CONCLUSION

Robert Fitzgerald said about Miss O'Connor that, "She was a girl who started with a gift for cartooning and satire". She went far beyond her beginnings, but elements of cartoonists technique, caricature and violence persist throughout her works. She created characters and situations to attain "deeper kinds of realism" (M.P., p. 33). In fact Miss O'Connor believed in the prophetic nature of life and felt that the main obligation of the writer was to illuminate the connection between prophecy and action. She remarked on several occasions that the prophetic writer, the realist of distances, is the most significant variety of novelists (M.P., p. 42). A peacock, a dilapidated car, a statue of a Negro, a tattoo of Byzantine Christ, all these objects are existing in this concrete and materialistic world, yet in the context of Miss O'Connor's fiction they succeed in creating an effect which combines the Mystery. A major premise of Miss O'Connor's thinking is that the realm of the Holy interpenetrates this world and affects it. It is the working of this Mystery that she was most concerned with demonstrating in her fiction.

Miss O'Connor did not discard the heritage of her old religion, rather she utilized it as a foundation for her own fiction by merging Christianity with the emotional and ethical dilemmas of her characters. Her characters
are unique and irreplaceable; they are marked by God for the most agonizing and unusual adventures, and they harbour destinies that reveal an unusual manner of evil and sin. Then only the ways of Grace are noticed. This mysterious presence of Grace stands poised over the landscape of the grotesque ready to wreak vengeance on people in their eternal flight from religious responsibilities.

Miss O'Connor had various persuasive techniques, and her technique of description is terse and severe, tending always towards the impressionistic in which landscape is distilled into primary images which render a picture of violent physical world. Images like burning bush, painful tattooing, ritualistic drowning illustrate both the pointlessness of a purely secular world and the indispensable need of God to correct the absurdity of man's condition. Thus through the use of grotesquery she tried to imply the opposite - the "wholeman" in the Christian sense. Throughout her stories there is a quality of honesty, a consistent sharpness, the relief of humour and an extended exposure of human weakness and pretension.

Miss O'Connor was the artist of the highest calibre, but she thought of herself as a prophet, and her art was the medium for her prophetic message. It was her intention that her stories should shock the reader and bring him to encounter a vision. She wanted her vision not only to be seen for what it was but to be taken seriously, and she was confident enough of her artistic powers to believe
that it would happen one day. Certainly recognition of Miss O'Connor has not taken that much time as she was prepared to wait. Between 1930 and then more than a dozen books on her work have appeared and the number of critical essays has been growing since 1958. She is being seen as a writer of importance despite the fact that the body of her work is very small. However, there is still a good deal of tension between her prophetic stance and the mood of the contemporary literary world. Of the books published on her works, one denies altogether the prophetic vision and its relevance to the understanding of her works.\(^2\)

The other book wonders if Miss O'Connor is one of those writers "whose private vision of things we respect less and less, the better we understand it."\(^3\) But on the other hand there have been critics like Thomas Merton who compared her to Sophocles\(^4\) and Thomas Carlson to Aeschylus.\(^5\)

Certain charges have been raised against Miss O'Connor's works by a number of critics. But having dealt with her stories in this thesis, I have come to the conclusion that these charges do not have much base. The first criticism has been that her rigid view of humanity is lacking in compassion. No doubt the themes of her stories do give this evidence to support such a charge, but Miss O'Connor's intention has always been to correct the view of a permissive society which confuses freedom with license and lax approval with responsible understanding. However, if one studies her works carefully, it is noticed that even
for those characters who strive to align themselves with something more enduring than worldly progress, something more meaningful than transient involvement in pleasure (such as in the case of Hazel Notes, Tawater, Old Tanner, and even the criminal Rufus Johnson) she evinces deep and obvious sympathy. She castigates Man so that he may awaken to his folly before it is too late. She is always on her way to rouse the Sleeping City, calling out that everyday is "Judgement Day".

Another criticism about Miss O'Connor's fiction is that it lacks in natural beauty. Once again it can be said that outwardly this charge has some truth. The reader seldom finds beauty of natural form in her stories, and there is apparently no aesthetic attraction of the surroundings. But this criticism can very well be rejected with the argument that the atmosphere in the stories reflects the character's dispositions - "sour", "dull", "sullen". The landscape serves very well its intended purpose: to set the emotional tone of the narrations. Her characters themselves are, for the most part, oblivious to the beauties about them. They pay no heed to the stars over Tawkinham or to the peacock's splendour. In "A View of the Woods", Mr Fortune is blind to the mystery of the view his grand-daughter praises. Moreover, the brilliance of the blazing sun, and the red colour of the setting sun has been used by Miss O'Connor in a number of stories.
Against the radiance of the sun, Mrs May in
"Greenleaf" encounters the bull—her fatal lover, and the
grand-mother in "A Good Man" is shot after her brief
moment of Grace. These blazing scenes depict the moments
of absolute truth. The child in "A Temple of the Holy
Ghost" contemplates the mysteries of divine perfection
incarnate in the imperfect human being while watching the
deep red sun-set; in "Revelation" Mrs Rupin gazes at the
crimson curtain of the evening sky when she gets the
Revelation. Hence it can be argued that if Miss O'Connor's
stories lack in natural beauty, it is because the setting
is invariably fitted to the action.

Still another objection about Miss O'Connor is
that her works are depressing because of her over-emphasis
on the morbid and the grotesque aspects of the life. In
this connection it may be mentioned that Miss O'Connor
depicts the realities of life. Her vision is apocalyptic,
and she is able to recognize the whole man, hence, she
is able to depict the grotesque. She insists that the
sharks hidden in the depths are as much part of the scene
as the gilded sea surface.

Yet another criticism levelled against Miss O'Connor's
works is that her fiction is not anagogical. The critics
who do not find any religious element in her fiction say
that her own critical comments about her works show that she
intended her works to be religious. It is very true that
because of her indirect technique for portrayal of the Christian myth, the critics have perhaps missed the underlying mystery in her stories. But the publication of her first essay "The Fiction Writer and His Country" in 1957 (M.E., pp. 25-35) dramatically changed the tenor of critical response. Until that time the spiritual meanings in her texts went unheeded. Miss O'Connor's letters in those early years are filled with jokes about the critical reception of her stories "I seem to attract the lunatic fringe" (The Habit of Beings, p. 56) she wrote to Peter and Robert Fitzgerald. Repeatedly she noted cases of what she considered misreadings. However, John Hawkes and Nathan A. Scott, Jr. were the first critics to suggest that Miss O'Connor's principal concern might be anagogical.

There can be no doubt that Miss O'Connor's sensibility is intensely religious, and there is much discussion of books in Miss O'Connor's letters. She liked to discuss theology but she maintained throughout her life that Church in no way impaired her true freedom. Miles Orvell considers Miss O'Connor's fiction anagogical to such an extent that he compares her with eight European writers who are by habit and conviction religious writers: Mauriac, Bernanos, Greene, O'Faolain, Waugh, Peguy, Claudel and Bloy.

This thesis deals with the search for Redemption in Miss O'Connor's fiction, hence intensive research has been conducted on the anagogical and religious aspect of
her works. I have tried to deal with all her stories with a clear understanding of Christian themes, and have tried to prove the sacramental view of life in Miss O'Connor's fiction. In each story the protagonist gets his or her moment of grace and sees the mystery of the universe. If one reads her stories deeply, beyond the literal level, he is able to easily discover the spiritual implications, because her fiction includes a metaphysical dimension, which is accessible to all. The purpose of this thesis is to prove Miss O'Connor's religious beliefs and to show the success of her analogical achievements. An attempt has been made to prove these points in chapters four and six.

The difficulties that the typical O'Connor story presents are very much like those encountered in the modern poetry: both seek to convey the total complexity of the subject without sacrificing the author's moral intent. To the morally neutral reader, Miss O'Connor's fiction will generate a startling range of misconceptions. But the reader with a sound background of modern literature and a classical understanding of Christo-centric religion will be able to understand Miss O'Connor's fiction for what it is -- a unique and forceful body of fiction based upon the profound and simple verities that have been the focal point of Western thought for almost two thousand years.

Because of the intricate complexity of her vision, whose diverse elements fuse as "Christian tragi-comedy", 
Miss O'Connor's works have confused some readers who have misunderstood or rejected the aims she seeks. She herself foresaw that her creations might not meet with immediate understanding and acceptance, but she insisted that she was prepared to wait, even fifty or a hundred years, to have her fiction understood. Fortunately, the recognition came sooner than she had foreseen. A Book-Book panel has described her work as being among "the most distinguished fiction published in America during the years 1945-65". With this evaluation, her ever-expanding audience would heartily concur.
Notes and References