CHAPTER III

ART

Flannery O'Connor's work is cited as belonging to the Southern gothic tradition. Violent incidents and grotesque characters occur in it and she, like William Faulkner and Eudora Welty, captures the quality of life, humour and grotesque in Southern America. Eudora Welty represents a vanishing way of Southern life—rural and largely conservative—tragic in its sense of past, but according to Ihab Hassan, Miss O'Connor, like Carson McCullers and like Faulkner before them, gives it darker colouration. She stresses alienation, and collapse of values and traditions, and in the old forms of the gothic and the grotesque, she finds new and universal metaphors for men. Like William Faulkner, Miss O'Connor's use of grotesque, violence and irony is recurrent in her fiction. In that era the theme of literature was a happy Southern family, but Miss O'Connor shows conflict between two generations, and all old myths are shattered by her with ridicule. Many attitudes associated with Southern plain folk surface in her work with ironic result.

In more than one way Miss O'Connor uses symbols to convey the basic situations. The use of Sun imagery functions as a visible manifestation of some divine agency. In "A Good Man is Hard to Find" symbol of Tower (Biblical
allusion) has been used. There is a remarkable influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne in the fiction of Miss O'Connor. She patterned both her novels on Scarlet Letter using reversal technique and turning point. Both Hawthorne and Miss O'Connor employ animal imagery like snake. Also for the symbol of spectacles, she is influenced by Hawthorne.

The symbol of river and drowning is also often used as in "The River" and in "A View of the Woods". The line of trees is used as the symbol of death and suffering as in "A View of the Woods" and "A Good Man is Hard to Find." Likewise, there are many symbols used by her.

Even Miss O'Connor's names have a symbolic meaning. There is Mr. Greenleaf who is slow in his work and Mr. Fortune who has amassed wealth but loses the human relationship. Similarly there is a plain Thomas who loves his electric blanket, Mr. Sheppard who seeks to play Christ, and Hazel Notes whose vision is hazy. There is Mrs. Cope who is unable to cope with the three boys, and Mr. Head who fails in his mission as a suitable guide for young Nelson. There is thus much allegory and symbolism in her works.

John Hawkes finds in Nathanael West, James Purdy and Flannery O'Connor "a quality of cold detachment, ruthless determination to face up to the enormities of ugliness and potential failure within ourselves and in the world around us, and to bring to this exposure a savage
or saving comic spirit and saving beauties of language. The need is to maintain the truth of the fractured picture, to expose ridicule, to attack but always to create and to throw into new light our potential for violence and absurdity for graceful action. This is the art of Miss O'Connor. She, like William Faulkner and Eudora Welty, captures the quality of life, humour and grotesque in Southern America.

II

Like William Faulkner, Miss O'Connor's use of grotesque, violence, and irony is recurrent in her fiction. Anne Jordan says that "her characters are self-consciously larger than life, her prose laden with portent in every semi-colon, her plotting so relentlessly tragic that every sentence is like a step inevitable and often predictable - toward a witches' brew of grand Guignol finale." Those who do not accept the theological viewpoint in Miss O'Connor's work often consider her to be just "another Southern writer" dealing with regional decay. Others who have accepted her viewpoint wonder why she deals with violent and grotesque people. Reply to these people is that any basic truth to have meaning in literature must be seen in relationship to the essence of life in a particular time. Man in the modern world and decaying society has in his soul a powerful
destructive element, which often makes him behave in a violent and grotesque manner. She herself points out, "violence is a force which can be used for good or evil, and among other things taken by it is the kingdom of heaven" (M.E., p. 113). The kingdom comes for man, as in the case of Tarwater, only after they are badly shaken. She further says that, "The man in the violent situation reveals those qualities least dispensable in his personality, those qualities which are all he will have to take into eternity with him." (M.E., p. 114). Janet Rohler Greisch, a free-lance writer has mentioned about similarities between Miss O'Connor's writing stories and raising peacocks. Miss O'Connor says about her peacocks, "The cock opens his tail by shaking himself violently......." (M.E., p. 10). Similarly there are as many violent shakings in Miss O'Connor's stories as among her peacocks.  

Clare Katz analyses Miss O'Connor's violence and says "For the writer, the inner and outer worlds merge in an imaginatively extended country and in the fiction of Flannery O'Connor that country is dominated by a sense of imminent destruction. From the moment the reader enters O'Connor's backwoods, he is poised on the edge of a pervasive violence. Characters barely contain their rage; images reflect a hostile nature; and even the Christ to whom the characters are ultimately driven is a threatening figure, "a stinking, mad shadow" full of apocalyptic wrath of the
old Testament." But Ms Katz agrees that Miss O’Connor’s conscious purpose is to reveal the need for grace in a world grotesque without transcendent context. Miss O’Connor herself says "I have found that my subject in fiction is the action of grace in the territory largely held by the devil" and she was not vague about that devil, rather, she defined devil as "an evil intelligence determined on its own supremacy." (M.W., p.112). Hence, whenever Miss O’Connor sees an impulse tending towards smug confidence that human nature is perfectible by its own efforts; she brings her characters face to face with the reality with an intense violent act. Miss O’Connor remarks, "violence is capable of returning my characters to reality - and preparing them for their moment of grace." (M.W., p.112).

If a reader wants a moral, he will not find it among Miss O’Connor’s stories, for she never tackled one on, even with the most artful sublimity. Instead, the reader finds murder, cruel accidents, deformities and disasters. Her characters are fanatics and freaks normally considered as grotesque. But what may look grotesque to the readers and reviewers may be the actual condition of man. What may appear normal to the unbeliever may look all wrong when seen through the eyes of faith. Hence the Christian writer tries to make that distortion visible to others also, and that requires shock and violence. Tarwater in ‘The Violent Bear It Away’ is reped to accept his religious mission.
Hazel Notes in Miss Blood commits murder to reach the 'in Point of light'. The violence is necessitated by the modern secular temper, and by the insensitive society. Miss O'Connor herself states "The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may be forced to take even more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience..... to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures." (M.L., pp.33-34).

Flannery 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. Louise Gossett says that "Sin, guilt, mercy and redemption are the realities of human life for her, and the lives of her characters are violent, mean, frustrated, twisted and fragmented because man is a sinner." Miss O'Connor herself remarks in this connection that "writers who see by the light of their Christian faith will have in these times, the sharpest eyes for the grotesque, for the perverse, and for the unacceptable." (M.L., p. 33). These writers thus are sensitive to these distortions because they look unflinchingly at what is real. Miss O'Connor analyses grotesque by saying that "The prophet is a realist of
distances, and it is this kind of realism that you find in the best modern instances of the grotesque." (F.E., p.44).

Seeing, thus, the futility of life these writers report in terms which will attract attention.

III

Miss O'Connor's fictional world is peopled with grotesque characters like Old Mason Tarwater, the 'mad' prophet, and she appears to affirm the apparent paradox that commitment to the fundamental truth about mankind — no matter how passionate, violent and compulsive it might be — it makes for a greater freedom, ultimately, than any thing achievable by the positivists and positive thinkers. That is the reason why she admits being hundred per cent behind old Mason Tarwater. Preston E. Browning, Jr. says that Miss O'Connor reveals a penchant for the twisted, abnormal, and the grotesque which surpasses their usefulness as technical devices and which suggests that she believed with Thomas Mann that 'Certain attainments of the soul and the intellect are impossible without disease, without insanity, without spiritual crime.'

Like Faulkner, Miss O'Connor's use of grotesque concerns matters of spirit and not earthly day-to-day matters. Both bring out the enduring qualities that define man at his worst and at his best. Even though the
world is full of decay and frustration, there is something mysterious which redeem them. Miss O’Connor’s concern is specifically Christian. However, according to Carter Martin, some of her stories could be classified as gothic. "A Good Man is Hard to Find" contains mass murder and horror. Even Bailey Boy’s words while turning the car to visit a plantation house "This is the only time we are going to stop for anything like this. This is the one and only time," (G.B., p.124) suggest the gothic essence. The description of the surroundings with grave-yard and the dirt-road full of pink dirt strikes a kind of terror and constitutes an element of gothic.

Similarly in "The Lame Shall Enter First" all three characters are grotesque. Sheppard is the false prophet and the do-gooder who represents distorted principles of Christianity. Norton is ugly and greedy in his actions. Rufus is club-footed. Sheppard is insensitive to his own son, Norton, but he wants to reform Rufus out of charity. He wants to be a Christ to him. The description of the scene where Rufus puts on Norton’s mother’s clothes and tries a grotesque dance, or Norton’s vomiting up everything that he has eaten brings out a nausea in the reader’s stomach. Moreover the depiction of terror, darkness, rain, storm, Rufus as the villain and Norton as the innocent victim gives the effect of the gothic fiction. She unleashes a whirlwind of destructive forces, and in order
for Sheppard to recognize his egoism his son Norton must hang himself.

However, her novels and short stories which abound in sordidness and perverse still maintain a delicate aesthetic balance on the side of religious affirmation. Thus although Hudga's artificial leg in "Good Country People", Devil's need for Baptism in "The River", Ruby's fear of pregnancy in "A Stroke of Good Fortune" have made them all grotesque, Miss O'Connor can always justify the oddity by juxtaposing the characters -- Hudga's hypersensitivity with insensitive and gross nature of Hudga's mother and a neighbour. The contrast of fumbling grand-mother and the misfit is another case in point. According to Fredrick J. Hoffman, in most of the stories, the so-called "grotesque" of O'Connor's fiction are the individual souls imbued with religious sentiments functioning in the role of surrogate Christ or challenging him to prove himself. But because such manifestations are surreal, Miss O'Connor makes these acts weird demonstrations of human conduct.9

Her true grotesque are those who are spiritually maimed and twisted, who cannot view the everyday life around them like ordinary well-adjusted people do. The roster of Miss O'Connor's freaks is brilliant and frightening from Hazel Notes who ultimately blinds himself to Tarwater who struggles to escape from the burden of Baptism. Enoch Emery in Miss Blood is another grotesque character who as
a human being can evoke no response from people. Only when he dons the gorilla suit, he is able to frighten the young couple. Hazel Motes and Enoch Emery find meaning only in violence. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. says that "Violence of Hazel Motes is the protest of one for whom salvation is of crucial importance against society for whom God is dead and for Enoch Emery violence of a wild animal becomes necessary in a society which will not offer him love and compassion." 10

In her work cities are evil but simplicities of romantic agrarianism border on idiocy. To the grandfather of Sally Poker Sash in "A Late Encounter", "the past and future were the same thing ... one forgotten and the other not remembered," (G. G., p. 139) and family loyalty has become a deception. A veneer of pretense covers most human relationship and masks people from their true selves. To peel back this veneer and reveal the twisted and demonic human nature below is the special function of violence in Miss O'Connor's fiction. In a doctor's waiting room only when a book is hurled at Mrs Turpin by a young girl, that Mrs Turpin finally receives revelation.

Nathan A. Scott, Jr. rightly says that perhaps the extremest heresy which the human spirit can embrace is that which has been codified by modern positivism of supposing that man's only transaction is with those things
which can be weighed and measured and handled in a calculating and deliberate way. It is the inclination of the men and women of our age towards this impertinent heresy that has awakened in the modern writer a kind of rage and has led him to make his writing itself an act of violence. Indeed whenever the poison of secularity attacks the mind, a terrible neutrality of spirit and dreariness of life sets in — as in Ruby Hill in "A stroke of Good Fortune" fighting off knowledge of her own pregnancy with disgusted recollection from childhood of her mother's various pregnancies or in the drunken parents of the little boy Harry Ashfield of "The River" who live in a dreary city apartment in profane environments.

Nathan A. Scott, Jr. says that "She [Miss O'Connor] leaves behind a body of work which is to be counted among the finest fiction produced anywhere by her literary generation. And what makes it in part so notable are the radical kinds of moral judgement into the service of which she was so intent on putting her art. It was indeed always an art that very much wanted to wake the spirits asleep, to break that somnolence into which we fee from the emotions of the moral life; and it consistently expresses a fierce kind of rage at the feeble, lack lustre slum to which the human world is reduced, when, through indolence of spirit or failure of imagination, men have lost all sense of pressure of glory upon mundane
realities of experience and have thus fallen into the 
profane."12

The most violent and unattractive characters in 
Miss O'Connor's work are those obsessed by religious 
fervour, they are infected with Bible belt literalism 
in its most virulent, uncontrolled, and hysterical form. 
In its grip they are capable of exploitation and violation 
of others, of fraud and self mutilation, or arson and 
murder. But Miss O'Connor does not stop with the simple 
equation that man corrupts even his religion, indeed his 
very corruption may be a sign for his thirst for righteousness. In the novels Miss Blood and The Violent Bear It 
Away, violence and grotesqueness are the means for 
accomplishing in fiction a vision which confronts men with 
the uncomfortable demands of genuine Christian faith. 
Miss O'Connor's penchant for freaks, idiots, and cripples, 
her fascination with the morbid, macabre and monstrous 
are traits she shared with many Southern writers. The same 
gothic vein can be found to varying degree in Erskine 
Caldwell, Budora Welty, Carson McCullers, William Goyen, 
Truman Capote and in William Faulkner. Like them she 
belongs to the manifold progeny of Poe. Yet the primal 
function assumed in her art by the grotesque cannot be 
explained away by fashion or tradition. Nor can one 
attribute it merely to the gratuitous play of a perverse 
imagination. Miss O'Connor used grotesque very deliberately,
and if it became one of her privileged modes, it was because she thought it to be the fittest medium to express her vision of reality. Its meaning in her fiction is closely linked to her religious concerns; in her eyes, the grotesque can no more be dissociated from the supernatural than evil can be separated from the mysteries of faith. The grotesque has the power of revelation. The derangement of minds and deformity of bodies point to a deeper sickness—the sickness of soul. Miss O'Connor has the gift of reducing human to non-human (people like Enoch Emery) and converting things into objects with a life of their own (Hazel's Essex in Miss Blood, the giant steam shovel in "A View of the Woods").

IV

A brisk current of humour runs through Miss O'Connor's fiction, generally as an accompaniment to violence and grotesqueness. Regional dialect and custom lightens the grimness of the life that Miss O'Connor views. Before setting out for Florida, the grand-mother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find", who is certain of her identity, dresses primly so that in case of an accident she will be recognized as a lady. According to the grand-uncle Tarwater has been properly educated, having been taught "Figures, Reading, Writing and History"
beginning with Adam expelled from the Garden and going on down through the Presidents to Herbert Hoover and on in speculation towards the Second Coming and the Day of Judgement." (The Violent, p. 4). Her humour, satire and irony run side by side. By the violence of her fiction, Miss O'Conner scores the "Life adjustment" philosophy of the twentieth century, and that is evident from an advice letter of the columnist to Sabbath Hawks in Miss Blood. 15

Miss O'Conner's sense of humour is set against sober and sometimes tragic background. Robert Fitzgerald observes that "the presence of her humour is like the presence of grace." 16 About Miss Blood Miss O'Conner herself says "that it is a comic novel that was written with zest ... should be read that way." (ibid., p.5). Hazel Notes' dignity and pride in his dilapidated car enhances the humour, and the most humorous situation comes in the novel when Enoch Emery expresses his naivete' and limited knowledge by trying to be friendly with Gonga the Gorilla actor. However, along with humour, the incident also has pathos in it. It proves the indifferent attitude of the city, towards the friendless Enoch Emery, and in this manner Miss O'Conner brilliantly satirizes the contemporary man. Northrup Frye's statement that "Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a context which the reader recognizes as grotesque and at least an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude towards experience," 15 applies accurately
to Miss O'Connor's fiction. According to Mr Frye, two things are essential - fantasy tending towards grotesque and moral standard which can be accepted by the readers. Hence a satirist's world contains fantasy as well as grotesque, and Miss O'Connor constitutes just such a world.

Mark G. Edelstein says that she does not invent a fantastic and a grotesque world, rather she sees man as grotesque because he tries hard to escape from his own Salvation, and the stupidity of this infuriates her. Hence much of her writing turns out to be a satire. When the cook asks the proud young twelve-year-old girl in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" why her attitude towards other people is so "ugly", the child replies in utter exasperation, "Those stupid idiots" (C.2., p. 242) — Miss O'Connor's own attitude is born of the same exasperation.

Through her humour and satire, Miss O'Connor shows how man's pride in his power ultimately renders him helpless. Mr Head in "The Artificial Nigger" feels that "his physical reactions like his moral ones were guided by his will and strong character" (C.2., p. 249) and he feels very confident in his ability to guide his grandson through the dangers of the city. But when he and his grandson become lost he panics like a child. He himself cannot understand the maze of the modern city life.

Similarly, with her satire Miss O'Connor strips Hulga (Joy)'s existentialism and leaves her perplexed and confused in
"Good Country People." Hulga is an intellectual who proudly describes herself as "one of those people who see through to nothing" (G.S., p. 287) but her real ignorance is exposed in her relationship with the 'Innocent' young Bible-Saleman. She condescends to seduce him, but in the end it is Hulga who is seduced and deprived of her most private possession -- her artificial leg. Thus the self-righteousness of Hulga, Mr. Head, Sarah Ruth Parker and others, in fact, expose their ignorance. Mrs. Shortley shows her own shortcomings when she talks about Catholics, "they never have advanced." (G.S., p. 296).

Warren Coffey talks about her satire and says that she owes much to Lardner and Nathanael West. "To Lardner, the satirist's trick of catching cliche as it falls and freezes the banality of a life or mind ("If I can help a person all I want is to do it. I am above and beyond simple pettiness") One of her social workers says, what we hear is the cliche of her attitude. The satirist hears and freezes on the page what is said." 17

Warren Coffey further says that Lardner proved that if you let the people talk in their accents for very long they would explode themselves more shatteringly than any body could hope to do from outside. Miss O'Connor adopted this and went on to make merry with the pretensions of social workers, intellectuals and anxious mothers and wives of Dixie Hog-farmers. 18
Such an intellectual is found in "The Enduring Chill" where its central character is the romantic youth and an intellectual misunderstood by his mother, family and farm. Asbury returns home from New York to die or so he believes. His death-bed scenes are purely humorous and sarcastic. Asbury requests to be visited by a Jesuit thinking "he would talk to a man of culture before he died -- even in this desert" (C.S., p. 371). The man of culture with whom he wants to discuss James Joyce turns out to be blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. When he asks Asbury about prayer and catechism, Asbury is irritated and replies "certainly I have heard of the Holy Ghost. And the Holy Ghost is the last thing I am looking for."

"And he may be the last thing you get" the priest said, his one fierce eye inflamed." (C.S., p. 376). It is then that Asbury gets his revelation and "the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire continued implacably to descend" (C.S., p. 382). Asbury detected the manner and world of his mother's farm but mysteriously they rise up to meet him.

In spite of being a devout Catholic Miss O'Connor frequently creates humour out of religion -- She says in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" "You put your foot in their door and they got you praying." (C.S., p. 247). Carter Martin says that "She uses humor for religious matters because she feels that humor will engage the reader's
interest and hold it until the subtle truth shows through."

The grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" talks about Christianity but is concerned with social status and her connection with antebellum days. Mrs Crater in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" speaking of old monks says "They wasn't as advanced as we are" (C.S., p. 149).

Mrs Turpin in "Revelation" has always thought herself to be a respectable citizen. She is class conscious, snobbish and holds herself above the white trash and niggers. She always thanks Jesus for making her what she is, and in her ladder of class consciousness she places white trash and poor niggers on the lowest rung. In the Doctor's office, she shows her snobbish superiority over the negro delivery boy in the following conversation which provokes laughter and humour:

"You see that button there, boy?" Mrs Turpin said, "you can punch that and she'll come ..." "Is this right?" the boy said agreeably as if he had never seen the button before. He leaned to the right and put his finger on it "She sometime cut" he said and twisted around to face his audience, his elbows behind him on the counter" (C.S., p. 495). This is the delivery boy's way of informing Mrs Turpin that he knew about the button all along and thus belittling her superior snobness. But it takes Mary Grace's violent hurling of a book at her to finally shatter her superiority and her snobness.
Miss O'Connor reveals a great comic flair in depicting the feminine temperament. In "A Circle in the Fire" Mrs. Pritchard relishes the details of physical illness when she gives the long account of the woman who conceives the child and gives birth to it in an iron lung. Similarly Mrs. Freeman in "Good Country People" provokes laughter as well as shock when she is shown as taking interest in "the details of secret infection, hidden deformities, assault upon children. Of the diseases she preferred the lingering or incurable" (p. 275).

Miss O'Connor's irony is often wonderfully effective because its shafts go in different directions. Upright Mrs. McIntyre in "The Displaced Person" cannot see how Guizaq can truly be a Christian if he would marry his cousin to a Negro. Implied here of course is the contrast between Christianity as it often is and as it ought to be. In "Good Country People" Mrs. Hopewell's negative virtue is described with irony. "Mrs. Hopewell had no bad qualities of her own but she was able to use other people's in such a constructive way that she never felt the lack." (p. 272).

John Hawks referring to Edwin Honig's book Dark Conceit which mentions that "for Melville it was a challenge to map out the relation of the unknown country of
allegory to the known countries and conditions of contemporary actuality" says that "this statement is appropriate for O'Connor also. The problem and the challenge are hers too, and the authority it describes is precisely what lies behind her "brutal" laughter; that "unknown country" and "actuality" are precisely what her fiction combines in a mercilessly pleasurable tension." Hawke compares Miss O'Connor to Nathanael West and says that both the writers suggest twin guffawing of peals of laughter above a dead landscape, quite ready for new humor, new vision and new art more meaningful comic treatment of violence. Both the writers are demolishing man's image of himself as a rational creature as Raynor's image in 'The Violent Bear It Away' and Sheppard's in "The Lone Shell Eater First." Thus it is clear that Man's rationalism would not save him. Perhaps the image must be demolished so that he can see beyond it to salvation. Similarly she destroys the intellectual pretense of Asbury in "The Enduring Chill" and shows him as a funny and a helpless figure. But in deflating Asbury's self-image, David Aiken says that Miss O'Connor satirizes the youthful type that rebels against his tradition and alienates himself from his family in the name of absolute dedication to art.

Satire is the sword Miss O'Connor uses even for her metaphors, similes and comparisons. There is the young brother whose face was as broad and innocent as a cabbage in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (G.S., p. 117) and there is the old woman who "was about the size of a cedar
fence post" in "The Life You Save may be Your Own" (L.B., p. 140) and there is the mother with two little boys who stand with faces "like pens set on either side to catch the grins that overflowed from her." (L.B., p. 99). John Knows says that "this creation of flat personality depends on the extreme absurdity of the juxtaposing the human and inanimate." Miss O'Connor's "A Late Encounter With the Enemy" is also a typical example of satire on those Southern people who live in shallow glorification of their past. Sally Poker Sash a sixty-year-old woman graduating from College has no sense of dignity when she thinks of her grand-father as a traditional dignified general. It only proves her vulgarity. The old man himself does not even remember whether he was a private or a captain in the war, but is presented as the general for the Premier of a movie and he wallows in that false dignity. He is portrayed as an ugly, and senile old man who is interested in "Pretty gals" and "Freemy" and cannot even remember his experiences in the civil war.

Carter Martin rightly says that her use of grotesque characters and situations, and her frequent inclusion of grim humour are technical features as well as aspects of her Christian theme. In order to bring out the follies of intellectuals she uses mockery and satire. The pride of intellectuals like Astbury, Rayner, Sheppard, Bulga Hopewell is mocked throughout her work. Bulga
Hopewell's belief in nothing is shattered before a nineteen-year-old Bible salesman, who has been believing in nothing ever since he was born. Similarly Julian in "Every thing That Rises Must Converge" and Thomas in "The Conflicts of Home" both suffer setbacks. George Fayber and Sheppard, both are unable to solve human problems. Miss O'Connor with the help of irony and satire brings out their shallowness and their lack of faith in God.

Northrup Frye defines satire as "Militant Irony" and Mark Edleston says that "this is a perfect description for O'Connor. Her anger should not be overlooked. She is furious at "those stupid idiots" and is compelled to expose their perversity in rejecting a god who is so obviously there. It is just like the Misfit who says in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," 'If He did what He said, then it is nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, but if he didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can -- by killing somebody, or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness (p.28)." That O'Connor tells us over and over again that man without God is nothing but meanness and perversion, and the only values he can have are materialistic or sensual ones, and that the only beliefs he can have are prejudices and hypocrisies."

Thus Miss O'Connor, apart from satire uses a subtle
form of irony and Carter Martin thinks that "this irony is basic to the Christian belief that the purifying effect of communion with Christ miraculously projects a man into a new existence significantly different from his former identity in sin."29 The "Partridge Festival" is the typical example of this definition. Mary Elizabeth and Calhoun put Singleton, the murderer, on a high pedestal in this materialistic world and take his side glorifying him against the hypocritical town of Partridge, but they are themselves shocked and horrified to see him nothing more than an insane murderer. Irony of the fact is that not only their opinion about Singleton is wrong, but that they too must learn to judge themselves and others properly. Tom T. Shiftlet in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" is a hypocrite and selfish man who marries a woman's retarded daughter and deserts her on their honeymoon just to get the car, but the irony is that he not only gives up a permanent house and "an angel of God" but also his own salvation. He speaks frequently of God and the spirit, but his actions give his character away. Mark Edelstein says about Tom T. Shiftlet that "the sun, birds, mountains, sky, all reflect God's presence but they fail to make any real impression on the obtuse Shiftlet."29

VI

Even a casual reader can hardly ignore the metaphors
that suggest sacramental vision, the sun, the peacock etc. Miss O'Connor uses the traditional symbols of sun, light, woods, trees and such animals as hogs, dragons, peacocks to link the stories with Revelation and Epiphany. Although her images are drawn from the common aspects of life, she makes it possible to believe that there are Christian Mysteries in ordinary matters. Patricia D. Reide says that "The reader enters this world through the eyes of characters, experiencing an environment fraught with extraordinary signs in the form of natural imagery. Among the recurring images a triad dominates — the tree line, the sun, and color purple. Essentially, the tree line suggests delineation between the known and the known; the sun reflects light or enlightenment, and the color purple indicates bruises and pain. But on metaphysical level, this triad represents an existential awareness and a spiritual process." Since the action in her stories is ultimately related to spiritual reality, the sun, sky and woods engage in violent interaction. At times the sun is "swollen and flame colored" clouds are "shaped like a turnip", and sky tries to push and break through the wall of trees. Miss O'Connor herself gives the analysis of the symbols and says "I think that for the fiction writer himself, symbols are something he uses simply as a matter of course. You might say that these are details that, while having their essential place in the literal level of the story, operate in depth as well as on the surface, increasing the story in every direction." (McL., p. 71).
In her stories the details tend to accumulate meaning from the action of the story itself and thus they become symbolic. In the story "Good Country People" the wooden leg of Bulga Hopewell accumulates great meaning and Miss O'Connor compares Bulga's wooden leg to a wooden part of her soul, indicating that in spite of her Ph.D. she is spiritually as well as physically crippled (E.M., p. 99). Similarly the material of her first novel 'Miss Blood' has been joined together with the help of symbolism. Stanley Edgar Hyman finds the title as the principal symbol and says "Bosch feels he has wise blood, because he comes to know things through his blood (intuition). Hazel also feels that he has wise blood — the blood of only reality with which he preaches 'the Church that the blood of Jesus does not foul with redemption.' In truth Hazel does possess the wise blood — the inherited vocation that preaches through him the ultimate redemption."

In the novel at every stage in various symbols like "Church without Christ", "rock strown landscape", "pin point of light", etc., a sharp mockery of secular rationalism can be detected. Seen from a different level the novel is an indictment of the modern and rationalistic attitude of today's world. The symbols of rat-coloured car and the rocks have an important part in the novel. For Hazel the car is the religious mystery, and as opposed to his grand-father, he preaches "No Religion" from its
hood. It is his pulpit and a means of escape. But he is unable to escape his predicament, until the car is destroyed by a policeman. Stanley Edgar Hyman considers the rocks as the Rock of Peter's Church. The symbolism of rock is used at various places in the novel. Hazel punishes himself by walking with stones and small rocks in his shoes. "Hazel's face might have been cut out of the side of a rock." (W.E., p. 121). Hazel sees a boulder on which is painted a call to repentance. Thus Hazel Notes of Miss Blood embodies the very essence of the problem common to Miss O'Connor's characters - moral blindness.

According to Stanley Edgar Hyman "Haze" indicates lack of clarity and "Notes" is a term used for some particle in the eye (Haze in the eyes - mote in the eyes - bean in the eyes). From the title of the book and the name of the protagonist to the words "Good Jesus" "My Jesus", the development of the action is foreshadowed by symbolism. Commenting on the subject of symbols, Miss O'Connor gives an example of Hazel Notes rat-coloured car in Miss Blood. "The car is a kind of death-in-life symbol as his blindness is a life-in-death symbol." (W.E., p. 72).

The story "Life You Save May Be Your Own" is again a symbolic one. On the secular level the title refers to the highway signs put up for road safety, but on the spiritual level it shows denial of grace by Tom T. Shiflet. His image associates him with Christ. He is a Carpenter.
and his shadow forms a "Crooked Cross" but he seeks materialistic world rather than spiritual. When he gets Mrs. Crater's ear running, he feels as if he has raised it from the dead. But he is not able to resurrect his own soul. Stuart L. Burns comments about the title of the story that "These signs stand in secular opposition to Christ's injunction in the Gospel of Matthew: 'Whoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake will find it.'"\(^{34}\) For the sake of materialistic happiness Shiftlet loses the spiritual happiness. Although he sees the "rottenness of the world" he is unable to recognise the "slime" in his soul.

In *A Study of Hebrew Thought* Claude Treadwontant says, "Fire in the Bible is the sign of God's love, His Jealousy and His Wrath .... It is fire which purifies, destroys the imperfect, perfecting the gold."\(^ {35}\) and Miss O'Connor frequently uses the symbol of burning. Mrs Cope in "A Circle in the Fire" is always worrying about fires in her woods. She is so involved in her snug and complacent world that she is disturbed by the three young boys who visit her farm. Mrs Cope, a self-satisfied woman sees her farm as her hard-won property and does not want to share it with any of these city-bred boys. She, however, does not understand Powell's (one of the boy) longing for the farm for whom it is like 'a heaven'. She fears the natural world, and beauty makes her uneasy.
She looks at the sun "swollen and flame colored and hung in a net of ragged cloud as if it might burn through any second and fall into the woods." (G.S., p. 134). Sister Kathleen Feeley says that "this story communicates the supernatural reality of the pursuing love of God." Mrs Cope experiences it mysteriously only when control of reality is taken out of her hands. When the boys set fire to the woods is she dimly aware of her true relationship to "her" property.

The symbol of Fire as the purifying agent has been used by Miss O'Connor frequently in her stories and her novel The Violent Bear It Away. Francis Tarwater burns the house with his grand-uncle's body in it. Thus he tries to break away from the spiritual influence of his grand-uncle and rejects his destiny. However, in the end Tarwater is purged clean by the same purifying fire. The novel is tightly unified by the principal symbol of burning. Old Tarwater wrote to Bayber "The Prophet I raise out of this boy will burn your eyes clean" (The Violent, p. 75). The girl evangelist says "The Word of God is a burning word to burn you clean" (The Violent, p. 134). At the end of the novel after setting fire to the woods, Tarwater is burned clean, and he sets his singed eyes towards the dark city. The symbol of fire in "Parker's Beck" also serves the purpose of changing the identity. When Parker's tractor crashes into a tree, the burning tree's symbolic meaning is revealed
to him. Carter Martin says that the fire ignited by his tractor is purgatorial for it consumes E. O.'s former identity when it burns his shoes causing him to go barefoot into town to have a tattoo of Christ on his back.37

The rain and water have also been used by Miss O'Connor as the purifying agents. Water is suggestive of regenerative power, and the turning point of Hazel Bates in 'Miss Blood' is shown when he throws the mummy outside in the rain and says "I've seen the only truth there is to see." (W.B., p. 103). The symbol of water frequently occurs in The Violent Bear It Away. The name Tar Water itself is symbolic in that the boy is torred by the original sin and is redeemed by water.38 Rayber's son Bishop's holiness is emphasized by his attraction for water. He is shown lurching into the fountain in the park. Later on Rayber takes Bishop and Tarwater on a fishing trip to Cherokee Lodge, a lake resort. There once again Bishop leads Tarwater to the lake where ultimately Tarwater drowns him as well as baptizes him. While discussing the patterns of imagery in this novel, Clinton Throwbridge says that "after drowning Bishop Tarwater feels that it is the silent land of the dead symbolised in the great whale that swallowed Jonah that has taken possession of him. A great fish has swallowed him and he is seen as a fish himself. It is this symbol which suggests that this was for Tarwater the moment of his soul's redemption. The imagery and the figures of speech suggest that actually Bishop drowns him
into the spiritual life — the life which he has been fleeing." Tarwater feels "He might have been Jonah clinging wildly to the whale's tongue." \textit{(The Violent, p. 216)}.

In this novel Miss O'Connor weaves the idea that only Christ can really satisfy man's spiritual hunger with the imagery of bread loaves, fish, and hunger, etc. About Tarwater O'Connor says "Since the breakfast he had finished sitting in the presence of his uncle's corpse, he had not been satisfied by food, and his hunger had become like an insistent silent force inside him ..." \textit{(The Violent, p. 162)}. Even after drowning Bishop Tarwater tries to reject his destiny and tells the truck driver that he is not hungry for bread of life \textit{(The Violent, p. 210)}. Finally in the vision he sees Christ feeding the multitude. Thus the idea of loaves and fishes is presented right from the beginning. Miss O'Connor describes old Tarwater's eyes "like two fish straining to get out of the net of red threads..." \textit{(The Violent, p. 10)}. The imagery of fish occurs repeatedly in this novel.

Apart from the two novels, her short stories are also full of imagery and symbolism. In "A Good Man is Hard to Find" symbol of Tower (Biblical allusion) has been used. Leon V. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain have compared Miss O'Connor to Nathaniel Hawthorne that she has employed animal imagery of snake. Serpent's imagery has been used
by Hawthorne for Chilling Worth in *The Scarlet Letter* and by Miss O'Connor for Shiftlet in "The Life you Save May Be Your Own." When the old woman offers to have the car painted, "Mr. Shiftlet's smile stretched like a weary snake waking up by a fire." (Cal., p. 152). Another symbol drawn from Hawthorne's work is the symbol of spectacles. In *The Scarlet Letter* he typifies his good old gentlemen morally and physically by defining their visions. The cynic in Hawthorne's "The Great Carbuncle" joins in search for the gem in order to prove that it does not exist. His spectacles are of importance in the story as are the spectacles of the Shiftlet and Hazel Notes, who wear silver-rimmed spectacles and both are seeking truth by denying revealed religion. Hazel Notes cannot "see" until after he has thrown away his mother's glasses aside.

Another animal imagery is the hog which has been used as a symbol for demon in a few of Miss O'Connor's stories. In "The River" the Pardine looks like a hog and represents a rationalist who refuses to believe on the basis of faith. In the same story Bevel (Harry Ashfield) is interested in a picture, the one with a carpenter driving "a crowd of pigs out of a man", suggesting the story of Christ casting the demons out of the man. James Goss says that "The hog symbol links together the various temptations that Bevel must withstand — materialism in the guise of his parents, and skepticism, in the form of
Mr. Paradise — in order to obtain his true home in the "Kingdom of Christ." Similarly the hog also appears in Miss Blood to tempt Hazel Notes away from Christ. From the train he sees "a few hogs nosing in the furrows." While the sun is far off in the distance, suggesting that Hazel is spiritually away from God and near to the devil.

Another of Miss O'Connor's recurring image is the "tree line" which Patricia Maile calls "a demarcation of what is immediate to a character's experience and that which lies beyond." In "A Circle in the Fire" the trees on the horizon enclose the land and are described either black or granite. Beyond these trees the three boys are shrieking with joy "as if the prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace, in the circle the angel had cleared for them." (C.S., p. 193). In The Violent Bear It Away, Tarwater becomes aware of environments when he takes Bishop for a boat-ride and the lake reflects a crown of trees. At the end of the novel, the purple red above the tree line indicates his purification and his acceptance of the call. In "A View of the Woods" the woods have a symbolic significance. They represent the moment of grace, moral reality and all that is beautiful, but the grandfather refuses to recognize them. Sister M. Bernetta Quinn comments on his lack of comprehension that "For the old man, the woods are first of all a vision of hell and as the story mounts to its climax, even more." In a fit of rage the old man kills his grand-daughter but in
consequence suffers a fatal heart attack and when he falls, "on both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance." (G., p. 356). Old Mr Fortune believes in progress and does not want any "view" to stand in his way, his materialistic idea of progress determines his view of reality. Sister Kathleen Feeley compares this conflict between the child and her grand-father to a conflict between pine woods and a bulldozer and ultimately to a conflict between spiritual vision and material progress.44

Yet one of the other important symbol employed by Miss O'Connor is the sun imagery. This image works in conjunction with the tree line image to convey the moment of grace. At times the sun appears as a huge red ball and sometimes it appears a forboding white. It is used as purifying as well as destructive agent. As the enlightenment dawns on the protagonist, the intensity of the sun also increases in proportion. Various critics have discussed this imagery and Louise Gossett says that "these sun images point a parallel between the life-giving and life-taking physical energy of the sun and the creative and destructive spiritual energy which inflames many of the characters."45 When the three boys set Mrs Cope's woods on fire the sun appears as a foreboding "white hole like an opening for the wind to escape through in a sky a little darker than itself ..." (G., p. 191). In "A Temple of The Holy Ghost" when
humility and revelation dawns on the little girl she sees
the setting sun as "a huge red ball like an elevated host
drenched in blood" (G.S., p. 246). But earlier while
driving to the Convent the child leans her head out of the
car window and when the wind blows her hair like a veil
over her eyes she is able to look "directly into ivory
sun which was framed in the middle of blue afternoon."
(G.S., p. 247).

Stuart L. Burns says that "Miss O'Connor's Sun
(and its related subordinates moon and stars) is a constant
symbol, retaining a consistent value, providing a touch-
stone for understanding and resolving largely the ambiguities
of such stories as "Revelation" "the Life You Save May Be
Your Own" and "Green Leaf" .... It always functions as
a visible manifestation of some divine agency intervening
in or judging the affairs of men."46 Burns further says
that there are nine references of sun imagery in "The
River", nine in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own",seven in "Revelation" eleven in "Greenleaf" and forty-one
in The Violent Bear It Away.47

In "Greenleaf" Mrs May initially does not like
nature. "Every thing is against you" she would say
"the weather is against you. The help is against you.
They are all in league against you. There is nothing for
it, but an iron hand." (G.S., p. 321). But just before
her death when she is gored by the bull the sun becomes so intense that she closes her eyes. (C.S., p. 332). Sun symbolism shows the basic difference between two worlds of Harry Ashfield in "The River". In the city apartment there is little sun which indicates lack of grace for Harry's parents, but in the country "white Sunday sun" follows Harry and Mrs. Conin as they walk to the religious service. (C.S., p. 162). Harry (Bevel) is baptized by the preacher under the "white sun scattered in the river." (C.S., p. 168). Thus the pieces of the sun are witness to his baptism like diamonds. However, on the Preacher's enquiry regarding ailment of Harry's mother, when he replies "she has a hangover" (C.S., p. 168) he can hear "the broken pieces of sun knocking in the water." (C.S., p. 168). Thus for the materialistic worldly parents there is no sunshine and no grace.

Patricia D. Haida says that in Miss O'Connor's symbols purple colour suggests bruising pain and self abnegation. Thus in "Greenleaf" when Mrs. May decides to destroy the bull "the sky was creased with thin red and purple ..." (C.S., p. 328). Mrs. May is about to receive physical and psychological pain as she is forced to come to terms with the truth.43 Similarly Julian's mother's eyes are affected in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" "The blue in them seem to have turned purple." (C.S., p. 416). Here also the character suffers a painful shock. Thus
according to Miss Maide the imagery of the tree-line, the 
sun and the colour purple suggest how grace operates in 
the natural order. As the provocative force of God, Grace 
operates subtly, usually without the individual's being 
aware of it.

Miss O'Connor, who raised peacocks at her farm in 
Milledgeville, says about the peacock's cry "To the 
melancholy this sound is melancholy and to the hysterical 
it is hysterical. To me it has always sounded like a cheer 
for an invisible parade." (M.M., p. 14). Peacock is the 
main symbol which Miss O'Connor has used in her story 
"The Displaced Person". It is the Christian symbol in 
the story showing divinity of Christ in all its glory. But 
only the Priest and Astor can recognise it. Miss O'Connor 
says about the beauty of the peacock "when it suits him the 
peacock will face you. Then you will see in a green-bronze 
arch around him a galaxy of gazing haloed suns." (M.M., p.10) 
Different people are described by her to have different 
attitudes towards her peacocks. An Old Negro woman once 
cried "Amen Amen" when she saw the peacock (M.M., p. 10). 
On the other hand the telephone linemen was completely 
indifferent to the display of the spread tail. All he 
said was "Never saw such long ugly legs. I bet that rascal 
could outrun a bus." (M.M., p.12).

Similarly her characters have different attitude 
towards the peacock in "The Displaced Person." Peacock
follows actor around and sits near him. Mrs Shortley never notices him. Mrs McIntyre sees him only as another mouth to feed and the priest is overwhelmed by its beauty.

"So beautiful", the priest said, "a tail full of suns" ... "The peacock stood still as if he had just come down from some sun-drenched height to be a vision for them all." (C.S., p. 198).

Stanley Edgar Hyman says that the Peacock symbolizes divine nature and the displaced person Mr Guiza, human nature. When Mrs McIntyre talks about Guiza to the Priest, he sees the peacock and stands transfixed and says, "Christ will come like that" (C.S., p. 226). Mr Guiza and the peacock are thus linked by this symbol as Mr Guiza embodies Christ as displaced. Like Him he suffers and is slain. 50 There is also a reference to Peacock in The Violent Bear It Away, when the girl evangelist says "God told the world He was going to send it a King and the world waited. The world thought a golden fleece will do for his bed. Silver and gold peacock tails will do for his sash." (The Violent, p. 131). All this indicates how the imagery and symbol of peacock is linked to Divinity.

In Hindu mythology omens connected with the peacock stem from the central belief that the bird is the annihilator of time, being the foe of the serpent. The peacock is an active creature of the earth associated with the sun and the solar energy while the serpent symbolises the
sluggish burrowers in the darkness of the nether world. Serpent is thus the symbol of the devil and peacock of God. It is an omen of victory and success. The peacock dance is a delightful ritual to welcome the rain which again symbolises regenerative power.\textsuperscript{51}

Sister Kathleen Poyley says that Miss O'Connor believes that attention to reality would lead to truth and hence she writes "symbolic theology" (God reveals the spiritual through material). She immerses her protagonists in the world of phenomenon to portray the character's awareness of the luminous quality of the world.\textsuperscript{52}
Notes and References


13. Gossett, *Violence in Recent Southern Fiction,* p. 96


21. Hawks, in Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 395.
31. Hymen, Flannery O'Connor, p. 2
32. Ibid., p. 9
33. Ibid.
36. Sister Kathleen Feeley S.S.N.D., Ibid. p. 130.
38. Driskell and Brittain, The Eternal Crossroads, p. 44.


45. Consett, *Violence in Recent Southern Fiction*, p. 86.


47. Ibid.


49. Ibid., p. 36.

