

# *The Functional Gothic Of Flannery O'Connor*

OLLYE TINE SNOW

WITH THE RECENT posthumous publication of Flannery O'Connor's collection of short stories *Everything That Rises Must Converge*,<sup>1</sup> readers are impressed again with the "terrible swift sword" that cuts away at man's sin. Again in these stories as in her other collection and in her two novels, the grotesqueries of man's defiant, sometimes stupid disobedience of God carry the theme. These grotesqueries very obviously, sometimes ironically, function on the basis of biblical prototypes and images—for example, the prophecy in "Parker's Back" of Obadiah E. Parker meets as bitter and as stubborn resistance as was Edom's enmity to Israel; the Holy Ghost's descending as a dove, or in the case of "The Enduring Chill," as a "fierce bird," shows explicit awareness of a Divine Being; Mrs. May in "Greenleaf" destroys herself through building up a wrong image in her mind of the bull ("silvered in the moonlight" at one time), just as Aaron sinned by trying to make an image of Jehovah in the Egyptian form of the golden calf.

But besides the biblical configuration, some of these grotesqueries, violent and horrifying in effect, recall the Gothic devices of eighteenth-century literature. Such a connection between the Gothic and Flannery O'Connor has already been noted in her previous work, but the connection has been chiefly deprecatory. With this appearance of the volume of stories on which she was working at the time of her death, it seems necessary to clarify the function of Gothic elements in the O'Connor fiction.

Actually, the Gothic conventions she adapts, refines, and trans-

<sup>1</sup> Flannery O'Connor, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, \$4.95.

mutates from eighteenth-century writing, in which they were used purely for effects of horror, function organically and artistically in her writing.

So far, only fleeting tribute has been paid to this aspect of Miss O'Connor's talent. One suggestion as to the function of the horrors and distortions in her fiction is offered by Robert Y. Drake, Jr., in his article, "Miss O'Connor and the Scandal of Redemption," which appeared in the Fall, 1960 issue of *Modern Age*: "Like many other contemporary Southern writers, she has consistently displayed a penchant for horrors; but unlike some of them—Tennessee Williams, for example—her distortions are always functional, serving to embody outwardly the inner horror of sin which is her principal concern. . . ." Dr. Drake sees the Gothic element as complementary to the theme of the fiction and therefore important to the success of the entire work. The opposite viewpoint, at least of *Wise Blood*, is taken by Isaac Rosenfeld. In his *New Republic* article, "To Win by Default" (July 7, 1952), Mr. Rosenfeld expresses the opinion that there is no correlation among Miss O'Connor's style, her techniques, and her statement—no linkage between the "monsters" of the narrative and her statement.

Other critics have approached the ugly and frightening creations in Miss O'Connor's fiction from both of these poles, the approving and the dissenting. Jane Hart, writing in the *Georgia Review* ("Strange Earth, the Stories of Flannery O'Connor," Summer, 1958), mentions the "literary cheating" or "opportunism" in which she says Flannery O'Connor, along with the other writers of the Southern Gothic school, indulges. Orville Prescott, in the *New York Times Book Review* for February 24, 1960, concludes that the distortions emerge to serve "no purpose except to demonstrate Miss O'Connor's determination to pile horror upon horror." Granville Hicks, in "A Writer at Home with Her Heritage" (*Saturday Review*, May 12, 1962) writes that the author herself explains the function of the grotesque in her fiction this way: ". . . In these times the most reliable path to reality, to the kind of reality that seems to her important, is by way of the grotesque. The grotesque, as she puts it, is more real than the real, and what many people regard as the real seems to her more grotesque than any of the characters she has created."

But the examination of the Gothic conventions on the basis of

their function in Flannery O'Connor's fiction can be expanded beyond what the critics have written or even what the author has expressed. For example, the Gothic details of distortion in the title story of Miss O'Connor's new book cause the reader to shudder as he discovers, "One eye of Mamma, large and staring, moved slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed. . . ." The emotional effect on the reader is primarily the same as that of the detached hand and foot on the stairwell in Horace Walpole's eighteenth-century novel, *The Castle of Otranto*. But in the short story, the eyes do much more than terrify the reader: they symbolize the purblind vision of Julian's spiritually impoverished mother.

As another example, the Gothic convention of the supernatural stranger in an episode in *The Violent Bear It Away*<sup>2</sup> has only a minor Gothic effect. The conversation between Francis Marion Tarwater and the "stranger" is brief; yet even here the Gothic quality functions patulously and organically. The omniscient voice, detached from a body, is a compressed Gothic device that adds a sense of mystery to the plot by its Gothic ghostlike quality and by its appearance in the midst of a deserted woods-clearing. The compression of the device, part of the supernatural motif in Gothic fiction, becomes evident if it is contrasted with the many manifestations of this particular motif in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*—the bleeding statue, the enormous sword, and the walking portrait.

To dismiss the "stranger," the voice, as merely a participant in an interior dialogue is to lose part of its significance. Francis Marion Tarwater, a fourteen-year-old backwoods Tennessean, converses with the "stranger" when he begins to dig the grave of his deceased great-uncle, who has reared him as a potential prophet and has commissioned him to baptize an idiot cousin. Tarwater is alone in a clearing within a desolate forest, the dead man is inside the deserted shack nearby, the sun which beams straight down is "dead still, holding its breath"—this setting culminates eerily in the emergence of the voice, a detached entity. Technically the inhuman detachment is achieved by the depersonalized representation of the dialogue between the boy and the voice, in which no quotation marks are used to distinguish the spoken words from the exposition, and by the constant repetition of the identifying label, the "stranger."

<sup>2</sup> New York: New American Library, 1961.

The haunting detachment of the voice is meaningful in Miss O'Connor's pervasive theme of man's struggle for freedom from authority, of his calamity when he "sets himself up as God."<sup>3</sup> Throughout *The Violent Bear It Away*, Tarwater searches for a means to dismiss Old Tarwater's command to serve God and instead to act by his own will. "I can act," he says, and "I can make things happen." But Tarwater has no control over the voice of the "stranger"; it punctures his brooding meditation. Most important of all, it emphasizes the contrast between the entity that is unhampered by human conventions and responsibilities and the boy who cannot escape, as the abstract voice does, from the tasks which confront him. This contrast between the voice and the fully animated, very much involved boy is heightened by the swift exchange of dialogue and the quick shifts in viewpoint, and also by the actions of the boy (he slams the door, hunts the shovel, begins to dig the grave) juxtaposed with the non-exertion of the stranger. The irresponsibly daring, Gothic-like evil voice is a foil for the character of the boy. But the full artistry of the foil is apparent only after the struggle is over and Tarwater has surrendered to authority, for the contrast is echoed again and again throughout the book as Tarwater meets the salesman who seems to do what he pleases, the schoolteacher who is much freer than himself, and finally the lavender-shirted maniac who is governed by nothing, not even conventions. Thus the purpose of this Gothic device is accomplished gradually in a pattern of contrast that develops throughout the book.

Miss O'Connor's subtlety in the use of a Gothic device to establish a significant pattern is again illustrated in another episode from the same novel. This one also is a minor part of the narrative. When the Negro Buford and his wife find Tarwater digging the grave for the old man, Buford's wife wails mournfully. Standing at the edge of the old man's grave, with the corpse nearby, and with a dark, dense forest behind her, she seems to have ample motivation for feeling frightened and upset. But she reveals another reason for her wails, telling that she has seen the old man's spirit. Momentarily, the whole dark, superstitious gamut of legends and mysteries common to the Negro tradition in the South converges from the past upon the three figures. This

<sup>3</sup> Harold C. Gardiner, "A Tragic New Image of Man," *America*, CII (March 5, 1960), 682, quoting Caroline Gordon.

train of meaning, prompted by the darkness of the Gothic setting and the supernatural suggestion of the transmuted Gothic "spirit," depends on the special combination of "nigger," "spirit," "dream," "grave," "raw ground," "wail," and "unrested." It functions here to set the protagonist, the little boy, for a fleeting minute back into the past, both the past of the Negro race with whom he personally shares disquietude and bondage (his great-uncle had bound his freedom) and the past of his family among whom there is "unrest." Here the past quickly vanishes, returning frequently, however, to pester the boy in his memories of the old man, in his struggle against the commandment, and in his haunting curiosity about the forest fire. The device of the "spirit," through this interpretation, becomes a symbolic, structural link.

The patterns established in the novel by the Gothic devices of the superhuman "spirit" and "stranger" blend into the larger design of the book; representations of the past and of superhuman detachment expand the theme of the human will, plagued by past guilt and conflict, striving for freedom from Authority. And Miss O'Connor's final comment on this struggle is, of course, that man will be defeated unless he does acknowledge obedience to the Supreme Authority.

Another manifestation of the supernatural—inexplicable, ethereal sounds—establishes a dominant pattern of its own in one of Miss O'Connor's short stories, "A Circle in the Fire."<sup>4</sup> Sound effects are practically absent from the beginning of the story. The noise of the farm tractor and the "Uggggghhrhh!" of the demonic Sally Virginia are the only loud sounds in the first part of the narrative; in fact, the pitch of the conversations seems muted, and one of the boys who visits the Cope farm draws "his arms across his nose as if to muffle his words" when he speaks. Into the notable half-silence of the first part of the story comes the "high vicious laugh" from the hogpen, followed by a gradual rise in volume with the whooping of the boys, shouts of the women, and later the Gothic "wild high shrieks of joy" from the woods.

Mrs. Cope, whose farm has been invaded by a crew of mischievous wandering boys, has an obsessive fear of fire; even so, she is unprepared to accept the reality of the fire the boys finally set. But the fire, like the two kinds of inexplicable noises that issue from the inanimate

<sup>4</sup> In *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (New York: New American Library, 1956).

objects, falls outside of her control. She has perpetually but unsuccessfully tried to control and order her life—by managing her hired hand, by disciplining the boys, and by taking every precaution against fire. At each attempt she fails; thus the Gothic sounds, representing the ubiquitous and the uncontrollable, economically suggest the necessity of her self-subordination and of her reliance on a power beyond herself—and, of course, Flannery O'Connor would mean a divine power.

The Gothic devices of the superhuman being and the evil sounds operate metaphorically and distinctively, then, in Miss O'Connor's fiction. Though the Gothic effect of the devices is not necessarily subtle (the "wild high shrieks" crash with a startling effect), their metaphoric function is always penetratingly so. Furthermore, their ultimate functions are fulfilled not by the devices within themselves, but by their extension beyond themselves.

The ability to extend beyond itself and to assume significance beyond its integral horror is evidenced by another type of Gothic device which appears in both of Miss O'Connor's two novels and in at least one of her short stories. This device is the modernized evil religious figure related to Father Jerome in *The Castle of Otranto*, Ambrosio in *The Monk*, and the corrupted clergy in Hawthorne's "Goodman Brown." Adaptations of this device include Onnie Jay Holy and Asa Hawks in *Wise Blood* and, on a lesser scale, the Cormodys in *The Violent Bear It Away*. Since these figures belong to the religious profession and may be considered servants of a divine authority, they are immediately related to Miss O'Connor's pervading theme of struggle against authority.

As supposedly dedicated servants of a Supreme Authority, these characters turn into grotesques because their values are the reverse of what is expected of them. Their deeds are evil, their thoughts are selfish, and their advice is usually guided by some ulterior motive. They preach self-abnegation; yet their own creed defies any authority except self. As protagonists of evil, these figures bring destruction, which is the main representation of evil in Miss O'Connor's scheme of values. But the destructive evil seems to come through them from another force—perhaps fate, certainly a great Unknown, of which all Gothic writers seem to be aware.

Asa Hawks in *Wise Blood*, a southern modernization of a Gothic

device, is a symbol in the service of theme, as are his violent actions within the narrative. Hawks, a blind man with "black glasses and curious scars," travels with his daughter, Sabbath Lily, through southern towns giving out religious tracts. Hazel Motes, the war veteran who has come to Taulkinham to preach The Church Without Christ, is strangely drawn to follow them as they stand on street corners or hibernate in their tiny, stifling room. Already a doer of evil deeds, Haze ironically encounters "temptation" through the Hawkses. Even more ironically, Hawks tries to convert Haze, but his method is sinister. Soon Haze decides to seduce Sabbath Lily. During one of his frequent visits on this mission to their room, an intensely hot little region, he learns the reason for Hawks's black glasses; his blindness (supposedly from lime) is only pretense. Hawks vanishes, after this climax, but the symbolically garish result of his hypocrisy remains in the promiscuous flirtation of his daughter, ironically named Sabbath Lily, who does realize his actual self.

Asa Hawks is the ace of hypocrites, the most hawklike of predators eating human spirit, and the compressed symbol of man trying ignobly to hide his satanic scheming for self-authority behind black glasses while lime corrodes his spirit.

Gothic conventions are also important to Miss O'Connor's sense of structure, which is acute. That she enlists the Gothic conventions in the functions of unity and coherence demonstrates her ability to give practical use to what might be considered superfluous elements. She even makes their function subtle.

Such is the case with the tyrannical figure of old Tarwater, an adapted Gothic convention reminiscent of the roaring tyrants of the eighteenth-century novels (e.g., Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto*). It is because of the violence of this tyranny that the old man's influence remains so great, even after his death in the first part of the book, as to affect the whole movement of the narrative. The structure of *The Violent Bear It Away* is roughly circular, with many flashbacks spiraling within the circle. The macabre death of old Tarwater at the beginning of the book looks forward to the birth at its end, the boy's spiritual rebirth. Like the attitudes and values of this Gothic tyrant, which are reversed from the normal human outlook, the life cycle is reversed here.

And it is the center of old Tarwater's very life that becomes the

center of attention in the book and a dominating motif: “. . . He didn't have but one thing on his mind. He was a one-notion man. Jesus. Jesus this and Jesus that.” Throughout the book, Francis Marion Tarwater, using his Gothic sensibility and becoming involved in Gothic conventions, orbits around this center, most of the time trying to ignore it and his grandfather's commandment to baptize his cousin, trying to take judgment into his own hands. But what Flannery O'Connor has set as the structural center of the novel remains fixed, and the conclusion she creates demands that Tarwater accept his fate of moving under God's power.

The Gothic convention of the tyrant turns up also in a story, “The Comforts of Home,” from Miss O'Connor's new book. The memory of the tyranny of Thomas' father drives the son to murder, even though the latter thinks he has inherited “reason without ruthlessness” from his father. Just as in the tyranny of old Tarwater, however, it works to destroy the evil blindness.

With his Gothic energy and his Gothic outlook on life, tyrannical old Tarwater serves as the delineating boundary of the *The Violent's* circular structure, which begins with one rescue and ends with another. Both of these rescues involve force, which is parallel to the coercive force of the old man's character, this being one of his typically Gothic attributes. The details of Mason Tarwater's rescue of the boy from the clutches of Rayber, who would rear him “according to his own ideas,” are given in the introductory exposition of the book. At the conclusion, Tarwater is rescued from indecision by spiritual directives to find “the children of God.” But the first rescue, in itself an example of Gothic tyranny, has necessarily precipitated the second rescue or else a final floundering doom, because the great-uncle's influence over young Tarwater involves him in such a quandary that he knows “something must happen,” he must “find out a few things,” and he must take either one path or another. The final rescue is, of course, the spiritual salvation of Tarwater when he bows to the Supreme Authority which he had been defying for so long.

Tarwater's struggles in readying himself for the final rescue constitute the emotional and psychological coils within the whole organization. There are three of these coils. During the whole time spent at Rayber's house he tries to exert his independence, but Rayber calls it a “backwoods, irrational independence” (cultivated by old Tarwater)



and will not recognize the strength of the boy's wilfulness. The Gothic struggle becomes more and more complex.

When Tarwater decides the second time to act, he slips secretly away from Rayber to the service held by Lucette, the child preacher, in the tabernacle. From this action he emerges "submissive," and his fury is carrying him paradoxically nearer the "roots of his peace." The second unit, then, stretches from this point to the drowning of Bishop, which is the inadvertant baptism, and the fulfilment of old Tarwater's wishes.

The third unit, the interim of recognition, includes the last part of the book in which Tarwater finally realizes, by a "red-gold tree of fire," that his will must be bent to that of God and the "sign of the Saviour," and, incidentally, to the will of his great-uncle. Thus Miss O'Connor shows that man can overcome his own perversity by subordinating himself to the power of God.

Linking these three units and the entire structure together are the many symbols and images of fire. The fire images relate to Tarwater and the Gothic convention of his tyranny through the fury of the fire, its uncontrollable combustion, and its wide sweep in a circle of devastation of cleansing. The basic fire image is the promise which old Tarwater gives Rayber that "the prophet I raise up out of this boy will burn your eyes clean." One initial symbolic act is the burning of the house on the plot of red clay, while the terminal ones are the woods-fire and the initiation rites of the spiritual experience. Lucette preaches that the Word of God "burns the whole world." Even Meeks, the salesman, is selling copper flues, and he plays a part in bringing the fire of God a bit nearer to Tarwater. And Powderhead, the name Mason Tarwater gave his clearing, hints of explosives, perhaps related to the explosive actions of the man himself. Though the fire images obviously recall biblical connotations, they definitely support the Gothic structure in which they are placed.

As another means of linkage and as a complement to the circular structure, Miss O'Connor uses images of circles in the book. These images all relate to destructive evil and thus indirectly to the Gothic conventions and to the atmosphere of terror. These images include old Tarwater's deep grave, Rayber's vision of a round burnt spot between two chimneys, Tarwater's "scorched eyes," the geographical unit of the Powderhead clearing, and the lake at Cherokee Lodge.

Also, Tarwater's trip from the country to the city and from the city back to the country is a circular movement. Old Tarwater's Gothic Tyranny and his fury reflected in fire can be traced through these images.

The circular structure of *The Violent Bear It Away* contrasts to the horizontal structure of "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*; but the structure of the latter is as much influenced by a Gothic convention as that of the former. General Sash's vision of the past is the influential convention in the story, which furnishes another example of how Miss O'Connor harmonizes plot, theme, and structure and of how she incorporates the Gothic element into the total pattern of a narrative with facility and purpose.

The form of "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" is balanced with precision and dexterity for half of the story, thus giving the same appearance of ready order as does a smooth file of troops on a battlefield. The last half is an artistic jumble that innovates a battle within itself; here the Gothic vision, the transporting of the man both back into the past and forward into death, gives meaning to the structure.

In the ten introductory paragraphs, symmetry is achieved by a regular, invariable alternation of "General Sash" paragraphs with "Sally Sash" paragraphs. The flashback about the premiere, which comes next, is balanced in contrast by the four paragraphs succeeding it which present the astringent life of the old man who has become physically fatigued but whose "heart continued persistently to beat."

With the arrival of graduation day, the structure becomes a dynamic chaos of action, dialogue, and thought, with no regular pattern. The tempo increases because of this, and the "encounter with the enemy," the General's fight against death which has already begun, now builds to a climax. The Gothic vision occurs. At this moment, words themselves fall everywhere and anywhere under the impetus of the moment's mood. Mixed together in one paragraph are "black procession," "a sword," "bone," "music," "body riddled"—all suggestive of the dark Gothic spirit and the struggle of the old man. Here in these words, representing the past, present, and future, is born a union of the ego-driven mortal and the universe.

Another example of the Gothic convention of visions or dreams

is the vision Mrs. Shortley has in "The Displaced Person." This convention, which is related to Edmund's dreams in Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* and Melissa's dreams of the death knell in *The Asylum*, can also be recognized as an important structural element, both within its individual narrative and in the whole book of short stories. The vision comes after Mrs. Shortley has mounted an incline while wandering through a pasture. This action recalls the opening of the story, when Mrs. Shortley had climbed a hill to stand at the summit and watch the Displaced Persons arrive. At both points, her superiority is suggested—at first, because of the peacock, the Christian symbol generally recognized as the "vigilant Church," which stands "behind" her, thus supporting her; later, because of the command to prophesy, a communication she believes is from the Lord. At both of these points in the story, not only does the character stand physically alone on a peak, but her spirit also stands on a peak, revealed for what it is.

A design of "peaks" runs through the book and ties the stories together, although for the most part their subject matter is unrelated. These stories were not written as a unit, but the form of their combination gains significance, in one way, by the Gothic details and a Gothic convention. In the title story, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," the peak comes after all the family except the grandmother have been led away to be murdered. The Grandmother, like The Misfit himself, is stripped of her conventional outlook on life and left in the grip of a grotesque realization of her own actually misdirected life: "Finally she found herself saying, 'Jesus. Jesus,' meaning, Jesus will help you, but the way she was saying it, it sounded as if she might be cursing."

In "The River," the revelation of Mr. Paradise's actual spiritual poverty comes at the very end of the story, after he has unsuccessfully tried to save the child from drowning: "Mr. Paradise's head appeared from time to time on the surface of the water. Finally, far downstream, the old man rose like some ancient water monster and stood empty-handed, staring with his dull eyes as far down the river line as he could see."

Mr. Shiftlet in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" is so selfish that he saves only his own life, after leaving his dim-witted wife deserted and after causing a hitchhiker to jump from his car. The revelation that his own life is saved but at the same time spirit-

ually endangered comes as he speeds toward further mobile-freedom, racing the “galloping shower into Mobile.”

In “Good Country People” the complete revelation of Mrs. Freeman’s evil comes after the Bible salesman has stolen Hulga’s wooden leg. She unknowingly admits the difference between the boy’s simple-minded perversity and her own tendency to gossip, to persecute, and to act a hypocrite: “Mrs. Freeman’s gaze drove forward and just touched him before he disappeared under the hill. Then she returned her attention to the evil-smelling onion shoot she was lifting from the ground. ‘Some can’t be that simple,’ she said. ‘I know I never could.’”

In the last story in the book, these summits of character revelation culminate in Mrs. Shortley’s vision and her prophecy: “‘The children of wicked nations will be butchered,’ she said in a loud voice. ‘Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain whole? Who?’” The Gothic effect of Mrs. Shiftlet’s question depends on the image of mutilation and distortion. The answer to the question, based on the symbolism of the stories, is that, of course, neither the grandmother, Mr. Paradise, Mr. Shiftlet, nor Mrs. Freeman will remain “whole,” and neither will the Polish man at the end of “The Displaced Person.” Gothic details in each of the revelations combine and symbolically lead up to Mrs. Shortley’s warning of butchering. Mr. Paradise is metaphorically a “water monster” with “dull eyes.” The grandmother’s cursing is a grotesquerie of her usual aimless chattering. Mrs. Freeman pulls evil-smelling onion shoots from the ground, disrupting the good earth and spreading evil. Mr. Shiftlet’s “stump,” his distorted arm, is another Gothic detail of mutilation. The atmosphere of the ugly, the evil, and the doomed is made to seem even more real by the supernatural message Mrs. Shiftlet finally receives, which is both a warning of the future and a résumé of the past.

Likewise, “peaks” of spiritual revelation or Gothic-like visions run throughout *Everything That Rises Must Converge*: Mrs. May “had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable”; in Sheppard’s vision of himself, he realized “he had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton”; and Mrs. Turpin saw through a “visionary light” that her supposed virtues would have to be eradicated.

Flannery O'Connor's technique of putting the Gothic conventions of her fiction to practical metaphoric and structural work is paralleled by the way she uses the conventions for tonal purposes. Initial tone in *The Violent Bear It Away* is influenced by two Gothic conventions, the old house (adapted from the Gothic castle) and the pine coffin (the Gothic tomb). Both of these are described in the first part of the book and thus are instrumental in creating a tone that is to be sustained. It is in the "large and dark" kitchen that Mason Tarwater's death occurs. He sits at the breakfast table with all kinds of stuff stacked in the room as a background—sacks of feed and mash, scrap metal, woodshavings, old rope, and ladders—but on the back porch is the old man's "pine box" that he has readied for his death. These details of setting create an atmosphere of paradoxically unsystematic order: the coffin is ready for death—the man's spiritual life is ordered and prepared, but his earthly life is a conglomeration of scrap metal and woodshavings. This atmosphere pervades the entire book as the young boy pursues a course hindered by "woodshavings" but fatefully guided toward peaceful order.

The pine box (the Gothic tomb) in "Judgement Day" (published for the first time in the new book) functions in the service of tone in much the same way as that in *The Violet Bear It Away*. It establishes a level of contrast between the pathetically unfilled final wish of Tanner and the selfish, stolidly decisive action of the daughter.

In *Wise Blood* the dominant tone changes from discontent to peacefulness. Although the tone is set chiefly by the actions of Hazel Motes and by his movements from rebellion to submission, the Gothic motif of the ancestral curse represented by the "wise blood" of Enoch Emery assists in this tonal development. The history of the motif ranges from Manfred's family curse in *The Castle of Otranto* to the enduring jinx of the Pyncheons in *The House of Seven Gables*, the inevitable fall of the House of Usher, and the degeneration of the Compsons in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County.

The two tones in *Wise Blood* match, first of all, the two periods in Hazel Motes's progression from conflict to peace:

1. Discontent—Haze comes to Taulkinham, sights Asa Hawks, establishes a residence, discontentedly wanders, purchases the "rat-colored Essex," seduces Sabbath Lily, preaches spasmodically but violently.

2. Peacefulness—Haze exists in self-inflicted blindness, forsakes active evangelism, practices fasting and silence.

Matching these two tones and two periods is wise-blooded Enoch Emery in his relationship to the motif of the ancestral curse:

1. Discontent—Enoch meets Haze and tells of his “wise-blood” curse, expresses desire for fellowship, visits the “new jesus,” the mummy in the “MUSEUM,” shows the “new jesus” to Haze, responds to his “wise-blood” urging to steal the “new jesus.”

2. Peacefulness—Enoch delivers the “new jesus” to Hazel Motes and to the world, vanishes into anonymity.

Thus the varying tonality of *Wise Blood* is actually a by-product of the central figure’s actions, but it is deepened by a Gothic convention which employs a grotesque symbol of the baby Christ, a John the Baptist who brings the Word in a new way, and a distorted “chosen one” who does not accept grace until after the “new jesus” is brought to him.

Reflection merely on the technique with which Miss O’Connor handles this Gothic motif of the ancestral curse, not to mention her techniques of putting to work the Gothic character types and other devices, recalls Drake’s comment quoted earlier. The artistic subtlety with which Miss O’Connor controls the “wise blood” scheme, a small part of the whole set of Gothic conventions, demonstrates that the conventions are certainly important, but in a much broader way than Drake explained. The “Southern ‘Gothic’ mode” of the fiction, which has been cited in half-derogatory references, can now be justified as being technically and artistically functional in the work. Basically, the conventions contribute to Miss O’Connor’s theme of man’s ability to overcome perversity only if he becomes obedient to Divine Authority.