously, she indicates that she believes the two concepts are related.

In addition to respect for one's heritage, politeness, in the grandmother's view, signifies goodness. The grandmother's esteem for politeness is implicit in her aforementioned conversation with John Wesley as, in upbraiding him for talking about his "native state that way," the grandmother suggests that she disapproves not only of John Wesley's view of Georgia but also of his rude manner of expressing that view (119). The grandmother's regard for politeness is again evidenced when family stops at Red Sammy Butts's restaurant The Tower. When Red Sam's wife asks June Star if she would like to be her daughter, June Star bluntly replies that she "wouldn't live in a broken-down place like this for a million bucks!" (121). The grandmother, clearly angered by June Star's untactful response, "hissed," asking June Star, "Aren't you ashamed?" (121). The grandmother clearly disapproves of June Star's impoliteness, but she does not simply view politeness as commendable behavior. As her conversation with Red Sam indicates, the grandmother equates politeness with goodness. Immediately after June Star exclaims that she would never live in The Tower, Red Sam enters the restaurant, lamenting that people are no longer trustworthy. The grandmother, in response, asserts that "[p]eople are certainly not nice like they used to be" (122). Juxtaposed against Red Sam's comments on the impossibility of trusting people in modern society, the grandmother's response seems inappropriate. Rather than agree that people are no longer honest or willing to treat others fairly, the grandmother notes that people are no longer "nice," a word that denotes politeness or agreeableness. Politeness and internal virtue, then, are the same to the grandmother.

Politeness and respect for one's heritage, both of which the grandmother associates with goodness, are based on secular constructions; politeness is defined according to socially acceptable discourse and behavior, and heritage is defined according to social groups. Since the grandmother's conception of goodness stems from these social constructions, her definition of goodness is grounded in secularism. The disparity between what the grandmother views as good (politeness and respect for one's heritage) and what Christianity defines as good (love, selflessness, etc.) reflects the vast separation between her and God, a separation that is further broadened by her definition of goodness, which encourages her unchristian behavior. The grandmother's pursuit of an ideal past that upheld her definition of goodness especially fosters her sinfulness. When the grandmother praises politeness or respectfulness, she continually links these qualities to a specific time period—her youth. The grandmother, for instance, begins reprimanding John Wesley for his disparaging comments about Georgia with the phrase “[i]n my time” (119). The earliest example of how the grandmother's “easy sentimentality” encourages her selfishness occurs in the beginning of the story when she attempts to convince Bailey to travel to Tennessee rather than Florida (Brinkmeyer 161). The grandmother, as the narrator points out, wants to go to Tennessee in order “to visit some of her connections,” but the grandmother's desire to vacation in Tennessee does not simply reflect a wish to see her “connections” (117). The frequent allusions to Tennessee throughout the story, including the grandmother's remark that “Tennessee has the mountains,” her remembrance of the plantation in Tennessee, and the playing of “The Tennessee Waltz” at The Tower, suggest that the state is significantly connected with the grandmother's past (119). The grandmother's desire to visit

Tennessee, then, stems not only from a longing to see familiar faces but also from her wish to reconnect with her past, and this yearning to return to an idealized past, with its polite and respectful people, provokes the grandmother's manipulative behavior. In attempting to convince Bailey to vacation in Tennessee, she attempts to make him feel guilty about traveling to Florida since The Misfit is traveling in the same direction: "I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that loose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did" (117). The grandmother's assaults on Bailey's conscience are unsuccessful, however, as he completely ignores her, not even troubling himself to "look up from his reading" (117).

Although the grandmother fails to persuade Bailey to vacation in Tennessee, she does succeed in forcing him to visit a plantation. After leaving The Tower, the grandmother sees a road that she believes leads to a plantation she visited "once when she was a young lady" (123). The plantation's significance is twofold—to many sentimental Southerners, it represents the South at the height of its glory, before it was devastated by the Civil War, and, to the grandmother specifically, it is linked to her youth. Obsessed with a connection to an idealized past, the grandmother again evidences no concern for any one's desire but her own: "She knew that Bailey would not be willing to lose any time looking at an old house, but the more she talked about it, the more she wanted to see it once again . . ." (123). The grandmother, knowing that Bailey would reject her suggestion to visit the plantation, manipulates her grandchildren, "craftily" telling them that the plantation contains silver concealed behind a secret panel (123). John Wesley and June Star, of course, become immensely intrigued by the prospect of finding hidden treasure, and they obnoxiously demand to see the plantation, aggravating their parents

until Bailey agrees to drive by it.

The grandmother, with her secular definition of goodness and consequential self-centered behavior, is clearly an example of the fallen individual who is vastly separated from God. As “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” illustrates, however, the grandmother is not beyond the possibility of redemption. Indeed, the grandmother does experience the transformative power of grace, but only after she meets The Misfit. The Misfit embodies an ironic reversal of the grandmother’s beliefs, and, significantly, as his stint as a gospel singer and his very literal interpretation of Christ’s resurrecting powers suggest, he comes from an Evangelical background. Additionally, as Robert Brinmeyer notes, The Misfit “possesses a burning awareness of the fundamentalist imperative to commit oneself for or against Christ” (33). The Misfit insists that the meaning of life depends on whether Christ was truly resurrected:

“If He did what He said, then it’s nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn’t, then it’s nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness. . . .” (132)

The irony of The Misfit’s character lies in the fact that he conforms to the grandmother’s definition of goodness, yet he is a serial killer, an “agent of evil,” not a good man (Desmond, “Flannery O’Connor’s Misfit” 129). The Misfit, for example, adheres to the grandmother’s notion of good since he respects his parents; he labels them “the finest people in the world” and proclaims that “God never made a finer woman than my mother and my daddy’s heart was pure

gold'" (127). In addition to his admiration for his parents, The Misfit's exemplary politeness renders him the epitome of goodness, according to the grandmother's conception of it. The Misfit continually expresses himself using polite language, addressing the grandmother as "mam'" (sic), and he evidences a sense of decorum when he apologizes for not wearing "a shirt before you ladies'" (127, 129).

Confronted by The Misfit, who should be good but, in reality, is a murderer, the grandmother faces a challenge to her conception of good, a challenge that ultimately exposes the erroneous of this conception and leads to her transformative epiphany. The grandmother, upon first meeting The Misfit, seeks to save her own life by appealing to The Misfit's sense of politeness and his respect for heritage. Ignoring the threat to the lives of her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren, the grandmother tries to save her own life by encouraging The Misfit to consider the propriety of his actions: "You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?" (127). Additionally, she attempts to awaken in him a sense of morality by referring to his family, claiming that she is confident he is "a good man'" because he does not "look a bit like you have common blood'" (127). Such early endeavors to save herself are unsuccessful, however, and the grandmother is obliged to try to appeal to The Misfit in a different manner as he constantly rejects her assertions. After the grandmother again insists that he is a good man, The Misfit openly admits that he is not, prompting the grandmother to find another means to save her life. Moving away from politeness and heritage, the grandmother stresses that The Misfit can become a good man "if you'd only try,'" and, when The Misfit completely ignores that appeal, she emphasizes faith in Christ, urging The Misfit to pray and insisting that "Jesus would help

you” (129, 130). The fact that the grandmother ceases to appeal to The Misfit’s goodness by stressing politeness and heritage suggests that she is aware that her conception of good is erroneous, although her awareness might be limited to a simple realization that The Misfit’s politeness and respect for his parents will not prevent him from murdering her.

Regardless of the extent to which the grandmother understands the falseness of her beliefs, she fails to comprehend the significance of being mistaken in assuming that politeness and respect for one’s heritage indicate goodness. Her appeals to The Misfit to seek out Christ, for example, do not evidence her awareness that Christ is the source of goodness. Rather, as Frederick Asals argues, “the grandmother self-servingly introduces religion into the dialogue” (146). Her appeals to Christ are simply another means of trying to persuade The Misfit to spare her life as she interchanges her references to Christ with comments she believes would calm The Misfit, such as ““Maybe they put you in [prison] by mistake”” or ““Maybe He [Christ] didn’t raise the dead”” (130, 132). Additionally, many of her attempts to persuade The Misfit to seek out Christ are but half-formed ideas, such as her simple reiterations “[p]ray, pray” and “Jesus, Jesus” (130, 131).

The grandmother’s failure to recognize Christ as the source of human goodness is corrected by her epiphany, which reveals goodness as a gift from Christ. Until her epiphany, all of the grandmother’s attempts to convince The Misfit of his goodness or his potential for it are grounded in the idea that goodness can be achieved through human means. For example, the grandmother’s question ““You wouldn’t shoot a lady, would you?”” insinuates that The Misfit could be a good man if he would consider the propriety of shooting a lady (127). Similarly, the

grandmother's insistence that The Misfit is "a good man" because he does not "look a bit like you have common blood" suggests that goodness can be achieved through human means, in this case, a person's origins (127). Even when she implores The Misfit to appeal to Christ, the grandmother implies that human will is necessary to goodness as she assigns Christ a secondary position to The Misfit's reformation, telling him, "Jesus would *help you*" (130; emphasis added). The grandmother's epiphany, however, corrects her notion of goodness by allowing her to understand it as an unmerited gift from Christ. In the moment of her epiphany, with her dizziness dissipated and "head cleared for an instant," the grandmother says to The Misfit, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" (132). Although the narrator does not provide a description of precisely what the grandmother realizes, the grandmother's statement suggests that she becomes Christ-like as she forgets about The Misfit's history as a serial killer and lovingly embraces him as her own child. Essentially, the grandmother's statement evidences her realization that human beings cannot achieve goodness through human means but can only receive it as an unmerited gift.

Although the grandmother's manipulative selfishness is manifested throughout the story, she apparently does not recognize that her own behavior undermines her definition of goodness. The suddenness of her realization that goodness is an undeserved gift from God suggests that her epiphany is an act of grace intended to enable her to perceive the falseness of her beliefs before her death. Additionally, as Desmond notes, "O'Connor explains nothing of what happens in the grandmother's mind and heart to bring her to this touch of kinship with the criminal, except to say that 'her head cleared for an instant'" ("Flannery O'Connor's Misfit" 134). Such a "gap"

between her judgment and acceptance of The Misfit further suggests that her epiphany is an act of grace (Desmond, "Flannery O'Connor's Misfit" 134). As an act of grace, the grandmother's epiphany transforms her nature. The grandmother, as George Kilcourse points out, "is no longer the controlling and manipulative woman whose religion has evaporated into social prestige and self-righteous judgment of others" (133). No longer concerned with saving her life, the grandmother, after her epiphany, selflessly and daringly accepts The Misfit as she reaches out to him and touches his shoulder.

The grandmother's salvation, evidenced by her transformation from a selfish person to a selfless one occurs unaided by her will. Of course, the grace she experiences comes upon her suddenly, without her deliberate pursuit of it, but the state of grace she enters upon experiencing her epiphany is also solidified without her willful cooperation. Immediately after the grandmother's loving gesture to him, "The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times in the chest" (132). The grandmother's violent death essentially prevents her from having the option to reject salvation; she does not have the opportunity to revert to her selfish, manipulative self and attempt to convince The Misfit that he is a good man. Indeed, as the description of her childlike posture and "her face smiling up at the cloudless sky" indicate, the grandmother's death effectively solidifies the salvation she has received.

"A Good Man Is Hard to Find" introduces several character types found in O'Connor's later work. As will be discussed later, the grandmother resembles the prejudicial Mrs. Turpin of "Revelation," although Mrs. Turpin's definition of goodness is more explicitly defined in terms of race and class. Additionally, the evil Evangelical, represented by The Misfit, reappears in the

figure of Rufus Johnson in “The Lame Shall Enter First.” Rufus, however, enjoys a more prominent role than The Misfit. “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” also touches on the parent-child relationship, a relationship that figures predominately in many of O’Connor’s stories, including the story that will be discussed next—“The River.”

CHAPTER FOUR: “THE RIVER”

Like the grandmother’s transformation in “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” the rebirth of the protagonist in “The River,” Harry/Bevel, is communicated subtly. O’Connor’s nuanced depiction of Harry/Bevel’s transformation stems in part from the fact that he is a child and, as such, not always allowed to behave according to his own will. Indeed, an examination of the religious dimensions of “The River” is in general complicated by the fact that the protagonist is a child rather than an adult like the intellectual Sheppard in “The Lame Shall Enter First,” who is clearly more inclined to follow the dictates of reason than a childish whim. Although “The River” is not the only one of O’Connor’s stories that raises the question of whether a child can fully comprehend the implications of accepting Christ, its child protagonist brings this question to the forefront of her texts. The child protagonist, however, does not diminish the story’s manifestation of Evangelical doctrines. Like O’Connor’s other stories, “The River” reproduces Evangelical theology as it emphasizes humanity’s fallen state, evidences the transformative power of grace, and suggests individuals’ willful cooperation is not necessary to their salvation.

As a young child, Harry/Bevel is incapable of formulating his own worldview; rather, adults, primarily his parents, determine how he views life. Consequently, it is first necessary to examine the lifestyle of Harry/Bevel’s parents in order to understand how “The River” highlights humanity’s vast separation from God. O’Connor’s portrayal of Harry/Bevel’s parents is saturated with lifeless imagery. Their apartment, for instance, is constantly described as “dark” (171). Even during the day, “[t]he sun came in palely, stained gray by the glass” of the window (171). Additionally, their apartment smells of stale smoke as it is littered with ashtrays filled with

“*dead cigarette butts*” (157; emphasis added). Even the food in the apartment lacks life-nourishing characteristics. In addition to crackers and an open bottle of ginger ale, unnutritious leftovers from a party the night before, Harry/Bevel finds “some shriveled vegetables” and “brown oranges” in the refrigerator (171). In stark contrast to the depiction of the lifeless imagery associated with Harry/Bevel’s parents, the imagery associated with the preacher Bevel Summers is suggestive of life; birds fly in the sky above Summers’s head, and “pieces of the white sun [are] scattered in the river” (168). Even the preacher’s voice, “soft and musical,” contains more liveliness than the “toneless voice” of Harry/Bevel’s mother (165, 158). The contrast between the lifeless imagery associated with Harry/Bevel’s parents and the bright, lively imagery associated with Summers clearly indicates the vast separation between God and humanity: Harry/Bevel’s parents, obsessed with secular pleasure and critical of religion, are dead in sin, while Summers, committed to spreading the Gospel, is alive in Christ.

The fallen nature of humanity indicated by the lifeless imagery associated with Harry Bevel’s parents is further emphasized through the effect that the lifestyle of the child’s parents has on him. With parents who value temporary secular pleasure and condemn religion, Harry/Bevel lacks a sense of purpose. He constantly “wandered around” the apartment looking for some entertainment while his parents, “out cold,” attempt to sleep off the effects of partying the night before (171). The influence of the parents’ lifestyle on Harry/Bevel can also be detected in his unassertive personality. Accustomed to being left alone or with a babysitter, Harry/Bevel moves passively through his life. The narrator describes Harry/Bevel as “mute and patient, like an old sheep” (158). Additionally, he is often depicted as silent and drowsy, and when Mrs.

Connin arrives to pick him up, he is “glum and limp,” waiting to be “pushed . . . forward” by his father (157). Harry/Bevel also passively obeys Mrs. Connin’s boys, who want to throw him into the hog pen, even though he associates them with “some strange boys” who had beat him once (161). Essentially, due to his parents’ inability to provide him with meaning, Harry/Bevel simply wanders about, blindly following the directions of others. Harry/Bevel’s lost state can certainly be regarded literally since he often wanders aimlessly, but it also can be interpreted figuratively as he is “lost” in the Christian sense. Unlike some of O’Connor’s adult protagonists, though, Harry/Bevel is lost not because he rejects Christian beliefs but because he has no knowledge of Christ. Indeed, until Mrs. Connin talks to him about Christ, Harry/Bevel “would have thought Jesus Christ was a word like ‘oh’ or ‘damn’ or ‘God’” (163).

Although Mrs. Connin introduces Harry/Bevel to Christ, Summers is the one who ultimately provokes the child’s epiphany. An Evangelical preacher who travels “‘all up and down this river’” evangelizing and healing people, Summers offers a message that is directly opposed to the worldview of Harry/Bevel’s parents (166). Summers, unlike the child’s parents, who value secular pleasure, advocates suffering, suggesting that it is a necessary part of the Christian’s journey to “‘the Kingdom of Christ’” (165). Certainly, Summers’s message involves a vision of relief from sorrow as he tells “‘people with trouble’” to “‘lay it in that River of Blood, . . . that River of Pain, and watch it move away toward the Kingdom of Christ’” (165). Summers, however, stresses that “‘the rich red river of Jesus’ Blood’” does not render life completely pain-free (165): “‘If it’s this River of Life you want to lay your pain in, then . . . lay your sorrow here. But don’t be thinking this is the last of it because this old red river don’t end here. This old red

suffering stream goes on, you people, slow to the Kingdom of Christ” (166).

If Summers’s message to the general crowd proposes a worldview that opposes that of Harry/Bevel’s parents, his particular interaction with the child further works to contradict the beliefs of the child’s parents as the preacher offers Harry/Bevel meaning in accepting Christ. While Harry/Bevel’s parents provide him with “some shriveled vegetables” and “brown oranges,” Summers offers life-giving spiritual food in the form of a symbolic Eucharist—“the rich red river of Jesus’ Blood” (171, 165). Additionally, Summers implies that Harry/Bevel, having not accepted Christ and been baptized, is insignificant, telling the child that, if he is baptized, he will “count,” he will matter in “the Kingdom of Christ” (168).

Much scholarly debate surrounds Harry/Bevel’s baptism as many critics disagree about whether it reflects a specific Christian doctrine. G. Lee Ramsey, for example, insists that, “[t]hough typically Protestant in his call to conversion, Summer’s [sic] stress upon baptism as removing original sin is deeply Catholic” (30-31). George Kilcourse likewise views Harry/Bevel’s baptism as Catholic, claiming that “baptism is clearly the antidote to original sin in O’Connor’s imagination” (137). Although Ramsey and Kilcourse concentrate on the relationship between original sin and baptism, Summers does not suggest such a relationship in his baptism of Harry/Bevel. Summers focuses on the child’s commitment to Christ, not his sinful nature, as he tells Harry/Bevel that being baptized will allow him “to go to the Kingdom of Christ” and subsequently asks the boy, “Do you want that?” (168). Additionally, as critic Joanne Halleran McMullen notes, Harry/Bevel’s baptism cannot be considered Catholic because it is “performed as an immersion in a river (not traditionally Catholic in the 1950s and 1960s)”

(181). Unlike Ramsey and Kilcourse, McMullen views Harry/Bevel's baptism as Christian. Her essay "Christian but Not Catholic: Baptism in Flannery O'Connor's 'The River'" seeks to prove that the child's baptism is Christian by illuminating how it does not conform to the definition of baptism upheld by the Catholic Church during O'Connor's lifetime. McMullen's argument against considering Harry/Bevel's baptism Catholic is sound, but, in focusing solely on why it is not Catholic, she fails to thoroughly examine the Evangelical elements of the child's baptism. In addition to its dependence on Harry/Bevel's desire to be saved, the presentation of the baptism as a symbolic, not grace-bestowing, act suggests that the boy's baptism reflects Evangelical theology. As Roger E. Olson observes, "virtually all evangelicals agree that baptism . . . does not convey grace *ex opere operato* (by virtue of the act itself)" (153). Certainly, Harry/Bevel's baptism upholds this Evangelical belief as Summers stresses the fact that the river itself has no power. Differentiating between "the River of Life, made out of Jesus' Blood" and the literal river in which he stands, Summers insists that "[t]his old red river is good to Baptize in, good to lay your faith in, good to lay your pain in, but it ain't this muddy water here that saves you" (165, 166). The actual river, Summers suggests, is a helpful means of understanding symbolic acts, but it does not literally confer grace, which, he preaches, can only be found in "the rich red river of Jesus' Blood" (165). Clearly, Harry/Bevel's baptism is distinctly Evangelical: an Evangelical preacher, standing in a river in the woods, asks the boy if he wants "to go to the Kingdom of Christ," and, upon receiving Harry/Bevel's affirmative reply, he immerses the child in the river as a symbolic representation of Harry/Bevel's desire to accept Christ (168).

While Harry/Bevel does admit that he wants "to go to the Kingdom of Christ," he does

not fully grasp the significance of his baptism; he thinks that being baptized means that he will “go under the river” and not have to “go back to the apartment” (168). Only later, in the moment of his epiphany, does he come closer to comprehending the true significance of his baptism. Critic Ralph C. Wood addresses the problematic issue of the young Harry/Bevel’s ability to understand the significance of accepting Christ in his essay “The Scandalous Baptism of Harry Ashfield: Flannery O’Connor’s ‘The River.’” Wood notes that “[e]ven a small child—especially a small child—can detect whether he really matters to his mother and father” (199). Certainly, like Norton, a child in “The Lame Shall Enter First” who is frequently ignored by his father, Harry/Bevel must have a sense of his parents’ neglectfulness. Wood links Harry/Bevel’s understanding of his parents’ neglect to the child’s understanding of the meaning that accepting Christ provides: “In his own childish way, therefore, Harry desires to have real significance, to be *somebody* . . . He wants to *count*, not just momentarily but absolutely and permanently” (199). Certainly, as Wood suggests, Harry/Bevel may not fully comprehend the significance of his baptism, but he does understand, albeit in rudimentary terms, that the Kingdom of God, not his parents or their lifestyle, can satisfy a deep desire. Significantly, Harry/Bevel experiences his epiphany during the clearest depiction of his parents’ neglectfulness. Left to himself because his parents are sleeping off the effects of the party they hosted the night before, Harry/Bevel spends his morning eating whatever he can find that is not rotten and trying to entertain himself, knocking over ashtrays and “rubbing the ashes carefully into the rug” (172). In this state of boredom, as he is “studying his feet,” he realizes that the river, not anything in the apartment, can satisfy him: “Very slowly, his expression changed as if he were gradually seeing what he

didn't know he'd been looking for. Then all of a sudden he knew what he wanted to do" (172). Harry/Bevel's epiphany, like the epiphanies of many of O'Connor's protagonists, is ultimately provoked by his encounter with an Evangelical. As with the epiphanies of O'Connor's other protagonists, however, Harry/Bevel's epiphany is not the direct result of his encounter with an Evangelical. Summers's sermon at the river does not reveal to the child that his life lacks the meaning only Christ can provide. Rather, Harry/Bevel's epiphany is an act of God's grace as he suddenly realizes that he desires meaning, "what he didn't know he'd been looking for," and that the Kingdom of God can provide him with it (172).

In addition to being provoked by an Evangelical, Harry/Bevel's epiphany resembles those of O'Connor's other protagonists in that it demonstrates the transformative power of grace. Harry/Bevel, as discussed earlier, is unassertive before his epiphany; he constantly wanders around and passively obeys everyone. After his epiphany, however, the born again Harry/Bevel manifests a sense of purpose. Walking toward the river, he twice fails to see Mr. Paradise because he is completely absorbed with reaching the river. The post-epiphany Harry/Bevel is also assertive as, after his epiphany, he displays a willingness to fight for the first time in story. Intending to go under the river and "to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ," Harry/Bevel forcefully immerses himself in the water and "pushed forward" (173). He does not cease in his attempt to drown himself even when "[t]he river wouldn't have him"; rather, he again tries to force himself under the river (173). Finally, angered by the river's rejection, Harry/Bevel "began to hit and splash and kick the filthy river" (173).

Although he is willing to fight to reach the Kingdom of God, Harry/Bevel's willful

cooperation is not necessary to his salvation. Significantly, Harry/Bevel's first three attempts to stay under the river fail as each time he tries to immerse himself the river forces him above the surface. The river's denial of Harry/Bevel three times recalls Simon Peter's denial of Christ, yet the similarities between Harry/Bevel and Simon Peter extend beyond their involvement in denial that occurs three times. Like Simon Peter, called by Christ to abandon his family and become a disciple, Harry/Bevel is called by Summers to essentially leave his family and follow "the River of Life, made out of Jesus' Blood" all the way "to the Kingdom of Christ" (165, 166).

Additionally, both Simon Peter and Harry/Bevel exhibit enthusiasm and a lack of understanding. Immediately before Christ predicts Simon Peter's denial, Christ tells him, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now" (John 13:36). Simon Peter responds by asking Christ why he cannot follow, but, without waiting for an answer, he hastily adds that he "will lay down my life for thy sake" (John 13:37). Like Simon Peter, Harry/Bevel is enthusiastic in his quest for the Kingdom of God; in readying himself to go under the river, he "bounded into it with his shoes and his coat on and took a gulp" (173). Harry/Bevel, however, does not understand that in staying under the river "until he found the Kingdom of Christ," he will die (173).

The similarities between Harry/Bevel and Simon Peter are helpful for understanding how Harry/Bevel's violent death illustrates that his willful cooperation is not necessary to his salvation. Before predicting Simon Peter's denial, Christ tells him, "Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not . . ." (Luke 22:31-32). Similarly, Harry/Bevel, immediately before the river's denial, is pursued by the Satan figure in the story, Mr. Paradise. Mr. Paradise, who "always comes [to the

healing] to show he ain't been healed,'" resembles one of Mrs. Connin's ugly hogs, which are associated in the story with devils (162). Harry/Bevel, for his part, cannot even distinguish between devils and hogs. He thinks that the picture depicting the story of Christ driving devils out of a man and into a crowd of pigs shows "the carpenter driving a crowd of pigs out of a man" (163). When Mr. Paradise sees Harry/Bevel walking toward the river, he decides to go after the child, taking "a peppermint stick, a foot long and two inches thick" to entice the young Harry/Bevel (173). The peppermint stick is clearly a false food, a food that seems more appealing than rotting food in the child's home but is just as unnutritious as his parents' food; it certainly does not possess the life-giving powers of the symbolic Eucharist Summers offers. Critics of "The River" also generally regard the peppermint stick as an indication of Mr. Paradise's intention to sexually abuse Harry/Bevel (Kilcourse 138; Wood 201). When Mr. Paradise pursues Harry/Bevel, then, he pursues the child with the intention to harm him, just as Satan desires to harm Simon Peter. Harry/Bevel, however, does not see Mr. Paradise coming after him until immediately before he drowns: ". . . he turned his head and saw something like a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting" (174). In an act of faith, Harry/Bevel, who moments before considered that the Kingdom of God might be "just another joke," tries again to immerse himself and stay under the river (173). This time, Harry/Bevel succeeds in staying under the water, not because he wills it but because "the waiting current," like Christ's prayer for Simon Peter, intercedes and "like a long gentle hand . . . pulled him forward swiftly and down" (174). Essentially, despite his enthusiastic willingness, Harry/Bevel drowns only because he is mercifully pulled under and thereby saved not only from

the immediate danger of Mr. Paradise but also from neglectful parents and a life without meaning. The violence of his death effectually prevents his return to his pre-epiphany self and preserves his state of grace that is devoid of “fury and fear” (174).

With its depiction of Harry/Bevel’s merciful but fatal deliverance from a sexual predator and a life without meaning, “The River” provides perhaps the clearest example of how violence in O’Connor’s stories works to suggest that individuals’ willful cooperation is not necessary to their salvation. The child suffering from neglect is a figure that will reappear in “The Lame Shall Enter First.” Like Harry/Bevel, Norton in “The Lame Shall Enter First” is driven by his parent’s neglect to commit suicide in an attempt to find meaning. As the deaths of Norton, Harry/Bevel, and the grandmother show, many of O’Connor’s protagonists die after experiencing their epiphanies. Not all of O’Connor’s protagonists die, however. Only those who are physically whole, those whose flesh must be subdued in order to receive spiritual salvation, suffer death; those who are physically deformed, such as Joy/Hulga, who will be discussed in the next chapter, need only receive an epiphany.

CHAPTER FIVE: “GOOD COUNTRY PEOPLE”

“Good Country People” treats several issues that are addressed in many of O’Connor’s other short stories. The pivotal role of the Evangelical in the protagonist’s salvation, evidenced clearly in “The River,” for example, is further commented on in “Good Country People,” which suggests that even false Evangelicalism, like that of Manley Pointer, can function as a catalyst for an individual’s awareness of God’s grace. Additionally, “Good Country People” attends to the question of whether an individual can reject God, a question that, as will be discussed later, is also addressed in “The Lame Shall Enter First.” In treating such recurring issues, “Good Country People,” like O’Connor’s other short stories, reflects Evangelical theology as it emphasizes humanity’s fallen state, evidences the transformative power of grace, and suggests individuals’ willful cooperation is not necessary to their salvation.

In “Good Country People,” the characterization of Joy/Hulga illustrates Evangelicalism’s emphasis on the vast separation between humanity and God. One of O’Connor’s intellectual characters, Joy/Hulga has a Ph.D. in philosophy. Having left her mother and their country home to attend a university, Joy/Hulga has experienced enough of the world to cultivate a disdain for “these red hills and good country people,” people she “would be far from” if her heart condition did not make living with her mother necessary (276). Critics of O’Connor’s work frequently label Joy/Hulga a nihilist (Brinkmeyer 145; Kilcourse 185). Indeed, considering her formal education in philosophy, Joy/Hulga must have been introduced to nihilism while attending a university, and she often echoes nihilistic philosophy in her conversations with others. She proudly declares to the Bible salesman Manley Pointer, for example, “I don’t have illusions. I’m

one of those people who see *through* to nothing” (287). The influence of nihilism on Joy/Hulga’s worldview is also evidenced by a passage she underlined in one of her books, a passage her mother thinks is “like some evil incantation in gibberish”: “. . . science wishes to know nothing of nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing” (277). The fallen Joy/Hulga does not simply reject God’s existence and espouse nihilism, however; she elevates nihilism to the position of a religion, using it to replace Christianity. Joy/Hulga, for example, employs the language of Christianity when she attempts to explain her nihilistic views to Pointer, telling him, ““In my economy, . . . I’m saved and you are damned”” (286). Additionally, she substitutes being able to ““see that there’s nothing to see”” for Christ as she tells Pointer that ““[i]t’s kind of a salvation”” (288).

As a replacement for Christian faith, Joy/Hulga’s faith in the saving power of nihilism encourages her rudeness and pride, characteristics that are opposed to Christian love and humility. Joy/Hulga is described as having “the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it” (273). Her blindness, understood as a spiritual blindness, suggests that, in embracing nihilism, she willfully prevents herself from recognizing Christian truth. Blinded but thinking that she is the only one who can see the world for what it is, nothing, Joy/Hulga is filled with “constant outrage” (273), which, as critic George Kilcourse points out, is directed at her mother Mrs. Hopewell and her “stream of clichés” (180). During almost every meal, Joy/Hulga is subjected to mindless conversation as her mother states a cliché, such as ““[i]t takes all kinds to make the world,”” and Mrs. Freeman responds by agreeing with her (273).

Considering her extensive education, Joy/Hulga's constant irritation with her mother clearly stems from the fact that, unlike the intellectual Joy/Hulga, Mrs. Hopewell seems incapable of formulating a complex worldview that cannot be captured in a simple saying. Joy/Hugla's anger, though often contained, sometimes erupts in the form of condescending rudeness. During one meal, for instance, Joy/Hulga, "standing up . . . with her face purple and her mouth half full," rebukes her mother for her simplemindedness: "'Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*? God!'" (276). Joy/Hulga's prideful nature, manifested clearly in her self-satisfied outburst, is also evidenced by her plan to seduce Pointer. Believing Pointer to be a simple country boy, she plans to engage him in "dialogues . . . that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths no Bible salesman would be aware of" (283). Her seduction of Pointer, she believes, will also afford her the opportunity of taking "all his shame away" by transforming "it into a deeper understanding of life" (284). Joy/Hulga's vision of her triumph is not simply a vision of humiliating a country boy, however. As critic Robert Brinkmeyer, notes, Joy/Hulga "perceives herself as the potential savior of those about her" (146). In her seduction scheme, then, Joy/Hulga imagines herself as a secular redeemer as she plans to save Pointer by exposing Christian beliefs as false and providing him with a new truth, "a deeper understanding of life," a nihilistic worldview (284).

Joy/Hulga's perception of Pointer as a simpleminded Christian is, of course, based on the identity he creates for himself. Pointer himself claims that he is "'real simple,'" and his occupation as a Bible salesman necessarily leads to the conclusion that he is a Christian (278). Although, unlike Bevel Summers, Pointer is not clearly an Evangelical, his preoccupation with

the Bible reflects Evangelical theology. Certainly, Pointer is an Evangelical in the strictest sense as he literally travels around spreading the Word of God, albeit for financial gain. Pointer, however, also resembles an Evangelical because the Bible, according to the story he tells about himself, occupies a central place in his life. Pointer tells Mrs. Hopewell that, as a child, his mother “had always seen that her children went to Sunday School,” but his mother is not only concerned with her son’s exposure to God’s message of salvation; she ensures that Pointer and his siblings, even though children, are grounded in the Word of God by making them “read the Bible every evening” (280). As an adult, Pointer seems to take the Bible with him wherever he goes. Dragging his valise, which Joy/Hulga thinks contains Bibles, Pointer tells her that he brought the Bibles on their date because “[y]ou can never tell when you’ll need the word of God” (285). Even Pointer’s sales pitch echoes Evangelical theology as he insists that “for a Christian [sic], the word of God ought to be in every room in the house besides in his heart” (278).

Pointer’s Evangelicalism is, of course, merely an act, but, like O’Connor’s other Evangelical characters, he plays a role in the protagonist’s salvation by propelling her toward her epiphany. As mentioned earlier, Joy/Hulga agrees to meet Pointer because she plans to seduce him and expose his Christian beliefs as false. Pointer, though, also encourages Joy/Hulga’s determination to meet him by complimenting her wooden leg, the source of her pride and, consequently, the source of her vulnerability. When he encounters her at the gate, Pointer focuses on Joy/Hulga’s wooden leg and uses it as a reason to express his admiration of her: “I see you got a wooden leg . . . I think you’re brave” (283). Joy/Hulga’s wooden leg represents

her intellectualism; it allows her to stand and walk just as her education provides her with a foundation and informs her actions, such as her aforementioned outburst and her plan to seduce Pointer. Scholars often differ in their analyses of Joy/Hulga's wooden leg. Critic Sarah Gordon, for example, maintains that it represents Joy/Hulga's "sense of her own uniqueness" (176). In *Risen Sons: Flannery O'Connor's Vision of History*, John Desmond argues that Joy/Hulga raises her wooden leg "to the status of an idol," claiming that "[s]he has imputed to it an ontic value which it does not possess" (44). Indeed, Joy/Hulga treats her leg like a sacred being: "She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private and almost with her own eyes turned away" (288). Although different, Gordon's and Desmond's interpretations support the idea that Joy/Hulga's wooden leg represents her education. Her education, both her formal training and her experience outside of the small country town, enables her to feel uniquely superior in the presence of the simpleminded Mrs. Hopewell, Mrs. Freeman, and Manley Pointer, all of whom have apparently never traveled beyond the country. Additionally, as discussed earlier, her education is a type of life-giving idol, for, to her, it is the source of "a kind of salvation" that allows "damned" humanity to remove their "blindfolds" and see the nothingness of life (288). When Pointer compliments Joy/Hulga on her courage in wearing a wooden leg, then, he admires the source of her pride, literally her unique, idolized leg, figuratively her unique faith in the saving power of intellectualism. The wooden leg, then, is a source of vulnerability for Joy/Hulga not because she views it as a defect but because she regards it as a rational addition of which she can be proud. Essentially, the leg renders Joy/Hulga vulnerable because, in encouraging her pride, it prevents her from being able to recognize how vulnerable she truly is.

In addition to applauding her courage in wearing a wooden leg, Pointer comments on Joy/Hulga's glasses, thereby again appealing to her pride and provoking her to follow the path that will eventually lead to her epiphany. Pointer tells Joy/Hulga that he “like[s] girls that wear glasses,” and he immediately links her glasses to intelligence, claiming “I think a lot. I'm not like those people that a serious thought don't ever enter their heads” (284). Gordon argues that Joy/Hulga's glasses represent “her sense of . . . her intellectual superiority” (176). Certainly, eyesight in O'Connor's stories, especially in “The Lambe Shall Enter First,” often reflects the protagonist's spiritual sight. Joy/Hulga believes that she is clear-sighted, “one of those people who see *through* to nothing,” because she does not “have illusions,” but, as she will later discover, she is blind to Christian truth (287). When the Christian Pointer compares his intellect to hers, Joy/Hulga is infuriated, although she does not show her irritation during their initial conversation. She does, however, hint at it when reflecting on their conversation as she determines to talk with him about subjects “that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths that no Bible salesman would be aware of” (283). Essentially, Pointer's comparison provokes the proud Joy/Hulga into resolving to prove to him that, unlike her, he is simpleminded.

Although Joy/Hulga is determined to seduce Pointer and convince him that his Christian beliefs are illusions, it is she, not Pointer, who is humiliated as she discovers that her secular knowledge is worthless. The description of Pointer and Joy/Hulga's rendezvous is dominated by a focus on sight, a metaphor for spiritual awareness. Joy/Hulga asserts that she can “see *through* to nothing” (287) and claims that she is one of those who “have taken off our blindfolds,” one

of those who can ““see that there is nothing to see”” (288). Despite her insistence that she can penetrate the surface of reality and recognize its nothingness, Joy/Hulga cannot see at all. During her date with Pointer, she “glared at him” (285), “[s]he sat staring at him” (288), “[s]he looked away from him,” but she never *sees* anything (287). Even her glasses, the symbol of her secular intelligence, do not seem to help her see. Soon after settling into the loft, Pointer removes her glasses and places them in his pocket, but Joy/Hulga, looking out at the landscape, “didn’t realize that he had taken” them (287). Blinded by “her sense of . . . her intellectual superiority” (Gordon 176), she continues to think that, in looking at Pointer, “she was face to face with real innocence” (289). Pointer, of course, promotes Joy/Hulga’s blindness by again appealing to her pride. He is frequently said to address her “reverently” (286). Indeed, Joy/Hulga regards herself as one who is worthy of reverence; she renames herself “Hulga” because “[s]he had a vision of the name working like the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called” (275).

Although Joy/Hulga does not realize that Pointer removed her glasses, she does notice when Pointer removes her wooden leg. She teaches Pointer how to take her leg off and how to put it on again, “thinking that she would run away with him and that every night he would take the leg off and every morning put it on again.” When he places it “out of her reach,” she becomes less confident in his simplicity and innocent intentions. “Without the leg,” the symbol of her secular knowledge, the source of her pride, Joy/Hulga “felt entirely dependent.” Without it, even “[h]er brain seemed to have stop thinking altogether.” Joy/Hulga, symbolically stripped of both her intellect and faith in secular knowledge, is repulsed by Pointer’s veneration. She

rejects his “offerings”—the box of condoms, the obscene playing cards, and the flask—which he lays out before her as if offering gifts “at the shrine of a goddess” (289). Furthermore, with her confidence in her intellect and her reliance on secular knowledge removed, Joy/Hulga is finally capable of seeing:

He jumped up so quickly that she barely *saw* him sweep the cards and the blue box into the Bible and throw the Bible into the valise. She *saw* him grab the leg and then she *saw* it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible at either side of its opposite ends. (290; emphasis added)

The fact that Joy/Hulga sees is important to understanding her epiphany, since, in this story, unlike in “The River,” the narrator does not state precisely what the protagonist is thinking during the epiphanic moment. Viewing her sight as a metaphor for her spiritual awareness, Joy/Hulga’s ability to see suggests her ability to perceive the spiritual significance of what she sees. Indeed, what she sees is just as important to understanding her epiphany as the fact that she can see. Looking inside Pointer’s suitcase, Joy/Hulga sees two Bibles—one the Word of God, the other hollow and false. The hollow Bible represents Pointer, who has ““been believing in nothing ever since I was born,”” for, like Pointer’s façade, the Bible’s cover belies its true contents (291). Certainly, as her abhorrence of Pointer’s true character and his “offerings” indicate, Joy/Hulga is not identical to Pointer as she does retain a sense, however undefined, that some actions are right and some are wrong (289). What Joy/Hulga sees inside Pointer’s suitcase, then, is her wooden leg, the symbol of her education, the source of her pride, merely occupying a space, unable to advance her to either complete faith in nothing or complete faith in Christ.

Joy/Hulga's realization that her secular knowledge is fruitless transforms her nature, and this transformation is further solidified by Pointer's violence against her. Although previously confident in her knowledge, after her epiphany, Joy/Hulga is humble. She does not attempt to reason with Pointer, as she does prior to her epiphany. Rather, she silently accepts Pointer's assertion that she "'ain't so smart,'" offering no reply that would justify her sense of intellectual superiority (291). Joy/Hulga's salvation, the solidification of the grace that her epiphany confers, occurs without her willful cooperation as Pointer's violence against her body ensures that she cannot return to her old, proud self. Gordon notes that "Joy/Hulga may have 'sinned' in her arrogant thinking . . . but she is overtly punished in her flesh" (180). Certainly, Joy/Hulga suffers physically for her pride, but what Gordon views as punishment is salvation for Joy/Hulga because it secures her transformation to a humble individual. Pointer's attempt to rape her must be a permanent reminder that "her professed (and professorial) knowledge" does not render her invulnerable, and his removal of her wooden leg ensures that she must continue to exist in a state of humility as, "chastened and helpless," she waits in the barn's loft for someone to find her and carry her down (Brinkmeyer 147). While Joy/Hulga might have been able to deny God as a reality, she is unable to reject His grace.

Joy/Hulga's transformation from a proud intellectual to a humble individual reconciled with God suggests a conflict between secular knowledge and Christian truth, but "Good Country People" is not the only one of O'Connor's stories that treats this conflict. Indeed, the opposition between secular knowledge and Christian truth is further established in "The Lambe Shall Enter First," which, like "Good Country People," features a protagonist who is convinced that reason

and education are the only true sources of enlightenment. “The Lame Shall Enter First” also comments on the relationship between physical impairment and spiritual salvation, though it does so with one crucial difference—in this story, physical deformity plagues an Evangelical, not the intellectual protagonist.

CHAPTER SIX: “THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST”

“The Lame Shall Enter First” contains many elements found in O’Connor’s other stories. Like “Good Country People,” it includes a character who is physically deformed, and it employs sight as a metaphor for spiritual awareness. “The Lame Shall Enter First” also resembles “Good Country People” in that its protagonist, Sheppard, is a proud intellectual who, like Joy/Hulga, is convinced that secular knowledge is the only source of salvation. Unlike Joy/Hulga, though, Sheppard concentrates on the relationship between secular knowledge and goodness; in this respect, he resembles the grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” who defines goodness in secular terms. Finally, “The Lame Shall Enter First” features a child who, like Harry/Bevel in “The River,” craves meaning. All of these elements work together to present perhaps the clearest example of an O’Connor story that embodies Evangelicalism through its emphasis on humanity’s fallen state, its depiction of the transformative power of grace, and its suggestion that individuals’ willful cooperation is not necessary to their salvation.

Sheppard, the protagonist of “The Lame Shall Enter First,” represents the fallen individual. A father of a young boy named Norton, Sheppard works as the “City Recreational Director,” but, more importantly, he volunteers every Saturday “at the reformatory as a counselor” (447). Having suffered the death of his wife over a year before the story begins, Sheppard throws himself into his counseling work, “receiving nothing for it but the satisfaction of knowing he was helping boys no one else cared about” (447). It is at the reformatory that Sheppard meets Rufus Johnson, a fourteen-year-old delinquent whose grandfather supposedly abuses him and whose mother is incarcerated. Sheppard believes that Rufus is an intelligent boy

who would abandon his criminal lifestyle if someone would only encourage his education.

Wanting to help Rufus, Sheppard gives him a key to his house, telling him that he is welcome to stay there whenever he wants. Rufus accepts the key, and one day, without warning, he goes to Sheppard's house, which he quickly makes his new home.

Delighted to find Rufus has accepted his offer, Sheppard formulates a plan to reform him, and this plan provides insight into the vast separation between Sheppard and God. During his first interview with Rufus at the reformatory, Sheppard tells Rufus that he can help him understand why he continues to get “‘into a lot of senseless trouble,’” but Rufus maintains that he needs no explanation, telling Sheppard, “‘Satan . . . has me in his power’” (450). Sheppard's response to Rufus's insistence that Satan compels him to steal illuminates his belief that secular knowledge and technology render faith in God foolish nonsense:

This boy's questions about life had been answered by signs nailed on the pine trees: DOES SATAN HAVE YOU IN HIS POWER? REPENT OR BURN IN HELL. JESUS SAVES. He would know the Bible with or without reading it. His [Sheppard's] despair gave way to outrage. “Rubbish!” he snorted. “We're living in the space age! You're too smart to give me an answer like that.” (450-51).

Sheppard despairs because Rufus's faith thrives in spite of modern technological breakthroughs, but his “outrage” is provoked by the fact that the seemingly intelligent Rufus can believe that Satan is real (451). Indeed, Sheppard's attraction to Rufus stems only from his belief that the boy is intelligent. He thinks Rufus “had a capacity for real response” to education and that the boy “was worth any amount of effort because he had the potential” (449). Consequently, he plans to

reform Rufus not by giving him moral direction but by “encourag[ing] him in some intellectual interest” (452). Sheppard obsesses over Rufus’s education; his face “shone with pleasure” whenever he would come home and find the boy reading, and he continually “talked a little above him [Rufus] to give him something to reach for” (456, 451).

Sheppard’s determination to use secular knowledge and reason to reform Rufus is also illustrated in his preoccupation with procuring two objects—a telescope and “a new orthopedic shoe” for Rufus’s clubfoot (452). With the telescope, Sheppard hopes to direct Rufus’s focus away from “his neighbor’s goods” and toward the powers of science: “He wanted to stretch his [Rufus’s] horizons. He wanted him to *see* the universe, to see that the darkest parts of it could be penetrated” (451). In addition to helping Rufus literally and figuratively see the extent of human knowledge, Sheppard wants to improve Rufus’s physical condition, which, he believes, will improve the boy psychologically. Sheppard reasons that Rufus’s “mischief was compensation for the [club]foot” (450). A new orthopedic shoe, then, according to Sheppard’s logic, will remove Rufus’s desire to steal by correcting the physical source of his psychological problem.

Sheppard’s replacement of faith in God with faith in secular knowledge, or, as Sarah Gordon terms it, “his system of *unbelief*,” clearly indicates that he is a fallen individual (233). His separation from God is further emphasized in the fact that his faith in secular knowledge encourages his pride and selfishness. Sheppard believes that his actions are motivated by kindness, but his decision to help Rufus results from his elevation of secular knowledge, not from his compassion. Indeed, as his interaction with his son indicates, Sheppard seems to be incapable of true compassion. Watching his son Norton devour stale chocolate cake covered in

ketchup and peanut butter, Sheppard is appalled by what he sees as the boy's "selfishness" (446). He tries to point out to Norton that the boy enjoys a more comfortable life than Rufus, adding that Rufus's mother, unlike Norton's mother, is incarcerated. Norton replies by suggesting that he would rather have an incarcerated mother than a dead mother because "[i]f she was in the penitentiary . . . I could go seeeee her" (447). Sheppard regards his son's "grief" as "part of his selfishness," and he responds to it by highlighting his own sense of selflessness (447): "Don't you think I miss her at all? I do, but I'm not sitting around moping. I'm busy helping other people" (448). Sheppard's insistence that he is compassionate is, of course, ironic. His eleven-year-old boy, who, like Harry/Bevel, has to find something to eat out of the stale food in the house, is sitting across from him and expressing his grief, but Sheppard chastises, not comforts, him. Sheppard's harsh treatment of Norton is not confined to this one moment, though. Throughout the story, he treats Norton contemptibly for Rufus's sake. He upbraids Norton for his selfishness in Rufus's presence, for example, in order to ask Rufus to help him "teach" Norton how to share and thereby offer Rufus a pretense for living with them that would not wound the delinquent's pride (457). Additionally, Sheppard ignores his child's discomfort with Rufus living with them. After hearing Rufus refer to his deceased mother's corset as "her saddle" and watching the delinquent play with his mother's clothes and other personal items, Norton opposes Sheppard's decision to allow Rufus to sleep in his mother's room (456). Rather than compassionately suggest another place for Rufus to sleep, Sheppard responds to Norton's dismay by "whipping" the child "in anger" (460). The reason for Sheppard's kindness to Rufus and his commensurate unkindness to Norton stems from his perception of each boy's intelligence. He

believes that Norton evidences “no intellectual curiosity whatsoever” (460) but that Rufus possesses “the intelligence” that renders “anything possible” (451). Essentially, Sheppard’s confidence in the uplifting power of secular knowledge, not his compassion, provokes him to take in Rufus as he is sure that “[w]hat was wasted on Norton would cause Johnson to flourish” (452).

Like the grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” Sheppard’s sense of goodness stems from a secular source as his decision to help Rufus results from his faith in the transformative power of education. Sheppard, of course, does not recognize that secular knowledge, not compassion, motivates him to help Rufus, and, consequently, he develops an elevated sense of self-worth. He thinks of himself as a priest, “except that he explained” sin by offering delinquents a psychological reason for their actions and, unlike a priest, “he had been trained for what he was doing” (449). Sheppard’s familiarity with psychological theories renders him overconfident in his ability to reform Rufus. Like a telescope, Sheppard’s secular knowledge narrows his field of vision, preventing him from perceiving the reality of Rufus’s evilness. Rufus continually evidences his dislike of Sheppard and his disregard for the man’s theories, but Sheppard does not believe that the delinquent is truly resisting him. Choosing to see only what he wants to see, Sheppard consistently dismisses Rufus’s “dissent or senseless contradiction” as a defense mechanism to protect “his pride” (451). Every time Rufus disregards his attempts to educate him, Sheppard reminds himself that Rufus is simply pretending to rebel and reassures himself that once the delinquent sees that his false rebellion is fruitless, he will openly embrace the knowledge Sheppard offers. When Rufus tells Norton that he should not “waste your

valuable time” looking out of the telescope, for instance, Sheppard conceives of Rufus’s indifference toward space as a needless example of his feigned rebellion (460):

Sheppard was amused by these sudden turns of perversity. The boy resisted whatever he suspected was meant for his improvement and contrived when he was vitally interested in something to leave the impression he was bored.

Sheppard was not deceived. Secretly Johnson was learning what he wanted him to learn—that his benefactor was impervious to insult and that there were no cracks in his armor of kindness and patience where a successful shaft could be driven.

(460-61)

The irony, of course, is that Sheppard is deceived. His belief that Rufus’s “perversity” is simply a psychological trick to irritate him blinds Sheppard to Rufus’s real evilness, and it encourages his pride in the impenetrability of his false compassion, the byproduct of his faith in secular knowledge (460). Sheppard’s pride is also manifested in the fact that, like Joy/Hulga, who “perceives herself as the potential savior of those about her,” Sheppard believes that he can save Rufus (Brinkmeyer 146). Indeed, he tells Rufus, “I’m going to save you” (474). As Rufus points out, Sheppard “thinks he’s Jesus Christ!” (459).

Sheppard’s determination to save Rufus reflects his desire not only to save the boy from a life of crime but also his desire to save him from Christian illusions. As Robert Brinkmeyer notes, “he wants, in effect, to substitute rationalism for the boy’s fundamentalism” (93). Indeed, as Brinkmeyer’s assertion suggests, Rufus’s defining characteristic is not his delinquency but his Evangelicalism. During his first night in Sheppard’s home, he tells Sheppard that his grandfather,

following Christ's command (Matt. 24:16), has recently "gone . . . to the hills" to prepare for the apocalypse (456). While Sheppard ridicules the boy's only caretaker for abandoning him, Rufus defends his grandfather's reasoning, telling Sheppard "in an indignant tone" that his grandfather "'ain't no fool'" (457). Rufus's Evangelicalism is not confined to his upbringing, however. He, like all Evangelicals, believes in "salvation by the work of Christ alone" (Bloesch 2: 250). When Sheppard insists that he can save the boy, Rufus replies, "'You ain't going to save me. . . . Nobody can save me but Jesus'" (474). Perhaps the clearest indication of Rufus's Evangelical faith is his reverence for the Bible. As Roger Olson explains, Evangelicals place especial emphasis on the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, and they affirm its infallibility and inerrancy (212-15). Rufus, in accordance with Evangelical doctrine, confesses his faith in biblical truth, adding that "[e]ven if I didn't believe it, it would still be true" (477). Additionally, Rufus often draws on Scripture in his conversations with Sheppard. When Sheppard attempts to highlight the difference between the moon, which is visible, and hell, which no one can prove exists, Rufus insists that "[t]he Bible has give [sic] the evidence": "Whoever says it ain't a hell . . . is contradicting Jesus. The dead are judged and the wicked are damned. They weep and gnash their teeth while they burn . . . and it's everlasting darkness" (461). In all respects, Rufus's description of hell conforms to the description that Christ offers in the New Testament (Matt. 8:12; Matt. 13:42). Like his description of hell, Rufus's insistence that he will forever be in Satan's power and will go to hell "[u]nless . . . I repent" echoes biblical truth (476). The apostle Paul, for example, insists that "repentance" is the only means by which people "may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his

will” (2 Tim. 2:25, 26).

Rufus, as he readily admits, is caught in Satan’s snare, and his evilness seems to complicate his characterization as an Evangelical. The boy’s evil nature is represented symbolically by his clubfoot. Described as “monstrous,” Rufus’s clubfoot is often depicted in terms of darkness or death; it is a “black deformed mass,” and the “the end of an empty sock” that covers it “protruded like a gray tongue from a severed head” (450). Rufus seems to relish in his sense of his own evilness. Just as he brags that he “‘lie[s] and steal[s] because I’m good at it’” (480), he is satisfied with himself upon finding that the orthopedic shoe Sheppard ordered is too small to contain the symbol of his evilness: “The clerk had obviously made a mistake in the measurements but the boy insisted the foot had grown. He left the shop with a pleased expression, as if, in expanding the foot had acted on some inspiration of its own” (466). Although Rufus’s Evangelicalism and demonic characterization appear to be contradictory, they are not completely opposed to each other. As George Kilcourse notes, Rufus “acts perfectly in character because the demons in the New Testament are the first to recognize who Jesus really is (Mark 5:1-10)” (267-68). Critic Frederick Asals similarly views Rufus’s evilness as working with, not against, his Evangelicalism. Rufus’s clubfoot, Asals argues, is “the visible sign of the boy’s prophetic role, warped to divine purposes” (157). Indeed, as both Kilcourse and Asals suggest, Rufus’s demonic characterization does not interfere with his Evangelical message. Rather, like the false Evangelicalism of Manley Pointer, the Evangelicalism of the evil Rufus succeeds in propelling Sheppard to his epiphanic moment.

Rufus’s role in provoking Sheppard’s epiphany is evidenced early in the story. After

Rufus agrees to live with Sheppard, the second section of the story begins with a scene in which Sheppard, Norton, and Rufus congregate in the attic to look out of the telescope he recently purchased, and it is during this scene that the conflict between Sheppard's rationalism and Rufus's Evangelicalism is unmistakably established. In purchasing the telescope, Sheppard, of course, hopes to encourage Rufus's interest in science. He watches the boy "put his eye to the instrument," praising himself for having "made it possible for this boy's vision to pass through a slender channel to the stars" (459). Significantly, Sheppard is concerned with Rufus's literal sight—where he looks, what he sees—but Rufus focuses on what cannot be seen with one's physical eyes. Even though he is looking through the telescope, Rufus directs the conversation to the unseen by claiming that he is "going to hell," and his reference to hell sparks a debate between Sheppard and himself (461). Sheppard insists that "[i]t's at least possible to get to the moon" because "[w]e can see it" and, consequently, can "know it's there," while Rufus claims that the Bible includes evidence that hell exists (461). Until Sheppard and Rufus begin debating, Norton sits away from them, wholly uninterested in the telescope. When Rufus begins to talk about hell, though, Norton injects himself into their conversation, asking Rufus whether his mother is in hell. Sheppard quickly intercepts Norton's question and insists that his mother "just isn't" (461). Norton is displeased with his father's answer because, like Harry/Bevel, Norton craves meaning: "The boy would rather she be in hell than nowhere" (462). Consequently, he "wrenched himself away" from his father's grasp "and caught Johnson by the sleeve," begging the Evangelical delinquent to tell him whether his mother is in hell (462). Rufus assures Norton, as long as his mother was not "a whore" and believed Jesus, she is in heaven

(462). In telling Norton that heaven “‘in the sky somewhere,’” Rufus sparks the young boy’s interest in the telescope, but he emphasizes that heaven cannot be seen with physical eyes as he states that “‘you got to be dead to get there. You can’t go in no space ship’” (462).

Much of the remaining story resembles the above scene. Sheppard continually stresses that rationalism and secular knowledge can save Rufus, and Rufus constantly counters his assertions by bringing up “the Jesus business” (475). Additionally, Norton, knowing that his mother is in the sky somewhere, spends most of his time looking through the telescope and seeking out Rufus’s spiritual guidance. Preoccupied with convincing Rufus of the benefits of secular knowledge, Sheppard, like Harry/Bevel’s parents, ignores his son’s need for meaning. Indeed, he completely forgoes any meaningful interaction with his child. Sheppard’s neglectfulness is clearly demonstrated one evening after the police have come to his house a second time to arrest Rufus. When the police first accuse Rufus of committing a robbery, Sheppard allows them to take the boy away. The next day, though, the police clear Rufus of the charges, and Sheppard is angry with himself for showing a lack of trust in the delinquent by permitting the police to arrest him. When the police again accuse Rufus of committing a different robbery, Sheppard views their accusations as an opportunity for him to demonstrate his confidence in the boy. He quickly tells the police that Rufus could not be guilty because he was watching a movie that night, but, after the police leave, he worries that Rufus might have left the movie. Knowing that going to Norton’s bedroom and questioning his son would upset Rufus, Sheppard approaches Rufus and asks him whether he left the movie that night. Rufus responds with indignation, reproaching Sheppard for his lack of confidence. Sheppard reassures Rufus of

his confidence and, calling him ““son,”” walks out of the room (469). Standing in the hall, he sees Norton “looking into the light from the hall” and “beckon[ing] to him” (469). Even though the door to Rufus’s room is closed, Sheppard is so terrified of offending Rufus that he ignores his own son; he “did not let his eyes focus directly on” Norton, and, “as if he saw nothing,” he stands in the hall for a moment, thinking about the orthopedic shoe that he believes will solidify his relationship with Rufus (469). When he walks away, the abandoned Norton remains “looking at the spot where his father stood” until “his gaze became aimless” (469).

Sheppard’s preoccupation with the orthopedic shoe at the moment Norton is clearly seeking out his father’s love indicates his neglect of Norton for the sake of appeasing Rufus, and his neglectfulness is further evidenced by his decision to leave Norton at home while he goes to pick up the shoe because “he did not want his attention divided” (469). To Sheppard, the orthopedic shoe is not simply a shoe; it is the salvation secular knowledge can offer. Knowing that “[h]e had failed” to inspire Rufus’s faith in the saving power of rationalism and secular knowledge, Sheppard places all of his hope in the orthopedic shoe, which he believes will correct the psychological cause of Rufus’s mischief (466). The shoe’s representation of the saving power of secular knowledge is reinforced by the description of the shop from which Sheppard has ordered the shoe, which contains many products of science that are designed to help those with disabilities: “Wheel chairs and walkers covered most of the floor. The walls were hung with every kind of crutch and brace. Artificial limbs were stacked on the shelves, legs and arms and hands, claws and hooks, straps and human harnesses and unidentifiable instruments for unnamed deformities” (469). Significantly, the items that clutter the brace shop can only palliate the

problems resulting from physical disabilities; they cannot heal deformities. Indeed, these devices can do no more than help people feel less conscious of their disabilities, just as the orthopedic shoe cannot correct Rufus's clubfoot but only prevent him from "know[ing] he don't have a normal foot" (470). Essentially, the orthopedic shoe represents not only salvation that science offers but an artificial salvation, a salvation that conceals rather than corrects. When Rufus rejects it, then, he chooses his genuine evil over the artificial salvation that science and Sheppard can provide.

With his rejection of Sheppard's gift of salvation, Rufus initiates Sheppard's realization of his failure to reform the boy. Sheppard, though upset with Rufus for refusing the shoe, "[g]rudgingly" encourages his "sympathy for the boy" by psychoanalyzing Rufus's rejection of it: "He realized that the boy had refused the shoe because he was insecure. . . . He understood that something he had been was threatened and he was facing himself and his possibilities for the first time. He was questioning his identity" (471). Significantly, Sheppard's sympathy is now forced, but his ability to feel any compassion for Rufus soon disappears as, in an ironic reversal of Simon Peter's denial of Christ, Sheppard defends the evil Rufus when the police come to arrest him for a third time. After angrily sending the police away, Sheppard looks to Rufus "with an expectant face," hoping to receive the boy's gratitude but finding instead that he has been deceived all along (472):

Johnson rolled his eyes. 'You don't believe in me,' he said. His voice was cracked the way it had been in the dark room two nights before. 'You make out like you got all this confidence in me but you ain't got any. . . .' The crack became

exaggerated, comic. The mockery in it was blatant. (473)

Rufus's characterization as a Satan figure is apparent in his mock appeal to Sheppard's compassion. Clearly, Rufus has been deceiving Sheppard, evidencing just enough gratitude to encourage Sheppard's confidence while never truly appreciating his attention. Rufus, of course, has also been tempting Sheppard, trying to provoke him into abandoning his compassion, and his characterization as a tempter is further illuminated in the argument that results from his confession that he has committed the robbery. Angered and "choked" with "hatred," Sheppard attempts to remain composed (473). He insists in a "toneless, mechanical" voice that his "resolve isn't shaken" (474). Rufus, clearly aware of Sheppard's anger, explicitly provokes him with the intention of showing him the failure of his compassion: "You ain't going to save me. . . . You're going to tell me to leave this house. I did those other two jobs too . . ." (474). Although Sheppard does not force Rufus to leave, Rufus does accomplish his purpose as Sheppard, "numbed" by "[t]he failure of his compassion" (475), now wishes that the boy "would only leave now of his own accord" (474).

While Rufus's demonic character allows him to expose the failure of Sheppard's kindness, his Evangelicalism makes his triumph over Sheppard possible. Sheppard spends the day following Rufus's confession hoping that the boy will leave, but when he returns from work, he finds Rufus, now wearing his Evangelical grandfather's suit, reading the Bible with Norton. Not content with merely relating the Biblical stories and truth he remembers, Rufus "lifted it [the Bible] from a ten cent store" so that Norton could read it himself (476). Although he has tolerated Rufus's declarations of faith, believing that he actually "flushed that out of [his] head

in the reformatory,” Sheppard is infuriated with Rufus for bringing the Bible into his home (474). Indeed, Sheppard shouts at Rufus, insisting that he is “to [sic] intelligent” to believe the Bible (477). Rufus responds by claiming that Sheppard is also in Satan’s power, and, in order to prove that he does believe the Bible, he rips a page out with his hands and then another one with his teeth, chewing both “furiously” (477). After swallowing the pages, “[h]is eyes widened as if a vision of splendor were opening up before him,” and he exclaims, “I’ve eaten it like Ezekiel and it was honey to my mouth!” (477). The description of Rufus’s eyes widening as if he were seeing a vision and his comparison of himself to Ezekiel attest to his role as a prophet. Rufus’s eating the Bible also alludes to St. John’s eating a “little book” which “was in my mouth sweet as honey” (Rev. 10:10). Like St. John, Rufus plays the role of a prophet who foretells the destruction of the world, Sheppard’s world. After Sheppard finally surrenders and sends Rufus away, Rufus lingers for a moment, “a small black figure on the threshold of some dark apocalypse,” and cautions Sheppard again, telling him, “The devil has you in his power” (478).

Rufus is clearly responsible for Sheppard’s realization that he is weak and unable to save the delinquent, but nothing Rufus does conveys to Sheppard the significance of his failure. After Rufus admits to committing the robberies, Sheppard is shocked by the fact that “[t]he boy looked at him as if he were the guilty one, as if he were a moral leper,” and he remains convinced of his goodness: “He knew without conceit that he was a good man, that he had nothing to reproach himself with” (475). Rufus’s departure does not even result in Sheppard giving his own son more attention. He sits alone in the parlor and only goes to see Norton, who is in the attic looking through the telescope, in order to ask the boy if he knows where Rufus is. Sheppard does not

notice the “unnatural brightness,” the spiritual illumination, that emanates from Norton’s eyes. Additionally, he barely registers the boy’s belief that he can see his mother in heaven as he quickly silences the boy by telling him that he needs to go to sleep (478). Even after the police drag Rufus back to Sheppard’s home and the delinquent accuses Sheppard of making “[i]mmoral [sexual] suggestions,” Sheppard fails to comprehend the significance of his battle with Rufus: “I did everything I knew how for him. I did more for him than I did for my own child. I hoped to save him and I failed, but it was an honorable failure. I have nothing to reproach myself with” (480). He remains blind to his pride and neglect of Norton until the moment of his epiphany.

Sheppard’s epiphany is clearly an act of grace since the understanding he receives from it he was unable to achieve on his own, and, as an act of grace, the epiphany transforms his nature. Although the indications of his pride and neglectfulness and Rufus’s evilness have been present throughout the story, Sheppard only recognizes his shortcomings and Rufus’s demonic nature due to his epiphany, which, like that of Harry/Bevel, comes upon him suddenly and is stated explicitly:

His mouth twisted and he closed his eyes against the revelation. . . . He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. He saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts, leering at him from the eyes of Johnson. His image of himself shrivelled [sic] until everything was black before him. (481)

Sheppard’s epiphany renders him the opposite of what he was before. Whereas the pre-epiphany

Sheppard, like Joy/Hulga, was proud, the post-epiphany Sheppard feels “a repulsion for himself so clear and intense that he gasped for breath” (481). Additionally, much like the grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” who is suddenly overcome with a love that compels her to reach out, Sheppard becomes consumed with unconditional love for his son, whom he had previously rejected for his lack of intellectual curiosity. His only desire is to “be mother and father” to his grieving son, to devote himself entirely to loving and caring for the boy (482).

Although his intentions are admirable, Sheppard’s willful resolutions are not necessary to his salvation. Sheppard, having searched throughout the house for his son, finds him in the attic, hanging “just below the beam from which he had launched his flight into space” (482). Norton’s death effectively solidifies Sheppard’s salvation regardless of his will. His determination to devote himself to his son could have waned over time, but, having seen his dead child hanging from a beam, Sheppard cannot ever forget that he neglected Norton in order to satisfy his pride. Indeed, Norton’s death ensures that the old Sheppard, the proud Sheppard, can no longer exist. The insignificance of Sheppard’s will in aiding his salvation should not be understood as an indication of a general lack of free will. Like Joy/Hulga, Sheppard can and does deny God’s existence. Though both protagonists retain their free will in choosing whether to believe God as fact, neither of them, in accordance with Evangelical doctrine, can resist or facilitate the salvation that God bestows.

Certainly, “The Lame Shall Enter First” features many elements found in O’Connor’s other stories. With the telescope, Norton’s ability to spiritually perceive his mother in heaven, and Sheppard’s blindness to the reality of evil, “The Lame Shall Enter First” evidences a

preoccupation with sight that also characterizes “Good Country People” and “Revelation.”

Additionally, in illustrating the conflict between science and religion, “The Lambe Shall Enter First” sets two common O’Connor character types in opposition to each other—Sheppard, the intellectual atheist, and Rufus, the uneducated Evangelical. The opposition between these two character types is, of course, also found in O’Connor’s other stories, such as “Good Country People.” “Revelation,” however, as the next chapter will demonstrate, alters this conflict as it suggests that even the uneducated can be as stubbornly proud and blind to Christian truth as intellectuals.

CHAPTER SEVEN: “REVELATION”

Like “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” “Revelation” comments on social constructions of goodness, but, while the grandmother’s ideas of goodness are loosely defined, Mrs. Turpin’s views on the relationship between social class, race, and goodness are explicitly articulated. Additionally, “Revelation,” like many of O’Connor’s works, concentrates on physical sight, a metaphor for spiritual perception. Mrs. Turpin, however, differs from the majority of O’Connor’s protagonists in that she does not need to be saved but regenerated. The difference in Mrs. Turpin’s spiritual state accounts for the story’s diversion from the pattern found in O’Connor’s other works in which the protagonists experience an epiphany that transforms them and then suffer from an act of violence that solidifies their salvation. Despite its departure from the pattern found in O’Connor’s other stories, “Revelation,” like those works, reflects Evangelicalism through its emphasis on humanity’s fallen state, its depiction of the transformative power of grace, and its suggestion that individuals’ willful cooperation is not necessary to their salvation.

As a fallen individual, Mrs. Turpin focuses on worldly constructions rather than spiritual concerns. Mrs. Turpin views the world as divided into a social hierarchy defined according to race and class:

On the bottom of the heap were most colored people . . . then next to them—not above, just away from—were the white-trash; then above them were the homeowners, and above them the home-and-landowners, to which she and Claud belonged. Above she and Claud were people with a lot of money and much bigger houses and much more land. (491)

Mrs. Turpin does recognize “the complexity” of such a hierarchy as she realizes “some of the people who had good blood had lost their money and had to rent” and notes that some blacks “owned their homes and land as well” (491). Although she knows that her simple hierarchy does not reflect all of the social positions that people occupy, Mrs. Turpin does not dwell on exceptions to her views. Indeed, she seeks to further solidify her social hierarchy through individuals’ appearances. Waiting on the doctor to examine her husband Claud, Mrs. Turpin looks around the waiting-room, judging everyone by their physical appearances. She observes, for example, a “white-trashy” grandmother wearing a dress “in the same print” as “sacks of chicken feed” (490). She also judges the old woman’s daughter, who has “[h]er dirty yellow hair . . . tied behind with a little piece of red paper ribbon” and is wearing “a yellow sweat shirt and wine colored slacks, both gritty-looking” (490). Additionally, she notices the daughter’s dirty appearance. When the daughter announces that she “got me some joo’ry” with “green stamps,” Mrs. Turpin thinks, “Ought to have got you a wash rag and some soap” (492). Reflecting on the clothes and filthiness of this “white-trashy” mother and her daughter, Mrs. Turpin concludes that they are “[w]orse than niggers any day” (490). As critic Bryan Wyatt points out, Mrs. Turpin’s class distinctions are based not only on economic positions but on stereotypes about classes, as well: “Being ‘white-trashy,’ for instance, does not inhere simply in lack of possessions or education; it is revealed in the failure to keep one’s child clean or teach it proper behavior” (83).

In addition to clothing in general, Mrs. Turpin focuses on people’s shoes. The pleasant lady, with whom Mrs. Turpin identifies, receives her commendation for wearing “red and gray

suede shoes to match her dress” as the woman’s shoes validate Mrs. Turpin’s belief that the woman is like herself, a person who respects social conventions (490-91). To Mrs. Turpin, the shoes that “the white-trashy mother” is wearing also confirm her stereotypical opinions of lower-class whites, for the mother “had on what appeared to be bedroom slippers—exactly what you would have expected her to have on” (491). Mrs. Turpin’s attention to people’s shoes is significant not only because it illustrates her belief that external appearances signify immutable truths about class but also because it demonstrates her prideful nature. The fact that she “always noticed people’s feet” suggests that she is always looking down, literally and figuratively, on other people (490). Mrs. Turpin, though, attempts to hide her condescension; she notices people’s shoes “[w]ithout appearing to” (490).

Just as she masks her judgmental glances at people’s shoes, Mrs. Turpin conceals her pride in being white and respectable under a guise of gratefulness to Christ. Preoccupied with her social hierarchy, Mrs. Turpin often considers “the question of who she would have chosen to be if she couldn’t have been herself” (491). She imagines a dialogue with Christ in which she has to choose to “either be a nigger or white-trash” (491). Mrs. Turpin frets over making such a decision, imagining that “[s]he would have wriggled and squirmed and begged and pleaded” for another option (491). Such imaginary dialogues, however, do not cause Mrs. Turpin excessive pain, for, eventually, she recalls reality: “Her heart rose. He had not made her a nigger or white-trash or ugly! He had made her herself and given her a little of everything. Jesus, thank you! Thank you thank you thank you!” (497). Of course, Mrs. Turpin’s gratefulness cannot be considered a virtue; she is thankful not because she feels undeserving but because she believes

herself to be superior to other people.

In addition to deriving pride from being white and respectable, Mrs. Turpin commends herself for her condescension and masks her pride in being kind in affirmations of gratefulness. Upon hearing a song that mentions helping others, Mrs. Turpin reflects on her own compassion: “To help anybody out that needed it was her philosophy of life. She never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black, trash or decent. And of all she had to be thankful for, she was most thankful that this was so” (497). She subsequently imagines another dialogue with Christ in which she haughtily rejects the option of being made a beautiful, land-owning white woman who lacks goodness, telling Christ to “[m]ake me a good woman and it don’t matter what else, how fat or how ugly or how poor” (497). Like her gratefulness, Mrs. Turpin’s kindness is not a virtue, for its goodness is negated by the fact that she only helps others because she feels obligated to do so. Reflecting on lower-class whites, Mrs. Turpin complains that “if you gave them something, in two weeks it would be all broken or filthy or they would have chopped it up for lightwood,” adding that “[h]elp them you must, but help them you couldn’t” (497). Clearly, Mrs. Turpin disdains helping others due to her stereotypical views concerning race and class. The role her social hierarchy plays in nullifying the virtue of her kindness is also evidenced in her treatment of blacks. In discussing the problem of finding farm help with “the pleasant lady,” Mrs. Turpin mentions that Claud picks up black workers in the morning to work on the Turpins’ farm and drives them back home in the evening, while she brings them cold water at the end of the day (492). As George Kilcourse notes, Mrs. Turpin’s “action imitates the gospel’s promise that if you give water to the least of your brothers or sisters,

you do it for Christ. But Ruby's motives compromise her virtue" (285). Indeed, Mrs. Turpin treats the black workers kindly not because she desires to but because she feels obligated to: "I sure am tired of buttering up niggers, but you got to love em if you want em to work for you" (494). She even glories in the falsity of her kindness as she mockingly waves her hand in the waiting-room of the doctor's office to illustrate how she pretends to be considerate in waving goodbye to the black workers.

While sitting in the waiting-room, Mrs. Turpin encounters Mary Grace, the girl who, as her name indicates, will propel Mrs. Turpin toward her epiphany of grace. Unlike the other characters who lead O'Connor's protagonists to their epiphanies, Mary Grace is not an Evangelical. She is only loosely connected to Evangelicalism as she is a student at Wellesley College, which was founded by an evangelist and began as a female seminary ("Henry Fowle Durant"). Mary Grace does not need to be Evangelical in order to direct Mrs. Turpin toward her epiphany, however, because Mrs. Turpin, unlike many of O'Connor's protagonists, does not need an introduction to Christian truths as she is already "saved" (506). While in the waiting-room, Mary Grace indicates that she comprehends Mrs. Turpin's prejudice and false pride; her eyes "smolder and . . . blaze" as she listens to Mrs. Turpin speak, and "[s]he looked . . . directly through Mrs. Turpin" (492). After recalling again that she is white and decent, Mrs. Turpin shouts "Oh thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you," an exclamation that greatly upsets Mary Grace, who subsequently throws her book at Mrs. Turpin (499). Having "struck her directly over her left eye," Mary Grace quickly lunges at Mrs. Turpin, grabbing her by the neck and attempting to choke her (499). The doctor immediately forces Mary Grace to the floor, and, as both the girl and

Mrs. Turpin lie on the floor, Mrs. Turpin turns to Mary Grace, asking her, ““What you got to say to me?”” (500). Mrs. Turpin, “waiting, as for a revelation,” receives an unexpected answer: ““Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog”” (500). John Sykes considers the conflict between Mary Grace and Mrs. Turpin a “stage of . . . judgement” (78). As Susan Srigley notes, though, “what Mary Grace says to Ruby is gracious, but not in the sense of a conclusive judgement,” for it “provokes the beginning of Ruby’s questioning” (150). Leanne Smith agrees with Srigley, arguing that “the experience of being hit with the book seem[s] to change Mrs. Turpin’s outward observation into self-reflection” (42). Indeed, as Smith and Srigley note, Mary Grace’s answer forces Mrs. Turpin to begin examining herself.

An example of Mrs. Turpin’s early stage of self-examination occurs shortly after she returns home from the doctor’s office. Mrs. Turpin does not tell her husband about Mary Grace’s message because she does not want “to put the image of herself as a wart hog from hell into his mind,” but, when the black workers return from the field and she brings them their iced water, she readily tells them Mary Grace’s condemnation of her (502). Mrs. Turpin’s willingness to present such an unfavorable image of herself to the workers certainly seems illogical. Knowing “exactly how much Negro flattery was worth,” Mrs. Turpin, however, must know that the black workers will not affirm but contradict Mary Grace’s message (505). When she tells them the story of being hit with Mary Grace’s book, then, Mrs. Turpin expects to hear the workers’ denial of Mary Grace’s opinion that she is a hog. The workers do adamantly reject Mary Grace’s comparison. Softening Mrs. Turpin’s enormous physical size, they refer to her as “[s]tout” and “sweet,” and they express their desire to “kill” Mary Grace for calling her a hog, adding that

“Jesus satisfied with” Mrs. Turpin (505). The worker’s flattery, though expected, does not reassure her of her superiority; rather, it provokes “her rage” (505). As her anger illustrates, Mrs. Turpin is no longer content with empty confirmations of her own opinions, confirmations which she willingly accepted in the waiting-room as she judged people by their physical appearances. Having been hit by Mary Grace’s book, Mrs. Turpin now seeks deeper, spiritual truth, an understanding of how she can be like an ugly hog. Consequently, she quickly leaves the black workers and rushes to the pig parlor with the intention of discerning how she resembles a hog from hell.

Hogs play a significant role in Mrs. Turpin’s self-examination. While they symbolize devils in “The River,” hogs in “Revelation” represent fallen humanity. After returning from the doctor’s office, Mrs. Turpin tries to fall asleep, but “[t]he instant she was flat on her back, the image of a razor-backed hog with warts on its face and horns coming out behind its ears snorted into her head” (502). Mrs. Turpin attempts to reject the image of the hog—the image of herself—as she tells herself “‘I am not . . . a wart hog. From hell.’ But the denial had no force” (502). Preoccupied with Mary Grace’s message and receiving no insight from the black workers’ flattery, she races the sun to “pig parlor” (505), “a square of concrete” with a “floor sloped slightly so that the hog wash could drain off into a trench” (505, 506). In the waiting-room, Mrs. Turpin explains to “the white-trash woman” that her hogs “‘are not dirty and they don’t stink’”:

“They’re cleaner than some children I’ve seen. Their feet never touch the ground. We have a pig-parlor—that’s where you raise them on concrete . . . and Claud scoots them down with the hose every afternoon and washes off the floor.”

Cleaner by far than that [white-trash woman's] child right there, she thought. Poor nasty little thing. (493)

Of course, as Frederick Asals points out, “however santized, a hog is a hog,” but Mrs. Turpin, in focusing on physical appearances, fails to realize that just as a clean hog cannot be superior to dirty hogs, cleanliness cannot render her better than anyone else (99). Standing on the fence above the pig parlor, Mrs. Turpin looks at the hogs with contempt, thinking that the shoats resemble “idiot children” (506). Beholding the creature to which she was compared, she asks God, ““What do you send me a message like that for? . . . How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?”” (506). As the sun begins to set, Mrs. Turpin looks more closely at them, “as if through the very heart of mystery” (508). The hogs, no longer grunting loudly and searching for food, “settled around the old sow” and “appeared to pant with secret life” (508). Significantly, “[a] red glow suffused them” (508). The image of the red glow suffusing the hogs ushers in Mrs. Turpin’s epiphany as it appears immediately before her vision, and it offers insight into her vision as it figuratively represents a message of salvation. Just as the water cannot remove the hogs’ appearance as “idiot children,” superficial cleanliness cannot remove the stain of sin (506); only the blood of Christ, the “red glow,” can soften humanity’s ugly sin (508).

While the image of the hogs suggests the redemptive power of Christ, Mrs. Turpin’s vision of the procession of souls traveling to heaven provides her with the realization that neither worldly distinctions, such as race and class, nor worldly virtues influence spiritual salvation. In her vision, Mrs. Turpin sees “whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their

lives, and bands of niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs” (508). This vision illuminates the insignificance of Mrs. Turpin’s superficial, worldly distinctions; the dirtiness of lower-class whites is inconsequential because their spiritual salvation makes them clean, and the dark skin color of the blacks is insignificant because their spiritual salvation enables them to wear the same white robes as everyone else. Significantly, the groups that Mrs. Turpin believes are beneath her are not marching or proceeding but “rumbling toward heaven” (508). Only the “tribe of people” of which Mrs. Turpin is a member “were on key” (508). Their orderly marching, like their responsibility “for good order and common sense and respectable behavior,” does not render them superior to the other souls, though (508). All of those in Mrs. Turpin’s group are “bringing up the end of the procession” and watching “their virtues . . . being burned away” (508). Essentially, Mrs. Turpin’s vision shows her that she has erred in making superficial judgments and deriving pride from artificial virtue as they have no bearing on spiritual salvation, and this realization transforms her. After she experiences her epiphany, her eyes no longer wander, searching, as they do in the waiting-room, for an object of criticism; rather, they are “small” and “fixed” (508). Additionally, “she got down” off of the four-foot high fence, an act which represents her loss of pride and her acceptance of the humble realization that she is not superior to the people she so fiercely criticized (509).

Unlike the epiphanies of many of O’Connor’s other characters, Mrs. Turpin’s epiphany is not solidified by an act of violence, but violence still plays an important role in her regeneration. Mrs. Turpin is a Christian before her epiphany, and, consequently, does not need to suffer

violence after it in order to solidify her salvation. Mrs. Turpin's spiritual problem is that she has not been regenerated before her epiphany; that is, she retains her old self, her judgmental self, and attempts to fit Christianity into her preexisting worldview. As John Desmond notes, "she had reduced Christianity to a conventional mode of reality and presumed herself to be one of the 'elect'" (110). Her epiphany, then, does not offer her salvation but a "deeper," "true discipleship" (Kilcourse 286). Of course, in order to be regenerated and acquire a new self, Mrs. Turpin's old self must die, and this death occurs with the violence she suffers in being hit with the book just above her eye, the part of her that enables her to view and judge everyone around her. Additionally, her willful cooperation is not necessary to her regeneration, for Mary Grace's violent act and message effectively force Mrs. Turpin toward her epiphany.

As one of O'Connor's later works, "Revelation" diverts from the typical pattern she employs in many of her earlier stories. The story's presentation of violence as a prerequisite to the protagonist's epiphany certainly distinguishes it from O'Connor's other stories, which generally posit violence as necessary to the solidification of the grace the epiphany bestows. As the next chapter will show, O'Connor's alteration of the placement of violence in her short fiction is also demonstrated in her final story, "Parker's Back," as violence in that work occurs both before and after the protagonist's epiphany. Additionally, the fate of Mrs. Turpin renders "Revelation" unlike O'Connor's other stories, for unlike the O'Connor protagonists who are physically whole, such as the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," Harry/Bevel, and Sheppard, Mrs. Turpin does not die but is, in a sense, physically deformed. The evolution of O'Connor's depiction of physical deformity, from the obvious physical impairment, such

Joy/Hulga's wooden leg, to the less drastic, such as Mrs. Turpin's swollen eye, is further advanced by "Parker's Back," which features a protagonist who appears to have no physical problems but is actually physically appalling and slowly growing weak.

CHAPTER EIGHT: “PARKER’S BACK”

As the last work O’Connor completed, “Parker’s Back” contains many elements found in her other short stories. Notably, “Parker’s Back,” like many of her other texts, employs abundant eye imagery. It also includes the most violence of the short stories discussed in this thesis as violent acts are scattered throughout the text. Additionally, “Parker’s Back” features O’Connor’s staunchest Evangelical character—Sarah Ruth—whose uncompromising commitment to spirituality distinguishes her from O’Connor’s other Evangelicals, such as Bevel Summers and Rufus Johnson. “Parker’s Back” also engages significantly with the Old Testament; it includes several allusions to Old Testament figures and events and treats Old Testament issues, such as idolatry and the judgment of an all-powerful God. While “Parker’s Back” is more concerned with Old Testament themes than O’Connor’s other stories, it, like her other works, reproduces Evangelicalism in its emphasis on humanity’s fallen state, its depiction of the transformative power of grace, and its suggestion that individuals’ willful cooperation is not necessary to their salvation.

A fallen individual who does not resemble the protagonist types in O’Connor’s other stories, Parker is not concerned with spiritual matters but with secular and physical pleasure. Parker seeks satisfaction primarily from tattoos. At the age of fourteen, he “saw a man in a fair, tattooed from head to foot” with “skin . . . patterned in what seemed . . . a single intricate design of brilliant color” (512). The tattooed man inspires Parker’s sense “of wonder in himself,” and, from that moment, he aims to make his body look like the man at the fair, an aim that becomes an obsession. Parker’s “only reason” for working, for example, is “to pay for more tattoos”

(513). As critic Christina Lake notes, Parker is “[i]n love with his body for himself,” and “his tattoos are for his own pleasure” (226). Indeed, Parker “had no desire for one [tattoo] anywhere he could not readily see it himself” and, therefore, refuses to have one on his back (514). His preoccupation with tattoos further encourages his indulgence in physical pleasure as, after he begins getting tattoos, he also begins “to drink beer and get in fights” and engage in sexual relationships with “the kind of girls he liked but who had never liked him before” (513).

Parker’s concern with secular and physical pleasure renders him dissatisfied. His tattoos can only provide temporary satisfaction. After about a month, “[a] huge dissatisfaction would come over him and he would go off and find another tattooist and have another space filled up” (514). Of course, Parker is seeking to fill not only a literal, physical space but also a figurative, spiritual one. Since his tattoos cannot fulfill a deeper, spiritual need, Parker’s “dissatisfaction” becomes “chronic and latent” and then “acute” (514). He further fails to achieve the beauty he sees in the tattooed man’s “intricate arabesque of colors” as his tattoos give his body “[t]he effect . . . of something haphazard and botched” (514). Essentially, as Lake argues, Parker’s failure to make himself beautiful indicates that he “cannot save himself” through worldly means (226).

In addition to his pursuit of secular and physical pleasure, Parker’s fallen nature is evidenced by his efforts to harden himself against all spiritual concerns. When his mother, perceiving his sinful ways, attempts to take him to church, “he jerked out of her grasp and ran,” and “[t]he next day he lied about his age and joined the navy” (513). A desire to escape all reminders of God is characteristic of Parker. He despises “[l]ong views” because they make him “feel as if someone were after you, the navy or the government or religion,” and he often tries to

divert his wife's attention from God's judgment by attempting to arouse her jealousy (516). The focus on Parker's hardened nature echoes the Bible's concentration on people's tendency to harden themselves against the things of God. The Old Testament especially treats this issue as many Old Testament books are concerned with Israel's turning away from God and pursuing the gods and religions of other nations. The link between Parker and the Old Testament is further evidenced by his first and middle names: Obadiah Elihue. Obadiah, of course, was a prophet and author of an Old Testament book, in which he prophesies God's judgment of Edom, and judgment, as will be discussed further, figures predominately in "Parker's Back." Elihu, a man who chastised Job for demanding from God a reason for his suffering, also refers to God's judgment in his speeches. Additionally, Elihu speaks to Job about the importance of being sensitive to sin (Job 33:27-28, 34:4), an issue which the hardened Parker, who "didn't see . . . anything in particular to save him from," certainly faces (518).

Although Parker does not recognize his need for salvation, Parker's wife, Sarah Ruth does, and she plays an important role in leading Parker to the moment of his epiphany. A woman who "is explicitly linked to . . . salvation history by her own biblical names," Sarah Ruth is a staunch Evangelical (Desmond, *Risen Sons* 77). The daughter of "a Straight Gospel preacher" who is "away spreading it in Florida," Sarah Ruth expresses an intimate knowledge of the Bible (517). In condemning Parker's tattoos as "'a heap of vanity. . . . Vanity of vanities'" (515), she quotes Solomon, who, in Ecclesiastes, labels all worldly pleasures and pursuits as "vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccles.1:2). Sarah Ruth also references Elihu, Parker's namesake, in her remarks on Parker's tattoos and his need to recognize that he will have to account for himself

one day “[a]t the judgment seat of God” (519). Elihu tells Job that “God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it,” adding that “[a]lthough thou sayest thou shalt not see him, *yet judgment is before him*” (Job 35:13, 14). Of course, O’Connor’s other Evangelicals also evidence a familiarity with Biblical truth, but what distinguishes Sarah Ruth from Evangelicals such as Rufus Johnson is her fierce opposition to any actions or objects that might lead to sin. Indeed, Sarah Ruth is “forever sniffing up sin” (510). With her “sharp tongue and icepick eyes,” she regards almost every object and desire as possessing the potential to encourage sin (524). Certainly her belief that “churches were idolatrous” represents an extreme rejection of the physical (518), but most of Sarah Ruth’s objections to worldly pleasures are moderate, grounded in her apparent conviction that “whosoever . . . will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4). Sarah Ruth, for example, “did not smoke or dip, drink whiskey, use bad language or paint her face” (510).

Sarah Ruth’s Evangelicalism and opposition to worldly pleasures play an important role in prompting Parker to pursue the path that results in his epiphany. Sarah Ruth’s significance to Parker’s salvation is manifested in her influence on him: “Parker understood why he had married her—he couldn’t have got her any other way—but he couldn’t understand why he stayed with her now. . . . Nevertheless, he stayed as if she had him conjured” (510). Indeed, Parker does not enjoy spending most of his time at home hearing about “what the judgment seat of God would be like for him if he didn’t change his ways,” but he returns home every night (519). Sarah Ruth’s commanding influence inspires Parker, who now wants another tattoo, to find “exactly the right one to bring Sarah Ruth to heel” (520). With only his back available, Parker becomes obsessed

with “having a tattoo put there that Sarah Ruth would not be able to resist—a religious subject” (519). Essentially, he aims to find a tattoo that will force Sarah Ruth to admit that she likes his tattoos, and it is his preoccupation with “a suitable design for his back” that effectively ushers in the violence that will lead him to his epiphany (520).

Picking up hay but thinking about potential tattoos, Parker crashes his employer’s tractor into a tree, and the accident provides him with the knowledge of what tattoo he needs on his back. As the tractor crashes into the tree, it “burst into flame”; the tree also burns as a result of the accident, and Parker’s shoes are “being eaten by the fire” (520). The image of the burning tree recalls an Old Testament event—Moses’ call to become a prophet as he confronts an angel in a burning bush (Exod. 3:1-8). Like Moses, Parker remains shoeless at the site of the burning tree, and, just as the burning bush incident initiates Moses’ journey to follow God’s plan for leading the Israelites out of captivity, the burning tree compels Parker to go to the city in search of a tattoo of God, a tattoo that will help bring him to the point of salvation. The burning tree, though, does not provide Parker with a proper epiphany: “Parker did not allow himself to think on the way to the city. He only knew that there had been a great change in his life, a leap forward into a worse unknown” (521). Clearly, the accident, unlike violence in O’Connor’s other stories, does not solidify the protagonist’s salvation; it only provides him with a vague sense of direction.

With only a general sense of having experienced a change, Parker seeks out a tattoo of God, a tattoo that will eventually provoke his epiphany. Having not experienced an epiphany, Parker continues to desire a religious tattoo that would enable him “to bring Sarah Ruth to heel” (520). As he tells the tattoo artist, he thinks that such a tattoo would force Sarah Ruth to admit to

liking what she now regards as vanity: ““She can’t hep [sic] herself . . . She can’t say she don’t like the looks of God”” (525). In addition to attempting to use God to make a point to his wife, Parker, of course, tries to combine God and worldly pleasure as he seeks not only to satisfy the feeling that he should get a tattoo of God but also to fulfill his own desire to get a new tattoo. The tattoo that he does get, “the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ,” directs the story’s focus to eyes. The Byzantine Christ has “all-demanding eyes,” eyes that make him feel “as though, under their gaze, he was as transparent as the wing of a fly” (522, 524). Significantly, the eyes of the tattooed Christ are harsher than those of the strict Sarah Ruth. Spending the night in “the Haven of Light Christian Mission” in the city so the tattooist can complete the tattoo the next day, Parker recalls Sarah Ruth’s “sharp tongue and icepick eyes,” which “appeared soft and dilatory compared with the eyes in the [tattoo] book” (524). Continually “feel[ing] their penetration,” Parker regards his wife’s eyes as “the only *comfort* he could bring to mind” (524; emphasis added). Certainly, Sarah Ruth’s strict spirituality cannot match the harshness of Christ’s call.

The tattoo of Christ prompts Parker’s realization that his soul is ugly and empty and that he must follow Christ, and this epiphany transforms him. After being thrown out of a bar for fighting with his friends, who, upon seeing his tattoo, joke that he has ““got religion and is witnessing for Jesus,”” Parker experiences his epiphany, which, like the epiphanies of Harry/Bevel and Sheppard, is stated explicitly (526):

Parker sat for a long time on the ground in the alley behind the pool hall, examining his soul. He saw it as a spider web of facts and lies that was not at all

important to him but which appeared to be necessary in spite of his opinion. The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed. (527)

Parker's awareness of the "facts and lies" that comprise his soul and the need to obey Christ transforms him. Parker's transformation, like Sheppard's, is clearly articulated. Parker's "dissatisfaction was gone," and he feels like a different person, "as if he were himself but a stranger to himself" (527). Additionally, "he felt the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors," giving him spiritually the same beauty that the tattoos could not give him physically (528). Although he is transformed, Parker's knowledge remains incomplete. He hopes that Sarah Ruth "would clear up the rest of it" (527). Wanting his tattoo "to please" his wife now rather than force her into approving of tattoos, Parker returns home to Sarah Ruth to show her the tattooed Christ (527).

Scholars' analyses of Sarah Ruth's reaction to Parker's tattoo differ widely, yet all seem to view her reaction as pivotal to an understanding of the story's religious meaning. When Parker returns home, Sarah Ruth refuses to admit him until he reluctantly confesses his full name, an act that, as Frederick Asals, signifies Parker's "acknowledg[ment]" of his "true identity . . . as Obadiah Elihue (names meaning 'servant of Yahweh' and 'God is he')" (127). Once inside the house, Parker forces Sarah Ruth to look at his tattoo, and, when he tells her that it is God, she is outraged, exclaiming "'He don't *look* . . . He's a spirit. No man shall see his face'" (529). Additionally, she labels the tattoo an act of "[i]dolatry" (529). Many critics understand Sarah Ruth's rejection of Parker's tattoo as indicative of her adherence to the Manichaean heresy (Gordon 250; Jackson 26; Kilcourse 290-91). Other critics, however, maintain that Sarah Ruth

does not believe in the separation of the spiritual and the physical. John Desmond insists that “it is a mistake to see Sarah Ruth’s rejection of tattoos . . . simplistically as evidence of her Manichean denial of the physical” (*Risen Sons* 78). Rather, Desmond suggests that Sarah Ruth neither identifies God with Parker’s tattoo nor identifies “Parker’s spirit exclusively with his tattooed body” (*Risen Sons* 77). John Sykes adds that Sarah Ruth is “Christlike in her ability to see through Parker’s self-deception” in believing that the tattoo represents God (52). Certainly, the Evangelical Sarah Ruth may be said to embody the fundamental precepts of Manichaeism if one accepts Robert Jackson’s argument that, during O’Connor’s life, “intense Protestantism was essentially Manichaeism in its strong sense of the fall of man . . . and in its sense of man’s need to be ‘saved’ in order to prepare himself for death and, presumably, a wholly spiritual meeting with God” (25). Sarah Ruth, however, does not say anything that does not adhere to Biblical truth. Her assertion that God is “‘a spirit’” (529) is a direct quote from Christ: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Additionally, her insistence that “[n]o man shall see his face” (529) echoes God’s conversation with Moses, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exod. 33:20). Rather than heresy, Sarah Ruth’s rejection of Parker’s tattoo reflects what Desmond calls “hard, demanding love” as, at the moment Parker is willing to follow Christ, Sarah Ruth chastises him (*Risen Sons* 78).

Sarah Ruth not only refuses to accept Parker’s tattoo; she also beats him with a broom, and her violence against him solidifies his salvation without his willful cooperation. While Sarah Ruth’s first beating of Parker with a broom initiates their relationship, her beating of Parker after

his epiphany ensures that he is physically fixed. Although Parker does exit the house, he does not leave the property to escape Sarah Ruth's judgment. Figuratively, Sarah Ruth, as Desmond writes, "is chastizing his errant spirit" (*Risen Sons* 78). Sarah Ruth's beating of Parker also softens him to spiritual concerns. After exiting the house, Parker stands against a pecan tree, "crying like a baby" (530), a phrase that, as Sarah Gordon notes, reflects "the essence of the experience of spiritual rebirth, of being 'born again,' as Protestants might describe it" (250). Essentially, the violence that Parker endures renders him sensitive to spiritual concerns and prevents him from leaving Sarah Ruth and her Evangelicalism in pursuit of worldly satisfaction. While violence in O'Connor's stories typically entails death or an action that physically deforms the protagonist, Sarah Ruth's beating neither kills nor deforms Parker. Parker, however, is already physically deformed at the moment of his salvation. His body, of course, looks deformed as it appears "haphazard and botched" (514). Additionally, Sarah Ruth contributes to the death of Parker's body: "He was already losing flesh—Sarah Ruth just threw food in the pot and let it boil" (519). Parker also "developed a little tic in the side of his face" due to his obsession with choosing the correct tattoo to bring his wife under his control (519). With his flesh already subdued, then, Parker does not need to experience violence that kills or deforms him in order to receive salvation.

Although it does not feature a protagonist who dies, out of all of O'Connor's stories, "Parker's Back" provides perhaps O'Connor's developed commentary on the Evangelical belief that the flesh must be subdued if a person is to achieve spiritual salvation. The beating of Parker may not be as drastic as the grandmother's death or as shocking as the suicides of Harry/Bevel

and Norton, but Sarah Ruth's constant rejection of the flesh and her insistence on violently persuading Parker to deny his flesh clearly communicate the need to overcome worldly desires in order to prosper spiritually. The figure of Sarah Ruth also links "Parker's Back" to O'Connor's other stories, such as "Good Country People" and "The Lame Shall Enter First," as her character demonstrates significance of Evangelicalism to salvation in O'Connor's short fiction. Whether strict like Sarah Ruth, deceptive like Manley Pointer, or evil like Rufus Johnson, O'Connor's Evangelicals consistently play an important role in leading those grounded in secularism to the point of becoming completely committed to Christ.

CONCLUSION

Critics of O'Connor's fiction often wonder how it would have evolved if she had continued to live and write. Would it have provided more explicit support for her Catholic faith? Would it have illustrated less conviction in the saving power of Christ? Or would it have closely resembled her other texts? Such questions, of course, cannot be answered. Certainly, as discussed earlier, O'Connor's later works, such as "Parker's Back" and "Revelation," deviate from the typical pattern established in her early short stories. Regardless of whether her fiction might have evolved in the future into a complete abandonment of the typical pattern, the works she did write clearly reproduce Evangelical theology.

In accordance with Evangelical doctrine, O'Connor's fallen protagonists are devoid of goodness. Even their seemingly good qualities, such as the grandmother's respectfulness, Sheppard's compassion, and Mrs. Turpin's generosity, cannot be considered virtues as they stem from the protagonists' selfish desire to validate their own worldviews. The protagonists' inherent sinfulness can only be removed by an act of grace, which, appearing in O'Connor's fiction as an epiphany that exposes the erroneousness of the protagonists' beliefs, transforms their natures. After realizing that his compassion for Rufus Johnson was really only a desire to elevate his sense of his own self-worth, for example, the selfish Sheppard becomes capable of unselfish love, and the proud Joy/Hulga, upon feeling her vulnerability, becomes humble.

While the epiphanies of some of O'Connor's protagonists, such as the grandmother and Mrs. Turpin, are shown rather than articulated, other O'Connor protagonists, like Sheppard and Parker, readily acknowledge the insight their epiphanies afford. All of O'Connor's protagonists,

of course, suffer from a violent act, but violence in those stories that feature a protagonist who is conscious of his or her epiphany especially emphasizes the Evangelical belief that salvation occurs without human aid. Harry/Bevel's determination to find the Kingdom of Christ, Sheppard's resolve to care for his son, and Parker's decision to obey the eyes of the tattooed Christ seem to indicate these protagonists' ability to recognize their fallenness and take action that could provide redemption. The violence these protagonists suffer, however, works to illustrate the Evangelical conviction that only Christ can save, for the violence ensures that the resolutions and self-willed changes that these protagonists express can be neither forgotten nor abandoned. Indeed, the violence renders their salvation permanent regardless of their wills.

The Evangelicalism that O'Connor's stories reproduce is also upheld by the role that Evangelicals play in her stories. Certainly, many of O'Connor's appear warped in some way. They seem evil, like *The Misfit* and Rufus Johnson, greedy, like the evangelist Summers, and exceedingly strict, like Sarah Ruth. Although they are flawed, it would be a mistake to simply view their characterization as an indication of O'Connor's condemnation of Evangelicalism, for her Evangelicals are the ones who propel the protagonists toward their epiphanies. Rufus, for instance, pushes Sheppard to the point of recognizing his own shortcomings, Manley Pointer places Joy/Hulga in a vulnerable position, and *The Misfit* disproves the grandmother's definition of goodness.

O'Connor's short fiction does not depict Evangelicals as perfect believers nor does it posit Evangelical beliefs as necessary to salvation. Still, in reproducing Evangelical theology and giving Evangelicals an important position in the protagonists' paths to salvation, O'Connor's

short stories present a favorable view of Evangelicalism. Although written by a Catholic, then, O'Connor's short fiction should not be understood as condemning fundamentalism; rather, it should be regarded as expressing support for the religious values of the largely Protestant South.

WORKS CITED

- Asals, Frederick. *Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1982. Print.
- Babich, Alan Thomas. "Crossing the Spheres: Flannery O'Connor's Catholic Imagination." Diss. State U of New York, 1998. PDF file.
- Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. *NetLibrary*. 1 Feb. 2011.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." Trans. Stephen Heath. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. 3rd ed. Harlow: Pearson, 2008. 313-16. Print.
- Bloesch, Donald G. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*. 2 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006.
- Brinkmeyer, Robert H., Jr. *The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989. Print.
- Caron, Timothy P. *Struggles over the Word: Race and Religion in O'Connor, Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright*. Macon: Mercer UP, 2000. Print.
- Davis, Doug. "Grace in the Machine: Technology and Transfiguration in Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction." *Flannery O'Connor Review* 7 (2009): 18-34. Print.
- Desmond, John. "Flannery O'Connor and the Symbol." *Logos* 5.2 (2002): 143-56. *Project Muse*. Web. 18 Oct. 2010.
- . "Flannery O'Connor's Misfit and the Mystery of Evil." *Renascence* 56.2 (2004): 129-37. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 16 Oct. 2010.

- . *Risen Sons: Flannery O'Connor's Vision of History*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1987. Print.
- . "Violence and the Christian Mystery: A Way to Read Flannery O'Connor." *Flannery O'Connor and the Christian Mystery*. Ed. John J. Murphy et al. Spec. issue of *Literature and Belief* 17.1-2 (1997): 129-47. Print.
- Gordon, Sarah. *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2000. Print.
- "Henry Fowle Durant." *Dictionary of American Biography*. 1936. *Gale Biography in Context*. Web. 15 Feb. 2011.
- The Holy Bible*. Nashville: Holman, 2000. Print. King James Vers.
- Jackson, Robert. "Region, Idolatry, and Catholic Irony: Flannery O'Connor's Modest Literary Vision." *Logos* 5.1 (2002): 13-40. *Project Muse*. Web. 18 Oct. 2010.
- Kilcourse, George A., Jr. *Flannery O'Connor's Religious Imagination: A World with Everything Off Balance*. New York: Paulist, 2001. Print.
- Lake, Christina Bieber. *The Incarnational Art of Flannery O'Connor*. Macon: Mercer UP, 2005. Print.
- May, John R. "Flannery O'Connor and the Discernment of Catholic Fiction." *Inside the Church of Flannery O'Connor: Sacrament, Sacramental, and the Sacred in Her Fiction*. Ed. Joanne Halleran McMullen and Jon Parrish Peede. Macon: Mercer UP, 2007. 205-20. Print.
- McMullen, Joanne Halleran. "Christian but Not Catholic: Baptism in Flannery O'Connor's 'The River.'" *Inside the Church of Flannery O'Connor: Sacrament, Sacramental, and the*

- Sacred in Her Fiction*. Ed. Joanne Halleran McMullen and Jon Parrish Peede. Macon: Mercer UP, 2007. 167-88. Print.
- Meeks, Lila N. "Flannery O'Connor's Art: A Gesture of Grace." *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality*. Ed. Jan Nordby Gretlund and Karl-Heinz Westarp. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2006. 18-25. Print.
- O'Connor, Flannery. *Flannery O'Connor: The Complete Stories*. New York: Farrar, 1971. Print.
- Olson, Roger E. *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*. Louisville: Westminster, 2004. Print.
- Ramsey, G. Lee, Jr. *Preachers and Misfits, Prophets and Thieves: The Minister in Southern Fiction*. Louisville: Westminster, 2008. Print.
- Riedmueller, Jessica. "The Not-So-Sophisticated Roman: The Catholic Voice of Flannery O'Connor's Southern Fundamentalist Brethren." *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association* 31.2 (2005): 23-36. PDF file.
- Shaw, Mary Neff. "Responses to God's Grace: Varying Degrees of Doubt in Flannery O'Connor's Character Types." *CLA Journal* 44.4 (2001): 471-79. PDF file.
- Smith, Leanne E. "Head to Toe: Deliberate Dressing and Accentuated Accessories in Flannery O'Connor's 'Revelation,' 'A Late Encounter with the Enemy,' and 'Everything That Rises Must Converge.'" *Flannery O'Connor Review* 6 (2008): 40-55. *Literary Reference Center Plus*. Web. 11 Nov. 2010.
- Smith, Peter A. "Flannery O'Connor's Subtle Parodies of Protestantism." *Kentucky Philological Review* 17.1-2 (2002): 34-39. PDF file.

Srigley, Susan. *Flannery O'Connor's Sacramental Art*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2004.

Print.

Sykes, John D., Jr. *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and the Aesthetic of Revelation*.

Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2007. Print.

Wood, Ralph C. "The Scandalous Baptism of Harry Ashfield: Flannery O'Connor's 'The River.'" *Inside the Church of Flannery O'Connor: Sacrament, Sacramental, and the Sacred in Her Fiction*. Ed. Joanne Halleran McMullen and Jon Parrish Peede. Macon: Mercer UP, 2007. 189-204. Print.

Wyatt, Bryan N. "The Domestic Dynamics of Flannery O'Connor: *Everything That Rises Must Converge*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 38.1 (1992): 66-88. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Nov. 2010.