CHAPTER V

ISOLATION AND DEATH

Isolation and death are the most predominant factors in the stories of Miss O'Connor and through death is the revelation of life. The cleavage between those who have won the victories of comfortable home and productive farm by sheer grit and determination and those who have not so struggled is complete. There is an horizontal division between coloured and the whites as in "Everything That Rises" and in "Judgement Day", and vertical division between generations. The loneliness which stalks the world of Flannery O'Connor is projected with the introduction of a past middle-aged widow against the background of a seemingly successful life epitomized in a well-run farm, a profitable dairy or a gleaming house wherein reside her children who have been educated and prepared for a more intellectual life away from the land. Between the mother and the children it is not the traditional generation gap, but total isolation. There is no communication between Mrs May and her sons in "Greenleaf", and between mother and son in "The Comforts of Home." Miss O'Connor links power, ownership and authority to violence. Her characters fight over land and children. Thus everything ends in death. The souls are driven into this world and so forced to crash. In "Greenleaf" Mrs May's inefficient tenant farmer can never keep the bull penned in. She is finally gored to death through a carelessness
on his part that is total hostility. In "The River" the
young boy tries to baptize himself in the river and
continues to keep on going till he can find the kingdom
of Christ. Death is doubly significant firstly as the
reveal of inner life of the central character and then
as the final sacrifice. In "The Lone Shall Enter First,"
Sheppard's son is sacrificed due to Sheppard's egotism and
hostility towards him. But death often provides hope for her
characters and brings Salvaation.

The thrust of Miss O'Connor's work is into the
heart of paradox, epitomized by serious consideration that
man's mortality might be an act of grace and the occasion
of death as prophetic sign. She undercuts the more
sensational or melodramatic aspects of dying, because she
is concerned less with documentary realism than with the aura
of understanding produced in the protagonist himself or in a
bystander. For her the change is the agent of permanence.
To Miss O'Connor her own illness and her father's early
death suggest an obvious source of a pervasive concern of
her writing - omnipresent death and disaster. Her work
is filled with depiction of violence and tragedy. This
pervasive awareness of death charges her work with a powerful
tension, and places her in the line of great tragic writers
who have insisted that man's own mortality is the central
feature of all human experience. Miss O'Connor's stories
speak of man's alienation from society and from supernatural
world. She relies on Christian doctrine to explain the agonies of the world because she understands as do many writers of Catholic origin in modern times, but it is geared to the problems of sin and evil, life and death, happiness and despair.

Sister Kathleen Feeley says that "Alienation was once a diagnosis, but in much of the fiction of her times it has become an ideal. The modern hero is the outsider.

His experience is restless. He can go anywhere. He belongs nowhere. Being alien to nothing, he ends up being alienated from any kind of community based on common tastes and interests."

Thus according to Miss O'Connor, if man is willing to accept the unseen and incomprehensible part of reality there could be no conflict between faith and reason. But in the modern times with the advent of rationalism, a sharp division has arisen between the reality which is accessible to the human intelligence and that which it is unable to comprehend. Thus there has developed a gulf between reality and reality. In her stories Miss O'Connor, therefore, portrays man alienated from the fullness of mystery because he refuses to believe anything which his mind cannot encompass. Alexis de Tocqueville in Democracy of America suggests that this is a national malaise. He says "... Thus they fall to deny what they cannot comprehend, which leaves them but little faith for whatever is extraordinary and almost insurmountable distress for
whatever is supernatural." This same definition applies to Miss O'Connor's alienated man - Man cut off, usually by pride, from a complete apprehension of Reality.

II

Miss O'Connor explores various kinds of alienation from Reality in her fiction, but her ultimate concern is about man's separation from supernatural. In a lecture at Sweetbriar College in March 1963 (M.B., pp. 154-168), she discussed the connection between literature and theology. She spoke of three types of alienated man: one who recognizes spirit in himself, but not a spiritual being outside himself whom he can acknowledge as Creator, and who therefore defies himself; one for whom spirit and matter are separated, who recognizes a divine being, but disbelieves in the possibility of apprehending Him or communicating with Him. Third type is the searcher "who can neither believe nor contain himself in unbelief." (M.B., p. 159). He searches desperately "feeling about in all experience for the lost God" (M.B., p. 159). Her first novel Miss Blood is a tale of man's attempt to eradicate from his consciousness the belief in Jesus Christ as Saviour. In the opening scene the words of a passenger in the train, "I guess you are going home" (M.B., p. 10) introduce the theme of the novel and show Hazel's spiritual
displacement which the entire story unfolds. It is only through death that Hazel finally reaches his home. Landlady's final words suggest the fulfillment of Hazel's spiritual quest "Well Mr. Notes ... I see you've come home" (E.B., p. 251). Miss Blood is an extreme treatment of alienated man's search for "Home."

Observers of the contemporary American fiction seem to agree on at least one point: modern life is anything but lovely, and the writers who portray it tell it like it is. In the preface of his book The Landscape of Nightmare, Jonathan Baumbach says that

"To live in this world, to live consciously in this world in which madness daily passes for sanity is a kind of madness in itself. Yet where else can we go? We are born into this nightmare and we do our best (with a sense of initiative duty and honour - with no sense at all) to make the worst of it. And for all our massive efforts at self-extinction we continue to survive - a cosmic joke."

No doubt, like Baumbach, Miss O'Conner too has a grim outlook of the modern world, and has thus constantly touched upon the theme of isolation and alienation in her books, but her main concern is for Redemption and Salvation of men. She conveys repeatedly the message that if men can recognize Reality, there would be no conflict in his mind and no isolation for him. But if men removes himself from Grace, he will no doubt encounter despair and alienation. In the landscape of fiction, which she creates, Miss O'Conner's grotesque - deformed in body and soul alike - wrangle with
ultimate problem. Those who succeed like Hazel Motes ultimately reach 'Home'.

But earlier Hazel Motes wards off all human contact and comes to the unknown city of Faulkner to preach his Church without Christ. He is infected with the legacy of his grandfather, a Bible Belt Preacher, and is obsessed with Jesus Christ to a degree which precludes normal human behaviour. Hazel is so isolated in the city that he has no place to counteract displacement, and thus he buys a car. His words to the dealer signify a new placement. "I wanted this car mostly to be a house for me, I ain't got any place to be." (M.B., p. 75). Initially a home the car becomes his pulpit. But the security of a car is only a temporary security because his car is ultimately destroyed. By deciding to reject the traditional figure of Christ, Hazel becomes a sort of a displaced person who leaves a known area and travels on an unknown path. Miss O'Connor's characters suffer from an acute sense of dislocation of place, but when they accept their failings and recognize the Supreme Power, like Hazel Motes, they no doubt reach home. What saves Hazel Motes from becoming no more than a burlesque of an anti-Christ is the very real pathos of his life. Hazel's most powerful feelings focus on objects or intellectual abstractions. Although Josephine Hendin thinks that his desire to leap through the window of the moving train is "more a leap away from the natural world,
away from the body, a leap toward becoming a thing," but reality of belief is so strong in Hazel that he is unable to uproot it: therefore to live comfortably with it, he must transform it into a shadow of reality. Contrary to Miss Hennin's statement Sister Kathleen Feeley rightly says "Basic to an understanding of Hazel's alienation is a true conception of what Redemption means, a conception stated in orthodox terms by St. Paul "No man is ever justified by doing what law demands, but only through faith in Christ Jesus." Thus through faith alone Hazel becomes "in point of light."

In the same novel Miss O'Connor extends the alienation theme through Enoch Emary's pathetic quest for friendship. He is isolated and lonely. He tries to make friends with Hazel Notes, with waitresses, street hawkers and even with Gonga the man in a gorilla suit. Enoch is a lonely boy working as a zoo keeper and a Park guard. The lives of these two alienated men (Hazel and Enoch) cross decisively when Enoch hears Hazel preaching his new religion and asking for a new Jesus. Enoch immediately thinks of the mummy in the glass-case as the new Jesus. He steals it and hides it in his cabinet and finally delivers it at Hazel's house. His materialistic and animistic nature ultimately makes him change himself into a gorilla only to find his extended gorilla hand rejected even more decisively than his human hand had been. Enoch exhibits a strange kind of alienation from human kind and a diabolical
attraction to Mystery. He seems to have no ties with the world of human friendship and concern. Miss O'Connor herself calls him "a moron and chiefly a comic character" (H.H., p. 116).

III

In *The Violent Bear It Away* trying to escape the vocation of propheticism, young Tarwater runs away from powderhead and comes to the city, but he finds nothing except isolation and failure in the city. For four days Tarwater moves about in the city refusing to accept his uncle Rayber's hospitality. Due to his suspicious nature created by the great-uncle Tarwater, young Tarwater is prevented from getting involved with Rayber. There is a struggle within Tarwater's mind and in order to suppress the task given by old Tarwater to baptize Rayber's son Bishop, he becomes alienated from the supernatural reality as well as from human emotions. He wants love, but instead he is taught hate by the old Tarwater and is given rational treatment by his uncle Rayber. Only his cousin Bishop is capable of loving young Tarwater and showing his love by his simple acts of trust and dependence. But those moments are rare and fleeting.

Louis D. Rubin, Jr., thinks that Tarwater's reason for loneliness and isolation is lack of affection and love. He says "The youth's spiritual integrity, invulnerable to the school master's complacent scientific rationalism, could
have been directed toward love instead of wrath, had such love been offered him. But in a world ignorant and disdainful of God's love — "Suffer little children to come unto me" — the only response possible is wrath.⁶ In the end Terwater recognizes reality and accepts the task of prophecy, but it is the prophecy of violence. He is still lonely and isolated although not alienated any more from spiritual reality. "His singed eyes, black in their deep sockets, seemed already to envision the fate that awaited him but he moved steadily on, his face set toward the dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping." (The Violent, p. 243). Louis D. Rubin, Jr. further explains alienation due to lack of faith and love by quoting T. S. Eliot's lines in this connection and says: "We recall T. S. Eliot's lines, "Remember us if at all — not as lost/Violent souls only/ As hallow men/ The stuffed men." For Eliot the collapse of faith in the western world has made us all hallow men."⁷

Similarly Miss O'Connor has shown Rayber to be completely alienated due to lack of faith. Rayber has learnt to fear and distrust emotion. He believes in objectivity and rationalism and has erected a wall of scientific detachment about himself. Being an atheist he is alienated not only from God but even from his own self. In this connection it may be stated that Miss O'Connor has herself discussed the reasons for writing about people who are spiritually afflicted, and she has underscored the relation between culture and belief in the twentieth century which
compels this choice.

Rayber is isolated with constant conflict in his mind. He wants to kill his idiot son and be rid of him but lacks the decision to act. He wants to give love and affection to his nephew, but wants to remain behind the veneer of rationality. For him existence is a series of malevolent frustrations which prove that man is alienated not only from God and human kind, but also from nature. Josephine Hendin who persists in her criticism that Miss O'Connor's work is not religious and it is the critics who have misunderstood her meaning comments on the struggle between Rayber and Tarwater over the baptism of Rayber's idiot son that, "In their struggle to possess the idiot child, both Rayber and Tarwater fight against their own pervasive feeling of nothingness, a feeling that can only be reduced by affirming their own existence." But as against this viewpoint, it can only be argued that for Miss O'Connor the lives of her characters are mean, frustrated, twisted and fragmented only because man is a sinner. He cannot escape the consequences of his pride and anger, sloth and greed except by the ministration of divine love and mercy. The secular expression of man's separation from God often takes the form of alienation and estrangement which eventually results in conflict and tension.

Miss O'Connor consistently expresses her themes as conflicts or embodies them in images of opposites. Whether she exalts her alienated hero (Hermaphrodite in "A Temple")
or burlesques him (Hazel Notes in Miss Blood) all her heroes alternate between the same peculiar, almost contradictory forces, emotional death and violence, confusion and certainty, detachment of human contact and domination by it. Strife can appear as the discord between generations which brings about estrangement, alienation and death.

Conflict between secular and religious life appears nearly in all Miss O'Connor's fiction, but it is expressed most powerfully when it is added to a social conflict between rural and urban life. Young Tarwater is kidnapped from the city by his great-uncle and raised at Powderhead, a backwoods area. Johnson in "The Lame" is raised by his grandfather who lives in the hills. The Mafit performs his mass murder far in the deserted area. All these characters have left the town and are alienated from the human world but they abound in their faith for the Supreme Reality. The towns on the other hand are full of social workers, and the teachers who advocate examined life. Secular atheists like Reyber and Sheppard see technology and psychology as roads to salvation, i.e., health and happiness. But such men are shown as estranged from the Divine Power. They like to trap and bind their words in their heads and in IQ tests, but eventually they themselves get trapped in their conflict and confusion.

IV

About Miss O'Connor's 1st volume A Good Man is Hard
to Find Preston M. Browning, Jr. says, "Permeating the entire collection is a stark mood of alienation. No one in these stories has escaped the existential consequences of the fall—estrangement. So intense is the estrangement and so all pervasive that it almost inevitably erupts in violence, and ultimately leads to an epiphany or the moment of grace." In the title story "A Good Man", a vacation-bound family comes in violent conflict with the Misfit an ex-criminal killer. Grandmother's inability to grasp Reality truly alienates her from its spiritual extensions. On the other hand, the Misfit too is an isolated figure. He has an honest concept of Reality which embodies all reason but no faith. His agnostician cuts him off from the supernatural world. Each member of the family is isolated from Reality and Mystery. The grandmother with her shallow conception of life lives in her own fantasy of traditional south and plantation Dames. She lives in her own pretensions of being a lady; to Bailey, her son, world is the only real place. His wife is only a face who is completely alienated from Reality by her passivity. It is only when the Misfit and the grandmother come in violent conflict that the grandmother understands the Mystery of universe, and her heart embraces the criminal in a moment of charity. The story ends in death for the entire family but through death the grandmother gains insight and knowledge of Mystery. In this connection Miss O'Connor has herself commented that "..... the violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing
them to accept their moment of grace." (N.N., p. 112).

The Misfit is definitely an isolated person - a lone figure seeking some faith. For him it is a matter of great importance whether or not Christ is a divine personality. If He is then all lives belong to Him, but if He is not then life is meaningless, and one can act without emotions or feelings in any manner one likes. Therefore, since the Misfit is not able to find enough faith and enough proof in his mind, he is out to kill the families on the roadside without any compassion. Miss O'Connell suggests that at present no doubt the Misfit does not see any reality, but the moment he comes to know the Mysteries, he would throw off the mantle of isolation. Miss O'Connell has made this point quite clear when she says: "I don't want to equate the Misfit with the devil. I prefer to think that, however, unlikely this may seem, the old lady's gesture, like the mustard-seed, will grow to be a great crow-filled tree in the Misfit's heart, and will be enough of a pain to him there to turn him into the prophet he was meant to become." (N.N., pp. 112-113).

The theme of alienation is depicted effectively in "The Lone Sheep Enter First" in which three characters each estranged from a different aspect of Mystery come to a comprehension of the world they live in and its spiritual extension. Sheppard, the do-gooder intellectual social worker, is too educated to believe in the Divine Power. He relies, like Reyher, on rational thinking and scientific
technology. Rufus Johnson, a crippled juvenile, has been nurtured on the Bible by his fundamentalist grandfather, but he has cut himself off from Faith and Reality with the clear knowledge of himself that Satan has him in power. Norton, Sheppard’s son is cut off from his mother by death, and is now becoming alienated from his father due to lack of attention. He is inconsolable over his mother’s death and thus closes himself in his own world. Johnson, no doubt, comprehends Reality but like the Misanthrope, has chosen the path of evil and becomes estranged from the society. He ransacks houses, peers in windows and tells lies with consummate skill. Yet he is the one who leads Norton to an understanding of the spiritual world and to the knowledge that his mother is in heaven. Norton jumps into space to meet his mother, and Sheppard realizes too late his folly of neglecting his own child. Thus the lone boy who though separated from worldly society brings an awareness of spiritual Reality to both father and son.

Sheppard, a counterpart of Raybor, is an atheist and scientific objectivist. Due to lack of faith in God, he is estranged from Spiritual Reality. But in the end he is forced to admit defeat when confronted with inexplicable evil of the boy Rufus Johnson. Sheppard who relies on scientific enquiry instead of compassion is emblematic of the failure of science to satisfy man’s basic emotional, psychological and spiritual, needs. About characters like
Sheppard, Gilbert Muller says: "When Miss O'Connor treats this petrification of spirit, this refusal to believe, she creates a startling malignancy beneath the comic texture of her stories, because atheism never enables grotesque characters to get by in the world that they live in."  

However, Sister Kathleen Fealey analyses both Sheppard's and Johnson's estrangement and says: "Sheppard's misguided estrangement from his own child is symbolic of his greater estrangement from God."  

About Johnson she says "Johnson's alienation from society jars strangely with his biblical spirituality. He is both angelic and demonic. He performs the function of a prophet for Horton, yet he calls himself a devil and acts the part. He is both an alien figure in civil society and a true citizen - even though an erring one - of the world which Bible has made real to him."  

However, this story though a moving portrayal of alienation, elicits compassion for all three characters. Underlying Miss O'Connor's presentation of alienated modern man is her concept of man totally integrated into the world of spirit. Because this concept is clear to her, she can depict its absence in a variety of imaginative ways.

The themes of entrapment and confusion have their sources in the pervasive emotional death of Miss O'Connor's heroes. The Misfit has so blocked any connection to other men that he could not remember if he killed a man or stole the tyre from his car. Both murder and theft are meaningless.
acts for him. Old Tarwater locked in Rayber's head or confined in the pit of asylum, and the Misfit in his coffin-like cell are metaphors for their relation to society. They are both ostracized by it unable to accept it or withstand it. Miss O'Connor's heroes are thus murderers, cripples and freaks. No doubt they have a sense of sin, and their crimes are connected with the 'Original Sin', but even in their violence Miss O'Connor's heroes are estranged from their innermost rage. She always gives their fury a detached oblique quality and objective view of violence. The Misfit murders the woman who calls him "one of her babies."

Perhaps the Misfit sees a picture of his own mother in the grandmother because he kills her after declaring that there was no fairer woman than his mother. By drowning Bishop young Tarwater tries to prove that he is free from both his uncles. By committing acts of burglaries and thefts, Johnson tries to prove that his fundamentalist grandfather is right that he (Johnson) is evil and damned and not simply misguided. Hence it seems that Miss O'Connor's characters are in fact estranged from their loved ones, and thus try to remain alienated from society as well as from God. Strife and discord in the families creates estrangement and alienation for them.

According to Miss O'Connor Revelation and Grace are not denied to criminals like the Misfit and Rufus Johnson. They both do not regard themselves at a complete loss because
they realize that salvation is a simple matter of repentance, that Jesus is the only one who can save them. They have deliberately cut themselves off from transcendent values and have lapsed into what is essentially an attitude of despair. Thus they have brought upon themselves a feeling of isolation, alienation and a sense of abandonment. But as compared to them Tom T. Shiftlet of "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" is an individual much more than a criminal. He is a grotesque Christ figure who is decadent and evil. Shiftlet, the one-armed carpenter, whose figure forms a crooked cross, marries and abandons a retarded girl in exchange for a dilapidated car. Perplexity about his own identity and the mysteries of the human heart drive him to desperate extremities and forces him to investigate demonically the possibilities of evil which arise from his key question - what is man? In the end Tom T. Shiftlet is seen driving the car to escape from the purifying rain, signifying that he can never save his soul. Thus by effectively removing himself from Grace, he encounters despair and alienation. Josephine Hendin says that in a way Shiftlet is restored "because metal and metallic world is the only thing he can touch. So he touches rain like 'tin can tops'." 13

 Estrangement also occurs due to the defect in the body. The body is the worst of Miss O'Connor's oppressors. Many of her characters are psychic cripples and are buried alive in their own defective flesh. In "Good Country People" Joy is forced to live with her mother in isolation because
of her weak heart and artificial leg. Images of entrapment by body frequently occur in connection with mechanical aids such as Joy-Nulga's artificial leg, Johnson's orthopedic shoes, Rayber's hearing-aid and dental braces worn by a number of adolescent girls. Ugly and defective the body must rely on steel and plastic to make it beautiful or even functional. But it will be noticed from Miss O'Connor's stories that although she may be pure poet of the Misfit, the oppressed, the psychic cripple or the freak, all her characters are redeemed and achieve the moment of Grace through Revelation and acceptance.

V

Apart from depicting man's isolation from Reality, Miss O'Connor is also pre-occupied with the idea of death. Most of her stories end in death and most of her characters understand the Mystery of Supernatural when they meet violent death. In an interview with Rose Mullin when Miss O'Connor was asked how her statement that "the creative action of Christian's life is to prepare his death in Christ" (Ed., p. 223) related to her work as a writer, she admitted her pre-occupation with death and said, "Death has always been a brother to my imagination, I can't imagine a story that does not properly end in it or in its bare-shadowings."14

When the fatal disease of Lupus struck Miss O'Connor
in 1951, she knew that her feet were set on the same road through which her father had passed to his premature death. But even her earliest story "The Geranium" contains the theme of isolation and death when old Mr Dudley is uprooted from his native place in Georgia to live with his daughter in New York. The yearning for his native place and the desire to go back cannot be satisfied just by looking at a neighbour's Geranium plant through the window. Old Dudley remains exiled from his southern home "the true country." The final image of entrapment reveals old Dudley framed in the window and staring across the road at the man who has told him not to stare. The neighbour has informed old Dudley to mind his own business, and Dudley has actually no business being in New York. To leave one's proper place is to choose alienation over communion and death over life. John R. May has aptly compared the fallen Geranium at the bottom of an alley with its roots in the air to Dudley's rootless death in exile.\(^15\) In another of Miss O'Connor's early stories "The Train" (which later became first chapter of Miss Blood) Hazel Motes recalls the death of his family members. For the birth-coffin symbol in "The Train", John R. May says that "The birth-coffin of "The Train" supports symbolically Mrs Motes's queries and discloses the agony of human limitations."\(^16\)

Miss O'Connor links death with the life which precedes it and consequently with the social milieu in which that life is lived. Her portrayal of life - and
ultimately of death — in her fiction is bound with the life in the South. One of her early stories "Wild Cat" deals with the idea of death of an aged blind Southern Negro. Although the story has a number of limitations and is not of the same literary merit as her later stories, but it is of value in revealing the beginning of Miss O'Connor's imaginative vision of death and her preoccupation with death. In "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" Miss O'Connor deals with the cultural and historical richness of her region and uses the theme of death to satirize the fake general. General Sash the 104-year-old fake general, is shown as the epitome of cultural grotesque because he represents not the substance of the tradition, but rather the desiccation of it. The story renders the concept of time moving into eternity in the life of an individual who is acting as a representative of southern history and is supposed to have taken part in the civil war. But the destructive force of death has been employed in such a way as to produce an estrangement within the cultural setting.

Miss O'Connor uses symbolic language to describe death as an entrance into an awareness of history. She has taken up the similar idea in "Greenleaf" in which she probes social and economic tensions intrinsic to the southern milieu. For Miss O'Connor's characters, humanity begins exactly when it ends in time. Human development, the growth of insight, wisdom and a right relation to reality, the flowering of love—these processes must take place in the individual here and now or they donot take
place at all. Such is the case with Mrs. May in "Greenleaf". She must achieve the bond of humanity and understand the Reality when she meets her violent death. The bull is both the central figure in the story and a complex symbol of the encounter with the Divine which is death. The story opens with the bull having broken out of the pasture chewing bushes outside Mrs. May's bedroom and staring at her like an "uncouth country suitor". It closes with the bull's bounding towards her like a "wild tormented lover" to bring her the embrace of death.

This shocking climax conveyed in actual imagery is, however, underscored with spiritual meanings. The bull lover who violates and penetrates the heart of this iron-willed lady, and who himself dies in her embrace recalls the old type of sacrificial victim. However, this violent lover - destroyer brings Revelation to her. Actually Mrs. May has cut herself off from religion as heritage and sees life and death only in terms of her farm. She is thus alienated from Reality and tries to live the complacent southern life by working hard on her farm. The bull becomes the agent in bringing awareness of Reality and Mystery when he races towards her. Gilbert H. Muller says about Mrs. May that her "failure to understand the rituals which Mrs. Greenleaf enacts before her eyes signifies the modern failure to integrate religious mystery with culture. Hence Mrs. May's destiny is violent because hers is the fate of the individual who is estranged from the
basic forces of the community of grace." In several of Miss O'Connor's stories there is a parallel suggesting that death is supremely valuable in its effect of blasting the sinner into the truth of Eternal Reality.

Miss O'Connor's story "The River" is another story that depicts the element of death and isolation and ends ultimately in Harry Ashfield reaching the Kingdom of Christ through death. In the story various allusions to death emphasize the process of Harry's passage through death to the life of Reality. When Harry's father brings the child to the door, he sees Mrs Conin "looming in it, a speckled skeleton in a long pea-green coat and felt helmet" (G.G., p. 157). Mrs Conin in the guise of death has been shown as the agent of Harry's passage. It is evident that Miss O'Connor thought that that the child was capable of perceiving moral and spiritual chaos better than the adult because his experience is never exclusively intellectual. In this connection Gilbert K. Muller says that "A child sees and accepts distortion, the fusion of animate and inanimate, the mingling of dream and reality and horror relieved by laughter. Hence a child is redeemed from the beginning because he apprehends the lines which create spiritual motion." Such has been the case, it appears, with Harry Ashfield. In his parents' apartment everything is "dark and grey" and everything is a joke. But with Mrs Conin he comes to know the reality for the first time.
The swine imagery-connected with the live shoot, the illustration of Jesus driving pigs from a man, and the demonic figure of Mr Paradise - is designed to establish the forces of evil and disbelief which Harry Ashfield encounters during his quest.

Nineteen stories of Miss O'Connor show tragedy in some form or the other. Of these, nine stories end in violent death, three end in bodily injury and the remaining end in some kind of a shock. The brutal inevitability of death is also portrayed by Miss O'Connor in her story "A view of the woods". The story shows estrangement from Mystery on the part of Mark Fortune. On the other hand, his granddaughter Mary Fortune perceives Reality but is as stubborn as Mark Fortune himself. Mr Fortune is more interested in material gain than in view of the woods. He is so much alienated from the Supernatural that the "view" in front has no meaning for him. His incomprehension of this idea denotes his stolid and materialistic view of Mystery. This ultimately comes in conflict with Mary Fortune's symbolic view in an incident which brings about the tragedy. Only once for a short time, Reality touches him. When he reaches his bedroom he looks across the road but sees nothing but woods. "Woods - not a mountain, not a waterfall, not any kind of planted bush or flower, just woods." (C.S., p. 340). But when he rises for the third time to look, the woods are charged
with sunset. "... the gaunt trunks appeared to be raised in a pool of red light that gushed from almost the hidden sun setting behind them." (C., p. 348). Although Mark Fortune recoils from this "unpleasant vision" it has some effect on him. But he reminds himself of the financial gain in selling the front portion and forgets the view altogether. Hence the conflict between the child and the grandfather becomes a conflict between spiritual vision and material progress, and this conflict brings about the tragedy resulting in the death of both the old man and his grand-daughter. About the people who remain isolated and are unable to understand the Supreme Power John R. Ray says "Isolation is integral to our understanding of original Sin, aloneness is perhaps men's typical psychological experience of his unfinished nature." 19

VI

The element of isolation, alienation and death in the changing history of new South has been used by Miss O'Connor in the title story of her second collection, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. The story presents a pseudo-aristocratic mother and her son Julian cut-off from the society in which they live. Neither has so far entered "the world of guilt and sorrow." The mother who constantly relies on the old manners and graciousness which are part of her culture ultimately encounters a
hostile reality in the hour of her death when a huge Negro-woman hits her with her large red purse. Her son Julian who prides himself on his acceptance of 'new South' is in fact more estranged from society than his mother is. They both live in an unreal world. She lives in the world of old South, and she is out of touch with the time and society. The black woman's reaction to her action of giving a shining penny to the Negro child gives a shock to her and makes her retreat into the secure world of youth. Julian is now left alone and isolated with a heavy burden of guilt for his own mother's death. Though he is still postponing his entry in the world of guilt and sorrow, there is an indication that he would enter that world.

In "The Displaced Person" Mrs McIntyre's complicity in the death of Quizee is parallel to the complicity of the people in Christ's crucification. Mr Quizee's tragedy occurs and ends in death because of his transgressions upon a rigid caste system, but with his death all the farm inhabitants become alienated from their environments. Mrs McIntyre suddenly feels that she is in "some foreign country", and as the farm disintegrates she contracts a nervous affliction. In the end the act of displacement comes full circle. Everyone is alienated from the farm and from common humanity. Gilbert Muller says that "Quizee is brought to the farm representing the world, but in unseen by humanity. Quizee's fate thus becomes an
interpretation of culture as the historical Christ, as the Penultimate displaced person he becomes the prototype of the grotesque protagonist preordained to wandering, persecution and crucification."\textsuperscript{20} About her hired hands Mrs McIntyre, proud in her security, says "We've seen them come, and seen them go." \textit{(G.S., p. 214)}. But what she does not know is that even she is not safe from alienation or from death.

Miss O'Connor's stories seem to laugh at these godless people who go on acting as if they hold their fates in their own hands. It is then that the disaster strikes them. At times it is fatal (Mrs May in "Greenleaf") and at times it leads to estrangement and isolation (Mrs McIntyre in "The Displaced Person"). But these disasters are actually acts of grace; for even if they are not fatal, they provide such violent shocks to the characters' egos, to their sense of well being, that they are forced to see themselves as they really are. Martha Stephens comments about Miss O'Connor's stories "A veteran O'Connor reader prepares himself for the worst when, midway through this story, the smug Mrs May reacting to the taunts of her sons, mutters, "They needn't think I'm going to die any time soon .... I'll die when I get good and ready." We know that she is never going to get by with that, and again biblical line as it is echoed in \textit{Everyman} springs to mind: "O Death, thou camest when I had thee least in mind!"

And indeed when Mrs May sees the bull racing towards her, she cannot grasp, she cannot believe what is happening to her ...."\textsuperscript{21}
However, it has been noticed nearly by all critics that in Miss O'Connor's stories death works as a manifestation of grace as in the case of grandmother in "A Good Man" and Mrs Shortley in "The Displaced Person". The paths which Miss O'Connor's characters take are not frivolous, although they are permeated with a brand of demonic humour. These quests are ascetic, and the voyage itself is mystical, a fact which defines an important aspect of Miss O'Connor's imagination. Although the paths which her characters take are obscure and unknown, they invariably lead to confrontations with God or with Satan. Her success in making her characters grasp the mystery is due to her ability to shock the characters into acknowledging the Spiritual Reality.
Notes and References


15. May, *The Pruning Cord*, p. 34.


