CHAPTER I

THEMES

Although Miss O'Connor's themes are concerned with human issues, yet the stories deal with matters of life and death and show man's fall and his dishonour. The recurrent situation is folly on the part of human beings to turn petty issues into great mistakes, but the shock ultimately brings a ray of Redemption. Miss O'Connor's first novel Miss Blood (1952) deals with the theme of Mystery and shows the struggle of human soul seeking divine destiny. The theme is based on the struggle through denial towards acceptance. Similarly, the theme of The Violent Bear It Away deals with Propheticism, but once again the movement is from defiance and denial towards acceptance and belief. These novels are tightly unified with sub-plots and symbolism which reveal the final Reality and Mystery.

About Miss O'Connor's two collections of short stories A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Everything That Rises Must Converge, it has been said that her main concern is with the vision hidden under the barren surface. In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" the grandmother sees the vision only after she understands the bond of love in the universe. In "The River" Harry Ashfield's search takes him in the river to find the Kingdom of Christ. In "Greenleaf" Mrs May
is gored by the bull to see the light. The story "Everything That Rises" deals with the original sin of pride, but ends in Redemption and rebirth of soul. In "The Lame Shall Enter First" Miss O'Connor uses the devil as the voice of judgement to show the vision to Sheppard the secular do-gooder.

The human fault is recurrent in every story, and the apex of all these stories, which are basically dramatic in structure, is death - physical or psychological.

II

Miss O'Connor is notable for the precision with which she defines the intention of her work and the power with which she dramatizes her ideas. Sin, Guilt, Mercy and Redemption are the realities of human life for her, and the lives of her characters are violent, mean, frustrated and twisted because man is a sinner. He cannot escape the consequences of his pride and anger except by the acceptance of humility, divine love and mercy. In Miss O'Connor's fiction, dramatic conflicts involve moral judgement, and she makes clear the moral basis from which she proceeds. Thus she examines every aspect of life with an artist's wholeness and truthfulness. The integrity of the writer, she insists, depends upon his honest attention to literal facts at the
natural level, for these are the only building materials which he has, and he cannot construct without knowing exactly their dimensions. For the writer, "concrete is his medium; and he will realize eventually that fiction can transcend its limitations only by staying within them." (E.L., p. 146 and p. 150). In Miss O'Connor's stories the secular expression of man's separation from God often takes the form of corrosive tension between parents and children, from which violence as an act or an attitude results. In the conflict between generations the complacency and conservatism of the old is put against the dissatisfaction and experimentation of the new. Her stories and novels move about with a slow pace, leisurely uncovering a series of unusual people and events. Louise Y. Gossett comments about her stories and themes: "History has been invaded by a dimension beyond the human, and man is thus defenseless. Uncertain about life and anxious about death, he must make a radical choice between believing and not believing." 

Miss O'Connor's usual themes in her novels and stories are about man separated from the true sources of his being, and about God whose habits are strange beyond knowing, but who gets His way in the end. The South furnished her the kind of flagrant images that her themes and her style demanded, and Southern dialogue augmented and perhaps even sharpened her wit. Miss O'Connor's theological implications are the touchstone on which she has built the vision of Faith and Reality which she has revealed in her fiction. All her stories and both her novels revolve around the
traditional Christian themes. Andre Breton remarks that, "It is hardly surprising that O'Connor should have acknowledged close affinities with Hawthorne. Her fiction is of a coarser fabric than his, less delicately shaded in its artistry and far less muted in its effects, but it belongs without any doubt to the same tradition of American romance: character and plots matter less than the power of darkness one senses behind them. Symbol, allegory and parable are never far away, and with O'Connor as with Hawthorne, the accumulated mass of allusions and connotations derives in a very large measure from the rich mythology of Christian culture."2

Her range of subjects and themes no doubt is small, but her position is analogous to Romano Guardini who says that "Mind must proceed from whole of Christian attitude, "Universal View" apprehends existence not in its diversity, but in its essential unity."3 Her own statement about the aim of fiction clearly proves this point: "The larger you look at one subject, the more of the world you see in it, and it's well to remember that the serious fiction writer always writes about the whole world, no matter how limited his particular scene." (Ibid., p. 77). Thus both Guardini and O'Connor assume that the essential unit of existence requires a wholeness of intellectual and artistic vision.

Miss O'Connor's respect for the wholeness provided
her with most important themes which include the wholeness and incompleteness. She herself says: "The artist penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depth the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality." (M.E., p. 157). Hence Miss O'Connor's stories cannot be reduced to only a specific theological formula. Rather, they culminate in an image that is true dramatically, psychologically and morally. With Miss O'Connor the dramatic image is close to the vision. Miles Orvell also compares Miss O'Connor, in this point, to Romano Guardini and says: "Just this was meant by Romano Guardini (whose unsentimental theology O'Connor admired) when he wrote apropos of St. John's verse, "and behold, a door standing open in heaven" (Apoc. 4:1)

The intellect may attempt to express in concepts and sentences all that the image "door" implies; but such concepts are mere props to the essential, not more. The truth is the other way around: it is the image that is the reality, the mind can only attempt to plumb it. The image is richer than the thought, hence the act by which we comprehend an image, gazing, is richer, more profound, vital and storied than the thought.

In O'Connor's best fiction too, it is the image that is the reality. John R. May also discusses the theological element and the dramatic element in Miss O'Connor's fiction and says: "A close reading of the structural dynamism of her short stories and novels indicate that she had, if not wanted, the best of both worlds. For whereas traditional hermeneutic theory explains her understanding of the
relationship between the work and reality, the new hermeneutic is the key to understanding the religious dimension of the aesthetic function of her stories, the relationship between the work and meaning. Thus it can be concluded that she places importance on relationship between the theme of the story and the ultimate reality.

III

It will, therefore, be noticed that Miss O'Connor's stories reach their climaxes and end with the violent shock for the character. David Eggenschwiler says that her stories end "with the traumatic shock to the 'old man' that makes the birth of the 'new man' possible." Miss O'Connor's first novel Miss Blood (1952) deals with the same theme. Central theme is Mystery, and the story deals with the struggle of human soul seeking divine destiny. Many critics have objected that it is the story of an unrepresentative everyman on a special, not universal quest. But in this novel she has tried to write a survey of major spiritual, psychological and social problems. Hazel Notes the hero of Miss Blood repudiates his fundamentalist background but finally accepts his guilt and achieves redemption. Nathaniel Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter perhaps provided her with the basis of structure for both her novels.
Comparing the novels of both the authors, Leon V. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain comment that Miss O'Connor has employed the same reversal technique found in *Scarlet Letter*. They compare the three confrontations with the caged animals in *Miss Blood* to Hawthorne's three scaffold scenes. Like Hawthorne Miss O'Connor believed that salvation is for sinners, so the theme of the fall — as that of Hazel Notes — in fact implies a plan for Redemption. The central concern of *Miss Blood* is Hazel Notes facing the question: what to do with Jesus Christ? He had been haunted by the apparition of Jesus since his childhood when his preacher grand-father had affirmed that Jesus would have him. From that point his religious practice becomes not of positive action, but of avoidance. He decides that the best way to keep Jesus from troubling him is to avoid doing things that would put Jesus on his trail. In the army he learns that he has no soul and he finds this as a suitable solution to his problems. If he has no soul, he has no need for Jesus to save it, and hence there is no such a thing as Sin. Now his total purpose is to convert others to this idea. Thus Hazel Notes becomes an apostle of negativism and goes to the city of Taulkingham to preach the truth about the "Church without Christ".

The main struggle in the novel is between two forces: Hazel's mother and his grandfather who had imposed upon him a sense of guilt, and Hazel who had been trying in vain to
run away from that sense of guilt. Hence, as a child he had a mixture of fear, awe and longing for Jesus which later gave way to nihilism. As opposed to these feelings, is the spiritual indifference and complacency in the city where Hazel has come to preach his Church without Christ. These two forces collide with each other in Hazel's mind. The Jesus about whom he was taught is a mystery, and demands that one must lose one's life in order to gain it. Thus, He sacrificed His own life for the mankind whom He claimed as His own. But in the secular society of the city, people try to commercialize the name of Jesus. The whole city is full of fake prophets. In such a society it is necessary to dramatize the effects for a true encounter with God. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. says about themes of O'Connor's stories and novels that "....... the ultimate law governing Flannery O'Connor's fiction is that of the coincidentia oppositorum. For what she seems to have felt is that, since the great pictures of Christian belief are not normally characteristic of our culture, they cannot therefore become the subject matter of an authentic contemporary art. But, if the human material of a truly contemporary literature has to be secular, then let it be radically secular, and negation, if it be profound enough, may itself, by reason of its very radicalism, begin to evoke sensibilities capable of a religious perception of reality and thus the opposites will coincide, at the heart of darkness. So it was, one suspects,
the hope of achieving something like a *coincidentia oppositorum* that led Miss O'Connor to people her books with so many monsters of nihilism and blasphemy...." The theme of *Miss Blood* is based on this concept. Hazel Notes uses his assumed role of disbelief in Christ so emphatically that it finally collapses, and he admits his defeat and switches towards longing for Christ. Meanwhile, the challenge is to begin a Church which depends entirely on the soulless individual. But things do not work that way.

Hazel is driven towards his destiny through various fake preachers he comes across in the city. The first one is the fake 'blind' preacher Asa Hawks. Hazel is obsessed with the desire to know the details of the preacher's earlier sinful life and of his conversion. This impulse leads him to discover that the blind man is a fraud. Preston Browning says that "the fact that Hawks lacked the courage to "blind himself for Jesus" is, for Hazel, tantamount to a betrayal." This discovery that appearances can deceive and people are not actually honest and truthful plants in Hazel's mind the first seed of belief. Hazel realizes that Asa Hawks is in fact an unbeliever who preaches Christ to make some money and says "you can't run away from Jesus. Jesus is a fact." (W.B., p. 51). This commercialization of religion abhors Hazel Notes. Another fake person whom Hazel encounters is Enoch Emery who represents pure animalism. Enoch Emery is a guard at the zoo who makes a ritual of watching the animals. Ultimately, by putting
on the gorilla suit, he changes himself into an animal. He tells Hazel Notes "If it's anything you want to know about Jesus, just ask me" (W.B., p. 51). Nathan A. Scott, Jr. comments about Enoch Emery "But, formed as he has been by the fossilized banalities of a bankrupt fundamentalism, he is really unprepared to reckon with what is genuinely radical in Hazel's testimony." Therefore, when Enoch hears Hazel ironically asking the people to show him "New Jesus" (W.B., p. 141) so that that 'Jesus' may be set up in Hazel's Church, he steals a shrunken mummy from the museum and offers it to Hazel as a 'New Jesus'. But Hazel with his nihilistic ideas, does not need any new 'Jesus' and says "There is no such thing as any new Jesus" (W.B., p. 158).

In fact, he believes in a Jesus who "Can't waste his blood redeeming people with it because He's all men and ain't got any God in him" (W.B., p. 140). Therefore when Sabbath Lily Hawks comes into the room with the shrunken mummy, Hazel Notes, standing there with his mother's glasses on, gets a shock at seeing those two crooked and twisted figures. In a fury he throws the saw-dust mummy out of the door. Drops of rain water splatter over him and sparkle from the brim of his hat, he says "I don't want nothing but the truth." (W.B., p. 183) "I've seen the only truth there is! " (W.B., p. 189).

Another fake preacher in this city whom Hazel meets
is Hoover Shoats who calls himself Connie Jay Holy, and proposes to Hazel that they form a business alliance. But Hazel is repelled by the idea of commercializing his Church and refuses to join Hoover Shoats. Not to be outdone by Hazel, Hoover Shoats employs a man strikingly similar to him in appearance who wears the same "glare-blue" suit and white hat - a man named Solace Layfield and who preaches, from the top of a rat-coloured car identical to Hazel's Essex, the same sort of philosophy Hazel has been delivering every night. Hazel, who has been watching the men, follows Layfield on his way home and murders him by running him down with his car. What angers Hazel, is the fact that Solace Layfield preaches a lie that he does not believe in Christ when he really does. He flings the judgement at the dying man, "You ain't true" (W.B., p. 110). Preston Browning has compared Hazel Notes to Albert Camus' metaphysical rebel, who is "not definitely an atheist .... but who is inevitably a blasphemer." 11

After killing his double Solace Layfield, Hazel is now ready for his own rebirth, specially when his car — his pulpit is destroyed; he knows it is time to begin his penance. Contrasted to Hazel's commitment to truth and honesty is the headless and indifferent attitude of the people of Taalhinham. Among them consciousness is accidental. They are all indifferent strangers who only
glare at him sitting atop his car. Once his car is gone, he has nowhere to go. He blinds himself and begins to see the real truth. Through the words of Mrs. Flood the materialistic landlady, the attention of the reader is focussed on the central theme — Mystery. About Lisa Flood Dorothy Walters says: "The novel among other things is almost a burlesque set within a theological frame. What emerges is comedy in the sense of providing laughter that we may be reminded of our vices; it is a tragedy in the sense that it deals with the recurring enigma of the human soul seeking its divine destiny."[^12]

IV

About the theme of The Violent Bear It Away, Nathan A. Scott, Jr. says that Miss O'Connor had, "..... a constructive purpose as well as a negative purpose: she wanted not only to exhibit what is banal and trivializing in the desacralized world of modern unbelief but also to portray its vacuity in such a way as to stir the imagination into some fresh awareness of what has been lost — and thus to "baptize" it, to render it open and responsive once more to the dimension of the sacred and the pressure of glory."[^13]

The novel The Violent (1960) deals mainly with the
theme of Prophecy. Nearly all critics, Stuart L. Burns in "Apotheosis in Failure" and Stanley Edgar Hyman in Flannery O'Connor have concentrated largely on this theme in the novel. Mr. Hyman likens the struggle of the fourteen-year-old Tarwater to avoid his calling to that of Moses and Jonah and proposes that in Tarwater's final acceptance of his burden there is "both vessel and instrument of divine purpose." Tarwater understands that "divine purpose is not answerable to human reason." Thus the central crisis involves confrontation with Jesus Christ and struggle for redemption. The structural pattern of The Violent enlarges upon the concept of journey "to the Father of Souls" (M.E., p. 35) and the theme of the novel is concerned with the question whether this journey towards self-realization and religious fulfillment is successful or not, whether the protagonist Tarwater passes the dragon or falls in its jaws (M.E., 35). The theme of the novel is based on the pattern of revolt against the Father, but this pattern is supplemented by an archtypal motif that supplies the novel with its ultimate meaning. Stuart L. Burns says that "The novel shows the adventures of the hero and his separation (from the myth) - initiation - and return (to the myth)." Discussing the meaning of the title The Violent Bear It Away which has been taken from the famous quotation from Matthew XI, Albert Sennholz analyses that "The Kingdom of heaven does not suffer from violence, it authorizes it - and to the
violent belongs the kingdom and they bear away the prize of salvation after the struggle." He further says "It is no accident that the Christian denomination of the South is Baptist, and that religious extremists in that region are "fundamentalists", for O'Connor sees the essential strategy of salvation as a return to the stormy principles of the prophet in the wilderness. We are not now ready for the Kingdom of heaven to be taken by the same yoke and lightened burden of Christ's love; our juncture of spiritual history is that of John the Baptist end of the violent conquest of the kingdom." The role of young Tarwater can thus be compared to that of John the Baptist.

The plot centres upon the adventures of Young Tarwater who has been brought up by his great uncle Old Mason Tarwater. The later is a self-styled religious fundamentalist who has 'called himself' to the duties of a prophet and earns a living by operating a whiskey still. The old man has rescued the child from his uncle and guardian Rayber an atheist school teacher who is living in the city. The old man stole the boy and took him off to Powderhead, an isolated rural backwoods area. John R. May says that "the central dramatic metaphor, linking the three principal characters of the novel — Mason, Rayber and Tarwater — is taken appropriately from the New Testament parable of the Sower. It is Mason who has sown the seed of
God's word in both his nephew and his grand-nephew. The old man planted in Tarwater's heart a seed of hunger for the bread of life and in Rayber the seed is a chronic impulse to love his idiot child Bishop." This seed was planted by the old man in Rayber when he was seven years old and the old man knows that it has been planted there deep and for good, although Rayber denies it and keeps on repeating that he has weeded it out. But even Tarwater knows that the seed is still buried there, and he brings home the truth to Rayber by saying, "It's you the seed fell in" "It ain't a thing you can do about it. It fell on bad ground but it fell in deep. With me it fell on rock and the wind carried it away" (The Violent, p. 192). In this manner Tarwater denies the seed planted in him, but he is only deluding himself because he is unable to avoid the effect of the seed in him.

The parable of seed is connected with the parable of loaves and fishes. Basic to novel is the idea that only Christ can really satisfy man's spiritual hunger. Miss O'Connor weaves this idea with the imagery of loaves and fishes indicated in the novel from the beginning. This imagery and the silent world of the dead among whom his great-uncle eats multiplied loaves and fishes eternally haunts Tarwater until he accepts his role as the prophet, "Jesus is the bread of life." (The Violent, p. 16) old man
has told Tarwater, but he resists that bread and flees from it, till he is burnt clean and accepts the command. Thus the idea of journey and fleeing from the task is also tightly interwoven in the novel. Old Tarwater and Rayber are the opposite paths and Tarwater has to choose which to follow. The path Rayber wants the boy to follow is the path of atheism and rationalism. It is obstructed because it is empty and lacks any feelings. Apart from Old Tarwater and Rayber, there are a few other false guides, including the Satan himself, who try to tempt Tarwater away from the path of prophetism. Meeks is the first person who gives a ride to Tarwater to the city and advises him on the philosophy of life. Meeks is the modern materialist who thinks that the greatest invention of man is the wheel. Another person is the truck driver who dramatizes moral indifference and contempt for his fellows. When Tarwater informs him that he has just drowned a boy, the truck driver says, "Just one?" (The Violent, p. 209). The third is the pervert who picks up Tarwater in his car. He is the devil himself who has come to take revenge from Tarwater for betraying him by baptizing Bishop. It is only after the pervert ropes Tarwater that he finally accepts his mission. Clinton Throwbridge says that "At the end when Tarwater accepts his role as prophet and goes to the city there is no other human figure to guide him except his own soul within himself." In the end it is the fire which
burns Tarwater clean, and the perilous journey which he
had undertaken in search of self-realization comes to an end.

Mason Tarwater had raised young Tarwater "to justify
his Redemption" (The Violent, p. 5) and had entrusted to him
two tasks: that old man be given a decent burial when he
dies, and Rayber's idiot child Bishop must be baptized.
But young Tarwater, like Hazel Notes, feels the need to
rebel against his great-uncle; thus, instead of digging a
grave he listens to the voice of a stranger and sets fire
to the shack with the body still inside. Young Tarwater
proves to himself that he is now independent and that there
is no need to follow the path of prophetism as commanded
by the old man. He now goes off to the city to look up
Rayber to prove that he can resist the old man's second
task of baptizing his cousin. However, even in the early
stages the boy's struggle for independence is a failure.
He has not succeeded in defying the wishes of his great-
uncle. The boy presumes the body to be in the house when
he sets fire to it, but the Negro neighbour had already
taken it out and buried it. However, Tarwater is not aware
of this fact, and he is now ready to struggle against the
old man's second task. But the first revelation comes to
Tarwater when he telephones his uncle Rayber, and the idiot
child Bishop picks up the telephone. Tarwater hears the
"heavy breathing" at the other end of the wire, and is
stunned by some internal blow. He feels that he has not escaped the fate by running to the city. Rather, he has furthered the old man's purpose. However, he still repudiates the role that is being thrust upon him. For four days Tarwater resists the call and refuses to baptize Bishop despite signs which point to the act as being a part of his destiny. In the end Tarwater fulfills the task of baptizing Bishop, but in the process of repudiating this task he also drowns the child. However, he is still an unwilling prophet till he is raped by the devil himself. It is then that he comes to realize that he does in truth belong to "that violent country where the silence is never broken except to shout the truth." (The Violent, p. 242). Nathan A. Scott Jr. rightly says "And thus it is that we are put in mind of what St. Matthew's Gospel tells us, that "from the days of John the Baptist, the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away" (11:12). They, of course by reason of their very violence, represent deformity and are mis-shaped; yet it is a humanly comprehensible deformity, and its passionate ness in the things of the spirit can be, even if obliquely, means of grace."  

Catholic critic Rainulf A. Stelzmann sees the struggle within Tarwater as being one between unwillingness to accept the mission of prophecy and loyalty to the spiritual conviction that old men had sought to instill in him. The voice which throughout the novel argues with the youth,
telling him that the old man's ideas were false and that he need not heed them, Stelzmann asserts was that of the devil. The school teacher Rayber is seen as the weak-willed, spiritually impotent spokesman for modernity, seeking in the name of rationality to nullify the boy's spiritual consciousness. When the boy realizes that in drowning Bishop he has fulfilled the mission of baptism, and learns that he has not cremated the old great-uncle after all, his religious integrity reasserts itself; he defies the counsel of the devil and takes up the prophetic burden as his great-uncle had hoped. But discussing this struggle Louis D. Rubin Jr. says that "The struggle within Tarwater's mind is (therefore) not simply that between heeding or denying the burden of prophecy bequeathed him by the old man; it is between the creative, life giving emotion of love and the destructive, death bringing emotion of hatred and violence."

However, Miss O'Connor herself says that the central action of The Violent is Baptism. The theme revolves around this significant action. According to the great-uncle, Baptism is a means whereby man can be born again to live a life of freedom; according to the school teacher's view Baptism is an act without significance; it is just another washing. According to the old man his nephew Rayber tries to "convert warm living transcendent reality into a piece of information inside his head." (The Violent, p. 16).
is the attitude Miss O'Conner takes of the secularism and new social scientism. To Tarwater, Rayber's view-points sound inconsistent; thus, Tarwater remains insatiable and hungry. The theme of man's hunger for something which the world cannot provide is constantly before the reader. David Eggenschwiler remarks about young Tarwater's denial and acceptance that "In his carping at Rayber and in his weak attempts to ignore the idiot, Bishop, he tried for a while to avoid the whole issue of his calling, to ease out of his dilemma by keeping his eyes fixed on the surface of things. But like the bourgeoise farm women of the stories he could not entirely anesthetize himself in the trivial. Through violently disrupting experiences he was called back to the task of baptizing Bishop."\(^{23}\)

V

In both the novels Miss O'Conner tries to unite out the central actions by means of subplots. In Miss Blood she uses Enoch Emery to parallel and caricature Hazel's efforts to become a natural, godless man. The story of Enoch Emery is designed as a parody of the story of Hazel Notes, and helps define, by contrast, the sense in which Hazel is a Christian hero. While Hazel's attention moves to higher things, Enoch's attention is directed towards animalism.
As a zoo keeper, he feels greater kinship with his charges than with the visitors to the zoo. The focusing symbol of Enoch's ethos is a glass-encased mummy located in the museum which for Enoch is a kind of shrine. Taking Hazel as his divinely appointed guide, Enoch takes him to the mummy shrine, but Hazel bolts out of the room. Before Enoch steals the mummy (new Jesus) for Hazel's Church without Christ, he carefully prepares the room for it. Its tabernacle will be the wash-stand which had previously held a slop-basin. When Enoch finally brings the mummy to Hazel's house, a parody of nativity scene is enacted by Sabbath Lily who thinks of herself and the stuffed mummy as the Madonna and the child. But here Hazel sees the truth for the first time and acts decisively against this mockery and smashes the mummy against the wall. This smashing means little to Enoch, but it has revealed the truth to Hazel. As Hazel progresses towards his faith, Enoch goes down lower and ultimately becomes a gorilla. This sub-plot of Enoch Emery thus serves as a confirmation of the meaning of the central story in Wise Blood.

Similarly in The Violent Bear it Away Miss O'Connor develops Rayber as a secondary protagonist. As he participates directly in the main plot, Rayber represents the profane rationalism that Tarwater must not only reject but also outgrow as he passes into a very different order of existence. Consequently, Rayber, like Enoch Emery,
disappears from the novel when it reaches its climax. David Eggenschwiler gives the right view that Rayber being the hero of the sub-plot struggles and even reaches something of revelation about himself. In fact Rayber does come to realize his own inadequacy and that his so-called rationalism has not helped him. About the two plots in this novel David Eggenschwiler says "Miss O'Connor does achieve a thematic unity of the two plots by making Rayber's conflict parallel to those of the Tarwaters, although, of course, the conclusion of his struggle is the inverse of theirs." 24

VI

Apart from two novels Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away, Miss O'Connor's work consists of two collection of superb short stories, A Good Man is Hard to Find (1955) and Everything That Rises Must Converge (1965). No finer collection than Everything has appeared in recent years. Here is a talent for lightning strokes and quick illuminations of human darkness. Richard H. Rupp says about Miss O'Connor's talent and her work that "Vision is Flannery O'Connor's central concern. Sacrificial action is hidden under the barren surface of her stories. Her purpose is not to separate feast from famine, but to reveal their inseparability. Her first collection of stories shows
Christ amid one-armed con-men, homicidal maniacs, hermaphrodites, and a virgin existentialist with a Ph.D. and a wooden leg. Once she has established the reality of her rural eccentrics as everyday people, she can push her artistic vision toward mystical illumination—roughly the difference between A Good Man and Everything that...25

With her first volume A Good Man, all lingering doubts about Miss O'Connor's talent were dispelled. She herself described the volume as "Nine Stories of Original Sin." However in this volume vision and sacrifice are disguised by ugliness and deformity. In a number of stories like "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" and "The Artificial Nigger" there is a gulf between human being and his world. Only through shock and revelation that gulf is abridged. But in many of her stories Miss O'Connor turns mystery against the prevailing fact and in a moment of vision illuminates the human condition. "A Good Man" is one such story. Throughout this story the characters react to one another with suppressed hostility. On a vacation trip through Georgia, the children quarrel with each other and insult the grandmother. Bailey, her son, scarcely tolerates her, and his wife ignores her. They are stopped by three men on a deserted country road. It is the grandmother who recognizes the Nuisance, and this recognition brings about the death of the family. But this recognition also anticipates the recognition of Reality, of common bond
of mankind and humanity. After hearing the Misfit's tale of lost faith, the grandmother sees him as her own son and understands the bond of love in the universe. Although the Misfit does not accept that bond of love, the grandmother has no doubt understood the secret of Mystery.

In fact Miss O'Connor identifies with her special talent two closely related words: Vision and Revelation. Vision refers to a mental representation of external objects as in a religious revelation, and such transfiguration of material world is commonly found in Miss O'Connor's fiction. Revelation means to make something visible, to show, to reveal the mystery of universe. Her above-mentioned story dwells on the theme of Revelation. But this story has been faulted on many grounds by a number of critics. Martha Stephens considers it as a conflict between comedy and seriousness. Miss Stephens finds "the chief horror of the whole massacre scene" to be the way in which the Misfit's casual discussion of belief "is punctuated by his polite commands for the execution of the other members of the family." Moreover, Miss Stephens judges the climactic scene a failure due to "the fact that a tonal shift that occurs midway through the story runs out of control. The story is interesting for our purposes in that we get a clearer view here than anywhere else of the tonal problem that exists in one degree or another in nearly all of
O'Connor's fiction - the problem, that is, of how to "take", how to react to, the disasters that befall her characters." 27 In this connection it can be argued that the shift in the tone of the story does not occur with appearance of the Misfit, rather it is the accident that brings the shift with sharp irony. Grandmother's hat had "broken front brim" and the children's mother only had a cut down her face and a broken shoulder (C.S., p. 125) 28. Moreover, it is actually the grandmother's desire to have her own way that causes the accident, and her recognition of the Misfit that causes the tragedy. Thus there are many elements that anticipate the story's tragedy. John R. May says that "the story patently assumes that life suddenly explodes with the possibility of meaning, that eschatological does indeed intrude upon the common place." 29 The tragic end of the story reveals to the grandmother the common bond of humanity, and the story which starts with the vacation trip gradually assumes the propositions of a revolt against the cultural distortions of Christianity. Gilbert H. Muller has rightly analyzed the story when he says that "Preoccupied with the myth of Christ, the Misfit becomes judge and executioner in order to do justice to a social situation in which punishment does not seem to fit the wrong. The Misfit is the religious consciousness of his age. For him the alternatives are simple - belief or disbelief. He chooses the latter course of action, but he does not take
any pleasure in killing the Bailey family." Martha Stephens has compared the theme of "A Good Man" to T.S. Eliot's maxim "It is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing." (Taken from T.S. Eliot's essay on Baudelaire). The Misfit wants to remain a ruthless Killer because "Jesus threw everything off balance." However, he admits at the end of the story "It's no real pleasure in life." (C.S., p. 33). This story suggests a double illumination - a vision of evil and a vision of sonship. The impact of the story depends upon our seeing them together as the vision of one man under different aspects.

Like Miss Blood Miss O'Connor's story "The River" dwells on the theme of Baptism. A little boy is baptized by a zealous river preacher while his parents sleep off a hangover. The river, the preacher says, is the river of pain, a river of blood moving towards the Kingdom of Christ. Harry Ashfield, the little boy, is introduced by the preacher to the meaning of life that his sophisticated and city bred parents are incapable of providing to him. The preacher explains to him the effect of Baptism and assures him "you won't be same again, you will count" (C.S., p. 168). Through this simple statement its rite becomes symbolic for Harry. The preacher begins by rejecting the self-centered motive and says "If you ain't come for Jesus, you ain't come for me. If you just come to see can you leave your pain in the river, you ain't come for
Jesus" (C.S., p. 165). The preacher tries to instill faith and love in the hearts of the people and shouts, "There ain't but one river and that's the River of Life, made out of Jesus Blood. That's the river you have to lay your pain in, in the River of Faith, in the River of Life, in the River of Love ...." (C.S., p. 165). The atmosphere of belief has already been provided for Harry by his baby - Sitter, Mrs Connin who takes him to hear Reverend Bevel Summers, the preacher. When Harry returns from his Baptism, his parents mock him and refuse to admit that now he "counts". So the little boy leaves his house the next morning taking only the car fare with him. "He hadn't taken a suitcase because there was nothing from there he wanted to keep." (C.S., p. 172). He returns to the river to Baptize himself and to find the Kingdom of Christ there. Mr Paradise who symbolizes the evil follows him to the bank with a big piece of peppermint candy, but Harry enters the river hotly pursued by Mr Paradise. "He plunged under once and this time, the waiting current caught him like a long gentle hand and pulled him swiftly forward and down. For an instant he was overcome with surprise, then since he was moving quickly and knew that he was getting somewhere, all his fury and fear left him (C.S., p. 172). In his innocence Harry finds the Kingdom of Christ, literally though unconsciously putting the devil behind him.
Although one is shocked at Harry's drowning, but the story gives the moral that one counts where concern is ultimate. Richard H. Rupp in his analysis of the story rightly concludes that "Celebration is hidden here under the shock of the boy's drowning. But Miss O'Connor challenges us to see the act with the eyes of mystery and not with those of fact." In fact, in Miss O'Connor's stories Grace is usually seen to operate as a powerful but hidden force which is entirely separate from human will and intention. God provides young and innocent children — set down in corrupting environments among adults — with a natural faith and powerful thirst for Him and a drive to get to Him quickly. The theme of "The River", as has been discussed, deals with this subject, but it also shows passage from ignorance to knowledge and darkness to light. Harry Ashfield is completely ignorant of religion, but when he renounces his name Harry and calls himself Bevel, he takes up a new identity. This marks the passage from darkness of ignorance into the light of God's Grace. The world of his parents is a wasteland and he, therefore, longs for the Kingdom of Christ which he ultimately finds in the river. Robert McCann sums up the total effect of this story very aptly when he says that it "achieves an effect of exquisite sadness, but then of exaltation, as the reader realizes that the forces working in the child's pilgrim soul were none other than divine grace."
Miss O'Connor's "A Temple of the Holy Ghost"
is one of the most positive stories with a purely religioustheme and Catholic characters. About this story Carter W. Martin says that deformity demonstrates "that man'scondition is normally corrupt and that he is better offin accepting it." The story gives a reassuring pictureof human potentiality. The principle theme of the storyis the ascertainment of confirmation from the point of viewof a twelve-year-old girl. But the story contains asubsidiary theme which shows the contrasting blindness ofthe two fourteen-year-old girls, Joanne and Susan who arevisiting the little girl's mother from the Convent School.These two girls show utter insensitivity towards religionand cannot understand the human body in any other terms than those dictated by their emergent sexuality. Theymake fun of Sister Perpetua who has explained to themabout the body being a temple of the Holy Ghost. Similarlythe two local boys who come to date the two cousins areequally ignorant about religion, and the child convulseswith anger when Wendell (one of the boys) supposes thatthe Amiara Iroko must be "Jew singing." She insists thatthe boys are "stupid idiots" (C.S., p. 242).

However, the main theme of the story is the transformation of the twelve-year-old unnamed girl'sattitude from disdain towards acceptance of reality. The
child knows that she is in the presence of evil but cannot understand it. A circus hermaphrodite utters the word that transforms the child into a maturing adolescent who is well on the road towards accepting herself and her world for what they are and what they can be. Physical deformity of the hermaphrodite is the story's symbol for spiritual limitation of the people, but admitting and accepting that deformity is the avenue to hope and Grace. With genuine humility the child recognizes her faults, to her as serious as the sins of her elders, and makes reparation for them by a vehement rejection of the sordid in life and by regret for her impatient, uncharitable behaviour. While contemplating the Benediction Host in the Convent Chapel, the child recalls again the words of the hermaphrodite about his deformity, "I don't dispute it" (Cas., p. 246). This association of Host with hermaphrodite conveys Miss O'Connor's point to the readers that God Himself has accepted the limitations of human condition.

Gabriele Scott Robinson finds a very apt similarity in the intellectual and moral views of James Joyce and Miss O'Connor, and finds a special affinity in the episodes and themes of Joyce's "Araby" and Miss O'Connor's "A Temple". Both stories are told from a child's point of view. The bazaar in "Araby" is associated with the adult world to which the boy wishes to belong, and it is also associated with the sexual curiosity on the part of the boy. In
"A Temple" the visit of the two cousins at the farm and their description of the fair conjure emotional visions in the heart of the young unnamed heroine of the story.35

Reading "Araby" it can easily be seen that the theme of both the stories is an initiation in each case brought about by a fair. Sex and religion are linked in both the stories and the stories centre on an epiphany. Joyce's child hero refuses to play with his friends and dreams about his love. But in his encounter with women he is confused and helpless. His final response is frustration and disillusionment. Miss O'Connor's child heroine is also confused above love, sex and adulthood. Thus she takes refuge in her day dreams and imaginations.

Both children pursue their quest in an environment hostile to spiritual values and are, therefore, forced to live their true lives in an imaginary world of heroism and romance. The crucial event of each story teaches them something of the discrepancy between the real and the ideal. The hermaphrodite and the truth about "Araby" shock both children out of their dream worlds and precipitate them into reality. Analysis of Gabriele Robinson is quite correct when he says "The stories of Joyce and O'Connor can be read as studies in deprivation, pain, and loneliness. Both focus on the manifest decay of their societies revealing the social, psychological, and spiritual "paralysis" of their country."36
In "A Late Encounter with the Enemy", Miss O'Connor has proved how the word that illumines the life has the power to execute judgement. The graduation oratory that "General" George Poker Sash is subjected to becomes a dreary procession of the personified demons of his past. By the time the ceremonies of graduation of Sally Poker Sash, sixty-two-year-old granddaughter of "General" Sash begin, the 'General' has already begun his encounter with death. Miss O'Connor's fiction and her essays give evidence that she was continually aware of the shaping forces of Biblical history in the life and death of contemporary men. For her that history was more than a mythical heritage. It was the frame work which set in perspective the events of man's life. By presenting history as "black procession" (p. 141) which fills the consciousness of an old man and brings him to his death, "A late Encounter" renders imaginatively the concept of time moving into eternity in the life of an individual who is acting as a representative of history. Paradoxically the old man has no consciousness of death, "Living had got to be such a habit with him that he couldn't conceive of any other condition" (p. 134), and no interest in history — "He didn't have any use for history because he never expected to meet it again. To his mind history was connected with processions and life with parades and he liked parades." (p. 135).

In fact the 'General' does not know the Southern
history at all. He does not even remember what he had
been in the war, but he knows that he had not been a General.
According to his grand-daughter he had been a Major.
Actually he was given that uniform of a general for a
premiere show of a movie in Atlanta some years ago, and even
twelve years after the event he is proud of it. He is
more interested in that "Preemy" and "beautiful gals"
then in Southern history. The General agrees to attend
Selly Poker Sash's graduation ceremony because she promises
to see to it that he would sit on the stage, and he likes
to sit on any stage. Sister Kathleen Feeley says about the
General's ignorance that "This lack of awareness of
Southern history in which he has played a part evidently
precludes for him an awareness of the larger history of
salvation which lies behind it."37 But before becoming
aware of actual Salvation, the General receives an experience
of words. The words become inexorable bullets of judgement
from an invisible enemy, history "..... letting the words
he heard into the dark places of his brain." (p. 142).
"He couldn't protect himself from the words and attend to
the procession too and the words were coming at him fast."
(p. 413). Thus the old man is unable to survive this
late encounter with words.

Two other aspects of man's relation to history are
presented by the old man's grand-daughter and her boy scout
nephew. Selly Poker Sash also romanticizes history and
delights in the Premier show. But during the premier show ceremony in Atlanta, while on the stage with her grandfather she suddenly realizes that below her long black crepe dinner dress which she had bought specially for the occasion are her brown Oxford work shoes which she has forgotten to change. Her consternation at this discovery suggests that reality has intruded in her dreams. She lives in one world and dreams about another world. She is proud of South's regal past and even though she knows that her grandfather has never been a general, she wants to show her false connections with that regal past through her grandfather's presence at her graduation ceremony. In contrast to her, the boy Scout nephew has no regard for the old traditions and South's regal history. He is supposed to look after the general, but being a member of the new generation, he disregards age, tradition and instructions in favour of a cold drink leaving the general exposed to the sun. The blazing heat makes the general feel "as if there were a little hole beginning to widen in the top of his head" (G.S., p. 141) and the death approaches to fill the hole with the black procession of history.

"The Displaced Person" is one of the finest story of the first collection with a significant manifestation of reality. Mr Quisac comes to Mrs Poiyne's farm with the help of Father Flynn. Because of his hard work and
honesty all the hired hands including Mr & Mrs Shortley feel insecure that the displaced person would displace them. The theme is depicted by various visions. The vision of peacock is like a vision of Christ for the priest. He stands transfixed when he sees the cock with its tail spread out. To Mrs McIntyre this vision is meaningless and irritating. Mrs Shortley's vision, on the other hand, is narrow, and she sees Guizar in a black light. Later, she even starts to prophecy thinking [wrongly] that she had a special part in the mystery of this world. Richard H. Rupp says that "Mrs Shortley sees the struggle to survive as a contest between herself and the priest — and we see it as a contest between true celebration and false." 38 But when the Shortley family leaves the farm, Mrs Shortley has the final vision when she "Seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country" (C.S., p. 214). She has at last seen the enlarged vision of supernatural Reality. For Mrs McIntyre the vision of Reality is not so simple. Her greediness for materialism, at first, makes Mr Guizar her salvation, but later when she comes to know about the arrangement of his cousin's marriage to Sulk, the Negro hired hand, she becomes upset that it would disturb the balance. She is not worried about the condition of the young girl in a Polish refugee camp, she is more worried about her Southern traditions and white superiority. Thus in this manner she rejects Grace and refuses to see Reality. This rejection leaves
Mrs McIntyre literally paralysed. After Mr Guizac's death, Shortley & Sulk desert her. Abandoned and impoverished she becomes bed-ridden.

Although the theme of the story dwells on hardwork and the main characters think that hardwork leads to success, Miss O'Connor proves that hardwork leading to a single goal -- material gain -- limits human vision to such an extent that only shock can shake the characters into awareness of Reality. In this story Mrs Shortley becomes aware of Reality when she comes to know that they are going to be displaced. Later Shortley and Sulk run away from the farm due to their guilt complex for Guizac's death, and thus Mrs McIntyre might in time become aware of Reality due to the shock of being deserted by everyone and being left alone on the farm. However, Shanen Burns gives a different reasoning for Mrs McIntyre's change in attitude towards Mr Guizac. She feels that Mrs McIntyre being a White Southern lady must have been irritated at Mr Guizac's indifference and lack of gratitude on his part. She wants Guizac to be grateful to her for all the things she is doing for the family. Shanen Burns says that "With Mrs McIntyre's slow realization that Mr Guizac is not "fitting in", a realization precipitated by the fact that her new hand wants one of the farms Negros to marry and bring to America his cousin, Mrs McIntyre apparently is violating her work ethic, for she knows full well that the Polish hand is the best thing that has happened to her farm in years. This apparent contradiction, however, is brought about by a stronger and more fundamental element of the work ethic:
no one deserves anything free, and that is just what Mr Guizac has had — a free ride. He had probably not had to struggle enough. She had given him a job. She didn't know if he was grateful or not. In fact, Mr Guizac had probably everything given to him all the way across Europe and over here. The peculiar selfishness and reactionary nature of work ethics surfaces here in Mrs McIntyre's pigheaded stubbornness in respect to Guizac."

Whatever the causes for the sudden change in Mrs McIntyre, it is evident that for her part in Mr Guizac's death she pays a heavy price — economic, social and spiritual. The collusion of guilt in the death of the D.P. makes all of them displaced persons. "Mr Shortley left without notice .... and the Negro Sulk was taken with a sudden desire to see the world." (C.S., p. 235).
"Mrs McIntyre felt she was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives." (C.S., p. 235).
Although Grace has been denied to her outwardly, Richard H. Rupp rightly says that "Miss O'Connor implies that the death of Guizac is a bloody oblation for the conversion of the woman. In due time the hidden feast will be made manifest." 40

In the first collection (discussed above) Miss O'Connor's concern is to actualize evil. In the title story "A Good Man" she makes clear that any society which glorifies materialism may expect to find the misfit
lurking somewhere demanding values other than monetary ones and seeking those absolutes denied to him by a society that lives for comfort and security. Because he finds no answer to his questions about Jesus, he rejects the grandmother's bond of love. He is seeking the truth which he is unable to find anywhere. This idea grows throughout the collection and reaches maturity in the final story. Leon V. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain state that "The progression is from the fact of evil and of sin toward the reality of atonement." In order to be "good woman" grandmother is literally shot, and Mrs McIntyre's first step towards becoming "good woman" in the sense of the Misfit results from a figurative shot: the shock and awareness of man's common guilt - hers as well as the shiftless lazy people's.

VII

Nearly all critics have commented upon the influence of Teilhard de Chardin on Miss O'Connor about the constant movement of the universe upward towards a point of universal convergence. The title of her second collection of stories has been borrowed from Teilhard's The Divine Milieu. Teilhard's Omega point is the goal towards which the universe is moving and in spite of shocking action of her stories, Miss O'Connor is largely
concerned with that point - the point of convergence. All the stories in the collection deal with affirmation of hope inherent in man's fall from grace. The fall stipulates the physical terms of man's existence, but God's redemptive plan enables him to transcend the physical. Analysing these stories Leon V. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain remark that "The collection bound together with numerous convergences and revelations, proceeds from a young man's entry into the world of guilt and sorrow to an old man's vision of resurrection."^42 Both the authors rightly state further that "In Everything That Rises she returns to her themes of sorrow and guilt, man's futile movement through physical space and historical time, and she progresses toward her eternal crossroads."^43 In this connection it has been noticed that the first story as well as the last story in this collection deal with Negro-white relations specially the convergence of two races as the Negro rises socially and economically. But within the frame work of this convergence, her recurrent theme has been that salvation is for sinners, and that the fall requires Redemption. On the literal level a number of stories no doubt deal with the conflict between races and classes but Miles Orvell says that "she deals less with the particulars of racial tensions than with the universal occurrence of self-deception."^44

In the title story "Everything That Rises Must
Converge" the conflict between mind and heart is personified in the interaction of Julian and his mother. Rene Jordan has criticized the story as "unconvincing as hell" and says that "the bus ride is a descent into Hades. The Negro woman is the black demon chosen to punish the old lady for her arrogance, and also in charge of setting up the next infernal circle where the son is now doomed to revolve......... To read the story with a straight face and timid soul is probably to find it incredible, repellant, grotesque. But it seems that Rene Jordan has not gone deep beyond the surface and has limited his criticism only on the outer level of the story, which although riddled with irony yields a fundamentally positive meaning. At the time of the fatal stroke, Julian's mother's request for Caroline, the coloured maid of her childhood, brings realization upon Julian that for all its defects, the older generation had more genuine personal feelings for Negroes than he with his liberal ideas.

The main action in the story centres around the new social order where blacks are asserting their presence, whereas Julian's mother is uneasy about this social change. The rules she has followed so far are based on a knowledge of what and who her antecedents are, and on her belief in the validity of her hard work, her
self-denial and her frugality. Miss O'Connor gives an ironic view of two sets of mothers and sons— one white and one black— risen from a widely different environments converging in a desegregated bus. Two women, though different, are the same in many ways. Their shared sense of the past about slavery is, of course, interpreted differently by each. Julian's mother lives in the glory of her past and prides herself on knowing who she is. She has used this past heritage to give herself the courage to support her son, and by sacrifice and saving has managed to send him to college. She lives in the past and refuses to accept the present. This has given her a narrow vision of life. Thus she is unable to deal with desegregation in her traditional South of old order. On the other hand, the behaviour of the Negro woman is similar to that of any southern Negro in those changing times. The coloured woman's present pride and dignity depends on her ability to reject every act that could be associated with the degradation and humiliations of her own past. Hence, the gesture of "genteel graciousness" of offering a penny to her son by Julian's mother is vehemently rejected.

Outwardly, Julian represents a modern Southern point of view. As a young liberal, he lectures his mother on her old fashioned notions of race relations. "The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth
a damn." (C.S., p. 419). "True culture" he says is a
culture of the mind, but his mother says "It's in the
heart and in how you do things, and how you do things is
because of who you are." (C.S., pp. 409-410). But Julian's
feeling of superiority is ripped away by the terrifying
guilt and helplessness he experiences as his mother, who
he hoped would be taught a lesson, falls dying on the sidewalk. In fact he secretly longs for that 'lost past' which
he never knew and which gave identity and security to his
mother.

In the story Miss O'Connor seems to convey that
a life based solely on the premise of an old world class
consciousness is narrow and limiting. Penny Chapin Hills
and L. Rust Hills make a very appropriate comment on
the theme of the story that "The author is telling us that
the modern intelligent Southerner, educated and supported
by a struggle in the past, must break out of his "mental
bubble", must overcome his disgust and impatience with
the past, must use his "sympathy" and "objectivity" for
more than token acts, and must somehow take actions to
prevent the collusion of converging rising forces, so that
the Negro, after an equally difficult struggle in the
present will not be so enraged at every intimation of the
past as to destroy what little of its blind strength
remains". On the deeper level, the story deals with
men's relationship to his neighbour, and therefore, to
himself and to God. Even when God is not mentioned explicitly, He hovers everywhere.

In nearly all the stories in this collection, Miss O'Connor deals with the same subject of vision and illumination. The title story (discussed above) and "Greenleaf" present death as the illumination of the self. The enlargement of vision is individual, but total. It is exactly in the instant of passing out of time and life and into eternity that her characters like Mrs May in "Greenleaf" seem to live most fully. Mrs May is a hardworking pround class conscious widow who runs a dairy farm against huge and terrifying internal threats, all of them bound up with a number of ironic juxtaposition of herself in relation to the Greenleaf family, the father of which has been her tenant farmer for fifteen years. His vague manner and shiftlessness are opposed to her own purposeful industry. On the other hand her own two sons, one a scornful intellectual and other a cheerful "nigger-insurance policy man" both unmarried are insulting and useless to her. Their ineffectuality is counterpointed in her mind by the effectiveness of Mr Greenleaf's twin sons as helpful children, mutually cooperative and successful dairy farmers, and as the husbands and fathers in the steadily growing families. Mrs May is convinced that the whole Greenleaf family has been living "like the lilies of the field -- off the fat that she had struggled
to put into the land." (Cas., p. 319)

The mother of the Greenleaf family constitutes one of the most vicious subtle threat to Mrs May's peace of mind. Mrs Greenleaf's brief appearance and actions establish her as an antithesis to Mrs May. She is a superstitious prayer healer and her prayer-healing is clearly associated with sexual drives both of which are avoided by Mrs May. "She thought the word Jesus should be kept inside the Church building like other words inside the bedroom. She was a good Christian woman with a large respect for religion though she did not of course believe any of it was true" (Cas., p. 316). Thus Greenleaf seems to Mrs May a sloppy and filthy example of "white trash" who practices a primitive faith-healing religion, whereas Mrs May is a practical person who believes in salvation through work. However, the real issue of disturbance to Mrs May is a bull among her milk cows. The bull roams about her pasture by day and by night munches at the shrubbery outside her bedroom window. At first she fears the bull but when she comes to know that it belongs to Greenleaf sons she realizes that she can force Greenleaf to shoot the bull. This thought brightens her up, and she feels the change in the weather "Spring is here! she said gaily" (Cas., p. 350). She is positive that now she can subdue everyone. She is obsessed with the evil and unjust nature of the world specially the superiority of
the hired man's sons to her own two sons.

The bull in the story stands metaphorically for God or as Zeus when he appears to Europa in the same form. It is presented both as the wild natural lover and the divine saviour—destroyer, suddenly when the bull comes bounding out of the woods towards her, Mrs May remains motionless in a "freezing unbelief", and thus she is gored to death by the horns of the bull. The violent consummation no doubt contains sexual and physical imagery, but it is underscored with spiritual meanings. Richard N. Rupp says about her death "She grows toward the illumination of life in the rising action of her death. That death, finally, is a lovely marriage ritual . . . . Thus Mrs May's expanding vision is both sexual and spiritual. The violence of her death reveals the dark beauty of the story, the beauty of a rising action that resolves harsh opposites into converging unity." Miles Orvell also makes a right conclusion when he says "... despite the horrible image of a woman impaled on the horns of a dying beast, one also feels that this is a "happy" ending: the persistent suitor has at last gained his mark." Carter W. Martin has analysed this story as the theme of justice. He too has given a very apt conclusion that although being killed by the bull is like suffering indignities at the hands of people like Greenleaf but "It is also the indignity which opens her eyes to the nature of the world—
the realization that what she construes as injustice is a part of the scheme God has prepared for men and part of inheritance of fallen man. 50

John Hawkes in his famous article "Flannery O'Connor's Devil" has said that she reveals a Hawthornesque black authorial stance, and in her themes she uses devil as her vehicle. 50 But in spite of presence of various devilish characters in her stories, the central theme of her stories is a man's ability to serve his soul by accepting the gift of God's love for him. Decision to accept or reject that God's gift becomes the central point in her stories. Miss O'Connor herself says in her essay "The Church and the Fiction Writer" that "Part of the complexity of the problem for the Catholic fiction writer will be the presence of grace as it appears in nature, and what matters for him is that his faith not become detached from his dramatic sense and from his vision of what is." (M.M., p. 147). The theme of "The Lame Shall Enter First" is based on this very idea. No doubt Miss O'Connor believes in Christian dualism, and thus brings in juxtaposition the fundamentalists and the secular do-gooders as in this story. Rufus Johnson in spite of being given the shape of the devil is in fact the voice of the judgment. It is only through him whom in the end Sheppard thinks to be a devil that Sheppard learns his lesson. Although the Grace is not explicitly mentioned, rather, Sheppard only wants to change his
attention from Rufus to his own son Norton, he is no doubt left with a sense of his own inadequacy.

In his introduction to *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Robert Fitzgerald suggests that Flann O'Conner's dissatisfaction with Rayber (*The Violent*) led her to a neater working of the same material in "The Lame Shall Enter First." (*Everything*, p. xxv). Thus the novella contains similar trio of Rayber, Bishop and young Tarwater in the form of Sheppard, his son Norton, and a crippled delinquent Rufus Johnson. Sheppard is a well-meaning widower who attempts to adopt and reform Rufus Johnson, an orphaned delinquent with an IQ of 140. In this process Sheppard neglects his own son Norton because this older boy Rufus, a club-footed criminal seems much more in need of help. On a more perceptive level Rufus is not a poor deprived soul. Rather, like young Tarwater, he has been reared by his fundamentalist grandfather in a shack, and has a profound sense of evil. "Satan" he said, "he has me in his power" (*C.S.*, p. 450). Johnson, thus, gives witness to his own evil. Norton, on the other hand, is inconsiderable over the death of his mother and thus remains in his own world. However, in spite of Johnson's criminal tendencies it is he who leads Norton to an understanding of the spiritual world, and to the knowledge that his mother is in heaven. Norton becomes completely absorbed in the spiritual world and through the telescope he thinks that
he sees his mother in the vast regions of space and
ultimately jumps into the space to meet his mother.

In his struggle with Sheppard, Johnson tries to
force an admission of personal evil. He begins with
burglarizing the neighbourhood, but Sheppard refuses to
believe the charges exhibiting his faith in Johnson. Later,
however, Johnson is caught red-handed, and Sheppard is
forced to face the truth. Thus Johnson destroys Sheppard's
humanistic self-deceptions by insisting on his own evil and
on Redemption through Christ alone. "Johnson hurled
himself forward, 'Listen to him' he screamed. 'I lie and
steal because I'm good at it! My foot don't have a
thing to do with it! The Lame Shall Enter First! The
hilt'll be gathered together, when I get ready to be
saved, Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist..."
(C.S., p. 480). This brutal rejection awakens Sheppard.
For the first time Sheppard realizes the enormity of his
pride. He rushes upstairs to pour his love on his
own son, but he is too late. He sees Norton hanging
in space from the beam in the attic. Self-knowledge
desolates Sheppard and although it does not directly
convert him to Belief, yet it gives him a personal awareness
that precedes Belief. Sheppard learns Reality at the
cost of his son's life. Stanley Edgar Hyman, who believes
that Miss O'Connor is a radical Christian dualist like
Dostoevsky, says that "According to Miss O'Connor it is
Sheppard who is a type of Satan taking over God's prerogatives in His assumed absence, and Rufus is the true prophetic voice of judgement saying of Sheppard, "He thinks he is Jesus Christ" and challenging him "Satan has you in his power" \(^{51}\) \(^{51}\) (\textit{C.S.}, p. 477).

"Parker's Back" Miss O'Connor's last story to appear during her life time in magazine form is one of her greatest story. Thematically, Miss O'Connor has shown the rebirth of a dead soul. She shows the soul burnt clear and shocked back into life through various experiences and sufferings parallel to those of Old Testament prophets. Richard H. Rupp comments on the theme and its treatment that "The theme is from Psalms: "By the waters of Babylon I sat down and wept, "but from the pun on the title right through to the end, the treatment is controlled, detached comedy." \(^{52}\) E. O. Parker's given name turns out to be Obadiah Elihu. It is a biblical name, Obadiah after the sixth century B.C. minor prophet, and Elihu after Elihu, a visitor to Job in the thirty-second chapter of that account. The story reveals the slow growth of self-awareness of E. O. Parker an unbeliever tenant farmer. Miss O'Connor, thus, explores the mystery of divine direction in this story and E. O. Parker though unwilling is still the 'chosen' one. The story shows the transformation of Parker's soul and its effect on life. God leads Parker to understand his destiny through a
strange combination of circumstances - his attraction to tattoos and his marriage to the woman who abhors them. Right from the age of fourteen Parker has a peculiar unease and only tattoos can satisfy that unease. Parker originally becomes aware of Mystery when he first sees colour and tattoos on a man’s body. Since then he has been responsive to the inner promptings of his spirit. Openness to Mystery is reflected in his eyes "which were the same pale slate color as the ocean and reflected the immense spaces around him as if they were the microcosm of the mysterious sea." (C.E., p. 314).

The instrument of God's providence is Sarah Ruth Cates who is destined to lead him to the goal of his quest. She is the daughter of a fundamentalist preacher and considers all forms of outward worship as idolatrous. She evidently marries Parker to 'save' him, but follows a narrow path to salvation and excludes any other means of apprehending God. She is for ever flogging the judgement of God in his face and seems the one thing which nourishes his ego: his collection of tattoos covering his whole body except for his back. To please his highly moral wife he decides to add a religious tattoo on his back and thus thinks of a suitable design. But before selecting a design he gets an apocalyptic vision when his tractor hits the tree and bursts into flames. He himself is flung out of the tractor but instead of his
usual "God damn" he utters "God Above" (C.s., p. 520). He knows now that there has been a change in his life, a leap into an unknown, and rushes to the artist for a tattoo on his back. But even after the vision he fails to acknowledge any need for Redemption. To the artist's query as to whether he has "got religion" he replies: "A man can't save his self from whatever it is he don't deserve none of my sympathy." (C.s., p. 525). However, he insists on the face of a Byzantine Christ with "all demanding eyes" on his back. Later the men in the pool hall to which he goes gaze incredulously at the tattoo depicting the face of Christ, and he lashes out at them as an Old Testament prophet. "Then a calm descended on the pool hall as nerve-shattering as if the long barn-like room were the ship from which Jonah had been cast into the sea." (C.s., p. 527).

It is then that Parker gets the perception of truth. He sits down and examines the "Spider web of facts and lies" that is his soul. He discovers that he belongs to Christ. "The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed." (C.s., p. 527). When he reaches home, his wife Sarah Ruth has locked the door. However, when he uses his full name, the door opens, and he stumbles in. Identification of his full name marks his rebirth, but his wife instead of recognizing the tattoo as a picture of God begins to beat him with a broom, screaming at him.
that she will have no idolator in her house. The closing sentence suggests a crucifixion scene: "There he was— who called himself Obadiah Elihu— leaning against the tree, crying like a baby" (Ca.5, p. 530).

Miss O'Connor, in this story, has used the idea of Silence as a sign of God's direction. Sister Kathleen Feeley has discussed the theme of this story fully in her book Voice of the Fennook and about this use of silence. She suggests that this metaphor may have been suggested by the sentence which Miss O'Connor marked in Karl Barth's book Evangelical Theology in her personal library "It is a terrible thing when God keeps silence and by keeping silence speaks." About Miss O'Connor's interest in Old Testament Prophets, Sister Kathleen Feeley remarks that Flannery O'Connor's interest in Old Testament prophet is evident in the number of books about them in her library." Chief among these is Bruce Vawter's The Conscience of Israel which Flannery reviewed in March 1962. Vawter describes the prophets as inspired men who had a deep conviction, expressed in scripture pictorially by the story of each one's call. He stresses the idea that the prophets were often unwilling initially to undertake the work of Lord. He depicts prophets as outcasts from their own people because they would not condone the waywardness they saw about them. It is possible that the idea of the tattoo as the metaphor in this story may have been inspired
by a book in her library about the art of tattooing entitled: *Memoirs of a Tattooist* - George Burchett. But it seems strangely fitting that the story of a man led by mysterious ways to incarnate the Redeemer on his own body should be the final story of an author led by equally mysterious ways to make Redemption a reality in her fiction. In each story of the second collection a self-sufficient character meets his consequence but in each story action is presented in such a way as to permit hope of Redemption and Grace. Julian's mother who dies in the title story experiences a regression at the time of her death while old Tanner at the end has a vision of his resurrection. At the climax of their experience both Tanner and Julian's mother experience fantasy reunions with loved ones. Julian's mother says "Tell Caroline to come get me" (C.S., p. 420), and Tanner assumes that his Negro friend Coleman will meet the train. Both Julian's mother and Tanner suffer due to racial pride. But in the end Revelation occurs to both of them. Julian's mother goes back to her innocence of childhood and Tanner attains spiritual victory. In this collection each of the story assumes the fact of Original Sin, but also affirms the fact of Redemption. Entry into the world of sorrow and guilt begins the book, but old Tanner's good death at the end testifies that this is a redeemed world for the faithful. Though the progression of the stories is linear,
its force is in their upward movement.

VIII

In a number of Miss O'Connor's stories a rare coincidence of apparently opposing forces and motifs is found, and this has made her a puzzling figure. But in her oft quoted letter to John Hawkes dated 13th Sept., 1959, she has herself written, "....... and for me there is always the conflict between an attraction for the Holy and the disbelief in it that we breathe in with the air of the times." (Habit of Being, p. 349). In fact in the very unity of these opposing forces like denial and acceptance, violent crime and "attraction for the Holy" that Miss O'Connor shows her talent. The protagonists of both Miss Blood and The Violent Bear It Away accept their destined task of prophecy after vehement denial and rejection. In her story "A Good Man" the Misfit murders an entire family though he realizes that either one has to throw everything away and follow Jesus or one has to do some meanness to somebody. Both the Misfit and Hazel Notes express their denials of Jesus through murder, and both ultimately express their intense belief in God. Similarly the preacher in "The River" says "believe Jesus or the devil..... Testify to one or the other." (C.S., p. 166). In "The Lame Shall Enter First" Rufus propounds the same
thought. Rejecting salvation from Sheppard he says
"Nobody can save me but Jesus." "If I do repent, I will
be a preacher" (C.S., p. 476). It is these opposite
forces prevalent in Miss O'Connor's stories which has made
a number of critics accuse her of being on the devil's
side [John Haws] and of being a Radical Christian
dualist since Dostovo ski [Stanley Edgar Hyman] . Hyman says
"There are two of every thing in her work - one Christ's
and one anti Christ's. There are two wafera. There are
two baptisms, one Old Tarwater gives and one Rayber gives.
There are two rivers in "The River" — one "rich red river
of Jesus' Blood", other mundane river in which Mr Paradise
disappears .... There are two Hazels in Miss Blood
and two young Tarwaters in The Violent."57 But he analyses
this subject further and comments rightly that according
to Miss O'Connor "The way to sanctity is through the
greatest sinfulness. Hence Tarwater's murdering of idiot
Bishop becomes proper metaphor of Christian Baptism,
firing the woods, a metaphor for Christian confirmation.
In a time of desperate unbelief the Christian sacraments
must be understood to be equally desperate and the
language of desperation is violence and crime."58

Preston M. Browning, Jr. and David Eggenshiiler
in their books (Flannary O'Connor and The Christian Humanism
of Flannary O'Connor, respectively) have also shed a
good deal of light on this aspect of Miss O'Connor. David
Eggenstahliler propounds the thesis that because Miss O'Connor viewed man as an ontological totality whose health depends upon a proper relation to God, himself and his fellow men, she wrote about "wholeness and incompleteness", "unity and estrangement". He further says that man is a synthesis of the divine and earthly, that he is free and therefore experiences dread, and that in this situation he confronts two alternatives: he may accept the grace of God or he may deny his essential self, but man's attempt to deny or defy God cannot destroy the infinite within him. Thus it can be concluded that Miss O'Connor's dualism or use of grotesque involves judgment. It describes a deficiency, a deviation from an ideal of human perfection, from the image of God. Her frequent use of opposing forces is a reminder that sinners can achieve grace and salvation.

Although critics like David Eggenstahliler, Preston H. Browning, Jr. and Miles Orvell have found positive elements in Miss O'Connor's themes and have equated her with a number of religious writers, there are critics like Martha Stephens, Josephine Hendin and Rene Jordan who comment on her repugnant view of human life and element of naturalism in her stories. In this connection Martha Stephens says about Miss O'Connor's work "That she was a gifted writer - astonishingly good at times, certainly no one wishes to dispute, but the fact is that she was
possessed of so eccentric, at times so — we must face this to begin with — repugnant a view of human life that the strain of trying to enter emotionally into her work is often very great indeed. 61 Rene Jordan says about Miss O'Connor, "Of all the first-rate American writers of the century she is the easiest to put down." 62 About Everything That Rises Must Converge he says "You can't help wondering what best-seller don't could have done to a book like this. Few will read it through and most of those who stop at the half way mark will become rabid anti - O'Connorites. 63 But most of the critics have given the true analysis and have found her work brilliant and deeply religious. Warren Coffey spoke of her entire literary production as "Work of an imaginative order and brilliance rare in the world at most times, perhaps always in American writing." 64 Miles Orvell in his book Invisible Roads shows how Miss O'Connor is able to incarnate in her art a religious understanding of men which in no way interferes with dramatic action of the story. 65 In the process of symbolism as practiced by Miss O'Connor, religious meaning and the meaning of ordinary human action coordinate with one another. In much of her fiction the interpenetration of the temporal and the eternal is the force which drives the action forward to consummation.

One of the finest tribute has been paid to Miss O'Connor
by Gilbert H. Miller who compares her work to the late fourteenth century artist Hieronymus Bosch because "his themes were concerned with Heaven, Hell, the Last Judgement and the Deadly Seven, and are similar in many respects to the main literary pre-occupations of Flannery O'Connor". 66 He further says that "Bosch's most famous painting The Millennium Triptych provides a gloss on what Miss O'Connor termed her 'Stories of Original Sin' "67. Mr Miller explains how the three panels of the Millennium show how evil came into the world, how it spread through creation and how it inevitably leads to hell. Yet when the panels are closed, one is presented with an ordered view of the universe on the third day of creation. Like Bosch Miss O'Connor creates a landscape wherein life is already hellish, where men are possessed by demons and devils who completely control their souls and who subject them to excruciating torment, until Shock brings Revelation and releases them. Thus what both these artists present in a style that is pointed and precise, is a violation of the limits which have been laid down by God for men. 68
Notes and References

1. Gossett, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction, p. 84.


27. Ibid., p. 18.


32. Rupp, Celebration in Post-War American Fiction, pp. 80-81.


36. Ibid., p. 92.


38. Rupp, Celebration in Post-War American Fiction, p. 82.


40. Rupp, Celebration in Post-War American Fiction, pp. 82-83.


42. Ibid., p. 123.

43. Ibid., p. 136.

44. Orwell, Invisible Perada, p. 10.


47. Rupp, Celebration in Post-War American Fiction, pp. 91-92.


58. Ibid.


60. Ibid., p. 33.


63. Ibid.

64. Warren Coffey, quoted in Preston M. Browning, Jr., *Flannery O'Connor*, p. 10.


67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., pp. 3-4.