Chapter II

*WISE BLOOD*
Wise Blood, O'Connor's first novel, is about a modern pilgrim who does not want to progress, who is in fact more interested in moving backwards than forwards. When the slim novel appeared on 15 May 1952, it represented an effort on O'Connor's part that, according to Sally Fitzgerald, had begun in December 1946 at the Writers' Workshop in Iowa City. Four of its fourteen chapters had already been published in various stages of similarity to the final version: "The Train" in Sewanee Review (Spring 1948); "The Heart of the Park" in Partisan Review (February 1949); "The Peeler" in Partisan Review (December 1949); and "Enoch and the Gorilla" in New World Writing (April 1952). O'Connor's struggle to put this novel on track is evidenced by some 2,000 pages of typescript housed in the Flannery O'Connor Collection at Georgia College in Milledgeville.

Because O'Connor had won the Rinehart-Iowa Fiction Award, Rinehart had the first option to publish the finished novel. The response from one of Rinehart's editors was disappointing. In 1949, replying to her agent Elizabeth McKee, O'Connor showed her fully developed integrity:

The criticism is vague and really tells me nothing except that [Rinehart's people] doesn't like it. I feel the objections they raise are connected with its virtues, and he thinks of working with them specifically to correct these lacks they maintain is repulsive to me. The letter is addressed to a slightly dim-witted Camp Fire Girl, and I cannot look with composure on getting a lifetime of others like them.
Three years later, after many rewrites, Harcourt Brace, not Rinehart, published the novel. When she received word from her editor, Robert Giroux, in the fall of 1961, that *Wise Blood* was going to be reissued, she could not bring herself to reread the book in order to write an introduction. Reluctantly, she submitted a terse paragraph to "prevent some of the far-out interpretations."³

When *Wise Blood* was published, Flannery O'Connor's neighbours celebrated the event, arranging a number of functions in her honour. The biggest, a tea, had the telephone book as the source of the guest list. It is said that few in Milledgeville understood *Wise Blood*—few people in the world did at first—and some were shocked by the language Flannery had used. Most people remained polite, however, and Flannery O'Connor returned the favour, concealing her wounded scorn as best as she could. Her relatives treated the matter as a family concern, and were more free with their opinions. One ancient cousin wrote to say, "I do not like your book."⁴ These words suggest and predict the puzzled and disturbed effect that O'Connor's writing had and would come to have on her readers. She was a devout Roman Catholic, with a Southern upbringing. But she was also a product of the South and knew well the voices and idiosyncrasies of her neighbours, their nuances and incongruities. It is said that:

*Wise Blood* can be read simply as a comedy of grotesques (the so-called 'Southern Gothic' genre), for its comedic effects and many grotesque elements. It can also be read as a philosophical novel, for it presents opposing views of reality and asks the reader to resolve the conflict. It can even be read as a social text,
for the novel captures the South at a time of great tension, when, after World War II, the rural and cosmopolitan populations were clashing, and tent-revival preachers encountered big city marketing. Finally, *Wise Blood* can also be read as an unusual case study of heresy and redemption. O'Connor frequently creates heretical characters and victims of spiritual confusion; however, *Wise Blood* not only has such a character, but also offers a complete biography that explains the psychological and spiritual crises that have brought her character to such a state of "grotesqueness."\(^5\)

In an early summary of the book that she prepared for the benefit of possible publishers, she wrote:

The principle [sic] character, an illiterate Tennessean, has lost his home through the breakdown of a country community. Home, in this instance, stands not only for place and family, but for some absolute belief which would give him sanctuary in the modern world. All he has retained of the evangelical religion of his mother is a sense of sin and a need for religion, which eventually torments him into taking up with a blind man and his wife, members of a small religious sect called in the novel, David Aspirants. This sense of sin is the only key he has to finding a sanctuary and he begins unconsciously to be search for God through sin. The ultimate sin becomes the seduction of the blind man's wife. An explanation of this at and of the realization, it brings him to can only be had through the novel itself.\(^6\)
Hazel Motes, the protagonist, is a Jesus-denying preacher. "Hazel" is a reminder of the biblical Hazael; Hazael tried to expunge God from their lives by using violence to destroy God's people. The biblical Hazael (which means "God has seen"), King of Syria, oppressed the Israelites, the chosen people of God (2 Kings 8-13). Hazael sought power and the fictional Hazel, ultimately and ironically, seeks God's empowerment. Throughout the book, "Hazel" is most often referred to as "Haze." The shortened name is a reference to a glazed, impaired way of seeing. It is the story of Haze, a 22-year-old man who returns home to Tennessee after four years' service in the army. Haze had grown up in the town of Eastrod, but his parents and family are all dead.

Haze is a man on the run. From the beginning of the novel to the end he is constantly in motion, whether on a train, in a car, or on foot in his final death walk. At the beginning of the novel, he bursts on the scene snarling, "I reckon you think you been redeemed" (6), into the faces of people he does not know. Just released from World War II, he has taken a train to Taulkinham to do some things he never has done before. He means to tell them they have not, but he never gets beyond saying that he will not believe in Jesus "even if He existed. Even if He was on this train" (7). They are insulted and uncomfortable with such direct talk. Hazel, who is running from God, is much more comfortable talking about Him than they are. We then learn a little bit of history about Haze. He left home at the age of eighteen to join the army, but vowed to return in four months exactly. He wanted to return to be a preacher just like his grandfather and "a preacher can always do without a foot. A preacher's power is in his
neck and tongue and arm” (10). When he left, he took only his black Bible and his mother’s silver-rimmed reading glasses. He had attended the country school to learn to read and write, but was taught that it is best to only read the Bible. He used to tell anyone in the army who invited him to sin that he was from Eastrod, Tennessee, and that he meant to get back there and stay back there, that he was going to be a preacher of the gospel and that he was not going to have his soul damned by the government or any foreign place it sent him to. His friends would tell him he was mistaken because he had no soul. Critics have noticed the mythic, almost typological qualities in Hazel Motes’ journey.

Martha Stephens calls the novel a “bitterly serious, if sometimes outlandishly comic, version of the Christian travail.” Throughout his travel with the army, Haze took time to examine his soul and concluded that it truly was not there. Four years later, the army released him and he immediately took a train home. When he arrives at Eastrod, he is surprised to find only the “skeleton” (13) of his house. Inside the house, the only thing that remains is his mother’s dresser. He secures it to the floor with a wrapping cord and leaves a note in each drawer that says, “THIS SHIFFER-ROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL MOTES. DO NOT STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED” (14).

Before Hazel meets Sabbath Lily, he decides that he wants to avoid sin and preach the gospel. His gospel, however, is different, he says, because he preaches “the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified” (31). In both his old and new attempts to avoid Jesus (sin, decay, death) he denies he has a body and hopes to avoid his
mortality by looking to the outer world, a world that hovers between abstract thought and tangible, concrete things. It is here that he meets the sordid characters that comprise this modern world: among them, Asa Hawks, a phony-blind street preacher, and Sabbath Lily, his homely daughter; Leora Watts, a too-large prostitute; Enoch Emery, "a friendly hound dog" (23), guard at the gate of the zoo; Slade, a sour used-car salesman and Slade, Jr., his Christ-cursing son; Solace Layfield, a wheezing fake prophet; Hoover Shoats, a sleazy radio preacher; and Mrs. Flood, an aging and prying landlady. As one of O'Connor's reluctant prophets, Hazel has from childhood been aware that for some reason God has chosen him. His grandfather prophesied that Jesus "would chase him over the waters of sin" (11). In return, Hazel vowed that he would avoid sin and thereby avoid having to confront Jesus. While most scholars see Haze's self-blinding as a moment of spiritual salvation, a few argue that Haze is the property of nihilistic control, a view represented most notably in the work of Josephine Hendin: "After losing his Essex, [Haze] is engulfed in a sense of nothingness, a mental emptiness broken by ambiguous, irrelevant symbols." The story begins with Hazel Motes riding in a train. During the trip he is seated opposite Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, who carries on an almost-continuous one-sided conversation in which Haze has no interest. He keeps staring at the porter, who he thinks is from his hometown of Eastrod, Tennessee, but the porter maintains he is from Chicago. He goes back to his berth to get some sleep, but begins to think of his childhood in Eastrod: the deaths of his grandfather, brothers, and mother and his desire to be a preacher like his grandfather. He had entered the army at age eighteen and had
stayed in the service for four years. During that time he had lost his faith and concluded that he did not believe anything. Upon his return he had found Eastrod deserted; all that was left in his house was an old chiffarobe, to which he had attached a sign identifying it as his and threatening to track down and kill anyone who might steal it. He had then embarked on this train trip, intending to go to Taulkinham. After the train leaves him at a rest stop and he waits six hours for the next train, he finally gets to Taulkinham, where he knows no one and has no place to stay. He finds the name and address of Leora Watts, a local prostitute, on the wall of a public bathroom and decides to go there. It is the first time he has slept with a woman.

The next night Haze walks through the shopping district at loose ends. He comes across a man on the sidewalk hawking potato peelers. While he is there a blind preacher and his daughter appear. She is passing out tracts, but Haze tears his up. She wants to buy a potato peeler but cannot afford it. A young man named Enoch Emery is there as well, and he brags to Haze about having a job as a guard at the zoo after only having been in town two months. Haze buys a potato peeler, intending to give it to the girl, and follows her through town to try to catch up while Enoch, who knows no one in town, follows him and refuses to leave him alone. When they finally catch up to the preacher, Asa Hawks, Haze gives the girl the potato peeler, but she says she does not want it. Asa tries to get Haze and Enoch to help pass out tracts, but they decline. When they get back to Leona Watts’ house, Haze finally gets rid of Enoch, but not before the latter tells him that the girl had given him the potato peeler, which he also wanted to buy but could not afford.
The next day Haze decides to buy a car so he will have somewhere to live besides Mrs. Watts' bedroom. He only has fifty dollars, so he seeks out the cheapest used car lot he can find. Like Haze, his grandfather had been similarly on the move. As a circuit preacher he "had ridden over three countries with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (9-10). For him redemption and movement had been as connected as they will be for Haze. Significantly, when Haze reaches Taulkinham, he will buy a car. In an exchange which shifts from the profane to the sacred, Haze bargains for the old "rat-colored" (38) automobile in the used car lot.

Haze moved quickly from the far side of the car and came around in front. "How much is it?" he asked.

"Jesus on the cross," the boy said, "Christ nailed."

"How much is it?" Haze growled, paling a little.

"How much do you think it's worth?" the boy said. "Give us a estimit."

"It ain't worth what it would take to cart it off. I wouldn't have it." (38-39)

The fact is that the car will cost Hazel his unbelief. The price will truly be Jesus on the cross. The cursing boy fills his tank before he drives the car and murmurs, "Sweet Jesus, sweet Jesus, and sweet Jesus" (41). In purchasing the car, Haze hopes to run from Jesus more effectively, but he will discover that because of the car he will be forced to confront Jesus more squarely. At one point he yells, "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (64). After much dickering he buys an old heap with no back seat
for forty dollars plus the cost of five gallons of gas, though the owner cheats him by only filling the gas can halfway. Haze then drives his car out into the country, where he stops at a boulder painted with the words "WOE TO THE BLASPHEMER AND WHOREMONGER! WILL HELL SWALLOW YOU UP? JESUS SAVES" (42). He looks at the sign for a few minutes and decides to visit Enoch at the zoo to get the address of the blind preacher from him. Enoch Emery is another sort of antagonist, who works as a guard at the city park, and has his own religious mystery: in fixed ritual stages he must daily have a sacramental milkshake and makes suggestive remarks to the waitress, then takes Haze to the museum. He makes a noise which "might have come from the man inside the case" (56). Enoch Emery does not know that Haze has started the Church Without Christ and has been preaching it every night on the street.

Enoch Emery also tells Haze that "I knew when I first seen you you didn’t have nobody nor nothing but Jesus" (33). Sabbath tells Haze, "I seen you wouldn’t let nobody have nothing. I seen you were mean enough to slam a baby against a wall. I seen you wouldn’t never have no fun or let anybody else because you didn’t want nothing but Jesus!" (106-107). Near the end of the book the landlady correctly concludes that "You must believe in Jesus or you wouldn’t do these foolish things. You must have been lying to me when you named your fine church. I wouldn’t be surprised if you weren’t some kind of a agent of the pope or got some connection with something funny" (127).

Enoch’s daily routine at the park is, after he gets off from work, to go to the swimming pool and hide in the bushes watching the women swim and sunbathe, then
stop at the refreshment stand and get a milkshake while flirting with the waitress, then walk through the zoo cursing and making obscene remarks to the animals because they eat better than he does, then going to the park museum and looking at one particular exhibit. This day, he has the feeling that he has to show that exhibit to someone. While he is hiding in the bushes, Haze arrives. He refuses to give Haze the address of Asa Hawks unless he follows him to the exhibit, going through the entire intervening routine in the process. Haze reluctantly agrees, but on the way keeps saying, both to the waitress and the owl, "I AM clean" (54); the exhibit turns out to be a shrunken man in a glass case. Enoch is so frightened by the exhibit that he forgets the address, so Haze throws a rock at him and knocks him out and then disappears.

That night Haze drives around town in his car looking for the preacher and his daughter. He finds them and sees where they live; noting that the house has a room for rent, then goes past a movie theatre where he begins to preach about his Church Without Christ to the people outside; after the ticket-taker chases him away he goes to two more theatres. The next day he rents a room where the Hawkses live. He intends to seduce the girl to show the blind preacher that Christ is not real. What he does not know is that the preacher is not really blind – he had promised to blind himself to justify his redemption but had lost his nerve – and that the daughter has taken a fancy to him and wants to seduce him. Haze visits them and leaves a note in the girl's hand telling her that he wants her and then goes to find a repair shop to get his car fixed. The next day he takes his car for a drive and is surprised to find the girl hiding in the back seat. She introduces herself as Sabbath Lily Hawks and suggests they stop and take a
walk in the fields to get to know each another better. She tells him that her mother, to whom her father was not married, died in childbirth, and that since an illegitimate child cannot go to heaven anyway, it does not matter whether she is good or not. Haze, meanwhile, keeps mulling over the fact that a preacher who was so devout as to blind himself could have had an illegitimate child. Sabbath asks him if she can go to heaven in his church, but he is not sure. She tries to seduce him, but he ignores her and goes back to the car, only to find that it will not start. A mechanic helps them get it started and they head home.

Enoch Emery comes to believe that he will be called upon to do something special, though he does not know what; his wise blood just tells him so. He begins saving money, eating next to nothing, and uses the money to clean up the room he is renting, get new curtains, and gild the inside of the cabinet under his washbasin. One day after work he buys popcorn and goes into the movie theatre, where he watches three movies. When he comes out he sees Haze preaching his Church Without Christ and hears him talk about the need for a new Jesus, one who is all man and does not care about redemption or dying. Enoch, remembering the shrunken man in the glass case, thinks he knows just what to do.

Haze keeps trying to visit Hawks but cannot get into the old man’s room; he cannot understand why any preacher would not want to try to save a lost soul like him. Instead, Hawks keeps trying to push his daughter on him. Haze has given up trying to seduce Sabbath and instead concentrates on protecting himself from her advances, even when she appears in his room in the middle of the night in her nightgown. She
complains to her father that nothing she tries is working, but he tells her that she had better succeed before he leaves town or she will not have anywhere to stay. Haze, meanwhile, is getting increasingly frustrated because his Church Without Christ cannot seem to acquire any followers. A sixteen-year-old boy shows some interest, but he only wants Haze to take him to a brothel. Then one night a man named Onnie Jay Holy begins to pay attention to Haze's preaching. Suddenly he begins to testify that Haze, a true Prophet, has changed his life with his message, and that his listeners can have their lives changed, too, for just a dollar. Haze calls him a liar, and when he tries to climb into Haze's car, he kicks him out. In a rage, Holy, whose real name is Hoover Shoats, tells Haze he intends to provide some competition for him in the future. When Haze gets home, he picks the lock on the blind preacher's room, lights a match, and looks into his eyes; now he knows the truth.

The next night Haze goes out to preach as usual, but in the middle of his sermon another car like his pulls up, and Hoover Shoats gets out with another man, one dressed just like Haze. Shoats introduces him as the True Prophet, who announces that the new Jesus is at hand and the unredeemed should redeem themselves. Soon the crowd leaves Haze and moves over to Shoats and his Prophet. Haze then drives home and finds Sabbath Hawks in his bed. She tells him that her father ran off because Haze uncovered his scam, and that she will not leave Haze even if he beats her because she has no other place to go. They then make love. That day Enoch steals the shrunken man — in reality a half-breed dwarf half-mummified — because he thinks it is the new Jesus. He hides it in his newly-gilded cabinet, but when he sticks his head in the cabinet the odour soon
makes clear to him what it is. He then decides to take it to Haze’s apartment wrapped in some paper. On the way, he sees a crowd at a movie theatre waiting for the appearance of the gorilla who stars in the latest monster movie. Enoch wants to insult the gorilla, but the man in the gorilla suit insults him instead. Enoch has not seen Haze since that day at the park when he showed him the shriveled man in the glass case:

"'If you had been redeemed,' Hazel Motes was shouting, 'you would care about redemption but you don’t. Look inside yourselves and see if you hadn’t rather it wasn’t if it was. There’s no peace for the redeemed,' he shouted, ‘and I preach peace, I preach the Church Without Christ, the church peaceful and satisfied!’" (80).

In one of his sermons he preaches:

"...What you need is something to take the place of Jesus, something that would speak plain. The Church Without Christ, don’t have a Jesus but it needs one! It needs is a new Jesus! It needs one that’s all man, without blood to waste, and it needs one that don’t look like any other man so you’ll look at him. Give me such a jesus, you people. Give me such a new jesus and you’ll see how far the Church Without Christ can go!

..."

"Show me where this new jesus is," Hazel Motes cried, “and I’ll set him up in the Church Without Christ and then you’ll see the truth. Then you’ll know once and for all that you haven’t been redeemed. Give me this new jesus, somebody, so we’ll all be saved by the sight of him!” (80)
Haze goes on:

“Look at me!” Hazel Motes cried, with a tare in his throat, “and you look at a peaceful man! Peaceful because my blood has set me free. Take counsel from your blood and come into the Church Without Christ and maybe somebody will bring us a new jesus and we’ll all be saved by the sight of him!” An unintelligible sound spluttered out of Enoch. He tried to bellow, but his blood held him back. He whispered, “Listen here, I got him! I mean I can get him! You know! Him! Him I shown you to. You seen him yourself! (80-81)

Haze had made the sounds of the new Jesus and the emblem complete. In the centre of the tabernacle – the museum of natural history – filled with stuffed birds (false replicas of the Holy Spirit), Haze had viewed his new creation – the Jesus which his church lacks. He is actually the father of this Jesus – a god attempts to create a new mythos, but not really wants any converts. When Haze asked a boy, “What church you belong to, you boy there?” (59), the boy replied, “Church of Christ!” (59) in a falsetto to hide the truth. “Church of Christ!” (59), Haze repeated. Then he said:

“Well, I preach the Church Without Christ. I’m member and preacher to that church where the blind don’t see and the lame don’t walk and what’s dead stays that way. Ask me about that church and I’ll tell you it’s the church that the blood of Jesus don’t foul with redemption.”

“He’s a preacher,” one of the women said. “Let’s go.”

“Listen, you people, I’m going to take the truth with me wherever I go,” Haze called. “I’m going to preach it to wha-
ever'll listen at whatever place. I'm going to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar. (59)

When Enoch gets to Haze's place, Sabbath takes the bundle and goes to the bathroom to look at it. When she opens it she thinks it is a dead baby, Haze's dead baby. She cradles it tenderly as if were a baby and brings it to Haze when he wakes up. In a strange parody of the Nativity scene, she becomes the new Jesus' mother and runs to show the baby to Haze. "Call me Momma now" (106), she tells Haze. Looking at the baby, she asks, "Ask your daddy yonder where he as running off to – sick as he is . . . Ask him isn't he going to take you and me with him" (106). Haze grabs it angrily, smashes it against a wall, and then throws what is left into the back yard. Haze intends to run off without Sabbath to another town to start over where people have not heard of his church before, but he feels too sick and tired to move.

Enoch now expects some reward from the new Jesus. He pulls apart his landlady's umbrella and goes out for a walk with the pointed shaft under his arm, thinking himself very sophisticated-looking. He goes to a diner where he borrows a newspaper and discovers that Gonzo the gorilla is making one final appearance in town. He goes to the theatre and hides in Gonzo's truck. When Gonzo enters and the truck drives off, he attacks the man and steals the gorilla suit. When he falls off the truck, he buries his own clothes and puts on the gorilla suit. He goes up to a young
couple and holds out his hand, expecting that they will shake it gladly the way the crowds did at the theatre, but they run away, leaving poor Enoch very disappointed with his reward from the new Jesus.

Meanwhile, Hoover Shoats is making money out of his new church and new prophet. One night Haze follows them and, after Shoats gets dropped off, pursues the new prophet, a man named Solace Layfield, to a dark country road. There he rams his car, pushes it into a ditch, then runs over Layfield. Right before the man dies, he confesses his sins, including stealing the car, and calls on Jesus for help. Thus death becomes an unavoidable fact for Haze when he murders his double. He kills him, running over him with the car, because he preaches what he does not believe in:

“You ain’t true,” Haze said. “What do you get up on top of a car and say you don’t believe in what you do believe in for?”


“A man has to look out for hisself,” the other Prophet said. “You ain’t true,” Haze said. You believe in Jesus. (114)

The Prophet begins to run in earnest. He tears off his shirt and unbucks his belt and runs out of his trousers. He begins grabbing for his feet as if he will take off his shoes too, but before he can get at them, the Essex knocks him flat and runs over him. Haze drives about twenty feet and stops the car and then begins to back it. The Essex stands half over the other Prophet as if it is pleased to guard what it has finally
brought down. The man does not look so much like Haze, lying on the ground on his face without his hat or suit on. A lot of blood is coming out of him and forming a puddle around his head. He is motionless all but for one finger that moves up and down in front of his face as if he is marking time with it. Haze pokes his toe in his side and he wheezes for a second and then is quiet: "'Two things I can't stand,' Haze said, '— a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is. You shouldn't ever have tampered with me if you didn't want what you got'” (115). Of course, in this respect Haze's words are self-convicting because he is the mirror image, the exact reversal of his double: Haze says he does believe what he does not really believe in at any rate; Haze kills the man, but before he dies the two become linked in the sacrament of confession:

"Told where his still was and got five dollars for it," the man gasped.
"You shut up now," Haze said.
"Jesus . . ." the man said.
"Shut up like I told you to now," Haze said.
"Jesus hep me," the man wheezed.

Haze gave him a hard slap on the back and he was quiet. He leaned down to hear if he was going to say anything else but he wasn't breathing any more. (115)

Haze is father confessor – a priest hearing the final confession of a dying man. In a real sense, this man – his double – is himself, and he is witnessing his own death, as well as his own acknowledgment of sin, belief, and faith. As Kathleen Feeley puts it, "Haze knows that he has heard only one end of a dialogue and that Layfield's
Redeemer truly lives."¹⁰ This is the point at which Haze’s conversion becomes inevitable. Bruce Gentry observes that “Hazel wanted to learn to die, and to die more willingly than his family did.”¹¹ This death of his double, and his recognition of his responsibility for that death, is the first climactic step in that direction.

Haze then leaves town, but is stopped by a patrolman on the road. When the patrolman finds that Haze has no driver’s license, he takes the car to the edge of a cliff and pushes it over. With the loss of his car, which had enabled him to move quickly, comes revelation. He rejects help and walks back to town, buys a bucket of lime, returns to his boarding house, and blinds himself the way Asa Hawks had promised to do. His landlady becomes intrigued with this peculiar figure, a blind man with “the look of seeing something” (120), a true blind seer. She knows he is totally blind because she saw him “as soon as he took off the rag he used for a while as a bandage” (121). He has become the ragged figure which he has been trying to avoid all of his life. Just as Enoch Emery has put on the clothes of the beast, so Haze puts on the ragged clothes of Jesus. Haze moves from the phenomenological to the existential.

When the patrolman destroys his beloved Essex by pushing it down an embankment, Haze sees nothingness for the first time. He has a vision that “extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth into space” (118). He explains to Mrs. Flood that he has blinded himself because blind eyes can hold more. It seems likely that what they hold more of is nothingness. After losing the car, his bond with the physical world, he has nothing at all. His shock at seeing the abyss, perhaps imagined as the embankment the car falls over, passes into a desire for another
anchor. He has gone from believing in but avoiding Jesus as a child, to preaching disbelief in Jesus, to propounding what is: from fear to blasphemy to a phenomenology in which all he can know is what he can see. After losing his Essex, he is engulfed in a sense of nothingness.

After his self-blinding, the direction of the action changes; Haze has nothing else to discover from the world around him or the people in it. Now it is his landlady, Mrs. Flood, who becomes obsessed with what it is that Haze knows. She soon has Sabbath sent to a detention home and begins to care for Haze herself. Once she steams open his government relief cheque and finds out how much he gets, she raises his rent and begins to charge him for board as well. She feels as though she has been cheated somehow. When she discovers that Haze walks on rocks and wraps barbed wire around his chest, she is entirely baffled, likening his actions to something she might have read in an Edgar Allan Poe story.

In an exchange in which the literal Mrs. Flood talks with the figurative Haze, O'Connor demonstrates how the same words move in opposite directions: Haze explains that he does these things because he is “not clean” (127). Mrs. Flood responds, “I know it . . . you got blood on that night shirt and on the bed” (127). When Haze explains that he means another kind of clean, she tells him there is “only one kind of clean” (127). Knowing that she is presently getting only two-thirds of his government cheque, she schemes to get the rest. At first she intends to marry him and have him committed, but then she decides to marry him and keep him around. She proposes this, but when he refuses she kicks him out. He walks away during miserable weather and is
found half-dead in a ditch by two policemen. They try to bring him back to the landlady, but he refuses, so one of the policemen hits him with his billy club, killing him. When the policemen return the dead Motes to Mrs. Flood, she spews forth her confessional apology to the corpse with a face “stern and tranquil” (131). Still attracted to his scarred blind eyes, she is now completely perplexed as she attempts to see into his eyes with her eyes shut. She has not solved the mystery that she finds somewhere in Haze; she is “blocked at the entrance of something” (131). O’Connor suggests with this powerful and mysterious conclusion that death has some answers that life simply cannot give, but those who are willing to make the sacrifice, who are willing to centre their lives in Christ, go into that life after life with a perspective denied to people like Mrs. Flood.

What saves Haze from being no more than a burlesque of an anti-Christ or a parody of existential man is the very real pathos of his life. Haze’s most powerful feelings focus on objects or intellectual abstractions. His desire to leap through the window of the moving train, perhaps to escape the “Parrum nigger” (5), whose father “got the cholera from a pig” (9), can be seen as a desire for a leap into redeeming faith. However, according to some critics, “... it is more a leap away from the natural world, away from the body, a leap toward becoming a thing.” According to Hendin, “Two worlds coexist in Wise Blood: one is a world of mechanical becoming, a world that is like an elaborated erector set; the other is a world in decline and decay not unlike an open grave.” While Haze is being chased, he is also doing some chasing himself. He is attracted irresistibly to the blind Asa Hawks and his daughter Sabbath, who preaches
on street corners and hand out tracts. Although Haze denies his faith and attempts to dissuade passers-by from their Christian beliefs, he cannot hide his Christian calling even from these strangers. Asa knows it at once. “I can hear the urge for Jesus in his voice,” he says (27). Even the taxi-driver who drives Haze from the train station to the home of Leora Watts, “the friendliest bed in town” (16), recognizes Haze as a preacher. When Haze says to Leora Watts, “What I mean to have you know is: I’m no goddam preacher” (18), she responds, tickling his chin, “That’s okay, son . . . . Momma don’t mind if you ain’t a preacher” (18).

Haze’s foolishness has been that he has moved around a lot, but he has not really gone anywhere. In his attempt to escape Jesus, he has not put any distance at all between them. Frederick Asals concludes that “Haze’s desperate unacknowledged search for Jesus . . . gives his paradoxical journey meaning only on the spiritual level, for the forward physical movement takes him, in every sense, nowhere.” After he blinds himself, he finally looks as if he is moving forward toward something he can see. Ironically, for the first time he is perfectly still:

His face had a peculiar pushing look, as if it were going forward after something it could just distinguish in the distance. Even when he was sitting motionless in a chair, his face had the look of straining toward something. (120-121)

At the end of the novel he is blind, but he sees; he is motionless, but he moves; he is a sinner and he is redeemed. This contradiction with its roots in the two-kingdom theology, which views humankind as both tied to the earth and straining toward
heaven, informs all of Haze’s actions in the book. If Haze shows his distaste for the physical world by a desire to leap away from the porter whose origins are associated with sick swine, he shows his revulsion for the pleasures of animal life as well. He longs to leap again after he has come to Leora Watts to show that sin does not exist. Confronted with the physical reality of Leora, he wants to get away. Though at first he says he does not believe in sin, he shows a remarkable understanding of original sin:

If I was in sin I was in it before I ever committed any. There’s no change came in me.” He was trying to pry the fingers off from around his arm but the blind man kept wrapping them tighter. I don’t believe in sin,” Haze said, “take your hand off me.”

Jesus loves you,” the blind man said in a flat mocking voice “Jesus loves you, Jesus loves you...” “Nothing matters but that Jesus don’t exist,” Haze said, pulling his arm free. (29)

He further says,

“Sweet Jesus Christ Crucified... I want to tell you people something. Maybe you think you’re not clean because you don’t believe. Well you are clean, let me tell you that. Every one of you people are clean and let me tell you why if you think it’s because of Jesus Christ Crucified you’re wrong. I don’t say he wasn’t crucified but I say it wasn’t for you. Listen here, I’m a preacher myself and I preach the truth.” (30)

His last statement is qualified by the doubts expressed in his knowledge about original sin. He is contradicting himself and revealing his rootedness in scriptural truth, while at the same time denying it. In this respect he is very much like the man who says
to Jesus, “Lord, I believed; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24). O'Connor quoted this passage in one of her letters when she wrote to a friend:

I didn’t know how the kind of faith required of a Christian living in the 20th century could be at all if it not grounded on this experience that you were having right now of unbelief. . . Peter (sic) said, ‘Lord, I believed. Help my unbelief.’ It was the most natural and most human and most agonizing prayer in the gospels, and I thought it was the foundation prayer of faith.15

From the first sentence of the novel the picture the reader has of Haze is that of a man who is not settled, who does not have a clear direction. Haze sits at a forward angle on the green plush train seat, “looking one minute at the window as if he might want to jump out of it, and the next down the aisle at the other end of the car” (3). His physical appearance and choice of clothing also give contradictory signals: “He didn’t look to her, much over twenty, but he had a stiff black broad-brimmed hat on his lap, a hat that an elderly country preacher would wear” (3). As he walks down the street in Taulkinham, his shadow occasionally makes him appear to be heading two directions at once:

Haze’s shadow was now behind him and now before him and now and then broken up by other people’s shadows, but when it was by itself, stretching behind him, it was a thin nervous shadow walking backwards. His neck was thrust forward as if he were trying to smell something that was always being drawn away. The glary light from the store windows made his blue suit look purple. (19)
Asa Hawks is still another false prophet, a fake blind man who pretends to have blinded himself with lime to justify his belief in Redemption. Haze puts Hawks in the role of Elijah in his new faith, and expects a secret welcome from him. He finds himself watching Asa Hawks, not knowing whether to leave him or to follow him: "He stood staring after him, jerking his hands in and out of his pockets as if he were trying to move forward and backward at the same time" (23). This approach-avoidance motion is echoed in the passages in which the sacred and the profane become almost indistinguishable. One critic has also noticed that Haze begins to reveal his contradictory nature early during his army years. When he is asked to accompany his friends to a brothel, his voice cracks, revealing his real desires.

Bruce Gentry observes, "It occurred not because he really wanted to go to a brothel, but because he feared that if he succeeded in returning uncorrupted to Eastrod and staying there, he might succeed in avoiding Jesus. It is typical of Hazel that a movement into wordlessness should say more about his unconscious desires than his conscious statements do." Haze says one thing and believes another. This duplicity reveals itself in a conversation he has with Sabbath Lily:

"I can save you," she said. "I got a church in my heart where Jesus is King."

He leaned in her direction, glaring. "I believe in a new kind of Jesus," he said, "one that can't waste his blood redeeming people with it, because he's all man and ain't got any God in him. My church is the Church Without Christ!"

She moved up closer to him. "Can a bastard be saved in it?" she
asked. "There's no such thing as a bastard in the Church Without Christ," he said. "Everything is all one. A bastard wouldn't be any different from anybody else."

"That's good," she said.

He looked at her irritably, for something in his mind was already contradicting him and saying that a bastard couldn't, that there was only one truth - that Jesus was a liar - and that her case was hopeless. . . . The thing in his mind said that the truth didn't contradict itself and that a bastard couldn't be saved in the Church Without Christ. (68-69)

Haze's choices are never clear-cut. They are always shot through with contradiction and ambiguity. Telling the taxi driver that he has chosen to believe in nothing instead of in sin (which will lead him circuitously to Jesus), he nonetheless asks to be left at Leora Watts' house. He has chosen evil, and as he has told himself in the past, if he can choose evil, then Jesus will have a chance with him. At one point he says, "I don't need Jesus. . . . What do I need with Jesus? I got Leora Watts" (31), but a few pages later her smile is described "as curved and sharp as the blade of a sickle" (34), death's emblematic instrument, reminding the reader of a truth Haze already knows: that the wages of sin is death. Haze wants a woman, "not for the sake of the pleasure in her, but to prove that he didn't believe in sin since he practiced what was called it" (62). His logic here is revelatory: if he is practising sin, then he must believe in it.\textsuperscript{17} His route to Jesus is indirect.

Haze is also disturbed by O. J. Holy's theology because it leaves no room for mystery. According to O.J. Holy, everything that cannot be explained simply is not true. Haze reveals himself as much more Catholic than Calvinist when he decides that
such rationalistic leanings are untrue. Haze demands mystery in his religion, but he also demands absolutes. When O. J. announces that in his church anyone can interpret scripture any way they want, Haze says, "This man is a liar . . . . I never saw him before tonight. I never . . . ." (87).

Haze's dream reveals his true discomfort with the religion he is preaching. He dreams "he was not dead but only buried. He was not waiting on the Judgment because there was no Judgment, he was waiting on nothing" (91). In his dream various people he has run into during the day look into the coffin/car in which he is trapped. They are merely curious and make no efforts to help him. Haze realizes, if only subconsciously, that if there is truly nothing rather than the Judgment, then the mundane, the everyday, superficial connections with people are all that is left. There is no such concept as the interconnectedness of humankind because the void simply swallows it up. All people do is look on suffering and need. They do not respond to it except as a curiosity. In fact, that is exactly what Haze is to the citizens of Taulkinhanm.

In most of O'Connor's fiction death is a major agent of revelation. This novel is no exception. From the beginning we see that Haze is closer to death than he realizes. His appearance is skull like: "[His eyes] were the colour of pecan shells and set in deep sockets. The outline of a skull under his skin was plain and insistent" (3). When he climbs into his berth on the train, he begins to remember his grandfather's coffin, and then his brother's and father's death. The berth is itself much like a coffin with one major difference: he can move. His grandfather, who had moved so rapidly over three counties, was stopped completely by death. Haze seems to fear the inability to move
more than anything else, probably because when he stops moving, Jesus will be able to
catch him. As a child Haze had sneaked into a carnival side-show in which a nude
woman squirmed inside a coffin, a macabre mixed image of sex and death. When he
returned home, he hid from his mother behind a tree, significant because Jesus was
constantly moving from tree to tree in the back of his mind.

It is very appropriate then that Leora Watts, for Hazel the embodiment of illicit
sex should also be described with the metaphor of death. When Haze finally gains a
convert, the false preacher O.J. Holy, he is not pleased. It is not only that a convert may
be an indication that Haze has been preaching the truth; O.J.’s dishonesty is also
problematical. Haze wants the truth. He wants no phonies: “I preach there are all kinds
of truth, your truth and somebody else’s, but behind all of them, there’s only one truth
and that is that there’s no truth . . . . "No truth behind all truths is what I and this church
preach!" (93). The truth is that there is no truth” is a linguistic Mobius strip. This type
of contradiction – self-contradiction, Christian Metz calls it – often has an amusing
effect:

If certain contradictions are amusing, it is because they come
very close to being reasonable statements, because they come
within a hair’s breadth of non-contradiction: for a fraction of a
second the listener is taken in, and it is at this logical surprise
that he will then laugh, at the contrast between the contradictory
phrase and the semantically normal phrase that he had glimpsed
or hallucinated an instant before. . . . 17
Here is O'Connor's serious comedy at work. She parodies, she drops one-liners, she has her characters reveal themselves inadvertently in the midst of contradiction which creates humour, but which is also deadly serious. In fact, both the humour and the pathos of this novel lie almost entirely in the contradictions.

Haze is not the only self-contradictory character. Early in the novel the reader sees Enoch, like Hazel, “looking both ways at once” (48). After he realizes that he is going to steal the new jesus, he backs away from Haze and is almost hit by a taxi. The driver asks him “how he got around so well when God had made him by putting two backs together instead of a back and a front” (81). The reader also learns that “Enoch’s brain was divided into two parts. The part in communication with his blood did the figuring but it never said anything in words. The other part was stocked up with all kinds of words and phrases” (49). Hazel’s bi-directional tendencies are echoed in these images of Enoch’s double-headedness. A Janus figure, Enoch looks both ways at once – toward heaven and toward hell. He will make his final choice when he disappears forever into the gorilla suit:

In an uncertain light, one of his lean white legs could be seen to disappear and then the other, one arm and then the other, one arm and then the other: a black heavier shaggier figure replaced his. For an instant, it had two heads, one light and one dark, but after a second, it pulled the dark back head over the other and corrected this. It busied itself with certain hidden fastenings and what appeared to be minor adjustments of its hide (111).

Frederick Asals points out that
Enoch's 'divided brain' is the comic counterpart of the rending split within Haze, but whereas Haze's fierce Protestant energy shapes his experience into the traditional form of the questing journey, Enoch is a kind of ur-Catholic, driven by his 'blood,' into obscure rituals which, on closer look, turn out to be parodies of biblical or Christian ceremonies.\textsuperscript{18}

These rituals are also emblematic in nature. Enoch finds the new Jesus in the museum which is in the centre of the park in the heart of the city – at the core, that is, of urban culture. It is dried out, impotent, and dead.

Before Enoch allows himself to approach the mummy, he goes through an elaborate ritual: watching the swimmers at the pool, eating ice cream in the stand, visiting the zoo, speaking obscenities to the animals, then proceeding on foot to the museum. This compulsive-obsessive behaviour lends some sense of order to his encounter with the icon, although he does not know exactly why he finds the rituals necessary. He is preparing to face a mystery, he feels, and ordinary, casual behaviour would just not be appropriate.

Enoch soon finds himself ritualistically cleaning his room, washing his furniture, buying drapes and gilt, painting the inside of the washstand, which was meant to hold a slop jar, but which would soon be the abode of the new Jesus. Asals calls this washstand "Enoch's Holy of Holies, O'Connor's parody of the Ark of the Covenant."\textsuperscript{19} At any rate, it is all emblematically appropriate. The false Jesus will be set up as a slop jar in a washstand which is in the centre of the room, the focus of Enoch's existence: "More than once after a big supper, he had dreamed on unlocking
the cabinet and getting in it and then proceeding to certain rites and mysteries that he had a very vague idea about in the morning” (75).

Haze violently rejects the “new jesus” that Enoch has stolen for him. Snatching the mummy from Sabbath’s arms, he throws it against the wall, pops off its head, and lets the dust inside spray out. When he sees the shrunken man through the mother’s glasses, he realizes that his own literal words preached on the street are an exact description of his call for a “new jesus”; “One that’s all man, without blood to waste, . . . that don’t look like any other man” (80). Motes understands that what he has called for is not what his church needs, and not what he needs or believes. He must reject literally the “baby” that Sabbath clutches to her breast and his own “fatherhood” in this fraudulent momentary drama. Figuratively, he rejects the religion behind the words he has spoken on the street, a first step on his path to salvation. When he throws his mother’s glasses out the door behind the mummy, he repudiates her brand of religion. He has only used her glasses when he reads the Bible he has brought from home. He banishes her view, discerning that he must come to his religious perspective through his own vision, unadorned with her spectacles.

Physical violence is also the manner through which Haze destroys Hoover Shoats and Solace Layfield. Shoats recognizes a potential monetary windfall from Motes’s Church Without Christ, immediately moving in on Haze’s preaching turf and renaming his church the “Holy Church of Christ Without Christ” (86). As he speaks Haze’s message in order to collect money from the listeners, he sees the “new jesus” idea as full of possibilities, only in need of “a little promotion” (90). Haze slams
Shoats's thumb in the car door, sending him howling into the night streets, and literally rejecting his intrusion. Figuratively, Haze denies the kind of religion-turned-flash that would earn money for something that its spokesperson sees only as an end in itself, a way to financial gain. Solace Layfield, Shoats's replacement for Haze as the "True Prophet," represents Haze's double. "Him and you twins?" (94), he is asked on the street. When Haze hears Layfield, he recognizes his own echo and knows he must "hunt it down and kill it" (95). Although the literal death of Layfield by Haze's running over him with his Essex is barbarous, the figurative meaning is the turning point on Haze's road to salvation. He realizes that Layfield is preaching against what he truly believes: "What do you get up on top of a car and say you don't believe in what you do believe in for?" (114), and he sees that he, too, is also guilty. When he kills Layfield, he symbolically kills his own Church Without Christ.

The last thing to stand in the way of Haze's return to that "wild ragged figure" of Jesus (11) is his prized possession, the high rat-coloured Essex, as much a character in the novel as any human because of the important roles it assumes as woman, with its "bulging headlights" and "thin wheels" (38) and Slade's invitation to "get under and look up it" (40); as home, with Haze's ready admission to Slade, "I wanted this car mostly to be a house for me... I ain't got any place to be" (41); and as his identity — "nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (64). When Haze becomes a preacher, the car is his means to reach the arbitrary church site, his place to preach from, and his way to depart. Here, too, is Haze's double. The car is as good as Haze is. When Haze finds out from one mechanic that the car cannot be put in "the best order" (65), he
drives to another who promises what Haze wants to hear—about himself and his car: that it was a “good car to begin with . . . with good materials in it” (65).

Since Haze denies original sin at this point, he advocates innate goodness. Haze listens to what he wants to hear, not truth. O’Connor, in writing about symbols, calls the Essex a “kind of death-in-life symbol” suggesting that its roles include, as Haze interprets them, “Pulpit . . . Coffin” and mistakenly a “means of escape.” When Haze asks young Slade the cost of the car, his response is symbolically important: “Jesus on the cross . . . Christ nailed” (38). He is letting Haze in on the secret mystery—his sacrifice for the car as symbol of spiritual home and identity must be complete; it will cost everything Haze has. Only Haze does not see young Slade’s point. He believes in his car because “nobody with a good car needs to be justified” (64); however, when the patrolman pushes his car over the embankment, Haze instantly needs justification. The literal need and the figurative point come together. In this new understanding, found in Haze’s gaze across the clearing, he now sees fully that he is not clean, so he blinds himself for Jesus, succeeding where Hawks has failed, acknowledging through further persecution of the flesh that he must pay.

O’Connor’s 1962 note assists the reader in interpreting the novel through Christian dogma. She does not mince words about her own belief: “I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that.” But she was also a product of the South and knew well the voices and idiosyncrasies of her neighbours, their nuances and incongruities. Louis Rubin leads
the school of thought that speaks for her as a "Southern writer rather than as a theologian."22

One of the ways O'Connor delivers her serious message through a comic novel is by exploiting what is most well known about Southern manners. One example is through the dress and hairstyles of women. She plays on the Southern stereotype of afternoon tea with ladies in lace and voile, describing their dress with various details that undercut at once any notion of Southern charm. Sabbath Lily, in her black dress and black knitted cap, replaces the proper purse with "a white gunny sack hung over the shoulder" (22). Leora watts, a prostitute who gets at least some business form the men's toilet at the train station where her name has written on the wall, dons the clothes of her trade, "a pink nightgown that would better have fit a smaller figure" (17). Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock is dressed appropriately for her train ride with "pink collars and cuffs" (3), and later as she prepares for her berth, she will grace the narrow train corridor in a pink wrapper. On the other hand, Maude, who drinks "whisky all day from a fruit jar under the counter" (51), wears a "once-white uniform clotted with brown stains" (50) to serve her customers at the Frosty Bottle. The reputed Southern hospitality and down-home cooking are served up by a woman who wipes her nose with her hand and greets Haze by asking, "What you come in here with a son of a bitch like that for?" (51).

O'Connor's minor female characters are often either no-nonsense women, such as Maude or the unnamed women Haze has lunch with on the train, one of whom repeatedly blows cigarette smoke directly in his face while ignoring him, or ladies who
appear ridiculous in spite of themselves. In this mastery of detail about the limited people, she depicts, she shows how clearly she has observed them from a distance; her audience, as she well knows, is far more likely to be sophisticated enough not to see themselves as the people she describes.

Protestant church buildings are so present throughout the South that O'Connor finds it “safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted.”23 O'Connor’s reaction of Motes, whose grandfather was a shouting, backwoods fundamentalist, Bible-declaring, evangelist preacher, and arrives every fourth Saturday “just in time to save them all from Hell” (10), makes sense within her orthodox views as well as within the milieu of her region. For the supporting cast in Wise Blood, O'Connor employs a secular use of religion to call attention to its abundant visibility and often surface meaning in the lives of Southern people. So powerful is the code of Southern manners that it often dwarfs religion, dominating the nature of its potential capacity for ultimate good. The references to “Jesus” or “Christ” and the Christian Trinity represented by the number three proliferate throughout the novel. At times, the words are clearly used as a way of cussing; other times, the words appear to be a prayer of supplication.

When Haze is trapped in his berth on the train, he receives no help for his stifled cries of “Jesus . . . Jesus” (14); ambiguity exists in the utterance. The words are a curse of frustration and/or a prayer of desperation. When the porter finally speaks, his comment could answer the prayer or the curse: “Jesus been a long time gone” (14). The porter means either that the world has lost Jesus, who is not around to answer the call
for help, or that Haze’s swearing has removed, “Jesus,” as the one signified, from the world itself, the signifier.

O’Connor uses the words *Jesus* or *Christ* 133 times in this novel, and references to Jesus by pronoun or inference abound. The use of the word in a pejorative manner dominates the text. When Motes becomes a preacher to “the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified” (31), a name he later shortens to “Church Without Christ” (59), his message on the streets is one of denying Christ: “Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar” (59). However, once Haze creates his church and becomes its preacher, he does not use word *Jesus* as a cuss word again. Before his decision to preach, he is partial to “My Jesus” (27), which he mutters in such a tone that Sabbath Lily notes: “Listen at him cursing” (27).

The obsessive play on the word *Jesus* calls attention to its paradoxical tension. The word is recognized as profane, but because of the repetition and the content of the story, the word takes on multiple meanings. The potato peeler seller, whose message is interrupted by the Hawkes’ distributing tracts, unleashes “damn Jesus fanatics” and “goddam Communist foreigners” (21) at them, which establishes “Jesus,” by proximity of word, as a displaced person. While the peeler seller’s message denigrates Jesus, the gathered crowd does not have any response. Maude admonishes Haze for being with Enoch:

“Jesus. . . . There ain’t anything sweeter than a clean boy. God for my witness. And I know a clean one when I see him and I know a son a bitch when I see him and I know a son a bitch
when I see him and there's heap of difference and that pus-marked bastard zlurping through that straw is a goddamned son a bitch and you a clean boy had better mind how you keep him company. I know a clean boy when I see one.” (51)

The woman who would use “Jesus” as a cuss word, call on “God” as her “witness” to identify a “pus-marked bastard . . . a god-damned son a bitch” has had her thinking affected by the whisky she drinks from the fruit jar. The language of “God” and “Jesus” have become so routine to her that her words mean no more than just “a way to say something” (90), an expression Haze uses to explain the “new jesus” concept to Hoover Shoats.

This attitude is evident in Mrs. Flood’s greeting to Haze when she considers renting a room to him in her boarding house. When he tells her he is a preacher, she wants to know the church: “Church Without Christ,” to which she asks “Protestant? . . . or something foreign? Of the two, Haze chooses “Protestant” (60). Mrs. Flood obviously knows the words, but she pays no attention to their meaning. “Protestant” has respectable associations. She does not see “Christ,” neither the word nor the idea, as relevant or necessary to a definition of Protestant. The fear of the unknown, the foreign, is what worries her. Haze assumes her stand and answers, for a Southerner, correctly; he is successful in obtaining a room to rent.

For O'Connor, the entwining of mystery and manners was inevitable. A discussion of manners in isolation is possible as long as religion can be kept at bay. In this novel, there is no escaping it. Her references to specific numbers with Christian
associations are more apparent with “three,” representing the Trinity – the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This number emerges as the most often chosen after Haze has declared his preaching vocation. He begins to preach from his car, he pays three dollars for his room, reads Hawk’s clipping three times, and preaches to three “portly” women. Three boys in “red satin lumberjackets” (58), and he repeats the message three times and moves on to three other picture shows before returning to Leora Watts for the last time. The symbolic suggestion through repetition is clear. In other uses of “three,” a car will be driven around the block three times before its occupants park and challenge Hazes’s message. The “True Prophet” earns three dollars for his first night’s work. After his blinding, Haze wraps “three strands of barbed wire” around his chest (126). While each of these uses points toward a possible reminder of the Trinity, each time the number is used in Enoch’s antics, the observe is insinuated. Enoch, in responding to the call of his blood, washes three items: the bed, the chair, and the washstand that was “built in three parts” (74). He has three pictures on his wall, and he goes to three movies, which as Frederick Asals points out, are the “cosmology of his universe as heaven, hell, and earth.”24 Of all characters in the novel, besides Haze, Enoch deserves attention.

Critics have often noted the doubling that parallels Haze’s and Enoch’s roles in the novel. In many ways, Enoch serves as a foil to Haze’s spiritual quest. Haze works insistently to determine what kind of religion will ultimately center his life. Enoch, on the other hand, works toward a literal center where he finds symbols of the modern world that are as tawdry and inconsequential as they are trivial and momentary. Enoch
guards the gate at a park that is "the heart of the city" (45), and his fascination with what he will come to identify as the "new jesus" Haze alludes to rests in a glass case in "the center of the park" (45). After Haze knocks him out with the rock, Enoch hears his blood beating "in the center of the city" (57). When his blood tells him to clean his room, he wants to go straight to the center, but he is crippled by his unanswering attention to an incomprehensible order, one that includes beginning with the least important item and working "toward the center where the meaning was" (75), saving the washstand for last because "this piece had always been the center of the room and the one that most connected him with what he didn't know" (74-75). What he does not know is symbolized by an empty space within the washstand, suitable for storing something of value, a kind of lost ark of the convenant.

Enoch raids the glass case in the center of the park and stores the shrunken mummy in this gilt-painted shrine. The mummy, soon to be dashed to duty pieces by Haze, is empty of substantial meaning for Enoch, and after he gives the "new jesus" away, the storage vault remains empty, symbolically duplicating Enoch's core belief system. What is telling is the mirror that sits on top of the washstand, with its wooden carved "hunched eagle wings" (74) protruding on each side, framing the face of anyone who would gaze in the mirror. This serves as a prediction for "The young man of the future" (108) that Enoch hopes to become. In actuality he will be more animal than human and incapable of seeing himself as others see him.

With his blood still heated and unconversant with himself, Enoch goes to Walgreen's in the "center of the business district" (77). Scratching his back against the
window as he inches his way inside, he must pass the displayed chaos, representing an accumulation of stuff that has some essential sway in modern life: “alarm clocks, toilet waters, candies, sanitary pads, fountain pens, and pocket flashlights” (77). O’Connor has selected items that appeal to the senses: they can be heard, smelled, tasted, felt, and seen. Grouped as they are, however, she has a plan for the chaos. Candies, which can be tasted, next to sanitary pads, which can be filled and felt, create a grotesque impression, helpful in marring the city’s image. The pocket flashlight assists its owner in seeing better in the dark, for O’Connor has already highlighted the indifference the Taulkinham folks demonstrate to the night sky’s beauty and magnificence:

“The black sky was underpinned with long silver streaks that looked like scaffolding and depth on depth behind it were thousands of stars that all seemed to be moving very slowly as if they were about some vast construction work that involved the whole order of the universe and would take all time to complete. No one way paying any attention to the sky.” (19)

Haze, however, does not look in the store windows.

Once inside the store, Enoch heads toward “the center of a small alcove” (77) to a “belching” popcorn machine. The city, brimming with superfluous gadgetry, is the place most likely to swarm with evil. Enoch’s encounter with the “pasty boy” who was “there to serve the machine” (77) highlights the ugliness of modern city ways, where humans yield to technology. The machine attendant feels around in “its vitals” and fills a bag, delivering the perversely acquired popcorn to Enoch, who pays with coins from his purse that, to the “pasty boy,” looks like “a hawg bladder” (77). The biblical
reference to Jesus' removing the demonic spirit from the people to the herd of swine, which then “ran violently down a steep place into the sea” (Mark 5:13) where they drowned, is a reminder of Enoch’s possession of the purse of pig. O'Connor appears to be suggesting that without Christ, Enoch is a prime target for the devil’s territory.

In fact, still haunted and controlled by his blood, Enoch goes to the movies. “Down a long red foyer,” that colour most associated with the devil, Enoch, “like Jonah,” finds his seat in the belly of this movie whale (79). The message of each of the movies foreshadows Enoch’s coming gorilla transformation. The Eye suggests that he is about to lose something he “couldn’t do without” (79), literally, his physical presence. The unnamed second picture is about life at “Devil’s Island Penitentiary,” where Enoch appears destined to roam when his gorilla hospitality days are done on earth. The third and final picture, Lonnie Comes Home Again, is about a baboon “who rescue[s] attractive children from a burning orphanage” and eventually receives “a medal” (79); Enoch’s own desire to reach out to people is apparent in the Gonga costume. Upon watching this movie, however, Enoch is repulsed by what he sees and is in a great hurry to leave the maw of this theater. After the three movies are over, he falls down “the two higher tunnels” and races out “the red foyer and into the street” (79). Unlike Jonah, Enoch does not appear to have changed his mind, heart, or direction; he remains other-directed, blood-guided. And the street he returns to is still in the city.

Finally, armed with his “denuded” umbrella stick, he makes his way toward the “Victory,” where he anticipates having his own kind of superior finish. Echoing the
message in the forgotten *The Eye*, he tells a waitress, "You may not see me again . . . the way I am" (110). Once Enoch disposes of the Gongga impersonator, he buries his own clothes. Although the dense Enoch believes this is "not a symbol to him of burying his former self," it is certainly a symbol to the reader. As Enoch eases into the Gongga costume, he erases his personhood. O'Connor shifts the pronoun from "he" to "it" (111), acclaims supreme happiness for this gorilla, and reduces God to a "god," who "had finally rewarded it" (112). However, when this gorilla moves in the darkness to shake hands with an unsuspecting couple on a bench, he rejects the hulking image and flees separately into the night. The last reference to Enoch occurs with a description of his wounds form the fracas to become the gorilla, and the last sight of the surprised gorilla is looking over "the uneven skyline of the city" (112). Enoch's comic wise blood spirals him toward his own empty center, Haze's unrelenting wise blood moves him to blind himself in order to pay for his earlier efforts to thwart the message of his grandfather: "Jesus would never let him forget he was redeemed. . . . Jesus would have him in the end! (11).

Many critics have viewed this as an unsatisfactory conclusion to Enoch's story — as an indicator that O'Connor left his dilemma unresolved. However, Leon V. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain's interpretation is different. They contend that Enoch is himself the new Jesus, that the bestial nature he assumes is the only alternative the urban culture has left him. Enoch is able to resolve his contradictions, unlike Asa Hawks and his daughter, who never do. They preach but are not believers. Asa appears blind but can see. The exact opposite of the traditional blind seer, who has insight and
extrasensory knowledge, Asa is a heretic who preaches to Haze: "'You still have a chance to save yourself if you repent,' he said. 'I can't save you but you can save yourself.' . . . ‘That's what I've already done,' Haze said, 'Without the repenting. I preach how I done it every night on the . . ." (63). When Haze challenges him to save his soul, Asa slams the door in his face. Even so, Asa's daughter Sabbath insists, "Anybody that blinded himself for justification ought to be able to save you – or even somebody of his blood" (64).

In a letter to Louise Abbot, O'Connor explained the sacrament of penance as "not acts performed in order to attract God's attention or get credit for oneself. It is something natural that follows sorrow."26 That is the most satisfactory way of explaining Haze's self-mutilation. He has, for the first time in his life, felt true sorrow, and it is natural for him to handle that sorrow by attempting to reject the parts of his body that have offended him. His eye has offended him, and so he plucks it out. He blinds himself not only because he is completing an act which the false preacher Asa Hawks never finished, but also because he realizes that his vision has led him astray. If he is blind, he will no longer be able to drive. If he is blind, he will be forced to confront that image which has burned in the back of his mind all of his life.

Richard Giannone has pointed out that in Hebrew Hazel meant "He who saw God," and that Taulkinham in Greek meant "the home of the small cross."27 Haze is finally able to see God by following the way of the cross, by confronting its scandal, and participating in the kingdom of God it ushers in. With loss, suffering, and death
comes revelation. With the sacraments of confession and penance come release and redemption. In a letter to Ben Griffith, O'Connor wrote:

Let me assure you that no one but a Catholic could have written Wise Blood even though it is a book about a kind of Protestant saint. It reduces Protestantism to the twin ultimate absurdities of The Church Without Christ or The Holy Church of Christ Without Christ, which no pious Protestant would do. And of course no unbeliever or agnostic could have written it because it is entirely Redemption-centred in thought. Not too many people are willing to see this, and perhaps it is hard to see because H. Motes is such an admirable nihilist. His nihilism leads him back to the fact of his Redemption, however, which is what he would have liked so much to get away from. 28

Haze finally gains a true convert in the landlady who watches over his corpse with her eyes shut. She sits staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and feels as “if she had finally got to the beginning of something she could not begin, and she saw him moving father and father away, father and father into the darkness until he is the pin point of light” (131). He is finally moving in the right direction. His death has moved him to redemption.

John Desmond sees the situation of Haze as connected with history, and though the novel’s action argues for a redemption vision, O'Connor has chosen to present “Haze’s quest obliquely as a via negation.” 29 Frederick Asals has labeled the novel a “modern pilgrim’s progress of a blaspheming believer.” 30 One of the major themes of the novel is faith and religious belief, but for most of the characters faith has become
little more than an annoyance that is sold in city streets. It is not a relevant or meaningful part of their lives. *Wise Blood*, however, has often been criticized for being an exotic book. Even some of its readers who recognize allegorical outlines have objected that it is the story of an unrepresentative everyman on a special, not universal, quest. Consequently, in their view, the novel is too diffused; it sometimes is too ambiguous as it tries to make situations serve conflicting purposes; and it is several times too pat in its use of social and religious platitudes.

Vision predominates in *Wise Blood*. Enoch, who supposedly possesses wise blood, senses in a mystery beyond understanding his role in Haze’s church. That is one type of vision. Sight is another: Asa, the blind imposter, who is street-wise; Haze, who cannot see until he is physically blind (like Oedipus); and Mrs. Flood, Haze’s landlady, who becomes absorbed in Haze’s eyes “as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn’t begin” (131). O’Connor offers sufficient support for this emphasis: Haze’s name which suggests colour and obscured vision, and “Motes” in connection with Matthew 7:3-5: “Why beholdest thou the mote that was in thy neighbour’s eye, but considerest not the beam that was in thine own eye . . . thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye.”

Contemporary reviewers were quick to notice that the characters in *Wise Blood* were beyond strange: in the *New York Times Book Review*, William Goyen said that “they seem not to belong to the human race at all,” and from Oliver LaFarge in the *Saturday Review*, “the individual is so repulsive that one cannot become interested in him.” Other reviewers suggested the novel’s “oddness,” its “strange, predatory
people,”35 and “its insane world, peopled by monsters and submen.”36 The book was seen as angry, not comic, and classified as “an important addition to the grotesque literature of Southern decadence.”37 At the time, no critic saw the novel as a unique contribution to American literature. A more appreciative critical understanding was to come after O'Connor added a short note to the 1962 second edition of Wise Blood. The novel has been described as Southern Gothic in its portrayal of the bizarre and the grotesque, as well as in its depiction of scenes of horror and violence. O'Connor also has a strong concern with questions of religious faith. Major themes of her novels include: the individual's search for vocation; the search for justification and redemption; the conflict of good and evil; the conflict of faith and doubt. Haze seems trapped by his destiny to become a preacher. Though he denies that Jesus exists, the individual's inability to deny that God exists. Even when an individual attempts to deny the existence of God, the individual is confronted by the presence of God. Haze's attempt to run away from God transforms the novel from bizarre comedy to an intense and searching study of the problem of redemption in the modern world.

Hazel Motes is a man in religious crisis. His own grandfather was a revival preacher, yet he has rejected not only faith, but the entire story of Jesus as “a trick on niggers” (43). In particular, he rejects guilt and redemption. Haze is tormented by belief and rejects it violently because of how much it is a part of him. Hazel begins as many O'Connor characters do a victim of a misunderstanding of the radical Calvinism of the South. His evangelical grandfather taught him that Jesus died for the sins of mankind and that Jesus would always “get you”:
... this *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* view of Christ leads Motes to view salvation as a form of punishment, so he decides that he can be saved from being evil by believing in nothing. That is, he can save his soul by having no soul at all. However, his nihilism becomes a positive belief. He is not an atheist, for his nothingness takes on the power of salvation. Haze believes in a vacuum as an alternative to a hunting, predatory Jesus.38

Enoch Emery, in contrast, believes readily but cannot see beyond the body. He, like other O'Connor characters, wants and demands a physical Jesus. He is a creature of clay, a man whose blood speaks to him. It was his “wise blood” (inherited from his father) that led him to Haze, whom he latches onto as a candidate for the “new jesus.” The character Asa Hawks, on the other hand, is one of O'Connor’s mountebanks. He has no belief in anything but himself. He takes no pleasure in evil or good, only in gratification of himself. His daughter Sabbath also believes only in self-gratification.

Haze is a believer without belief and a seer without vision. Each of O'Connor’s stories has, she said, a moment of grace, but it is a Roman Catholic grace — grace that brings a person to the brink of belief, but not grace that saves by itself. It is transformative, but those to whom the grace is given must choose to either accept it or not. One interpretation is that Haze’s own moment of grace comes with his destruction of the “new Jesus” that Enoch Emery has discovered (a mummified body he steals from a museum). Another is that throughout the novel, Haze’s “rat-colored car” (46), takes on more and more meaning as it becomes not only a mode of transportation, but a
place to live and a platform (the “nose” of its hood) from which to preach his Church without Christ. At various times in the novel he says “Nobody with a good car needs to be justified (64), and “nobody with a good car needed to worry about anything (116).

In this context, after the malicious patrolman destroys his car, the actual “church” from which his new denomination is launched, his moment of grace occurs: he is left with nothing but his own mind and body to incorporate his church. This is when he decides to blind himself with lime. Another interpretation is that the patrolman’s spite in rolling the car off the road and destroying it reminds Haze of his own spite in rolling another man’s car off the road the night before and destroying that man’s life, a man who was made to look just likes Haze. Having denied the existence of sin or guilt up to this point, Haze now says, “I’m not clean” (127) when questioned about the barbed wire he wears under his shirt. Having denied the soul’s need for redemption, Haze now tells his landlady that he walks with rocks in his shoes “to pay” (121), still rejecting Christ’s redemption in his ironic attempt to forge his own. Whether Haze’s mote is ultimately removed or not is not made clear in the novel.

O’Connor herself said that a chief theme of the novel is “integrity.” For those people who think belief in Christ is “a matter of no great consequence,” O’Connor writes, “Haze’s integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind,” but for her “Haze’s integrity lies in his not being able to.” Free will, she says, “does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man,” and freedom is a mystery that cannot be reduced to a simple definition. These comments, written in 1962 on the 10th anniversary of the novel,
seem contradictory. It is the integrity, the sameness of will and character, that is demonstrated by the frustration of Haze's overt will and character, for the Haze who emerges from apostasy is not the Haze who blindly gainsays the sermons of the grandfather who "had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (9-10). The religious vision of Haze's last asceticism is not Hell-inspired or guilt-inspired, and so his defeated will is the accomplishment of his will. In the same preface, she describes the character of Haze Motes as "a Christian malgré lui" - a Christian in spite of himself.
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