CHAPTER III

CONVERGENCE-CONFRONTATION: GRACE IN RACIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The art of Flannery O'Connor and J.F. Powers finds roots in contemporary issues and the realities of life in the sixties. Both writers feature the race question as inevitable in their fiction. Problems in communication between black and white, emerging conflicts resultant from prejudiced attitudes, violent confrontations, and rare convergences evolve at levels of heightened consciousness as two races seek workable formulas for harmonious daily living in their short stories.

As familiar and commonplace figures on the Southern landscape, blacks appear as routine characterizations in O'Connor's short stories. The many nameless blacks, who, as farm hands and petty labourers, are responsible for the maintenance of estates belonging to the Mrs. Mayes, Mrs. Soppe and Mrs. McIntyres of O'Connor's Southern scene, constitute a sizable section of her fictional characterizations. Typical Southern attitudes
toward the black are evident in casual comments and passing references which betray prejudices peculiar to a mixed society. The colour conscious grandmother's offhand admiration of the "cute little pickaninny in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," and Mrs. May's mistaken identification in "Greenleaf" of the stray animal in her yard as "some nigger's scrub-bull," are minute reflections of accepted Southern social assumptions of white superiority in Flannery O'Connor.

Blacks in a subordinate role respond to their white associates with typical sullenness, or, in adjustment to unalterable social conditions, in cringing acceptance of inferior status. Stereotyped black attitudes and responses, adopted in a pattern of defense against an inimical society draw forth corresponding stereotyped treatment by the whites who accept this stance of defensiveness as an inborn attribute of the coloured race. Not only in Flannery O'Connor, but also in Fowes, racial responses in the fiction are cliché-ridden and stereotyped, following typical, predictable patterns of behaviour and attitude. In Fowes, Northern
attitudes of sentimental liberalism replace the
open condescension of Flannery O'Connor's Southern
middle-class whites. However, the realities of
oppression and injustice are brought to light by
both writers, as conflicts erupt in violence and
brutality.

Although blacks occupy a fundamental position
in the body of Flannery O'Connor's characterisations,
it was not until relatively late in her career that
she considered seriously the race question itself
as a prominent theme for her stories. In "The
Artificial Nigger" and "The Displaced Person,"
stories from O'Connor's first collection, A Good
Man Is Hard to Find (1955), though the role of the
black is significant, the major encounters depicted
are between whites. In her second volume, Everything
That Rises Must Converge, published in 1965, racial
crisis and adjustment emerges as a specific concern in
several pieces. Problematic situations caused by
rapidly shifting racial conditions, and changing
attitudes of each race toward the other create
communal discord and barriers in communication.
Flannery O'Connor explores the special problems of
racial discrimination with the balance and
dispasion of a mature artist. Her studies in
black and white reaffirms her authority and power
as a fiction writer and confirm the total direction
of her art.

In conformity with the rest of her fiction,
which seeks to expose the shallowness of secular
liberalism in every aspect of life, Flannery
O'Connor's black stories may be considered a reaction
against the unholy prospect of a social equality
which does not take into account human depravity
responsible for the breakdown of human schemes and
systems. W.S. Marks notes the affinity between
O'Connor and the black radicals of her generation:

Temperamentally, Miss O'Connor displays
more in common with such lay preachers
of the New Left as Le Kel Jones and James
Baldwin than with any specifically
Southern or Catholic reaction. Similar
to Baldwin's, her gripe against white
liberalism grew out of a sense of
estrangement from its ultimate and
unannounced purpose: the homogenizing
of all racial, regional, and religious
cultures into one uniform and godless
civilization.¹

W.S. Marks, III, "Advertisements for Grace:
Flannery O’Connor’s ‘A Good Man is Hard to
However, Flannery O'Connor is less concerned with social causes than with the responsibilities of the individual, whether black or white, toward society and toward God. Even in specific stories on blacks, she does not display a personal involvement in the problem of conflicting racial relationships. Immediate social problems are sublimated to a higher order of morality in her fiction and are considered in the light of personal convictions overarching human ethical values into realms of spirituality and divine perspective.

Fowers' analysis of the racial issue is confined to five stories written early in his career. In contrast to the work of O'Connor, Fowers' black stories lack the maturity of mellowing years. Personal rage against the plight of the black, both in the South and in the "liberal" North, expresses itself in violent encounters which emphasize the cowardly, inhuman qualities of the white and laud the strength and moral courage of the black. However, in Fowers,
as in O'Connor, social confrontations and differences are resolved in deeply spiritual experiences of acceptance and reconciliation. Powers' black stories stand apart in their treatment of violence and racism. Blacks do not feature even as minor characters in any of his other stories, secular or religious. Moving toward maturity, and registering a selflessness in his responses and attitudes to social, moral, and religious issues, Powers substitutes the outbursts of physical violence employed in these stories with subtle psychological tensions and moral violations more effective though less blatant, in the shock and awareness they create. Incidents of actual physical violence are replaced in his later work by conflicts of inner violence which, for him, provide a sharper, more viable artistic tool.

Conscious of the peculiar sociological problems that the race issue generated, Flannery O'Connor is acutely aware of the difficulties in adjustment between blacks and whites on a personal
level. The elaborate code of manners and
gentility evolved in the South provided a social
discipline by which the two races could work out
harmony in daily life. With no idealistic
pretensions and with sufficient apprehension as
to the practicality of lofty and noble ideas on
human equality, Flannery O'Connor recognizes the
importance of workable social codes in the
maintenance of personal relationships between
individuals of different races. An oft-quoted
statement of her observations on racial adjustment
in the South is explicit and honest in its appraisal
of race relations in the region:

It requires considerable grace for two
races to live together, particularly when
the population is divided about fifty-fifty
between them and when they have our
particular history. It can't be done
without a code of manners based on mutual
charity.... Formality preserves that
individual privacy which everybody needs
and, in these times, is always in danger
of losing.²

² C. Ross Mullins, "Flannery O'Connor: An
Interview," Jubiloq, 11 (June, 1963), 33-34.
In O'Connor's insights into race relations may be detected the fundamental religious tenets to which she has always subscribed. Man's depravity and inclination to selfishness gain predominance over ideals of Christian charity and the equality of mankind. She does not deprecate down-to-earth codes responsible for social adjustment in the South:

"When you have a code of manners based on charity, then when the charity fails—as it is going to do constantly—you've got these manners there to preserve each race from small intrusions upon the other.... The South has survived in the past because its manners, however lopsided or inadequate they may have been, provided enough social discipline to hold us together and give us an identity.... In practice, the Southerner seldom underestimates his own capacity for evil."  

Flannery O'Connor's earliest stories on race take into consideration these codes of conduct which provide guidelines for social behaviour between blacks and whites. Violations of the rules result in disaster, and violence is the
normal climate in which differences are brought to light. Tensions and fears give way under the slightest provocation to violent outbursts of hatred and revenge.

CONVERGENCE OF CLASH

O'Connor's early studies in black-white relationships give comparatively superficial treatment to the more complex aspects of racial adjustment. Three of six stories submitted for her Master's degree in Fine Arts at Iowa University, have difficult racial adjustments as their central focus. However, these - "The Geranium," "The Barber" and "Wildcat" - deal with racial conflicts arising out of commonplace situations, and in their treatment of violence do not measure up to the forcefulness and power of her later work. Violence as an inevitable ingredient in a social set up that seeks to unite black and white and reconcile differences of race and colour, does not exemplify its highest use as a strategy in fiction. Black stories from O'Connor's second volume, *Everything*
That Rises Must Converge, however, excel not only in their candid and impartial view of the race problem itself, but in their multifaceted approach to human problems as fundamentally spiritual in origin. Violent convergences extend beyond immediate circumstances toward heightened awareness and ultimate consciousness.

The presence of evil as a real force in society and within the individual places these stories on racial disharmony in the centre of Flannery O'Connor's artistic work. The essential depravity of man, the selfishness and inclination toward vice manifested through extremes of violence in most of her stories, are responsible for the confrontations between the races in *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. In their recognition of evil and vice through violent encounter, these stories, like the rest of O'Connor's fiction acknowledge the need for spiritual power and redeeming grace in individuals who must cope with trying social situations. O'Connor's best stories on race, despite the social issues they necessarily treat,
do not shift from the spiritual emphasis of her work as a whole. As extensions of her earlier fiction, stories in *Everything That Rises Must Converge* follow O'Connor's special patterns and strategies as a religious writer: "God-ridden and violent - six of the nine and in something like mayhem - they work their own small counter reformation in a faithless world."  

That Flannery O'Connor's basic concern even in her black stories is religious rather than racial is evident from her impartial treateest of both blacks and whites as individuals responsible before God for hard-heartedness, pride, and lack of compassion. "The Displaced Person," one of her most minute explorations into the complexities of the race issue in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* has for its central theme, universal guilt and redemption through grace. The sequence of misunderstandings which stem from the European

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refugee's ignorance of American racial mores leads to a major disaster.

Mr. Guizac's death is a result of his failure to perceive that ideals of Christian charity and human equality do not extend to basic practical issues such as marriage between black and white in the American South. White betrayal of black reflects in a larger context, the betrayal of Christ by all of mankind. The final analysis is of mutual involvement in guilt and sorrow, the consequences of which fall impartially and irrespective of colour, class or race.

In stories from *Everything That Rises Must Converse*, including those that deal with black-white situations, Flannery O'Connor, is basically religious. "Every story in *Everything That Rises Must Converse* treats man's relationship to his neighbour, and therefore to himself and to God. Even when God is not mentioned explicitly, he hovers behind the trees, in the woods, in clichés and idle words, in judgments passed, in death, and in the necessity of
facing life. Spiritual illumination is O'Connor's primary concern. Social maladjustments are only symptomatic of gross spiritual maladies and the deep cleansing action of redeeming grace in her prescriptive remedy.

In a treatment of the race issue, violence is apparently an inevitable and essential factor. On a superficial level, it is quite expected that racial differences erupt in violence. Racial violence itself has provided a common, even hackneyed, fictional theme to writers black and white. Violence in Flannery O'Connor's black stories, however, goes beyond immediate situations and circumstances in careful fulfillment of technical and strategical purposes. Violence plays a strategic role in O'Connor's black stories as an outward manifestation of inner conflicts and tensions and as a cathartic in ultimate spiritual resolution.

Violence in O'Connor, though most often blatant and physical is often also psychic and spiritual in origin. In her black stories, as in the rest of her fiction, violence has religious and supernatural connotations. As Gilbert Muller observes, it is apparent that Flannery O'Connor places a premium upon violence in her fiction because it creates heightened situations which are rich in theological implications and which are also congenial to a grotesque vision. "Acts of violence in Miss O'Connor's fiction illuminate a world of continual spiritual warfare." 6

Violence in O'Connor's black stories, as in all of her fiction, is rarely expected. Quite in contrast to hackneyed and superficial treatments of racial violence, O'Connor is typically controlled and taut in her style. Strategic incidents of violence take the protagonist and the reader by surprise and create a sense of shock.

and heightened awareness. Structurally, O'Connor’s stories, even those black stories in which violence may be anticipated, consciously create a climate of controlled quietness into which violence enters suddenly as an intruding force. The implications of such instances as Mary Grace’s sudden violent outburst against Mrs. Turpin in “Revelation,” or that of the black woman against Julian’s well-intentioned mother in “Everything That Rises Must Converge” are unmistakable:

Translated into stylistic terms, the need to make violence surprising accounts for the deceptively slow pace of many Flannery O’Connor stories.... The deliberately controlled, matter-of-fact omniscience works against the exaggerated effects of violence to create an incongruity of tone which lends itself to the grotesque.... When violence exceeds the literary form designed to contain it, there is a suggestion that all characters are susceptible to disruptive forces and to displacement.”

Flannery O’Connor owes the central philosophy and the title of Everything That Rises Must Converge to a study of the writings of a Jesuit priest, Tielhard de Chardin. In The Divine Milieu,
Tielhard describes the soul’s progress from bondage into full union with the divine, a path toward grace that is fraught with traumas necessary in the journey of the soul into higher levels of being. In the evolution of species into higher and higher forms of consciousness, there is a continuous upward movement accompanied by a series of convergences or points of fusion, when lower consciousness is drawn into combination with higher consciousness. By such a process, through a final fusion of all being with supranatural consciousness, an ultimate state is reached at omega point.

In O’Connor, however, convergence assumes ironic implications of collision, as the stories work out the progressive growth of consciousness in protagonists faced with social and spiritual crisis. Collision occurs as conflicting values emerge in situations that involve differences of race, class, social status, and age. In interpersonal relations, the clash of ideas as two races or two generations confront each other must
lead to acceptance of a higher set of values and
life on an improved spiritual plane. When the
necessary adjustments are not made, confrontation
is invariably disastrous and results in
elimination by death instead of in reconciliation
and spiritual growth.

As extensions of her earlier fiction, and
as a group of stories collected in a volume,
stories from *Everything That Rises Must Converge*
comment on one another by juxtaposition, association
and progression of themes, character-types,
situations and symbols. In a pattern common to
the body of her fiction, O'Connor's characters in
these stories also consider themselves superior
human beings, and must come to a truer understanding
of themselves. In racial contexts particularly,
protagonists' estimates of themselves as more
intelligent, hardworking, gifted, charitable or
socially well-placed are undercut by harsh
revelations and insights into reality. Again,
with the use of familiar devices such as a
character double to serve as a revealing mirror,
O'Connor prepares the reader for the ironic reversals on which her plots rest. Both protagonist and reader are forced to experience a rise in consciousness which makes possible spiritual illumination and entry into grace.

In stories in which the race question is a definite problem, the clash between cultures takes the form of physical violence released against a specific representative of the opposite race. The common misconception that social well-being and financial security are directly related to superior personal virtue is repudiated in a familiar fictional pattern. O'Connor's fundamental concern emphasizes a recognition and acceptance of one's spiritual poverty through shedding of pride and mistaken notions of personal, moral superiority. Mollie Skaggs sees O'Connor's battle against the deadly sin of pride as rooted in the values of her region. Attitudes glorified and cherished in the South are exposed through ironic inversion as shallow and false. As Skaggs points out in his
study of characterization in Southern fiction:
"the major mark of a plain folk character as the
local colorists drew him was his pride in himself.
While Miss O'Connor takes a pointedly ironic view
of such pride, it often dominates her protagonists."8
Pride in family, pride in personal dignity, pride
in personal accomplishment through hard work,
and pride in class are cherished southern values
that O'Connor treats with irony in her black
stories. Forrest Ingram in a concise plot
definition describes the stories in *Everything
That Rises Must Converge* as "concretizations or
the horizontal plane of man's proud and self-
righteous spirit battling (and therefore violently
confronting) his own transfigured and ultimately
self-condemning image."9

In *Everything That Rises Must Converge*,
Flannery O'Connor's preoccupation is with the
gruelly of disease and the deeper cruelty between


parents and children. As Josephine Mondin observes, O'Connor brings out with distinctive irony, some of her most powerfully violent tales of destruction and psychic savagery under the plaus banner of a mystical Jesuit. "Whatever atom of spirit her heroes possess are unleashed in acts of violence." In "The Enduring Chill," "Revelation," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge," violence is insidious, a slow but terrible disease. Psychic or physical weakness that binds children to their mothers is found in several black-white stories. What rises and converges in these stories on race is blood itself.

"Revelation" is one of O'Connor's masterfully brilliant pieces. As in "The Enduring Chill" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge," rage at a mother is vented upon a character-double as Mary Grace directs her pent up fury against the insufferably superior Mrs. Turpin. Viewing Mary Grace as "one of those women who suddenly turns,"

Hendin describes "Revelation" as "a tale in praise of violence." The complexity of the story comes less from its action than from its themes and images. The theme of conflict between parent and child is developed in a wider context so that Mrs. Turpin is made to confront herself in the altercation between a mother and her rebellious daughter.

The major action of "Revelation" takes place in a doctor's waiting room. While Mrs. Ruby Turpin waits for her husband Susan to be examined for a bruised leg, she talks to a stylish lady who is also waiting with her daughter, a sullen and ugly Wellesley student named Mary Grace. Mary Grace reads a book entitled Human Development while the two older women exchange banalities. Her irritation at their discussion rises as the class conscious Mrs. Turpin, reminiscent of Mrs. Cope in the earlier story, begins an effusion of thanks to Jesus for all that she has:

11 Ibid.
"If it's one thing I am," Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, "it's grateful." When I think how all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for asking everything the way it is!' It could have been different!' For one thing, somebody else could have got Claud. At the thought of this, she was flooded with gratitude and a terrible pang of joy ran through her. "Oh, thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!" she cried aloud.12

The action climaxes when Mary Grace, without warning, buries her book at Mrs. Turpin calling her an old wart hog from hell. The chaos in the room is quelled but Mrs. Turpin cannot get over the shock of the girl's words.

In the spectrum of society assembled in the doctor's office, Mrs. Turpin occupies a middle point. Representative of a microcosm of society, the group consists of Mrs. Turpin and her husband, the ugly Wellesley girl and her effable mother, an old car, who, to all appearances is dead, a dirty child, his white-trash mother, and his grandmother.

in an old sack dress. A perfect example of the Southern plain woman, Mrs. Turpin occupies a stable niche in the community. She has achieved economic and social security through the prosperous little farm on which "we get a little of everything" (p. 494). Obsessed with class distinctions, she defines herself in relation to others by her possessions, colour, clothes, and size. Though she lives with less prestige than the well-dressed woman with whom she talks, she is confidently superior to the white trash family whom she categorizes as "worse than niggers any day" (p. 490).

In her obsessive comparative analysis of her status, Mrs. Turpin has evolved a hierarchy of classes and social categories:

If Jesus had said to her before he made her, "There's only two places available for you. You can either be a nigger or white trash," what would she have said? "Please, Jesus, please," she would have said, "Just let me wait until there's another place available," and he would have said, "No, you have to go right now and I have only these two places so wake up your mind." She would have wiggled and squirmed and begged and pleaded but it would have been no use and finally she would have said "All right, make me a nigger then - but that don't scare a
trashy one." And he would have made her a neat clean respectable negro woman, herself but black (p. 491).

Having made a careful catalogue of social classes in which she confuses economic and spiritual worth, Mrs. Turpin is faced with the frightening prospect of a confusion of those classes. Her sense of spiritual value is threatened along with her sense of personal worth:

Sometimes Mrs. Turpin occupied herself at night naming the classes of people. On the bottom of the heap were most colored people, not the kind she would have been, if she had been one, but most of them; then next to them - not above, just away from them - were the white trash; then above them were the homeowners, and above them the home and land owners, to which she and Claud belonged. Above she and Claud were people with a lot of money and much bigger houses and much more land. But here the complexity of it would begin to bear in on her, for some of the people with a lot of money were common and ought to be below she and Claud and some people who had good blood had lost their money and had to rent and then there were colored people who owned their homes and land as well. (p. 491)

In a disturbing break-down of class distinctions with the newly emerging social order, "all the classes of people were moiling and rolling around" in Mrs. Turpin's head, filling her with uncertainty and dread.
while "Revelation" is, in a sense, a story about social structure and about ways of relating the self to the world around it, it achieves its results through a process of growing consciousness, a process conveyed through a metaphor of seeing. Hendin elaborates on the idea stressing the importance, in the story, "of the gap between one's self and one's self image, a gap that appears objectively in the use of doubles."13 While the stylish mother is Mrs. Purpin's ideal self-image, Mary Grace, her fat, ugly daughter provides her with a bothersome negative self-image. "Every convergence in the stories entails a conflict of visions. One's self-image is shattered when one looks at himself through other eyes, usually through the eyes of someone who, on a significant but not immediately apparent level is one's double."14


Mrs. Turpin's belief in herself as a kindly, respectable Christian woman, is shaken by Mary Grace's accusation that her virtues are meaningless. Her self-satisfaction and joyful self-love lead to the revelation that crushes her:

"I am not," she said tearfully, "a wart hog. From hell." But the denial had no force.... She had been singled out for the message, though there was trash in the room to whom it might justly have been applied. The full force of this fact struck her only now. There was a woman there who was neglecting her own child but she had been over-looked.

The message had been given to Ruby Turpin, a respectable, hard working, church-going woman.... (p. 502)

More than the buried book which unexpectedly bruises her head, the blow to Mrs. Turpin's ego knocks all her props from under her. Like Mrs. Hopewell and Joy-Hulga's mother in "Good Country People," Mrs. Turpin and Mary Grace's mother have no particular vices themselves. Pride in their virtues is what makes them obnoxious. Bland, affable and complacent, they are condescending and pitying in their attitudes to others. In Ruby Turpin's assessment of blacks, Flannery O'Connor exposes the hypocrisy behind the popular myth of
naturally achieved racial harmony in the south: "I sure am tired of buttering up niggers, but you got to love em if you want em to work for you" (p. 494). Mary Grace's affable mother assures a stance of gracious condescension: "Oh, I couldn't do without my good colored friends," the pleasant lady said" (p. 495). However, no effective rapport or communication is established with the blacks here, as also in "The Enduring Chill," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," or "Judgement Day." When Mrs. Turpin turns to her black servants for consolation, she receives stock phrases of mindless flattery and false sympathy. As Dorothy Walters points out, in white attempts to break through communication barriers to the black, "no confrontation occurs because the participants in the dialogue move along parallel tracks which permit no real points of contact." 15

Though Mrs. Turpin knows exactly where

blacks and white trash belong in the human scheme of things, in the final reckoning, blacks, whom she had always placed lower on the ladder than her own caste, appear ahead of her kind of people in the parade through the heavens. She can have no clearer sign that "indeed, in the God's-eye view of man, the bottom rail is, in reality, on top." In her fury and confusion, as inconsolable Mrs. Turpin directs her anger against God, she struggles to establish her true identity and re-evaluate her spiritual position: "How am I a hog and as both? How am I saved and from hell too?" (p. 505), she questions violently. Now she is hardly satisfied with what God has made her: "You could have made no trash, or a nigger. If trash is what you wanted, why didn't you make me trash?" (p. 507). While the psychic violence within Mary Grace is expressed in an unpremeditated act of physical violence, the violence of conflict within Mrs. Turpin is as real. The violence

that O'Connor employs here has metaphysical dimensions arising from man's loss of theological identity. "If in terms of effect, this violence partakes of exaggeration, sensationalism and shock, it nevertheless raises problems which treat the moral and religious order of the universe." 17

The answer to Mrs. Turpin's searching comes in a sobering vision which settles once and for all her spiritual status in the divine hierarchy. As Mrs. Turpin stands beside the pen-pan gazing up at a purple streak in the sky, her arms outstretched in a profound, hieratic gesture,

`visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it, a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black wretches in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given

17 Gilbert Muller, Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Proteasian, p. 77.
wit to use it right.... They were
marching behind the others with great
dignity, accountable as they had
always been for good order and common
sense and respectable behaviour. They
alone were on key. Yet she could see
by their shocked and altered faces
that even their virtues were being
burned away (p. 508).

Mrs. Turpin’s vision culminates in a phrase
which aptly describes the state in which all
O’Connor’s protagonists finally find themselves,
with even their virtues burned away. “No one
escapes the need for grace: even the virtues of
this world, being worldly, are corrupt.” But it
is easy to guess what Mrs. Turpin sees. Passing
before her is that gallery of rogues and lunatics
who are the personae of Flannery O’Connor’s work—
all of them loved from the beginning, and all
of them saved now by God’s mercy, terrible and
sure.” 16

Following a common fictional standard,
“Revelation” treats spiritual illumination as
its primary theme. “The scenes with the black
characters subordinate to the larger theme of

16 Sullivan, “Flannery O’Connor, Sin and Grace:
Everything That Rises Must Converge,” Collins
Critics, 6.
enlightenment through grace, and the primary 'convergences' are thus spiritual rather than racial." Though the story uses motifs and structural patterns common in O'Connor, it rises above any other in spiritual profundity:

"Revelation" deals with the initiation of a self-satisfied person of no particular vice or virtue into an awareness of her place in the universe. The woman's revelation makes her see that the ways of God are beyond man's reasoning and that what seems to be virtue is only smug pride.... This revelation is the most powerful of the author's Revelations, for it questions the very foundations of our assumptions of salvation and the ethical life.  

Here, freaks, lunatics, blacks, white-trash and the respectable, all go to heaven. To the dismay of the self-righteous and class-conscious Mrs. Turpin among O'Connor's readers, "Even salvation is a force for leveling all human distinctions. Her heaven is a celebration of violence, a universal chaos in which everything is destroyed."  

19 Walters, Flannery O'Connor, p. 126.  
while "The Enduring Chill" and "Revelation" deal with futile efforts in communication between blacks and whites, in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and "Judgement Day," such efforts prove not only futile but fatal. In the physical violence that is released in the clash between the cultures, an older white person, unable to adjust to the changing social situation, is annihilated by a rising younger black. As opening and closing stories of O'Connor's second volume, "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and "Judgement Day" are "crucial explorations of the potentially drastic consequences of the white-black encounter."22 The perspective in which the black is viewed shifts from that of victimized to victimizer.

"Everything That Rises Must Converge" revolves around various racial attitudes and is simply the study of the interaction of these various states of mind which results in the elimination of one of them. The point of view of

22 Walters, p. 127.
Mrs. Cheatney, Julian's mother, is governed by the various norms of traditional Southern orthodoxy. Though she makes shallow claims to broadmindedness, "Of course...if you know who you are, you can go anywhere.... I can be gracious to anybody. I know who I am" (p. 407), she ignores the vital evidences of social change and sacrifices her life to her stubborness.

In contrast, Julian represents the enlightened younger generation, constantly enraged at his mother's condescension and vulgarity. He deliberately provokes his mother by flaunting her social standards and vices to demonstrate his own unprejudiced, superior state of mind by trying to strike up "intellectual" conversations with his black acquaintances. He indulges in cruel fantasies of revenge against his mother - of being able only to find a black doctor for her as she lies desperately ill; of joining a sit-in demonstration as sympathizer; of bringing home a black woman as his fiancée. "There was in him an evil urge to break her spirit" (p. 409).
In reversal of, perhaps, the most sentimentalized element of Southern local colour, O'Connor repeatedly examines the conflict between two generations of the same family. "Indeed it appears that in her stories no child of any age can get along with his guardian or parent." 23

At the opening of the story, Julian waits impatiently for his mother whom he is to escort to her exercise classes at the Y. On the bus, Mrs. Chestny begins to complain about integrated buses to a white woman sitting near her. To annoy her, Julian starts a conversation with a black man. A black woman and her little son get on the bus, the woman wearing a hat identical to Mrs. Chestny's. Mrs. Chestny makes affable, condescending remarks to them, and when they leave the bus, offers the child a penny. Infuriated, the black woman strikes her. Julian gloates over his mother's misfortune, telling her that she deserves the blow. Too late, however, he realizes

that he can never change her ideas, or ever make known to his mother his unexpressed love for her. Succumbing to the shock of the assault upon her, Mrs. Chestny suffers a heart attack and dies, not recognizing Julian as her son.

"The Southerner's pride in his family and his vanity about his relations gives Miss O'Connor the opportunity for some of her most sardonic humor."24 Herself a proud descendant of the Godhighs, Mrs. Chestny encourages Julian with reminders that he is above all, a Chestny. She maintains an unperturbed image of herself as a daughter of aristocracy, and pride in her family history protects her from facing the unpleasantness of living in a shabby neighbourhood. In a society in which whites must be classified either as aristocrats or trash, paradoxically, those of a middle category are often the most class-conscious. Through Mrs. Chestny as through Mrs. Turpin, O'Connor illustrates that "such pride in class

24 Ibid., p. 249.
appears ironically inappropriate, whatever character exhibits it. 23

Mrs. Chestny's chatter on the bus introduces a theme that runs through each story in Everything That Rises Must Converge. The desegregation of buses and the rise of the black in society signifies, for her, the disorder of the modern world, "a chaos in which the old and the young, the present and the past, most violently collide." 24 The blurring of class distinctions perturbs Mrs. Chestny and, as Mrs. Turpin expressed at greater length, "with the world in the mess it's in," she said, "it's a wonder we can enjoy anything. I tell you, the bottom rail is on the top" (p. 407). In words that echo Mrs. Turpin's attitude towards blacks, Mrs. Chestny, who concedes that blacks should rise, "yes, but on their own side of the fence" (p. 406), expresses her appreciation in condescending terms: "I remember the old darky who was my nurse, Caroline. There was no better

23 ibid., p. 252.
26 ibid., p. 105.
person in the world. I've always had a great respect for my colored friends," she said. I'd do anything in the world for them..." (p. 405).

Ironically, however, Mrs. Chestney's graciousness towards blacks evokes resentment rather than good-will. Skeggs explains:

Another theme sacrosanct to nineteenth century southern literature, of course, was the racial harmony and understanding possible in the South, primarily because its whites and blacks loved each other. In Miss O'Connor's reversal of this theme those whites who assume the conventional stance of gracious condescension to Negroes (such as Julian's mother in *Everything That Rises*) are struck down by resentful blacks, either actually or psychologically.\(^{27}\)

The militant black woman who is instrumental in Mrs. Chestney's downfall cannot accept the patronizing attitude that has been the lot of her race for generations. Her reactions display her pride and dissatisfaction with the state of things, though she is more aware of the changing social situation and diminishing need for anybody's pity. Her resentment is pronounced and she regards overtures of friendliness as intrusions of privacy.

\(^{27}\) Skeggs, p. 253.
"The seating arrangement on the bus, though coincidental, is significant in its irony:

He saw his mother’s face change as the woman settled herself next to him and he realized with satisfaction that this was more objectionable to her than it was to him. Her face seemed almost gray, and there was a look of dull recognition in her eyes, as if suddenly she had sickened at some awful confrontation. Julian saw that it was because she and the woman had, in a sense, swapped sons. Though his mother would not realize the symbolic significance of this, she would feel it (p. 415).

If Mrs. Chestny is wary and resentful of her son’s being positioned next to the black woman on the bus, the latter is even more vexed at her own child’s proximity to the white woman: “Gawd!” the woman said. “You hear me? Come nesh!” (p. 415).

As an effective double, a mirror that reflects Mrs. Chestny’s inadequacies, the black woman plays a key role. She even wears a hat identical to the monstrosity that Mrs. Chestny has chosen for herself, a hideous one with purple velvet flaps on either side, looking like “a cushion with the stuffing cut” (p. 415). The uniformity in the
selection of accessories reflects the fact that the economic status of the blacks is rapidly overtaking that of the whites and that the new social standards have given to blacks as to whites, the freedom to pursue absurdity and eccentricity. The significance of the hat strikes Julian immediately though his mother is less sharp.

The vision of the two hats, identical, brooked upon him with the radiance of a brilliant sunrise. His face was suddenly lit with joy. He could not believe that Fate had thrust upon his mother such a lesson. He gave a loud chuckle so that she would look at him and see that he saw. She turned her eyes on him slowly.... For a moment he had an uncomfortable sense of her innocence, but it lasted only a second before principle rescued him. Justice entitled him to laugh. His grin hardened until it said to her as plainly as if he were saying aloud: Your punishment exactly fits your pettiness, this should teach you a permanent lesson. (p. 426)

The action which triggers off the final assault upon Mrs. Chestny is her thoughtless presentation of a penny to the little black child, totally oblivious of the insult she delivers with the coin. The black woman's response is instinctive and violent: "Then all at once she
seemed to explode like a piece of machinery
that had been given one ounce of pressure too
much.... "He don't take nobody's pennies!" (p. 416).
Julian's response to the sudden outburst and
attack upon his mother, is typically unimaginative
and self-engrossed. Instead of offering sympathy
and compassion: "I told you not to do that."
Julian said angrily, "I told you not to do that!... You
got exactly what you deserved," he said.
'Now get up!' (p. 416). He is insensitive and
boorish, blind to the drastic effect of shock
upon his mother. His chief concern is that the
lesson the incident holds for her should not be
lost. His detailed interpretation of the meaning
of that lesson, though precise in its estimate of
the social situation, is heartless and irrelevant
in the circumstances:

"Don't think that was just an uppity
Negro woman," he said. "That was the
whole coloured race which will no longer
take your condescending pomposity. That
was your black double. She can wear the
same hat as you, and to be sure...it
looked better on her than it did on you.
That all this means, he said, "is that
the old world is gone. The old manners
are obsolete and your graciousness is not
worth a damn."

............
You needn't act as if the world had come to an end," he said, "because it hasn't. From now on, you've got to live in a new world and face a few realities for a change. Buck up," he said, "it won't kill you." (p. 419)

The irony of his words strike Julian, too late, as his mother collapses even as he continues to berate her. All his saucy assertions to independence and individuality dissolve now in the realization that he is losing his mother, his sole financial, emotional and spiritual support.

"Mother!" he cried. "Darling, Sweetheart, wait!... mama, mama!... wait here, wait here!... Help, Help!" (p. 420).

Though, as J. C. Smith has observed of "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "O'Connor has constructed the story as a veritable storehouse of southern clichés," stereotypes are completely destroyed by the story's climax. The mother and son, representative of "the touching but exasperating ignorance of the heart, and the shroud but sterile preoccupations of the mind," undergo a definite

28 Smith, "Ritual and Violence in Flannery O'Connor," Thought, 356.
29 Ibid.
change. While a lesson is implicit in the black woman's violent action, it is Julian who is the pupil. Freed from the safety of skeptic intellectualism he is at last initiated into the love he feels for his mother and forced, by a sudden turn of violence, into a world of guilt and sorrow.

The convergence at the end of the story is almost literal. The black woman's blow not only shatters Mrs. Cheatsy's sense of who she is, it destroys Julian's illusions about his own strength. While Mrs. Cheatsy becomes weak and child-like, Julian's childish voice echoes down the street.

Both mother and son are relics of the old South, powerless in the face of the future suggested by the black woman's act of violence. Dying and defenseless, they confront each other in a kind of equality. "Paradoxically O'Connor suggests that true vision might come only through death, mortification and denial. In some respects the end is the beginning."30

"Everything That Rises Must Converge" does not deal with the race issue as a sociological problem but with the adjustments required on the level of personal encounter. The story is only peripherally about changing racial relationships. The author makes use of the context of the modern South to create awareness of a wider, more comprehensive, spiritual perspective:

"Everything That Rises Must Converge" and "Revelation" do not deal with religious ceremonies as such. In both there is a baptism into awareness, but the baptisms are clearly ones of violence delivered in both cases by an outsider who pronounces judgment but who possesses no religious connotations. In these stories, written after the two novels, the author seems to be moving toward less eclecetic subjects. Religious dislocation is linked more naturallyistically with social or racial dislocation.31

Flannery O'Connor does not here present solutions to social problems. She is impartial in her evaluation of the race issue, displaying no sentimentality for either side. The biased Southerner clinging to outmoded values, the

31 Smith, Thought, 557.
enthusiastic young liberal eager to show-off his good-will, and the sullen black resentful of attempts at communication, will exhibit vices of foolish pride and absurdity. While no one is singled out as a major culprit, the warning is for all involved. "The villain is lack of compassion, failure of sympathy, and, as such it resides in the souls of all, black and white, young and old."^32

"Judgment Day," like "Everything That Rises Must Converge," explores the relationship between black and white in which an older white person suffers death at the hands of a younger black. Inability of a representative of the older generation to adjust to changed social patterns provokes the wrath of the emancipated black. Unique among O'Connor's collected stories, "Judgment Day" is the only one set in the North. The conflict emphasizes the differences in social attitudes between the rural South and the cosmopolitan North. In the move from country to city is encountered the
first of many problems of conflicting values and
re-adjustment to changed social norms. Interestingly,
also, this last narrative in O'Connor's second
collection is actually a recast of her very first
published story, "The Geranium," written during
student days at Iowa, was published in *Acent* in
1948. However, major changes occur in the later
adaptation.

In her earlier effort, O'Connor uses a highly
contrived symbol of a potted geranium to emphasize
the uprootedness of an old white man suddenly
transplanted from his southern associations into
a northern metropolis. His black, northern
neighbour is a genteel liberal who in a gratuitous
act of kindness assists the old white Southerner
up the apartment stairs. There is a reversal of
situation here, and the reaction of the proud,
unflinching white to charity is the same as that
of innumerable blacks in similar circumstances.
Dudley is shaken by his experience of such a
reversal of black-white roles but the experience
does not kill him.

In "Judgement Day," Tanner, a white man,
lives in the South in a squatter's shack shared with a black. Poverty forces him to move to his daughter's home in New York City where people live in pigeon hutchses and the air is "fit for cats and garbage" (p. 531). Tanner's relationship with Coleman, his black friend, is a typically stereotyped one. He defends his arrangement to live with the black on grounds of convenience:

"Who you think cooks? Who you think cuts my firewood and empties my slops. He's paroled to me. That no good scoundrel has been on my hands for thirty years. He ain't a bad nigger." (p.535)

In reality, Coleman is Tanner's only friend in the world, to whom he writes from New York and speaks to in his imagination, recounting unpleasant experiences of the city.

The friendship between Tanner and Coleman is made possible by the rules that each accepts with regard to the other. The difference in their colour will never be ignored and Tanner, as a white, will always hold a superior position. The black is easily managed as long as he follows the role chosen for him and submits to prescribed forms of treatment. Assumptions to the inherent
character of blacks gives whites like Tanner principles to be followed in handling them so that harmony is maintained between the races. As O'Connor herself observes, "All this may not be ideal, but the Southerner has enough sense not to ask for the ideal but only for the possible, the workable." 33  Tanner's success with Coleman is based on Southern stereotyped assumptions:

There was an art to handling them.  
The secret of handling a nigger was to show him his brains didn't have a chance against yours; then he would jump on your back and know he had a good thing there for life. He had had Coleman on his back for thirty years. (p.536)

By contrast, Tanner's daughter tries to explain to him the racial principles followed in the North:

"That's the way people were meant to get along in this world. Everybody can get along if they just mind their business. Live and let live.... Up here everybody minds their own business and everybody gets along. That's all you have to do." (p. 543)

In a pattern familiar to most of the stories in the collection, Coleman serves as Tanner's

double. On his first encounter with Coleman, Tanner "had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot" (p. 539). Their physiological development reinforces their similarities:

when Coleman was young, he looked like a bear; now that he was old he looked like a monkey. With Tanner it was the opposite; when he was young he had looked like a monkey but when he got old, he looked like a bear. (p. 539)

Dr. Foley who owns the land on which Tanner and Coleman live is representative of a second major black type or class in the story. An opportunist who competes with the white middle-class in the struggle for material possessions he exploits his own race as fully as a white man might. Only part black, the rest Indian and white, Foley "was everything to the niggers - druggist and undertaker and general counsel and real estate man and sometimes he got the evil eye off them and sometimes he put it on" (p. 535). While Tanner is determined not to live on Foley's
land on terms set out by him, in New York City he feels he would have been better off as a “nigger’s white nigger” than in the confusing Northern metropolitan racial situation.

As an old man too set in his ways to learn new habits of thought and behaviour, Tanner relies, inappropriately, on previously learned response patterns in coping with his new situations. The consequences are fatal. His failure to recognize the role played by the black actor and his wife, new neighbours in their apartment house, leads to violent confrontation and death. As a third black type depicted in the story, the black actor reacts to Tanner in a manner that Tanner himself had never resorted to in racial relationships: "...from childhood, he had been weakened for that kind of violence by the fear of hell. He had never killed one, he had always handled them with his wits and with luck" (p. 536). In the case of Coleman, they had managed to live in terms of mutual affection and respect.

The black actor's violent reaction takes Tanner by surprise. At first the black tries to
ignore the interfering old man on the stairway. "The Negro did not take a step or answer. His eyes began to move....very slowly, while some unfathomable dead cold rage seemed to stiffen and shrink him" (p. 544). The provocation, however, as with the woman in "Everything That Rises Must Converge," proves too much: "When he was close enough he lunged and grasped Tanner by both shoulders 'I don't take no crap,' he whispered,...and I'm not no preacher! I'm not even no Christian. I don't believe that crap. There ain't no Jesus and there ain't no God'" (p. 545). As he is slammed against the wall and knocked backwards through his open door, Tanner experiences a confusion of values that renders all absolutes meaningless: "'And you ain't black,' he said. 'And I ain't white!'" (p. 545).

"Judgement Day" emphasizes O'Connor's priorities with regard to religious beliefs and attitudes. Though the story deals with problems of race, in O'Connor's scale of values, it is one's basic religious assumptions, ultimately,
which make the difference. At the root of all
problems of human relationships, including
inter-racial relationships, the selfishness
inherent in man is a direct outcome of unbelief and
lack of devotion to God:

"The unique, the distinctive thing
about Miss O'Connor was that she
posed what we may call the Jesus
question...directly, with no
apologies and with no holds barred.
The perpetual, overriding question
in all her work is "what think ye of
Christ?" or, again, "Whom say ye that
I am?" And Jesus Christ is really
the principal character in all her
fiction, just as her one real story
is concerned with man's encounter
with Him in this fallen world today." 34

O'Connor's religious attitudes are contrasted
with those of his daughter and the black neighbour
who are both emancipated from provincial religious
beliefs. While his daughter disdains traditional
belief, the black neighbour is openly atheistic.
Renunciation of religious faith and practice
underlies their lack of humanity. The black, for

34 Robert Drake, "Flannery O'Connor and American
Literature," Flannery O'Connor Bulletin, 3
(Autumn, 1974), 11.
instance, though in this situation the obvious intellectual superior, evidences none of the compassion that Tanner himself had displayed in similar situations when his was the superior mind.Ironically, the very motives that saved Tanner’s life in his initial encounter with Coleman, lose it for his hero. Tanner’s long-planned practical joke assumes serious connotations in the ending of the story. Because of his untimely death, the day becomes a judgment day for all the characters in the narrative, the survivors as well as the dead.

Of the stories in O’Connor’s last collection, Stanley Hyman believes that the author has come to rely too much on death to end them.\textsuperscript{35} Martha Stephens observes in this regard that while one may often forget the endings of novels, “endings in short stories matter...a good deal more than they do in novels and tend to color one’s whole feeling about a tale much more than in the longer form.”\textsuperscript{36} The devastating conclusions of these

\textsuperscript{35} Stanley Hyman, \textit{Flannery O’Connor} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 45.

stories on racial adjustment tend to destroy the precarious tonal balance that is one of O'Connor's greatest literary achievements.

That violent death often marks the point of convergence or confrontation in O'Connor is especially significant, however, in the light of her belief in death as a means to the highest spiritual end. The idea of death as a manifestation of grace, central to very many O'Connor stories, grows out of her preoccupation with Teilhard de Chardin's fundamental views on the soul's progress toward divinity. Teilhard's vision of the transforming power of death offers a key to several of O'Connor's fatal endings:

There is a further step to take; one that makes us lose all foothold within ourselves.... In itself, death is an incurable weakness of corporeal beings, complicated, in our world, by the influence of an original fall. It is the sum and type of all the forces that diminish us, and against which we must fight without being able to hope for a personal, direct and immediate victory. Now, the great victory of the Creator and Redeemer, in the Christian vision, is to have transformed what is in itself a universal power of diminishment and extinction into an essentially life-giving factor.... The
The lives of Mrs. Chestny and Tanner are, in O'Connor's view, then, not merely sacrificed in a Darwinistic process of social change, though the violence of racial confrontation does affect most the old, who in terms of a new society, are expendable. The older generation bears the brunt of change as it collides with the forces shaping the new world. However, death is a means of entry into grace and O'Connor's stern voice of judgement speaks without the sentimentality of liberalism to blacks as well as whites. Universal guilt extends to all races and permeates all blood lines. Human virtues are worthless, for grace and spiritual illumination are shattering, hard-won experiences paid for, often, with the price of life itself.

VIOLENT CONFRONTATIONS

Powers involvement in the racial issue is manifest in five stories that thematize the problems of blacks in a white society. Unlike Flannery O'Connor whose concerns are religious rather than racial, and whose characterizations of blacks afford a treatment that emphasizes spiritual problems of redemption irrespective of race, Powers' prime motivation in his black stories is earthly minded. Mortality rather than immortality is his perspective, creating an urgency that makes him, in these stories, more of a propagandist than an artist.

Written early in his career, "these stories are not the best of Powers."36 Sore of youthful anger against social injustice they are too emotional and result oriented to stand the test of true fiction. J.F. Sisk in his analysis of Powers' black stories pinpoints their major artistic defects. The stories contain too much

built-in tension and drama to provide a challenge to their author. "But more important... is the fact that Powers needs more emotional distance between himself and his subjects. There is a charge of anger in these stories which does him credit as a man but ever simplifies him as an artist." 39

A prominent characteristic of these early themetic specializations of Powers is that they feature physical violence, conspicuously absent in his mature work. Lacking in the psychological subtlety of his later fiction these stories portray racial violence, brutality, rape, lynching, and murder as events upon which their plots revolve. In contrast to his typical style which "goes against the trend of modern violence-ridden fiction," Powers can sound quite contemporarily violent on occasion.

All of the three black stories "The Trouble" "He Don't Plant Cotton" and "The Eye" included in

39 Ibid.
Prince of Darkness, as well as the two, "Blessing" and "Interlude in a Bookshop," wisely omitted, deal with racial violence and its consequences. Any in action, these stories are a contrast to the quiet, meditative, introspective mood that in Powers' special talent. Melodramatic and moving rapidly from one tension to another, they seek to draw attention to a vital social problem that was, at the time, much on the mind of the author.

Powers uses physical violence far less effectively than he does the subtle psychological violence that is his special forte. In these stories on racial conflict, he employs a strategy of physical violence and assault to illustrate the drastic consequences of racial confrontation. Violence is purely incidental, however, to Powers' plots and the assaults, lynchings, and riots that he depicts remain on a superficial level as events and occurrences with no deeper significance of their own. Physical violence in Powers is not specially symbolic and lacks the intensity of his controlled, subtle psychological tensions and inner conflicts of the
mind. Powers' talents in this respect may be contrasted with those of Flannery O'Connor, who demonstrates the multifarious and far-reaching effects of a thorough exploration of physical violence as a fictional strategy. While both writers have a common religious bias and employ violence as a means to spiritual progress, their talents are varied and follow individual directions.

"The Eye" describes racial violence in the South and in an ironical "twist away from another stereotype - the Northern liberal's view of the Southern white bigot - Powers presents a conscience-stricken protagonist, who cannot escape his own deep-seated morality."40

The central incident of "The Eye" has been disparaged as an absurdity. A Southern black, who bravely rescues a pregnant white girl from drowning, is lynched for his pains. The plot thus oversimplified has little to offer and the story contains the stock situations of a Southern

racial context. The action is sentimentalized and melodramatic. The internal narrator, a slow-witted boy, serves as a device for a bifurcated point of view whereby the reader is aware of larger implications to the action than the narrator is allowed to perceive.

Sleep Bailey is a deaf pianist who heroically rescues a white girl from drowning. His action is lauded by the girl's boyfriend, Clyde Bullen, who decides to make a collection in the pool hall to reward Bailey. Events take a bizarre turn, however, when the whites suspect that the black had attempted to rape the white girl after rescuing her. To bring matters to a head, the hospital report states that the girl is seven months pregnant. Unthinking in their fury, the whites raise a lynch cry and pursue Bailey. The innocent black, however, can do nothing to convince the unreasonable mob. His only logical course is passivity, which he believes is proof of his innocence. He continues calmly at his piano while the whites approach: "Don't it prove nothing if
I'm here, if I didn't run away? Don't that prove nothing?" But Bailey is ruthlessly murdered by the mob.

The complication of irony in the plot, however, lies in the fact that Clyde Bullen, who has been prodded into leading the mob against Bailey, is the guilty party. He is himself the father of the girl's child and she has attempted suicide to escape the shame of unwed motherhood. The mob's eagerness for leadership could have provided Clyde Bullen with an excellent cover for his own guilt. However, conscience-stricken and aware of Bailey's innocence, he is reluctant to participate and refuses to join the lynch cry. While Bullen does not actually confess his guilt, he makes a desperate attempt to prevent the lynching, turning in fury against the mob he is forced to lead. But his attempt to save Bailey is unsuccessful.

While Clyde Bullen's action may hardly be commended as heroic, the story, bordering on sentimentality shows the Southern white in whose racial bigotry is an accepted attitude, as possessing moral qualities of conscience and justice.
Clyde Bulleen's is not an active, open triumph of conscience. However, he is not as callous, as Powers' Northern white liberal who fires his black employees with no qualm of conscience, nor as cowardly as his white war-time Chicago rioter who hides in a black home.

The two other black stories in Prince of Darkness, "He Don't Plant Cotton" and "The Trouble," deal with the problems of blacks in the liberal North. Ironically, Baby the jazz drummer, and the family in "The Trouble" are Southerners from New Orleans, who have migrated to Chicago in search of employment and better opportunities. The life they face illustrates, however, that in Powers' view, the North with its claims to liberalism has little to offer the black in terms of social justice and physical security.

"He Don't Plant Cotton" (1942), the first of Powers' three black stories in Prince of Darkness is described by Stanley Hyman as "unconvincingly melodramatic in its central action...but at least a respectable try at a story."41 Based on the

story of the famous Jazz artist, Baby Dodds, "He Don't Plant Cotton" depicts a contest of wills between black musicians and their white customers. The whites want the blacks to behave in a stereotyped manner in confirmation of white superiority but the blacks resist and refuse to degrade themselves by acquiescing to such demands. They make a claim to human dignity at the cost of losing their jobs and exhibit a moral superiority over their white oppressors in the total lack of hatred especially in Baby, the central character.

While the use of racial stereotypes is common in the fiction of O'Connor and Powers, Powers, unlike O'Connor, is sentimental in his attitude to the black. While O'Connor is careful not to allow liberalism to weaken her point of view, and is impartial in her view of the failings of both black and white, Powers most often favours the black, while his whites evoke contempt. In his reversal of stereotyped characterizations, Powers makes it a point to avoid those types which portray the black as intellectually inferior, stupid,
and eging in a white society. While white pride is shallow and rooted in racist prejudices, black dignity is resilient and abiding.

A Southern black from New Orleans, Baby, a jazz drummer, and his friends Dodo, a piano player and Libby, a singer make their living as entertainers in Chicago. Life is difficult and Chicago is not the entertainer's pot of gold. The treatment they receive, from both customers and employers, is cheap and without human dignity. Their unique artistry is hardly appreciated or understood.

Jobs for musicians were getting harder and harder to find. What they wanted was Mickey Mouse sound effects. Singing strings, electric guitars, cello violins. Hard to find a spot to play in and when you did, it was always a white place and drummers advertising men who wanted to hear a Old Song - "My Wild Irish Rose" or "That Old Gang of Mine." So you played it, of course, plenty of schmaltz. And the college kids who wanted Swing - any slick popular song. So you played that too. And always you wanted to play the music you were born to, blue or fast, music that had no name. You managed somehow to play that too when there was a lull, or the place was empty and you had to stay until four A.M. anyway. 42

The note of frustration in these musings of Baby, the jazz drummer, hints at the pivotal point on which rests the climax of the story. As Chester Eisinger observes, "The music made by Powers' Negros is the food for their will and the lines that mark out their being; it is the world that the gross, flesh-bound whites cannot enter, the world where matter flows into immaterial but sustaining sound." 43

As Baby and his fellow musicians entertain their frivolous audience with song after song, they are subjected to racist prejudices, subtle as well as blatant. Unconscious racism is present in the attitude of the college student who requests "St. Louis Blues": "Oh, play it low down, the way you people play it" (III), she says. The drunken white Mississippians, who are nostalgic for the South, insist upon repeated renderings of "Old Man River," carry the humiliation to the limits of endurance. Expecting the singers to "tote that bar, lift that bale" all night for their cheap satisfaction, they

seek to assert their racial superiority over the black artists. The Northern white attitude is one of condemnation. The manager is apologetic to his boorish Southern white customers as he fires the uncooperative black group: "...Well, I guess so all right, don't pay to pamper 'em to give 'em an inch" (113).

The emotional satisfaction that their rebellion gives the young blacks compensates in the joy and dignity for the loss of their jobs. Baby is glad of Libby's initiative in refusing to be pushed beyond a point: "waves of warm exhilaration washed into him, endearing him to himself. No, he smiled. I'm sorry, no favor today" (112-15). He walks tall as they tramp down the street in the snow, his big drum on his shoulder. The final image contrasts the spirit of hope, expectation, and lack of bitterness in Baby with the realistic attitudes of his friends, Libby and Jodo. As he motions hopefully towards an approaching cab,

it slowed up, pulled over the curb, hesitated...and lurched away, with Baby's hand reaching for the door. Baby watched the cab speed down the snowy street, following it for a few
steps, speechless.... Libby and Dodo... had seen the cab come and go. They had not moved an inch....
"Why you laugh so much, woman?" he enquired plaintively from the street." (113)

"He Don't Plant Cotton" contains some appreciable elements despite the disparagement that Powers' early work — "his worst dealing with Negro life"44 — has received. The story, though lacking a specifically Christian framework, contains moral overtones that are heard above the tautness and control of the narrative. Unlike the other black stories, "He Don't Plant Cotton" is rescued from the blatant physical violence of the propagandist's art. In the tension of conflicting values of stereotyped behaviour expectations and the exhilarating, mental and emotional break-through of the blacks, an attempt at the psychological subtlety which Powers used to perfection in his later career. In characterization, too, the portrayal of Baby approaches a complexity and depth of personality that both black and white stereotypes

of Powers' black stories sadly lack. Finally, as Nagopian observes, the "undefeated expectation of decency" that survives in Baby is significant: "It is prophetic that in Powers' earliest fiction this motif is expressed for it becomes a recurrent element throughout his literary career... he contrasts it with an all pervasive corruption in American society."45

"The Trouble" also deals with racial problems in the North. It describes a race riot in Chicago in which the child-narrator's mother is killed by a white mob, and the bereaved family, in Christian charity, rescue a cowardly white rioter from attacking blacks. This piece, which Powers himself describes as "not a terribly good story,"46 however, considers religious and moral questions relative to the racial issue itself. Eisinger perceptively points out:

In "The Trouble," Powers fuses his concern for the Negro with his dedication to charity and mercy. He makes this vital connection by submitting the life of the spirit to its ultimate test: can the

45 Nagopian, J.F. Powers, p. 36.
member of a despised and oppressed race, under conditions of intolerable personal loss, live in obedience to virtue and forgo vengeance? Clearly, the affirmative answer that Powers gives is not easily won, since it is given with the knowledge of the cost in the love of man for his wife and the identification of a man with his race.47

The story portrays the strong sense of values and close family ties among blacks in contrast to the cowardice and moral inferiority of the whites. As the child narrator, forbidden by his grandmother, watches the riot from their tenement window, there is innocence and impartiality in his view of the scene, while he shows a natural leaning in favour of his own people: "I hoped the coloreds would be do the job right,"48 he does not hesitate to admire a white man's act of self-defence. "Then he did a smart thing" (p. 207), as he hit an approaching black over the head with a bugle he was carrying.

The events lose the excitement of a football match, however, when the child's mother is brought

47 Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 175.
into the house badly battered and dying. There is a
sharp contrast in mood and tone. Despite the
emotional shock and pain that now envelop them,
superior strength and moral stamina show forth in
this black family. From a spectator's stance:
"This time...I saw that I thought I'd never see...
a white man that was fixing himself to get himself
nice and killed. A white man running - running,
God Almighty, from a million coloreds" (p. 207),
the child is drawn into compassionate involvement.
In the midst of their personal crisis each
member of the black family exercises instinctive
and active concern for a fellow human. "Then Old
Granna," who had gone out in the midst of the riot
to buy candles, "opened our back door and saved
him" (p. 208). The instinctive action of the old
woman is taken at great personal risk. But again,
as the infuriated black mob makes a search, "...Old
Granna pulled another fast one. She ran out...and
pointed her old yellow finger in about three wrong
directions" (p. 209). The child, too, instinctively
transcends immediate racial prejudices: "I was very
glad for the white man" (p. 208), till he remembers
his mother, lying broken to pieces on the bed.
The intruding presence of the cowardly white into the closeness of family crisis contrasts the moral strength of the blacks with the spiritual inferiority of the white. It also introduces conflicting racial and religious values and brings about a final spiritual resolution that results from the blacks' transcendence over hatred and a desire for vengeance, into mercy and charity. The white man's presence is an intrusion in the close confines of the tenement room filled with tension and sorrow: "He even looked funny and out of place to me in our room" (p. 209). His tactless remarks and bungling observations hardly help to make him more acceptable. He lacks the sensitivity and good sense that even the children display in the situation: "'You colored folks, I mean,' the white said. 'Americans, I mean'" (p. 210). At the covered body on the bed he comments casually: "Oh, is someone sick over there" (p. 209).

Rowse uses the despicable cowardice of the white man to repudiate, on a larger perspective, false claims of racial superiority. Afraid of the mob outside, the white man whose presence in the
room is barely tolerable in the circumstances, cannot accept the doctor’s suggestion that he leave. Provided with shelter from a black mob, he will not risk going out even when the circumstances have changed. Powers makes his acknowledge the barbarity of his own race:

...it's a white mob this time, you'd be safe. No, the white man said. I should say not, I would n't be soon with them, they're as bad as the others almost. (p. 210)

The white priest, too, has no regard for his cowardly compatriot. As the man ventures at last to leave with the priest, the cleric is forthright in his contempt: “You won't be the first one to hide behind a Roman collar” (p. 214).

Though the transcendence attained by the father in “The Trouble” is moral and spiritual, Powers suggests that religious affiliations are not the criteria for unity of spirit. Colour seems to be the common unifying factor between persons in the story. The white intruder’s attempt at acceptance on the grounds of a common religious identity is useless:

“I'm a Catholic too, Father, the white man said.

“That's the trouble,” the priest said. (p. 213)
In the group that kneels together to pray with oneness of heart, the members of the family, the doctor, and "the old woman-friend of old Gramma's, a solid Baptist if ever I saw one,"Thomas seems to suggest that in matters of spirit it is human kindness rather than doctrinal affiliation that counts. The Baptist woman is totally accepted into the context of the family's suffering, but of course, she is black. While their religious denominational affiliation cannot unite the black family and the white intruder who is also a Catholic, it does not divide them from their Baptist sister, a fellow black. The surrender of rebellious questioning of divine justice in the narrator's sister, "No! Carrie said, it must be a white God too!" (p. 213) is magnified in the child's reflections on the futility of hatred and revenge as the white man leaves unharmed:

I did not see what difference it could make to Mama if the white man lived or died. It only had something to do with us and him.... The trouble is somebody gets cheated or insulted or killed and somebody else tries to make it come out even by cheating and insulting and killing the cheaters and insulters and killers. Only, they never do. I did not think they ever would. (p. 208)
The wisdom of the child's conclusions is the wisdom of the ages, an understanding born out of suffering, injustice and oppression. The father's final tortured decision against revenge: "I wouldn't touch you" (p. 214), as a logical course of action, may be explained by Margaret Walker's lines which introduce the story: "Neither the slavers' whip nor the lynchers' rope nor the bayonet could kill our black belief" (p. 202). Whatever issues of race and religion, Powers here seeks to explore, and whatever artistic incompetence and lack of maturity the story may exhibit, "The Trouble" contains that vital germ of spirituality for which Powers' fiction is valued. Hagopian's observation is telling: "The presence of grace is in these Negroes..."

In his black stories, in an attempt to expose white injustice and cowardice, Powers makes it a point to emphasize the moral superiority of the black. He portrays the black man, usually, as possessing strength of character and admirable human

49 Hagopian, J.F. POWERS, p. 41.
qualities. On the other hand, his whites, whether from the liberal North or the bigoted South, are weaklings with shallow moral values and contemptible in their behaviour. In "The Eye," Clyde Sullen, as an exception, displays feelings of conscience and justice, but he does not possess the active heroism and unselfishness of his black friend Bailey. Baby, in "He Don't Plant Cotton," in his innocence, hopefulness, and total lack of rancour exemplifies that sparkling quality of character by which the human spirit survives hardship and humiliation.

The whites in the story, the boorish Southern whites as well as Baby's opportunist Northern employers who pander to the cheap racist feelings of their white customers, are despicable in their behaviour. In contrast, the blacks, despite their lower socio-economic status, are more civilized and more human.

Similarly, in "The Trouble," the black family displays positive qualities of closeness, affection, and strength in personal crisis. Despite constant subjection to racial prejudices - they are not even
sure that the white priest will heed their summons for help - they respond to the need of the desperate white refugee as to a fellow-human, without any consideration of his colour. The white man, on the other hand, is cowardly and weak, tasteless, and insensitive to the troubles of others. He earns nothing but contempt even from his compatriot, the white priest.

Elizabeth Hardwick assesses that Powers' black stories, "while they indicate a good ear for common speech and an ardent devotion to the Negro's cause,...suffer from...the powerlessness of literature as propaganda." Stock situations and stereotyped characterizations have been cited as the chief technical flaws in these stories. However, one must recognize that in those early works, despite the author's emotional involvement in his subject, there is a move toward the maturity of his later fiction. "He Don't Plant Cotton" exhibits tautness and control in style and structure, which has proved the chief asset to Powers the mature artist. "The Trouble,"

50 Quoted in Hagopian, p. 157.
anticipates the practical Christian virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation that were to provide Powers with his fictional base not only in his most popular stories on the Catholic priesthood, but also in the several secular considerations he has explored.

The black stories anticipate that "Powers' real subject is spiritual victory and defeat, the difficulties of spiritual vision. For him the reality of a Christian profession is demonstrated in the act. The more difficult the act, the more assured may we be of the Christian virtue that impels it." 51

The triumph of the blacks in "The Trouble," in the peculiar circumstances of the test they face as a family is more spiritual than racial. They do not overcome mere racial pressures but win a spiritual battle against the temptation to hatred, bitterness and vengeance. It is grace rather graciousness that wins for them their victory.

Powers is at his best when, like Flannery O'Connor, he rises above the immediate problems of

51 Kiminger, p. 175.
racial conflict to direct his concern to the spiritual realm where solutions, if any, may be found to the selfishness and inhumanity of man against man. Flannery O'Connor recognizes no conflict and no triumph other than the spiritual, and builds her fiction, despite immediate racial themes, on the universal need for redemptive grace. Powers, too, has begun in his black stories to recognize the presence of grace in every context. Physical violence is sublimated by charity and angry emotion finds resolution in spiritual transcendence.

The black stories of Powers and O'Connor subordinate the racial to the religious, fixing the cause for strife and disharmony between the races as spiritual rather than sociological. Human equality becomes a reality only in the acknowledgement of spiritual equality, in the recognition and acceptance of spiritual poverty and the universal need for redemption through grace. Colour and race are irrelevant in the light of justification of soul and spirit. Though physical violence is incidental to Powers' plots
set in inter-racial contexts, such violence is
superceded always, by spiritual victory and
moral transcendence. In anticipation of his
ultimate fictional concern, Powers, despite his
more immediate, propagandist aims is far-sighted
enough in his moral vision to seek solutions to
human problems in the realm of spirit rather than
in political, satirical or social schemes.

Flannery O'Connor, to whom the south and its
peculiar social problems are part of a deeper human
sadness, stresses the importance of priorities in
each of her stories on racial issues. The human
scale of values is exposed for what it stands,
and is contrasted with true worth in the spiritual
scale. Her revelations are revelations of the
spirit, providing renewed insights and altered
perspectives which destroy vanity and pride in
one's virtues.

Death in both O'Connor and Powers is more than
a drastic, consequence of violent racial confron-
tation. Death, as the highest price paid for
blindness to the winds of change, is very often
the means and manifestation of grace in the lives
of protagonists and their nearest kin. Family conflicts and the tensions generated by differences in age and social outlook melt in spiritual convergences that culminate in death. While the death of a parent is a sobering experience for O'Connor's sons and daughters who are mute spectators to harsh spiritual realities, it binds the wounds of the oppression of centuries in the black family portrayed by Powers. Redemptive grace descends in these parables of black and white in which secular and sacred images are yoked together by violence to construct an artistic vision that is defiantly spiritual.