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CUTTING 'AESTHETIC TEETH':  
FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S HABIT OF ART

por

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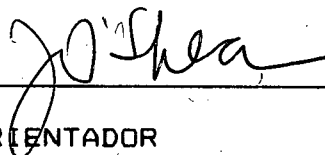
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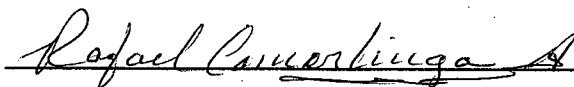
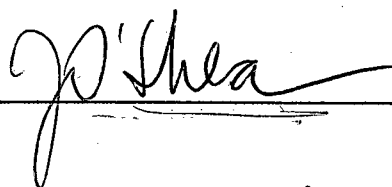


COORDENADORA



ORIENTADOR

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Dedicated to the Memory of

Julia Hawley and Joseph Vincent Loughlin, my grandparents;

Paul Thomas Loughlin, my father;

and Thomas, my son

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## ABSTRACT

This study was suggested by Flannery O'Connor's assertion that her "aesthetic teeth" were cut on Jacques Maritain's Art and Scholasticism. The purpose has been to arrive at the connection between the meaning of the phrase and her practice as a literary artist. To this end, all of O'Connor's letters in any way referring to Maritain's book were examined, to gauge further the extent to which the book had impressed her, and for what reasons.

A detailed investigation of the contents of Art and Scholasticism was then carried out, in an effort to experience the book in a way similar to that in which O'Connor herself had experienced it. An exploration of her essays and letters followed, in which a large number of echoes were found of numerous points in the content of Art and Scholasticism. Three central points, equally emphasized in the writings of O'Connor and in Art and Scholasticism, were selected as criteria for analyzing O'Connor's habit of art: 1) art inevitably implies a struggle; 2) art can only begin to be perceived through the senses; and 3) art demands the undivided attention and dedication of the artist to the work that is being brought into being.

Point one is illustrated with reference to O'Connor's own account, taken from her letters, of the process through which Wise Blood began, developed, and was brought to publication. Point two is elaborated through the presentation of images from Wise Blood, selected for their exceptional fitness for cartoon animation. Point three shows, by presenting radically opposed interpretations of Wise Blood--which are only reconcilable

through the concept of art presented in Art and Scholasticism--that O'Connor's novel is a work of art, rather than religious propaganda.

The study concludes that, for O'Connor, cutting her "aesthetic teeth" on Art and Scholasticism signified that, in perceiving its analysis of the nature of art as one to which she could assent, she had been enabled both to recognize herself as qualified to become an artist, and to take on irrevocably the task of developing her own habit of art.

## RESUMO

Este trabalho foi sugerido pela afirmação de Flannery O'Connor que sua "dentição estética" nasceu através do contato com *Art and Scholasticism* de Jacques Maritain. O propósito foi chegar a uma interpretação do sentido da frase. Para este fim, todas as cartas de O'Connor referentes de alguma maneira à obra de Maritain foram examinadas, para sondar com mais exatidão até que ponto e por que motivos o livro impressionara tão profundamente.

Uma investigação detalhada foi feita do conteúdo de *Art and Scholasticism* para que a obra pudesse ser percebida de uma maneira parecida com a da própria Flannery O'Connor. Uma pesquisa de seus ensaios e suas cartas seguiu, que revelou numerosos ecos de diversos trechos que constam no texto de Maritain. Três pontos principais, enfatizados tanto nos escritos de O'Connor quanto em *Art and Scholasticism*, foram escolhidos como critérios na análise do hábito artístico de O'Connor: 1) a prática da arte implica uma luta; 2) a arte somente pode ser percebida pelos sentidos; e 3) a prática da arte exige do artista dedicação indivisa à obra nascente.

O primeiro ponto se exemplifica através da descrição da própria O'Connor, encontrada em suas cartas, do processo através do qual *Wise Blood* se iniciou, se desenvolveu, e chegou a ser editado. O segundo ponto foi elaborado mediante a apresentação de imagens de *Wise Blood* escolhidas pela sua adequação notável à representação em desenho animado. O ponto três mostra, pelas interpretações radicalmente opostas de *Wise Blood*--reconciliáveis unicamente através do conceito de arte apresentado em *Art and*



*Scholasticism*--que o romance de O'Connor se classifica como obra de arte e não como propaganda religiosa.

O estudo conclui que, para O'Connor, o brotar da dentição estética, através da leitura de *Art and Scholasticism*, significou que, ao perceber na análise da natureza da arte algo com que podia concordar, ela reconhece tanto sua própria capacidade de tornar-se uma artista literária, quanto sua vontade de assumir a tarefa de desenvolver em sua pessoa o hábito da arte.

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## Chapter I: A Close Look at Art and Scholasticism

Jacques Maritain's book declares at the outset that the Schoolmen, western Christian civilization's prime philosophers from the ninth until the 17th century, had no formal philosophy of art, but rather a "very profound theory of art", the elements of which are to be found in "austere treatises on some problem of logic . . . or of moral theology" (3).

Maritain's strategy, therefore, in effecting his intended synthesis (he disclaims its having exhausted the possibilities of the Schoolmen's maxims for use in the construction of a "rich and complete theory of Art" (94)), is first to seek in the Metaphysics of the ancients their understanding of the Beautiful, and then to confront that with, as Maritain baldly puts it, "Art".<sup>1</sup>

The announced purpose of this confrontation is to disclose the error of the "Aesthetics" (the quotation marks are Maritain's) which, as the product of contemporary philosophers (unnamed) who have restricted their understanding of art exclusively to the fine arts, thus limiting the discussion of the beautiful to its expression in these, "runs the risk of vitiating both the notion of Art and the notion of the Beautiful" (4).

The Schoolmen, in contrast, although without a formal philosophy of art and whose theory of art, as has been seen, lies scattered in assorted treatises on other subjects, did debate art in general (the shipbuilder's, grammarian's, logician's), including (but only incidentally) the nature of art as such, while leaving aside altogether the subject of the fine arts. It is from this more general point of view that Maritain hopes to offer

correctives for "the immense intellectual disorder inherited from the nineteenth century, and of finding once more the spiritual conditions of *honest work*" (4).

### 1.1 The Distinction between Making and Doing

The human intellect is one in being, but functions in two ways. To clarify its mode of operation, Maritain, following Aristotle<sup>2</sup> and Thomas Aquinas<sup>3</sup>, first recalls the metaphysicians' distinction between the speculative and the practical order, as well as the virtues pertaining to each. Accordingly, to the speculative order belong the Understanding of first principles, Science, and Wisdom: those virtues by means of which the intellect exercises its sole function, i.e., to know. To the practical order, on the other hand, pertains that virtue which, rather than being turned towards the pure interiority of knowledge, is directed to action, in a word, art, which is found wherever "some productive operation [is] to be contrived, some work to be made" (6).

Within this practical order to which art pertains exist two distinct spheres, called by the ancients of classical Greece and Rome "Doing" (*agibile*) and "Making" (*factibile*). The first of these is understood as "*the free use, precisely as free, of our faculties*" (7) directed with no regard for that which is made, but rather by the Will, whose interest is exclusively in the good of man: the increase of his being and the fulfillment of his desire. As to whether a particular act is good or not, that depends on its conformity (or lack of it) with "the true end of human life" which Maritain identifies as "God Himself sovereignly loved" (8).

Making, in contrast, is defined by the Schoolmen as "*produc-*

tive action, considered . . . with regard to the thing produced" (8), this "thing produced" being a self-sufficient end in which resides the good of the act. And it is in this action that Art first appears, ruling Making, in a sphere beyond the human in so far as its ends, rules, and values are determined by a single criterion: "the exigencies and good of the work" (9). Thus, the *artifex*, the artist or artisan, is in effect a servant confined to a world ruled solely by the thing-to-be-made, a situation regarded by Maritain as a sort of deliverance: "the ennui of living and willing stop at the door of every workshop" (9).

In that same workshop, however, what is nonhuman art (from the standpoint of its end) becomes essentially human in its mode of operating: the work-to-be-made is brooded over, ripened in a mind before being birthed in matter and permanently stamped with the "color and savor of the spirit" (9). From this process proceeds that which Maritain identifies as art's formal element, since "what constitutes [art] in its species and makes it what it is, is its being ruled by the intellect" (9) in a rule which, if art is to exist at all, must necessarily be as ruthless as that of the thing-to-be-made over the *artifex*. For the work itself is merely the matter, whose form is undeviating reason.

## 1.2 The Nature of Art and the Notion of the Habit

Because art originates as an idea it is by nature intellectual, inhering as a quality in the intelligence of the *artifex*. Essentially a stable disposition perfecting in its nature the subject in which it inheres, this quality was denominated by the ancients *habitus* which, although both are acquired through exercise and use, Maritain warns us not to confuse with "habit" in

the modern sense. For whereas habit is mechanical and lodged in the nerves, "operative *habitus*, which attests the activity of the spirit, resides principally in an immaterial faculty, in the intelligence or the will" (11).

This *habitus*, which proportions the intellect to and makes it commensurate with a given activity, is acquired through precisely the activity itself, engaged in consistently and directed towards a given end. As a result, the intellect is progressively modified, immeasurably enriching its subject: "The man who possesses a *habitus* has within him a quality which nothing can pay for or replace; others are naked, he is armed with steel: but it is a case of a living and spiritual armor" (11).

The armor is as permanent as the object by which the habit is specified or, in another formulation, the quality created by the practice of art is as unalterable as the nature of art itself. Maritain shows that the two are reciprocally related, for if it is the nature of art which specifies the *habitus*, only through the *habitus* is art realized in being. (Wryly, Maritain notes that the *habitus*--permanent, forceful, rigid--is also a social liability: "Men of the world, polished on all sides, do not like the man of *habitus*, with his asperities" (12).)

This *habitus* of the practical intellect, which is Art, is also a virtue, defined as a quality through which the original indetermination of a faculty is triumphed over and drawn to a certain maximum of perfection and operative efficiency" (12). In contrast with that "lack and infirmity" called evil, virtue is defined by Aquinas as essentially "a *habitus* operative of good".<sup>4</sup>

Without the *habitus*, the virtue, there is no good in the work, for, continues Aquinas, "the manner of action follows the disposition of the agent, and, as a man is, so are his works".<sup>5</sup> And it is upon this connaturality, this intimate similarity

between the workman and his work, that Art is concretely realized, for no work of art exists which was not first present in the workman, "conformed to it, so as to be able to form it" (12), again: through the virtue, the *habitus*.

Furthermore, as *habitus* is a virtue of the practical intellect, tending by necessity towards the good, Art (= virtue = *habitus*) implies "infallible rectitude" (13). Its step is never false; its only truth (and here Maritain paraphrases John of St. Thomas) consists in "*directing*, in conformity with what ought to be according to the rule and measure of the thing to be effected" (13).<sup>6</sup> This infallible rectitude, however, is restricted to "the formal element of the operation, that is to say, the regulation of the work by the mind" (13), because, in the execution, a trembling hand, a defect in an instrument, can impede art's perfect realization. But such problems are considered by the Schoolmen to lie outside of art's strictly mental realm. For them, skill is a subject apart.

In their efforts to distinguish precisely the nature of Art, the ancients compared it with another virtue of the practical intellect: Prudence, whose concern is the discernment and the application of means to moral ends, themselves subordinate to God, the ultimate end of human life. In this sense, however, Prudence is also an art: that of living well, whereas Art (as we have seen) operates only for the good of the work. In their own sphere, good and bad are measured solely by their effects on what is being made and, according to Aquinas, as long as the artist works well, his sweet or sour disposition is irrelevant.<sup>7</sup>

But, of course, what is being spoken of here is the artist pure, an entirely amoral abstraction in contrast with its concrete realization, whose human condition precedes and is the

condition for further refinements. For example, it is upon the specific artist's rectitude of will, its ordering to the good of the whole man, that the use of his power depends: "art gives only the power of making well (*facultas boni operis*), and not the use itself of making well" (16).<sup>8</sup> However, although as a power art may be badly used, or not used at all, as a virtue of the practical intellect it remains intact, and its judgments are infallible.<sup>9</sup>

As for the rules by which the artist works, the fact that art is ordered by the good of its matter, i.e., the object to be made, renders its rules stable and fixed, unlike those of prudence, which vary in each case, according to a judgment reached through that "which the ancients called *consilium* (deliberation, counsel)" (18). But the art considered in this comparison is generic, not specific; its product is, as in the mechanical arts, a ship or a clock, matter formed to a determined end by reason's unwavering rules. And even in the case of Medicine, Agriculture, or Strategy, wherein the matter is particularly imperfect, fixed rules still apply, although accidentally requiring first the application of contingent rules, as well as that same deliberation exercised in the judgments proper to prudence.

In conclusion, the Schoolmen can be said to have seen in the Artist an Intellectual who makes (as distinguished from the Scientist, an Intellectual who demonstrates), and in the Prudent Man an intelligent being of Will, who acts well (20). Furthermore, this intellectual-who-makes includes great masters and simple village artisans alike, all of whom are endowed with the same intellectual virtue, i.e., a certain perfection of the spirit. Indeed, as the artisan "represented the general run of men . . . in the normal type of human development . . . of truly human civilizations" (20), the intellectual virtue of art should



in principle be as easily found as common man himself.

### 1.3 The Nature of the Fine Arts

With respect to the fine arts, the ancients did not regard them as a category apart. Rather, the arts were distinguished as servile (requiring bodily labor), or liberal, when the construction is purely spiritual. Thus, painting and sculpture are servile arts, whereas music, arithmetic, and logic are liberal, sounds, numbers, and concepts having, prior to their materialization, been arranged in the soul. How then does Maritain arrive at the category of fine art, unspecified as it is by both Aristotle and the Schoolmen?

He begins with Aquinas's simple definition of the beautiful *per effectum*: "*id quod visum placet*", "that which, being seen, pleases" (23).<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, beauty's terms are two: the vision, or intuitive knowledge, and the resultant delight, not from the act of knowing (which itself is delightful), but rather from the qualities of the particular object known. In other words, it is by one's exultation on apprehending some object that the presence of beauty is recognized.

Insofar as that which knows most fully is the intelligence, beauty is essentially its object and by nature dwells in an intelligible world from which, says Maritain, it descends. But, since our intelligence is human and not angelically intuitive, the perception of beauty is dependent, "enormously", "well-nigh indispensably", on the senses. Maritain recognizes that in human beings the intuitiveness necessary if beauty is to be perceived is perfect only in sense knowledge; intelligence's "sight", on the other hand, depends on abstracting and discourse. Therefore,

although the enjoyment of purely intelligible being is possible, that which is "*connatural* to man is the beautiful that delights through the senses and through their intuition" (24). This beauty proper to art, having now been defined by its effects, remains to be defined by its nature.

Maritain says that beauty is "essentially a certain excellence or perfection in the proportion of things to the intellect" (24). Its three conditions according to Aquinas are integrity, proportion, and radiance, or clarity, which, materialized in fine art and perceived through the senses, respectively pleasure the intellect in (1) fullness of being, (2) order and unity and, above all, (3) light and intelligibility.<sup>11</sup>

This last, a kind of splendor, is attributed by the ancients to beauty, whereas for the Platonists it is an attribute of truth, and for Augustine, of order. Aquinas, however, according to Maritain understands light as a consequence of form, that principle constituting the "proper perfection of all that is . . . in their essences and qualities", "the ontological secret" borne within things, the "spiritual being, . . . operating mystery" and, above all, "the proper principle of intelligibility, the proper *clarity* of every thing" (24-25).

For his part, Maritain describes beauty as "a flashing of intelligence on a matter intelligibly arranged" (25), from which, when recognized by the intellect, arises the delight of seeing itself reflected. In other words, in the intellect's recognition of beauty, light meets light. Conversely, because sensible beauty alone cannot delight the intellect, odors, no matter how pleasing, are not beautiful in the complete way possible to colors.

The clearer the comprehension of how thoroughly the perception of beauty is sense-dependent, the clearer becomes the dis-

inction between the acts of, on one hand, intuiting beauty and, on the other, abstracting scientific truth. For abstraction is the fruit of intellectual labor, whereas in the apprehension of beauty, "like a stag at a gushing spring, intelligence has nothing to do but drink; it drinks the clarity of being" (26).

As for the materialization of beauty, Maritain emphasizes that this is possible in "not just one . . . but a thousand or ten thousand ways" (27): Venus de Milo's arm is missing, a futurist's painted lady has a quarter of one eye, but in such instances, because what is present is sufficient for the particular case, integrity exists. Likewise, "Roualt's clowns are . . . perfectly proportioned in their genre" (27). For proportion, like integrity, can be understood only in relation to a given end. Isolated, it becomes an abstraction.

Similarly, radiance of form is ontological rather than conceptual, i.e., it resides in the work itself, whether accessible to the perceiver or not, and, in fact says Maritain, the more profound the radiance, the more hidden. But however hidden or evident, this radiance of form for the Schoolmen is both the principle of intelligibility and the proper principle of mystery, insofar as mystery exists when what is to be known exceeds our comprehension. Thus, "to define the beautiful by the radiance of the form is in reality to define it by the radiance of a mystery" (28).

Maritain points out that, as the radiance of form may be present in obscure as well as clear works, so may the radiance of mystery, although this latter naturally appears more strikingly in the obscurity of every genuinely new work. At any rate, clear or obscure, and to whatever degree a created thing may be beautiful, it is not equally discernible as such by its perceivers, for

it is beautiful under aspects not recognizable by all.

#### 1.4 The Transcendence of Beauty

Maritain observes that, although the beautiful shines forth from intelligibly disposed matter, it belongs equally to the order of the transcendentals, i.e., "objects of thought which transcend every limit of genus and category . . . [imbuing] everything and . . . found everywhere" (30). This specific transcendental presence in being, as one of its properties, "everywhere present and everywhere varied" (30), is evident in the delight found by the intellect in all which is.

Just as being is particularized, so is beauty in each thing which exists. But because it is transcendent, beauty draws the soul of its perceiver beyond the created, heavenward, and great art, because it occasions in its perceiver a sensing of and a thirsting for a plenitude of beauty which it only suggests, has been said by Baudelaire and Poe alike (32) to induce irritability and even sorrow, because we have not yet arrived at the destination to which it points. Furthermore, when a work tends towards this beauty rather than towards something serviceable, some means (a ship or a clock) to an end, then the realm of the fine arts is entered, where that which is made is an end in itself. And even if "it is material and enclosed in a genus, as beautiful it belongs to the kingdom of the spirit and plunges deeply into the transcendence and the infinity of being" (33).

Maritain says that fine arts are to the *genus* art as man is to the *genus* animal. Since both are points of encounter between matter and spirit, like man the fine arts have a spiritual soul, and their contact with the beautiful has modified in them certain characteristics of art in general, notably and not surprisingly

with respect to the rules of art, which cannot be expected to govern identically artifacts as dissimilar, for example, as Rouault's clowns and a pair of boots.

Developing further the consequences of his analogy between man and the fine arts, Maritain asserts that contact with the beautiful has also "[disclosed] and [carried] to a sort of excess other generic characteristics of the virtue of art, above all its intellectual character and its resemblance to the speculative virtues" (33). Nor is this surprising; fine artists materialize visions, bind beauty and matter, occasion delight. Ipso facto, their mode of operation cannot be a simple duplication of the blacksmith's, whose material and ends are well-defined by specific, everyday needs.

By way of further clarification, Maritain introduces an analogy between the fine arts and wisdom, both of which in addition to being ends in themselves are "ordered to an object which transcends man and which is of value in itself, and whose amplitude is limitless, for beauty, like being, is infinite" (33). The fine arts and wisdom are further linked by their relation to contemplation, although whereas wisdom's act is contemplation, the fine arts "aim at producing intellectual delight, that is to say, a kind of contemplation" (34), necessarily pre-existent in the artist.

However, a great difference exists as well, for Art belongs to the order of Making: "it is by drudgery upon some matter that it aims at delighting the spirit" (34). Therefore, although engaged in the business of incarnating the spiritual soul which characterizes fine art, the artist "must wear himself out among bodies" (34), participating fully for better or worse in the human condition. "Without enjoying the substance and the peace of

wisdom, he is [both] caught up in the hard exigencies of the speculative life, and . . . condemned to all the servile miseries of practice and of temporal production" (35).

Maritain emphasizes that the results of both the wiseman's and artist's efforts can only be relatively delightful, because neither agent is capable of satiating more than partially the hunger and thirst of the human spirit. As for art specifically, it is "folly to seek in [it] the words of eternal life and the repose of the human heart; the artist, if he is not to shatter his art or his soul, must simply be an artist, what God wants him to be - a good workman" (36).

Concluding his considerations on beauty and art, Maritain observes that the modern world has seduced the artist with its promises, and left him barely able to survive. He cites the two principles upon which, for him, the age is founded: "the *fecundity of money* and the *finality of the useful*" (36), which have destroyed man by stranding him on a treadmill of never-ending need, destroying the soul's leisure and making of material goods ends in themselves, thus preventing man from discovering his spiritual identity and kinship. But, in spite of these conditions, the artist's vocation by nature leads to beauty and thus back to the lost, true direction. Indeed, it is Maritain's prediction that through the artist's "disinterested activity, the human race will live" (37).

### 1.5 The Rules of Art

When he turns to the discussion of art's rules, Maritain says that "the whole formal element of art consists in the *regulation* which it imprints on matter" (38). Indeed, the ancients regarded fixed rules as part of art's essence [38], although

these are not "conventional imperatives imposed on art from without, but the ways of operation peculiar to art itself, the ways of working reason, ways high and hidden" (38). Maritain compares these rules to preexisting paths through a tangled thicket, which must be discovered (176). Inhering in the *habitus*, the virtue of art, they are the tools of the artist, through which he "holds . . . matter and the real", and although he may act above them it will only be "in conformity with a higher rule and a more hidden order" (39).

To convey more exactly the elusive nature of these rules, Maritain contrasts them with Descartes' concept of "method as an infallible and easy means of bringing to the truth 'those who have not studied' and society people" (40). The rules likewise differ as much from Leibnitz's "logic and language whose most wonderful characteristic is that it *dispenses from thinking*", as from "the taste, the charming curiosity, the spiritual acephaly of the Enlightenment" (40).

In an egalitarian atmosphere, says Maritain, it is in such ways that *habitus* must be denied, for it is a virtue held by the few, as the ancients recognized, perceiving as they did that the access to beauty and truth is difficult, reachable only through a discipline capable of elevating the seeker so he may in some way become proportional in stature to that which is sought. For the ancients, the very idea of a method or set of rules would have seemed absurd, because they understood "rule" as something vital, live, for which no amount of theoretical knowledge could substitute. And it is precisely because of the visible consequences of the vast gap between method and living rule that gifted children and primitive people are easily recognized as being closer to the mode of operation of the artist in whom *habitus* inheres, than are

laureates in whom it has yet to sprout.

Wherever it does exist, however, *habitus* has begun with an inborn disposition, a spontaneous instinct, rooted in the "physical disposition of the body", which concerns the faculties of the senses, in particular "the imagination, the chief purveyor of art . . . gift par excellence by which the artist is born . . . so intimately bound up with the activity of the creative intellect that it is difficult in the concrete to distinguish the one from the other" (41). Even so, the imprint on the mind made through that natural gift's cultivation to the point where it becomes *habitus*, is of "an incomparably deeper quality . . ." (41).

The depth of the imprint of the individual *habitus* largely depends on the philosophy and form of education, which may even "atrophy the spontaneous gift" (41) if it is "rotten with recipes and clever devices," or "theoretical and speculative instead of being operative" (42), for the practical intellect can only develop by positing effects in being, rather than proving or demonstrating. (So true is this that he in whom the *habitus* is most fully developed may be the least capable of articulating it.)

In his concern for the consequences in education of correctly understanding *habitus* and the conditions most favorable for its development, Maritain asserts that since "art is a virtue of the practical intellect, the mode of teaching that by nature belongs to it is apprenticeship-education" (42) in which, exemplarily, the teacher is a helper, at the service of "the interior principle, the intellectual light present in the pupil, which is, in the acquisition of science and art, the *principle cause* or *principle agent*" (44).

In any case, since the fine arts are in contact "with being



and the transcendentals" (44), the student soon learns that the rules proper to them have peculiarities of their own. In partial explication, Maritain says that because "beauty, like being, has an infinite amplitude" (44), it conflicts in a way with an artistic genus, by its nature incapable of exhausting all the possibilities for expressing beauty. Thus, the artist "creates", i.e., "discovers a *new analogate* of the beautiful, a new way in which the radiance of form can shine on matter" (45). This new way, incarnate in his work, escapes the boundaries of existing genera, creating automatically a new genus, requiring further adaptation of perennial rules.

In effecting this rupture, the artist as creator employs *viae certae et determinatae*, those paths through the thicket "adapted and personal to the artist and designed to disclose themselves to one man only" (43), which he himself has never before employed. In doing so, he simultaneously breaks rank with himself, disconcerting others in the process.

But it is at precisely such moments, when a break is effected, that the proper life of the fine arts manifests itself: "the contemplative activity [is] in contact with the transcendental" (45). As the new discovery, however, is exploited by "the merely operative activity [talent, cleverness, pure technique], little by little the genus exhausts itself, materializing formerly living and spiritual rules" (45). Change will once again be called for, a genius required, if art is to live. And art may not even be the better for a given change.

Maritain cites Rembrandt as a bad, though successful artist, and even if some believe that art declined in quality, in spirituality, and in purity "from Bach to Beethoven and from Beethoven to Wagner" (45), Maritain does not question their necessity to

music, for "art has a fundamental need of novelty: like nature, it goes in seasons" (46).

In completing his discussion of art's rules, Maritain, in order to clarify the role of the appetite in art, once again turns to the analogy of the virtues of art and prudence. He reminds us that whereas straight appetite (which is the whole truth of the practical intellect) in prudence implies "the power of willing and loving, in relation to man's end or in the line of morality" (46), in art its meaning refers only to the power to will and labor for the good of that which is created.<sup>12</sup>

The appetite in the case of the fine arts, therefore, tends not towards beauty as general end, but towards the "particular end which rules [the artist's] present activity and in relation to which all the means must be ruled" (46). It is according to this specific end, this particular and original realization of beauty, that judgments must be made, in a process involving more than reason alone: "a *good disposition of the appetite* is [also] necessary, for everyone judges of his own ends in accordance with what he himself actually is" (46). Having based himself here on Aristotle<sup>13</sup> and Aquinas<sup>14</sup>, Maritain goes on to affirm that the virtue of art by nature overflows from the intellect, into the sense faculties and imagination of the whole man, for

if all of the artist's powers of desire and emotion are not fundamentally straight and exalted in the line of beauty, whose transcendence and immateriality are superhuman, then human life and the humdrum of the senses, and the routine of art itself, will degrade his conception (47).

In a word, the artist must love what he is making, so that beauty may "inviscerate itself in him through affection . . . and his work may come forth from his heart and his bowels as well as

from his lucid spirit" (47). This unwavering love Maritain calls "the supreme rule" (47). But, he concludes, love presupposes intellect; without it love can do nothing, and, in tending towards the beautiful, love in that same movement tends to what delights the intellect.

Although the nature of love and intellect do not vary, the mode of ruling matter changes with each new end proposed, which makes of prudence and the fine arts in this respect analogues of one another. However, it is also true that the *viae certae et determinatae*, the unique, immutable, most fundamental mode of expression characteristic of each artist, that which stamps all of his works alike, no matter how different among themselves, do not change.

As Maritain portrays him at work, the artist seems, in contrast with the paint-spattered, not infrequently outrageous figure of the popular imagination, more like a stealthy hunter. Proceeding with "prudence, *eubulia*, good sense and perspicacity, circumspection, precaution, deliberation, industry, memory, foresight, intelligence and divination" (47), the artist moves towards a new realization of beauty through the application of old and unchanging rules, in a way which he himself could not have foreseen. Only thus, says Maritain, is the ruling of the virtue of art infallible and, by way of suggesting the intensity of the struggle involved, he quotes Degas: "A painting is a thing which requires as much cunning, rascality and viciousness as the perpetration of a crime" (48).<sup>15</sup>

Summing up his commentary on the rules of art, Maritain writes: "In the end, all the rules having become connatural to him, the artist seemingly has no other rule than to espouse at each moment the living contour of a unique and dominating intui-

tive emotion that will never recur" (48). This activity is regulated by artistic prudence, which Maritain calls a "spiritual sensibility", in the absence of which, "to the extent that the rules of the Academy prevail, the fine arts revert to the generic type of art and to its lower species, the mechanical arts" (48).

### 1.6 The Purity of Art

The purpose of art, according to what Maritain calls "Aristotle's celebrated and generally misunderstood observation" (49) is to purify the passions. For their part, the Schoolmen purified the notion of beauty by stressing unceasingly the primacy of intellect, reason, as the first principle of all human works, including the work of art.<sup>16</sup> Maritain adds that since they establish Logic as the first among the liberal arts, the Schoolmen "are telling us that in every art there is a sort of *lived* participation in Logic" (49), thus the ugliness of all clutter, e.g., in architecture.

In stressing this point, Maritain cites Rodin: "Everything in art is ugly which is false, which smiles without motive, everything that is senseless affectation, everything that struts and prances, everything that is but parade of beauty and grace, everything that lies" (50).<sup>17</sup> For the truth of art, according to the ancients through John of St. Thomas, is in its conformity to rules which exclude such artifice.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, says Maritain, all art

must be steeped in logic: not in the pseudo-logic of clear ideas, and not in the logic of knowledge and demonstration, but in working logic, always mysterious and disconcerting, the logic of the structure of the living and of the intimate geometry of nature. (50)

In order to clarify better the difference between "pseudo-logic" and the mysterious and disconcerting logic of living structures, Maritain recalls that "if the choir of a Romanesque church was destroyed by fire, they rebuilt it in Gothic, without further thought" (51). He also describes both the *Summa* of Aquinas and Notre-Dame de Chartres as marvels of logic, noting further that "flamboyant Gothic itself remains averse to veneer, and the extravagance in which it exhausts itself is that of the elaborate and torturous syllogisms of the period" (50).

As has been seen, according to Aquinas "the perfection of the virtue of art consists in the art of judging" (51). Thus, manual dexterity, although requisite, is as extrinsic to the virtue as it is to the *habitus*. In fact, says Maritain, as a muscular habit, capable of substituting for the guidance of the intellectual *habitus*, skill is a "permanent menace to art" (51) since it may block the influx of art from the intellect. Conversely, an awkward stroke may reveal the spiritual virtue at its source. Thus the charm of the primitive arts whose clumsiness is "a sacred weakness through which the subtle intellectuality of art reveals itself" (51). Thus, also, the wonder of the medieval cathedrals, no two halves of any one of which are symmetrical, and whose technical problems were resolved ad hoc as they arose, by artists/artisans working without benefit of plans on paper (none existed, and vellum was rare and costly), comfortably set out well in advance, and all the other accoutrements of their successors.

In a time of plenitude of material means, and progress in scientific technique, the previously well-worn road of access to the dwelling place of the *habitus* has sprouted weeds that flourish freely because, says Maritain, man is by nature inclined to

living *in sensibus* anyway. In his opinion, "beyond a certain limit, whatever removes a constraint removes a source of strength, and whatever removes a difficulty removes a source of grandeur" (58). And, in fact, who bothers to expend energy in search for hidden solutions, and the riches they may contain, when effortless ones are at hand?

Just as Maritain celebrates the works of medieval artists/artisans as examples of the results of *habitus* cultivated to plenitude, so does he lament an aesthetically contrary development in sixteenth century art which, paraphrasing his own words, may be called the installation of the lie, signifying that painting, infatuated with science, adopted imitation as its ultimate aim and endeavored "to give the *illusion* of nature and to make us believe that in the presence of a painting we are in the presence of the scene or the subject painted, not in the presence of a painting" (52). Maritain points out that such great classicists as Raphael (1483-1520), Greco (1541-1614), and Watteau (1684-1721) succeeded in purifying art of this lie in which, Maritain says, the realists and to a certain extent the impressionists, delighted.

As another example of fundamental repudiation of the lie, he points to Cubism, which "despite its enormous deficiencies" (52), "recalled painting to itself" by recalling it "to the essential exigencies of art in general" (53). He says that a few of its practitioners demonstrate "the most noteworthy effort towards the logical coherence and the simplicity and purity of means that properly constitute the veracity of art" (53).

Maritain claims that the issue "rather violently posed" by Cubism is exactly that of imitation which, as has been seen, is precisely what art is not. For art consists in making, "in accordance with the law of the very object to be posited in being"

(53). Therefore art is destroyed when imitation is conceived of as its essential end.

And here the name of Plato enters the discussion, he who, because of his theory of imitation, misconstrued, "like all exaggerated intellectuals" (53), the nature of art, and consequently held poetry in contempt. Rightly so, says Maritain, for "if art were a *means of science*, it would be tremendously inferior to geometry" (53).

It is nevertheless true that imitation bears a relation to art which, although the latter was no doubt prompted by "the pleasure of reproducing an object with exactness" (54) in the reindeer age when man traced animal forms on cavern walls, has long since undergone a process of purification, by which that original joy of imitation has been modified. For fine art aims at producing "the joy or delight of the intellect through the intuition of the sense" (54). But the intellect's delight in this case stems from the perception of beauty, and is therefore different from that proportioned by the true (occasioned by successful imitation), or by the simple act of knowing.

The delight specific to the perception of fine art, as has been seen, overflows in the act of recognizing beauty through the intuition of the senses, "when the object upon which [the act of knowing] bears is well proportioned for the intellect" (54). It is a delight, therefore, which presupposes knowledge, an increase in which implies increased possibility of delight, which (Maritain steadfastly insists) does not "at all depend on the perfection of imitation as reproduction of the real, or on the exactness of representation" (55).

Thus imitation, like manual dexterity, bears a relation to art, although not constituting it. Similarly, the sensible signs

of art (words, meters, rhymes and rhythms, masses and forms, etc.): these are only material, therefore remote, elements of the beauty of a work of art, which must still be intelligibly arranged by the artist, and on which he must yet "make shine the radiance of a form" (56).

For this reason, when he restricts his aim to material imitation, the artist enslaves himself to a lesser god because, with respect to reality, art is by nature sovereign, concerned exclusively with manifesting her hallmark: form. When the artist successfully imitates this, he is simultaneously constituting that formal element of art by which is expressed some secret principle of intelligibility. Shining forth on suitably proportioned matter, it is this secret principle which according to Maritain "gives art its value of *universality*" (57).

Continuing his discussion on the relation between beauty and the intellect, Maritain observes that when the intellect rejoices in the presence of a beautiful work, discourse is absent, for the radiance of form suggests rather than reveals, expressing what is beyond the power of ideas to signify. Nevertheless, in the case of the visual arts, which involve the most cognitive of the powers of knowing (intellect and sight), "a stricter necessity of imitation or signification imposes itself extrinsically" (58). Intellect and sight, because they are "most drawn to the object, cannot experience complete joy if they do not know, in a sufficiently lively manner, some object - doubtless a sign itself in its turn - which is signified to them by mass, color, or words" (58).

One or another aspect of the work must therefore be legible and, Maritain points out, between a clear and an obscure poem, if the poetic value is equal, the soul will derive more enjoyment from the first. For, although clarity and obscurity are condi-



tions formally extrinsic to art, "if the obscurity becomes too great, if the signs are no longer but enigmas, the nature of our faculties protests" (58). It is, then, within the range short of imitation, at one extreme, and of utter obscurity, at the other, that the artist operates, doing his necessary violence to nature.

Returning to the subject of form, since, as we have seen, "the imitative arts aim neither at copying the appearances of nature, nor at depicting the 'ideal', but at making an object beautiful by manifesting a *form* with the help of sensible signs" (59), the next question is: from whence does form derive? Answers Maritain, "first and above all [from] the immense treasure house of created things, [from] sensible nature as also [from] the world of souls, and [from] the interior world of [the artist's] own soul" (59).

Certainly the artist's power of sight is more penetrating than most, for, as Rodin put it, "*His eye grafted on his heart reads deep into the bosom of nature*" (195),<sup>19</sup> acquiring thereby an existential knowledge of forms and secrets to which he is "docile and faithful" and which cannot be expressed unless he "[distorts] in some measure, [reconstructs, transfigures] the material appearances of nature" (60). In this way what is expressed, even in a portrait perfectly resembling its subject, is "a form engendered in the spirit of the artist and truly born in that spirit" (60).

Through a "spiritual marriage" joining "the activity of the artist to the passivity of a given matter" (60), a new creature is born, the work of art, which is capable of affecting other souls. In his role, therefore, the artist imitates the Creator, whose work, rather than copying, he continues in his own. For just as God is stamped in creation, so is the artist in his work,

his conception having emerged from within his soul.

The artist, says Maritain, is the pupil of God, as well as of the masters who preceded him, thus he cherishes and bases himself upon nature "because it is a derivation of the divine art in things" (61). And what he imitates in nature is "the creative agility of the spirit" (61). Or, as Degas put it, "the model is there only to set me on fire, to enable me to do things that I could not invent without it. . . . And [I fail] if I throw myself too much into it" (61).<sup>20</sup> In other words, the function of the artist is, far from copying nature or expressing himself, to imitate a quality of the spirit.

If art must defend itself against slavish imitation or the ascendancy of manual dexterity, it is also threatened when the artist's first concern is creating a beauty which merely pleases, aimed above all at arousing emotion. For, as we have seen, the highest delight experienced in the presence of art is that of the soul. Therefore, any intention, no matter how well meant, which is extrinsic to the work and yet acts directly on it, escaping expression through the *habitus*, renders the work impure, because

[it] prevents the work of art from springing from the heart . . . spontaneously like a ripened fruit; it betrays a calculation, a duality between the intellect of the artist and his sensibility, which two, art . . . wants to see united. (63)

Here, Maritain ringingly declares: "I resist an emotion which [another] will . . . seeks to impose on me" (63). Rejecting manipulation, what he seeks to share with the artist is, having contemplated the object laid before him, "the emotion which in him and me springs from a same beauty, from a same transcendental which we communicate" (63). And to exemplify the artistic spirit which makes this experience possible, Maritain

cites the cathedral builders, who he claims harbored no theses, nor did their work with an eye to arousing pious emotion or demonstrating "the propriety of Christian dogma" (63), and who "even thought a great deal less of making a beautiful work than of doing good work" (63). As this was their sole concern, says Maritain, their work reveals God's truth.

### 1.7 The Problem of Christian Art

Christian art, says Maritain, can only be defined "by the one in whom it exists and by the spirit from whom it issues" (65). It is "the art of redeemed humanity . . . [which is] at home wherever the ingenuity and the joy of man extend" (65). Maritain concedes its difficulty, fourfold he says, because to be an artist is not easy, nor is being a Christian, and the total difficulty is the result of one multiplied by the other. Complicating the matter further, since the artist is affected by the spirit of the times, when these are not Christian the challenge is that much greater. On the other hand, however, Christian art is found wherever purity exists in art, which is therefore (regardless of its cultural roots) Christian in its hope, because "every spiritual radiance is a promise and a symbol of the divine harmonies" (66).

Such art, says Maritain, proceeds not from the Muses, but from God, and is a "symbol of supernatural inspiration" (66). At God's pleasure the artist's inspiration is conceded through the soul, about which Maritain observes that "nothing is more accessible to supra-human influences, to inspiration properly so-called (whether of the natural or of the supernatural order) than this fluid and violent world" (211). (Maritain does not distin-

guish the sub-conscious from the soul.)

Based on these considerations, Maritain concludes that to make a Christian work of art it is necessary to be a Christian, bent on fashioning a "beautiful work, into which [one's] heart will pass" (66). As for dissociating the art from Christ, that is impossible anyway, providing art has not been isolated from the soul "by some system of aesthetics" (66). Ideally, when a Christian artist is at work, the product is one only, ruled by the undivided soul, creating through the *habitus*. On the other hand, "if [he] were to make of [his] aesthetic an article of faith, [he] would spoil [his] faith . . . [or if he] were to turn desire to edify into a method of [his] art, [he] would spoil [his] art" (66).

For Maritain, two conditions guarantee Christian beauty in art: right disposition of the appetite with respect to the beauty of the work, and Christ's presence through love in the artist's soul. Thus, "the quality of the work [becomes] the reflection of the love from which it issues and which moves the virtue of art instrumentally" (67). The more vibrant the love, the more Christian the art. In fact, says Maritain, "Christian work would have the artist, as man, a saint" (67). And, of course, what can issue from such soil could never be summed up in technique or rules. Anything, an infinity of forms, is possible.

But where are such artists? According to Maritain, they can only be found in the great stream of contemporary art from which, for as long as their effort does not "spring spontaneously from a common renewal of art and sanctity in the world" (69), it cannot be separated.

Maritain readily concedes that art is not made easier by being Christian for, as we have seen, this very condition impedes its access "to many facile means" (69). But, argues Maritain

(reiterating what he has previously observed about the relationship between constraint and strength, difficulty and grandeur), while this fact on one hand complicates matters, on the other it forces into existence new levels of beauty, "more delicious than light . . . [giving art] what artists need most . . . - simplicity, the peace that renders matter docile to men and fraternal" (69).

### 1.8 The Relationship between Art and Morality

Maritain makes a distinction between artist/man in the relation of the one person to the work-to-be-made. For the artist, morality does not bear upon what he is creating. Of course, the use for which the object is intended imposes requirements which the work must satisfy, because without respecting them, proportion (as we have seen, one of the elements of beauty) would be lacking. But even so, for the artist qua man who wields the brush or labors with the chisel (or at the typewriter or any other means of expression) the work can never be an end in itself, since as its creator is a moral being in the specifically Christian sense, his beatitude is to be found in the vision of God, to whom his work must always represent a closer approximation in love. While his art, nevertheless, is as sovereign as wisdom in its own domain, it simultaneously exists in and is freely used by the subject man and is accordingly "subordinate to the end of man and to the human virtues" (71). For this reason, says Maritain, it is subject to an "extrinsic control, imposed in the name of a higher end which is the very beatitude of the living being in whom it resides" (71). This control is assumed to be exercised naturally, since "the law has become the [Chris-

tian artist's] own interior inclination" (71) and, consequently, to him nothing offensive to God could be conceived of as beautiful.

Maritain here introduces an analogy between the two aspects of control exercised by the artist/man over his work and, basing himself on Aristotle<sup>21</sup> and Aquinas<sup>22</sup>, the dual control imposed on an army, first by its own intrinsic order and second, that imposed by its commander, which determines movement and is ordered to victory. Since the first aspect of order is subordinate to the second, the latter is the nobler of the two.

To these two aspects, Maritain also compares what he calls "the social common good", which is the province and aim of the engineer, tradesman, etc., and the superior common good of the universe, i.e., "God", properly the concern of the artist and metaphysician. Thus, their superiority: in touch as they are with the transcendental order of beauty and truth, the service they render to the community is greater than that of the engineer and the tradesman.

In the specific case of the artist, while his noble function does not necessarily demand that he isolate himself from the city, or exclude human aims from his work, his main responsibility is, therefore, through the strength of his *habitus*, to "dominate [in every case] his matter without losing anything of its loftiness and purity, and to aim, in the very act of making, at the sole good of the work, without being turned aside or distracted by the human ends pursued" (73).

Thus, although from his normal and indispensable interaction with the surrounding community and environment the artist both finds the matter of his work and arrives at certain proximate human ends, which the work itself cannot disregard, he must at the same time be able to distinguish clearly between what as

workman he is aiming for, as opposed to what the work, as it is being brought into being, requires for its own beauty. However, a distinction cannot be made in practice between the workman and the artist. The purity of the work, therefore, depends on the *force* of the *habitus* which reconciles both the aesthetic demands and human end of the work.

As for the distinction between art and the material condition from which it arises, although on the one hand transcendent as the spirit and unbounded as the beautiful, art resides initially in an incarnate soul which, in contact with a specific human society, pace by pace over long seasons, gradually matures. Influenced by history and tradition, the offshoot of a given time and place, art itself (no less than the artist) is a creature of time. And the deeper the mark of the natural environment on art, the more universal it is, this property (along with all the other spiritual virtues) threatened only when a given nation becomes a "*metaphysical and religious* cult [seeking] to enslave the intellect to the physiology of a race or to [its own] interests" (75).

This is so because art is a function of values, which are determined by that value which is highest, the god-in-effect. If that value is spiritual, progress (defined by Aquinas as the tending of any nature in the direction of its Principle<sup>23</sup>) will ultimately be likewise spiritual, i.e., a movement from lesser towards greater ends which express ever greater spiritual values: "to civilize is to spiritualize" (75).

Of course, material progress may or may not be at the service of this higher progress and, therefore, may or may not benefit art. If employed for the soul's leisure, the peace which is the condition for contemplation and its fruit, greater spiritual-

ization results and greater possibilities exist for the flourishing of art. But in the service of unrefined human nature and its characteristically blind passions, i.e., the will to power, or greed, which is by nature insatiable, progress propels both art and the world itself toward dissolution.

In any case, however, art is indispensable to the human community. For, as Aquinas (following Aristotle) wrote: "nobody can do without delectation for long. That is why he who is deprived of spiritual delectations goes over to the carnal" (75).<sup>24</sup> And because art begins in the sensible, and thus by nature adapted to the requirements of man, it is most able to lead him beyond itself, in the direction of the spiritual, even preparing him remotely for contemplation which in the view of Aquinas seems to be the end of all human operations.<sup>25</sup>

As for the problem of classifying artists and their works, Maritain maintains that a hierarchy of different types of art is feasible only from the "human point of view of their properly civilizing value, or of their degree of spirituality" (76). Thus his own list begins with Holy Scripture and the Liturgy, going down through the writings of the mystics to "art properly so-called: the spiritual fullness of mediaeval art, the rational harmony of Greek and classical art, the pathos-laden harmony of Shakespearean art" (76). Even romanticism, tainted for Maritain by its "deep-seated lack of balance and its intellectual indigence" (76), as the "instinct of the heart" maintains the concept of art through its imaginative and verbal richness. As for naturalism, for a time almost devoid of the concept of art, it then reappears, "cleansed and sharpened, with new values" (71).

When he discusses the demands on the artist himself, if the high ends of increased spiritualization and "remote preparation for contemplation" are to be reached, Maritain warns that these



are by no means trivial. For the artist must submit to a type of asceticism which does not exclude the possibility of heroic sacrifice. He must be ruthless in the service of the ends of his art, consciously resisting at every turn the "banal attraction of easy execution and success" (78), and unwavering in the cultivation of his *habitus* which, however strong, never ceases to be delicate in its dependence on the constancy of the acts which are its only sap. The vitality of the *habitus* demands, furthermore, that the artist subject himself spiritually to a nomadic existence, ever in search of more difficult terrain, once the fertility of a previous one has been demonstrated in the fruit he has enabled it to yield. Insecurity is what the artist must seek, barren land.

With respect to his art, major virtues are indispensable: "humility and magnanimity, prudence, integrity, fortitude, temperance, simplicity, ingenuousness" (78). Thus it happens that, in speaking or writing of his work, the artist "easily takes on the tone of a moralist" (78), for his existence as artist depends on the preservation of a virtue. Or, as Jean Cocteau put it, "We shelter in ourselves an Angel whom we constantly shock. We must be the guardians of this angel. Shelter well your virtue" (78).<sup>26</sup>

However, as a man, the artist must at the same time recognize in his work not an end in itself but a creature like himself, existing ever in relation to the Ultimate Good. In fact, it is only from this standpoint that the Prudent Man, for his part, is qualified to judge art at all (79). His concern with art is from morality's angle, i.e., as it relates to the good of man. With respect to art, that is where his competence ends.

In connection with his comment on the Prudent Man, Maritain

calls attention to the fact that Prudence as a moral virtue is superior to art which, however, because it aims at beauty and therefore resembles the speculative virtues is more splendid intellectually and superior metaphysically. According to Aquinas, this is so because speculative virtues are ends in themselves, and not ordered to any use.<sup>27</sup>

For Maritain, while Art is sovereign with respect to its objects (unlike science, which is subject to wisdom), with respect to the human subject Prudence has sole domain. Therefore, over Art's objects both Art and Prudence have legitimate claims: one from the point of view of poetic or working values, the other from that of human values and moral regulation of the free act. Correct valuation of a given work requires the judgment of both Art and Prudence. But, again, the acts of each proceed from distinct sets of values.

Maritain, having discussed the relation between the Artist and the Prudent Man, then observes that the Contemplative and the Artist, having more in common, are less likely to have difficulty understanding one another. Sharing the intellectual nature of their respective virtues, they are consequently bound to the transcendental order.

Since it is the business of the contemplative to seek the first cause in things, inevitably he is an intimate of beauty, understanding by connaturality the artist. And, reciprocally, at least by intuition the artist will recognize in the contemplative a spiritual kinsman. In fact, dedicated as the artist is to beauty, regardless of the moral quality of his life he is "oriented in the direction of subsisting Beauty" (80) by the nature of his *habitus*.

This same *habitus*, however, by no means guarantees the artist smooth relations with the Prudent Man, for concerning

overlapping claims of Art and Prudence, clashes can only be eliminated completely by Wisdom, which judges from the point of view of God, for whom Doing and Making exist side by side, in the harmony of the lion and lamb of Isaiah's prophecy. But man is imperfect in Wisdom, at which he can only aim. Therefore, perfect reconciliation is not always attained, as in the time of the Italian Renaissance, when Prudence was sacrificed to Art, and of the nineteenth century, when "right-thinking" circles, having made of Respectability the supreme value, did precisely the opposite. And it is here that, without summary or conclusion, as if Maritain were temporarily stopping a discussion shortly to be continued, Art and Scholasticism ends.

#### 1.9 Summary

From the standpoint of Jacques Maritain and the thinkers he represents, Art, while pertaining to the practical order and directed towards action, is equally an intellectual quality which rules making and results from constant work. This quality, according to context termed either "virtue" or "*habitus*", necessarily precedes in order of existence the work of art itself.

As a quality, a subsisting modification of the intellect, art's characteristic act is judging, in which it is infallible. But art's infallibility does not guarantee that the power to make will itself be properly used, a determination which depends on the disposition of the will.

For the ancients, no distinction was made between art and the fine arts, except that, insofar as the latter required bodily labor, they were considered to be servile, as opposed to the liberal arts, the products of which result from exclusively

mental labor. To arrive at the category of fine art, Maritain therefore relies on Aquinas's first definition of beauty, which is by its effects.

For Aquinas, beauty is that which, when seen, pleases. Thus, beauty is first grasped intuitively, through the senses. But the ultimate delight occasioned by the perception of beauty is the intellect's which, for Aquinas, is a result of the similarity between (1) the "light" emanating from the materialization in things of three qualities: integrity, proportion, and radiance, and (2) the "light" of the intellect itself.

Besides being that which, when seen, pleases, and the sum of certain qualities incarnate in objects, beauty is also an object of thought, a transcendental which, when materialized in an art object, becomes a place of encounter between matter and spirit, like man himself.

Art, that in which beauty resides, is an end in itself, ordered to the transcendent object beauty, and by nature destined to produce delight. But equally, since it belongs to the order of making, art demands drudgery among bodies, full immersion in the human condition. The marks of this humble origin, limiting absolutely what can be expected of art's fruit as sources of delight, are indelible in each work. Furthermore, in the same way that the product of his work cannot exceed a certain level of perfection, the highest condition to which the artist himself can legitimately aspire is to be a good workman. If this condition is met, the product of his labor will be beautiful.

The rules of art are neither fixed nor conventional imperatives, but ways of operating peculiar to art itself, hidden modes of working reason inhering in the *habitus*, paths discernible only as the artist proceeds. They are his tools: vital, live, to be confused with neither taste nor method.

As for the *habitus*, it originates in the "physical disposition of the body", manifesting itself as a spontaneous instinct. Whatever else this inheritance may encompass, the main element, the gift par excellence, is the imagination, whose consistent activity is synonymous with the development of the *habitus*.

Because art is a virtue of the practical intellect, it must be trained by positing effects in being and is, therefore, best developed through apprenticeship. But in addition it requires: 1) knowing the tradition of the discipline; 2) education by the masters; and 3) the experience of the continuity in time of human collaboration.

When the artist succeeds in creating a new analogate of beauty, in that very act he is breaking with a previously existing artistic genus. Moreover, it is at this exact point that the proper life of the fine arts manifests itself, i.e., contemplative creativity in contact with the transcendent.

As the artist goes about his work, his appetite must be directed solely by the good of that which he is making, rather than towards the creation of beauty as an end in itself. Of course, the good of the work varies with each new end proposed, an end by which he must allow himself to be guided as he rules his matter. But an artist's characteristic mode of expression is as unvarying as his fingerprint.

In every art there is a "lived participation in logic", corresponding to the intellect's foremost role in each human work. In fact, the very perfection of the virtue of art is in the act of judging, as opposed to mere manual dexterity, which is extrinsic to the *habitus*. So true is this that, beyond a certain point, progress in technique and material means may actually thwart the development of *habitus*, by eliminating the constraints

that are the sources of strength.

Another threat to art is imitation, which endangers the simplicity, logical coherence, and purity of means which are the veracity of art. The only element legitimately imitated by an artist is form, that agility of the spirit which is lost when what is sought first is to please, to arouse emotion. The capacity of an individual to perceive form, to experience delight in a work of art, depends on his knowledge: the greater it is, the greater the delight. But the possibility for delight also depends on the intelligibility of the form. When excessively obscure, the faculties protest.

Christian art is defined solely by the spirit from which it proceeds. Therefore all art characterized by purity is, regardless of its cultural roots, Christian in its hope. Such art, supernaturally inspired, is symbolic of the Divine from whence it ultimately springs. By this same token, it is condemned from the start if the artist makes of a system of aesthetics an article of faith, or succumbs to the desire to edify.

Art is sovereign in its own domain, but since it exists in and is freely used by man, it is subordinate to man's own end, and to the human virtues. Within this broader context, it is thus not an end in itself. Therefore, in the process of dominating his matter, the artist must lose sight neither of the requirements of the work, nor of what he as workman requires. Possible conflicts between the two must be resolved by the *habitus*.

Art is transcendent as the spirit and unbounded as the beautiful, but also, like the artist himself, both time- and place-bound. Thus, like man himself, Art is mortally threatened by enforced ideologies and nations-as-cults, i.e., imposed absolutes, for art is a function of values and depends, therefore, on the god-in-effect. But in any case, art is indispensable because

man's nature demands delight, and if none of a spiritual nature are available, lesser ones will be found.

The artist's mission is to assist his fellow man in attaining to higher realms of spirituality, by proportioning him opportunities for experiencing delight. Such an exalted mission, and the requirements of art itself, demand of the artist a certain asceticism: he must 1) resist easy success; 2) unwaveringly cultivate his *habitus*; and 3) constantly seek uncultivated ground, in spite of the concomitant insecurity.

Finally, the artist, in spite of his lofty mission, characterized as it is by contact in his work with the transcendental, must recognize in its product a simple fellow creature which, like himself, the artist-as-man, is ultimately subject to the dictates of prudence.

#### 1.10 Conclusion

Art and Scholasticism ends abruptly, mid-topic, as if shortly to be continued in the established rhythm. But, exactly as it was, the relatively brief text had been sufficiently impressive for Flannery O'Connor to have recommended it repeatedly, with unbridled enthusiasm.

Before going on to her own writings, one thinks of some questions for which Maritain's essay may have provided satisfactory answers: what is art; what is an artist; how is he to be taught; how does an artist work; what rules does he follow; what is his relationship with his environment; what is his objective; from whence does his inspiration arise?

In Mystery and Manners, O'Connor writes: "Art is a word that immediately scares people off, as being a little too grand"

(65), and it certainly seems not unlikely that, to have made such an observation at all, she had at one time counted herself among their number. If this is so, we may imagine that, as she accompanied Jacques Maritain through the steps of his dialectic, both the sublime and the earthbound faces of art were showing themselves ever more clearly, at the same time progressively sapping the word "art" of its power to intimidate. One may conclude that, at the end of her reading, the questions which O'Connor likely had had--and perhaps felt were common to many--had been satisfactorily answered.

For, as Art and Scholasticism makes clear, who is an artist if not everyman insofar as he goes about his daily work single-mindedly, with unmeasured painstaking making whatever it may be? Thus, Maritain's synthesis in effect amounts to (at least from the point of view of those who may require one) a demystification, rendering "artist" and "art" friendly words, pedestrian even, to be applied with confidence to all who make with care, to be used with ease by all with an eye for that which is well-made, and a desire to talk about it.



## Notes

- (1) Throughout Art and Scholasticism "art" is capitalized or not according to a criterion which appears to have been highly personal. Maritain's usage, however, has been respected in the paraphrasing.
- (2) *Metaphysics*, Bk. II, 995 b 21, ctd. in Maritain.
- (3) *II Metaphysics*, lect. 2., ctd. in Maritain.
- (4) *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 55, 3, ctd. in Maritain.
- (5) *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 55, 3, a. 2, ad 1, ctd. in Maritain.
- (6) *Cursus Theol.*, q. 62, disp. 16, a. 4, ctd. in Maritain.
- (7) *Summa theologiae* I-II, 57, 3, ctd. in Maritain.
- (8) *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 57, 4, cited in Maritain.
- (9) Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, VI, ctd. in Maritain.
- (10) *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 27, 1, ad 3, qtd. in Maritain.
- (11) *Summa theologiae*, I, 39, 8, ctd. in Maritain.
- (12) Cajetan, *IN* 1-11, 5 ad 3, ctd. in Maritain.
- (13) *Eth. Nic.*, III, 7, 1114 a 32, ctd. in Maritain.
- (14) *Commentary*, lect. 13; *Summa theologiae* I, 83, 1, ad 5, ctd. in Maritain.
- (15) Qtd. by Etienne Charles in *Renaissance de l'Art francais et des industries de luxe*, No. 2, April, 1918; reqtd. by Maritain.
- (16) *Summa theologiae*, 58, 2, ctd. in Maritain.
- (17) Quoted in *Rodin* (Paris: Grasset, 1911), edited by Paul Gsell; reqtd. in Maritain.

- (18) *Curs. theol.*, t. VI, q. 62, disp. 16. a. 4, ctd. in Maritain.
- (19) Quoted in *Rodin* (Paris: Grasset, 1911); reqtd. in Maritain 195.
- (20) Quoted by Albert Andre in his book *Renoir* (Paris: Cres, 1919); reqtd. in Maritain.
- (21) *Met.*, XII, 10, 1075 a 15, ctd. in Maritain.
- (22) *Commentary*, lect. 12. Cf. *Summa theol.*, I-II, 111, 5, ad 1, ctd. in Maritain.
- (23) Thomas Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, d. 18 q. 2,2, ctd. in Maritain.
- (24) *Summa theologiae*, II-II, 35, 4, ad 2, qtd. in Maritain 75.
- (25) *Summa contra Gent.*, III, 37, ctd. in Maritain.
- (26) *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*, 1918 (*Le Rappel a l'Ordre*, Paris: Stock, 1926), qtd. in Maritain.
- (27) *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 66, a. 3, ad 1, ctd. in Maritain.

Chapter II: Echoes of Art and Scholasticism  
in O'Connor's Essays, Letters, and Interviews

A reading of Flannery O'Connor's Mystery and Manners proves to be a reencounter with a great number of the ideas expressed in Art and Scholasticism. Of course, the idiom greatly differs: typically terse, consistently chaste, effectively employing simple words to express what O'Connor had to say, none of which was either academic or trite, nor unnoticed by her contemporaries.

Of the most concentrated source of her comments and reflections on art, the essays compiled in Mystery and Manners, Frederick Asals writes in Critical Essays on Flannery O'Connor: "[They are] direct and unpretentious", as well as being "free from cant and filled with quiet assurance". Furthermore, "[they] often [glow] with her finest awareness". "Unlike Faulkner," concludes Asals, "she did not (to use the polite term) 'mythologize' her role or her works in her remarks on them" (50).

For Saul Maloff, a contributor to the same book, O'Connor in Mystery and Manners showed herself

as a writer of fiction reflecting on craft and art who in perfect confidence took herself and her work as sufficient instances of general problems about which universal assertions can be made, and when, in violation, almost, of her native temperament, she addressed herself to more theoretic questions - of regionalism, of being a Southern writer, of the 'grotesque' in fiction, and especially of the vexed problem of religious belief, particularly Catholic belief and its

relations to literature - she did so, one feels, as much because no one else could, or cared to, as because of the great pressures they exerted upon her as she practiced and sought to perfect her distinctive, recalcitrant art. (54)

Maloff further states that Mystery and Manners is "a steady expansion of implication and statement to the point where the ideas essential to her life and art gathered towards the makings of something like a system" (54), reminiscent therefore of what Aquinas, Aristotle, and the ancients had done, in the texts that Maritain sifted as he elaborated the project which became Art and Scholasticism.

But, of course, O'Connor was writing in the twentieth century, so we may expect fresh mintings of ideas of ancient lineage, datings that the passage of time and the evolution of thought make inevitable. For example, *habitus*, that frequently found word denoting a venerable concept, consistently italicized in Art and Scholasticism to distinguish it from "habit" by emphasizing its purely intellectual nature: with customary lack of ceremoniousness, O'Connor simply replaces it with "habit", e.g., "What interests the serious writer is not external habits but what Maritain calls, 'the habit of art'; and he explains that 'habit' in this sense means a certain quality or virtue of the mind" (MM 64-65).<sup>1</sup>

As the reader may observe, in this chapter the order of the subjects considered approximates the order in which they appear in Maritain's work.

## 2.1 On Art and the Habit of Art

Flannery O'Connor's art was fiction writing, one which she perceived as misunderstood by not a few: "people don't know what they are expected to do with a novel, believing, as so many do, that art must be utilitarian, that it must do something, rather than be something" (MM 123). Connor's understanding of her own branch of art clearly differs: "all I mean by art is writing something that is valuable in itself and works in itself. The basis of art is truth, both in matter and mode. The person who aims after art in his work aims after truth, in an imaginative sense, no more and no less" (65).

The first part of this statement obviously accords with Maritain's text: "the work to which fine arts tend is ordered to beauty; as beautiful, it is an end, an absolute, it suffices of itself" (A&S 33).<sup>2</sup> However, a difference seems to arise when O'Connor states that the artist "aims after truth" imaginatively. Is his aim not "the good of the work", and is truth not the province of the speculative, rather than the practical, intellect? But Maritain had also distinguished between "the *truth of the speculative intellect*, which consists in *knowing*, in conformity with what is, and the *truth of the practical intellect*, which consists in *directing*, in conformity with what ought to be according to the rule and measure of the thing to be effected" (13). Thus, "the truth of the practical intellect" refers to a mode of procedure, and concisely expresses the entire process of bringing about the good of the work.

But, before being either a mode of procedure or an object, according to O'Connor art is a habit, and fiction writing, like all other arts,

is something in which the whole personality takes part

- the conscious as well as the unconscious mind. Art is the habit of the artist; and habits have to be rooted deep in the whole personality. They have to be cultivated . . . over a long period of time, by experience . . . . I think that [the habit of art] is a way of looking at the created world and of using the senses so as to make them find as much meaning as possible in things. (MM 101)

Here, although she begins by citing what Maritain calls "the habit of art", O'Connor demonstrates her own earthy understanding of what Maritain goes to such lengths to restrict to the realm of the spiritual, calling it as he variously does "[a] metaphysical [title] of nobility", an "intrinsic [superelevation] of living spontaneity", a "vital [development] . . . which [fills the soul] with an active sap" (A&S 11).

Such definitions make it possible to qualify *habitus* as infallible, irrespective of its visible product, because they refer exclusively to the formal element, i.e., the regulation by the mind, of the work. Whatever imperfections the final product may present will have to be ascribed by Maritain's reckoning to "the hand", i.e., the body or material conditions of art's production (A&S 13).

For her part, O'Connor agrees that art is a habit, and calling it that, rather than *habitus*, in no way seems to make it less pivotal and operative, in spite of "[residing] in the nerve centers" and "[attesting] the weight of matter" (MM 11).

## 2.2 On the Function of Reason in Art

Maritain's text emphasizes that art's characteristic act is

to judge. According to O'Connor, for the writer of fiction one of the judgments that this act characteristically translates into is the selection of detail, which must be not the "simple, mechanical piling-up of detail" but rather an accumulation controlled by "some overall purpose, and every detail has to be put to work . . . . Art is selective. What is there is essential" (MM 93).

O'Connor cites strictly naturalistic works of fiction as loci of detail used because "it is natural to life, not because it is natural to the work", as opposed to the use of detail in genuine works of art, where "we can be extremely literal, without being in the least naturalistic. [For the truthfulness of art] is the truthfulness of the essential" (MM 70). The writer of fiction, therefore, must steadfastly draw a line between detail expressing the essential which is "natural to the work", and clutter.

But the act of selection extends to every small item employed in the construction of a fiction:

The novelist makes his statements by selection, and if he is any good, he selects every word for a reason, every detail for a reason, every incident for a reason, and arranges them in a certain time-sequence for a reason. He demonstrates something that cannot be demonstrated any other way than with a whole novel. (MM 75)

On this subject, O'Connor is adamant: "A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate" (MM 96). O'Connor cannot make this plain enough: "When you can state the theme of a story, when you can separate it from the story itself, then

you can be sure the story is not a very good one" (96). Again: "When anybody asks what a story is about, the only proper thing is to tell him to read the story" (96).

For O'Connor to emphasize this point so strongly and in such a variety of ways, she was certainly persuaded that every word in a well-told story implies a choice, the result of a judgment, again, the act characteristic of the artist. Nor should her vehemence be surprising: as Maritain had written of artists, "all that deviates from the straight line of their object galls them; hence their intransigence - what concession could they admit of? They are fixed in an absolute" (A&S 12).

### 2.3 On Art as a Source of Delight

Flannery O'Connor demonstrates her belief that art by its nature is a source of delight when she criticizes those who understand literature principally as a puzzle, to be dissected in each of its specimens: "I think something has gone wrong . . . when, for so many . . . the story becomes simply a problem to be solved, something which you evaporate to get Instant Enlightenment" (MM 108). In a letter to an unnamed professor of English, she writes that the meaning of a story is not subject to capture by an interpretation anyway, but, on the contrary, likely to expand in the reader's mind, the more he reflects upon it (The Habit of Being 437).<sup>3</sup> In this same letter, she identifies the problem created by English teachers whose manner of dealing with fiction is inappropriate to its nature: "If teachers are in the habit of approaching a story as if it were a research problem for which any answer is believable so long as it is not obvious, then I think students will never learn to enjoy fiction" (HB 437).



O'Connor, however, was certainly not opposed to literary analysis, although "too much interpretation is certainly worse than too little, and where feeling for a story is absent, theory will not supply it" (HB 437). For her, in fact, interpretation is simply a means to enjoyment: "Properly, you analyze to enjoy" (MM 108). But satisfactory analysis presupposes enjoyment: "to analyze with any discrimination, you have to have enjoyed already" (108).

For O'Connor, fiction writing is an art, and its product another material residence of beauty, the sign of whose presence is the readers' delight. In language as poetic as it is philosophic, Maritain had described the experience of delight proportioned by the intuition of artistic beauty:

The intelligence, . . . diverted from all effort of abstraction, rejoices without work and without discourse. It is dispensed from its usual labor; it does not have to disengage an intelligible from the matter in which it is buried, in order to go over its different attributes step by step; like a stag at the gushing spring, intelligence has nothing to do but drink; it drinks the clarity of being. (A&S 26)

For O'Connor, he who has not yet experienced in a work of fiction the satisfaction of a "stag at [a] gushing spring", is not prepared to analyze. Such a reader is comparable to someone visually impaired before a masterpiece in a gallery.

#### 2.4 On the Role of the Senses in Art

In A&S, Maritain initially concedes only with a certain reluctance the roll of the senses in the perception of beauty, art's prime characteristic. First, he says that "beauty is essen-

tially an object of *intelligence*, for that which *knows* in the full sense of the word is intelligence, which alone is open to the infinity of being" (23). However, before beauty can be thus known, from its natural dwelling place in the intelligible world, it first "descends. But it also, in a way, falls under the grasp of the senses, in so far as in man they serve the intellect and can themselves take delight in knowing" (23). Only after having established beauty's origin does Maritain grant, and surprisingly generously, considering his original reluctance, that "the part played by the senses in the perception of beauty is even rendered enormous in us, and well-nigh indispensable, by the very fact that our intelligence is not intuitive, as is the intelligence of the angel" (23). Ultimately, in order to distinguish with maximum clarity the act of intuiting the "brilliance of form" which is beauty, from the act of abstracting scientific truth, Maritain ringingly declares: "beauty . . . no matter how purely intelligible it may be in itself, is seized *in the sensible and through the sensible*, and not separately from it" (25).

For O'Connor, on the other hand, the role of the senses in art is outright fundamental, without apology inseparable from her art, from start to finish:

[One] quality of fiction . . . I think is its least common denominator - [is] the fact that it is concrete . . . . [The] nature of fiction is in large measure determined by the nature of our perceptive apparatus. The beginning of human knowledge is through the senses, and the fiction writer begins where human perception begins. He appeals through the senses and you cannot appeal to the senses with abstractions. (MM

67)

This principle O'Connor repeatedly presents, approaching it from various angles, as if endlessly fascinated by what she evidently considers the splendid truth it conveys: "Fiction is supposed to represent life, and the fiction writer has to use as many aspects of life as are necessary to make his total picture convincing. The fiction writer doesn't state, he shows, renders" (HB 143). According to O'Connor, this is, very simply, the nature of the task, determined by the nature of fiction: "If you're writing about the vulgar you have to prove they're vulgar by showing them at it" (43).

What O'Connor means by "rendering" she demonstrates clearly in two sentences (from Flaubert's Madame Bovary), the second of which she says "always stops me in admiration":

She struck the notes with aplomb and ran from top to bottom of the keyboard without a break. Thus shaken up, the old instrument, whose strings buzzed, could be heard at the other end of the village when the window was open, and often the bailiff's clerk, passing along the highroad, bareheaded and in list slippers, stopped to listen, his sheet of paper in his hand. (MM 69)

In the previous sentence, according to O'Connor Flaubert has created "a believable village to put Emma in. It's always necessary to remember that the fiction writer is much less *immediately* concerned with grand ideas and bristling emotions than he is with putting list slippers on clerks" (MM 70).

For the writer, what corresponds to the obligatory and constant use of concrete detail in the construction of fictional worlds is the necessity of developing the power of observation: "learning to see is the basis for learning all the arts except music," says O'Connor. "I know a good many fiction writers who paint, not because they're any good at painting, but because it

helps their writing. It forces them to look at things" (MM 93).

For writers, therefore, O'Connor recommends the study of "logic, mathematics, theology, and of course and particularly drawing. Anything that helps you to see, anything that makes you look. The writer should never be ashamed of staring. There is nothing that doesn't require his attention" (MM 84), for "the first and most obvious characteristic of fiction is that it deals with reality through what can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched" (91). It is this reality, rearranged, that will result in the fictional world, but the fiction writer must be able first to describe the real world accurately, which presupposes having perceived it sharply, "in order to have the authority to rearrange it at all" (98).

In her considerations on the role of the senses in art, it is evident that O'Connor follows Maritain only as far as her own experience as a writer of fiction allows. Thus, for example, she makes no mention of beauty descending "from its natural dwelling place in the intelligible world". From wherever beauty does or does not descend, O'Connor evidently has perceived such speculation as irrelevant to her task as a writer of fiction.

## 2.5 On the Relationship between Fiction and Mystery

In spite of the fact that art begins with and is dependent fundamentally on the senses, O'Connor perceives the reach of one of these means of perception as supplemented in a perhaps unexpected way: "[although for] the writer of fiction everything has its testing point in the eye", this organ "eventually involves the whole personality and as much of the world as can be got into it" (MM 144). O'Connor notes further that "Msgr. Guardini has

written that the roots of the eye are in the heart. In any case, for the Catholic they stretch far and away into those depths of mystery which the modern world is divided about" (144-45).

Concisely, O'Connor describes what she understands as the consequences for the Catholic writer of fiction:

When fiction is made according to its nature, it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete, observable reality. If the writer uses his eyes in the real security of his Faith, he will be obliged to use them honestly and his sense of mystery and his acceptance of it will be increased. (MM 148)

For O'Connor, "all novelists are fundamentally seekers and describers of the real, but the realism of each novelist will depend on his view of the ultimate reaches of reality" (MM 40-41). Furthermore, such is her respect for concrete reality that she seems to ascribe to mere descriptions of it power to evoke that which lies beyond: "a writer may produce a great tragic naturalism, for by his responsibility to the things he sees, he may transcend the limitations of his narrow vision" (41).

In any case, what is clear from her writings is her unquestioning regard for sensible reality as the sole prime matter of fiction, regardless of the ultimate point to which it may lead the heart-rooted eye:

What the fiction writer will discover, if he discovers anything at all, is that he himself cannot move or mold reality in the interests of abstract truth. The writer learns, perhaps more quickly than the reader, to be humble in the face of what-is. What-is is all he has to do with; the concrete is his medium; and he will realize eventually that fiction can transcend its limitations only by staying in them. (MM 145-46)

This insistence on the precedence of "what-is", if mystery is to become manifest, clearly follows Maritain, for whom the form of things, "their operating mystery", their "ontological secret" (A&S 24), is "seized in the sensible and through the sensible, and not separately from it" (25). For the artist O'Connor, as for the philosopher Maritain, no other access to mystery exists.

Nor can mystery be disassociated from the activity and purpose of the novelist: "the art of the novel . . . is something that one experiences alone and for the purpose of realizing in a fresh way, through the senses, the mystery of existence" (HB 143). Fiction, therefore, "is the concrete expression of mystery" (144), but only because "The fiction writer is an observer, first, last, and always" (MM 178).

## 2.6 On the Humility of the Fiction Writer's Task

Flannery O'Connor seems to have been constitutionally incapable of dramatizing either herself or the type of work she did: "There has been no interesting or noble struggle. The only thing I wrestle with is the language, and a certain poverty of means in handling it, but this is merely what you have to do to write at all."<sup>4</sup> She was equally unfazed by the task confronting fellow practitioners of the art: "Fiction writers engage in the homeliest, and most concrete, and most unromanticizable of all arts" (MM 53). And just as the Schoolmen, according to Maritain, had attributed the virtue of art, "the intrinsic development of reason, the nobility of intellect" not only to Phidias and Praxiteles, but to "the village carpenter and blacksmith as well" (A&S 20), so did O'Connor, reciprocally, describe fiction writing as "heavy labor" (MM 69), echoing Maritain's description of

the artist's toil with matter as "drudgery" (A&S 34).

For the type of heavy labor that is his lot, the fiction writer's sensibility, no matter how fine, or psychological perception, no matter how acute, alone are as insufficient as they would be to the work of a carpenter or blacksmith. A writer not yet cognizant of this sobering fact "will put down one intensely emotional or keenly perceptive sentence after the other, and the result will be complete dullness" (MM 68), dull because empty, devoid of the stone and mortar with which the fiction writer by the nature of his art is condemned to work:

The fact is that the materials of the fiction writer are the humblest. Fiction is about everything human and we are made of dust, and if you scorn getting yourself dusty, then you shouldn't try to write fiction. It's not a grand enough job for you. (MM 68)

The fiction writer, made of dust, must express his vision through that which is likewise made of dust, for "any abstractly expressed compassion or piety or morality in a piece of fiction is only a statement added" (MM 75). Where abstraction begins, fiction ends and, with it, the suffering: "Writing a novel is a terrible experience, during which the hair often falls out and the teeth decay" (77), in manifestations analogous to the aching back of the blacksmith, and strained muscles of the carpenter.

O'Connor makes clear that if Manicheanistically inclined persons are to suffer falling hair and tooth decay, novel writing will unlikely be the cause:

The Manicheans separated spirit and matter. To them all material things were evil. They sought pure spirit and tried to approach the infinite directly without any mediation of matter. This is also pretty much the modern

spirit, and for the sensibility infested with it, fiction is hard if not impossible to write because fiction is so very much an incarnational art. (MM 68)

A country lady shows thorough understanding of this principle when she observes of some of O'Connor's stories, lent to her by the writer herself: "Well, them stories just gone and shown you how some folks *would* do" (MM 90). Notes O'Connor: "I thought to myself that that was right; when you write stories, you have to be content to start exactly there - showing how some specific folks *will* do, *will* do in spite of everything" (90).

O'Connor reveres this principle so much that she singles out for one of her memorable blasts would-be writers of fiction who have not yet perceived its significance:

[Showing how some folks "will do"] is a very humble level to have to begin on, and most people who think they want to write stories are not willing to start there. They want to write about problems, not people; or about abstractions, not concrete situations. They have an idea, or a feeling, or an overflowing ego, or they want to Be A Writer, or they want to give their wisdom to the world in a simple-enough way for the world to be able to absorb it. In any case, they don't have a story and they wouldn't be willing to write it if they did; and in the absence of a story, they set out to find a theory or a formula or a technique. (MM 90-91)

Certainly theories, formulas, or techniques, if they were compatible with the nature of fiction writing, would lighten the burden of novelists, but as matters stand, the load continues heavy: "One reason . . . people find it so difficult to write stories is that they forget how much time and patience is re-



quired to convince through the senses" (MM 91). Only dust, in multitudinous forms constituting that variegated reality accessible through sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, is capable of persuading the reader of fiction. Therefore the fiction writer, like the spider, cannot skip any step in the process of weaving his web:

The fiction writer has to realize that he can't create compassion with compassion, or emotion with emotion, or thought with thought. He has to provide all these things with a body; he has to create a world with weight and extension. (MM 92)

O'Connor notes that Henry James has named the sin of fiction writers insufficiently concerned with detail "weak specification." Thus, "the eye will glide over their words while the attention goes to sleep" (MM 92). Analogously, what is it reasonable to expect of the work of a carpenter, potter, or portrait painter habitually inattentive or indifferent to the fine requirements of his craft and the possibilities of his materials?

## 2.7 On the Rules of Art and their Consequences for the Fiction Writer

Maritain had compared the rules of art to preexisting paths through a tangled thicket, which must be discovered, "ways of operation peculiar to art itself, the ways of working reason, ways high and hidden" (A&S 38). O'Connor, who cites Wise Blood as having been written by an author "congenitally innocent of theory" (MM 114), portrays her own procedure when writing fiction as groping through just such a thicket. Declaring herself a

non-believer in theorizing, O'Connor goes on: "In the end you do just what you're able to and don't know what has been done."<sup>5</sup>

Showing just how uncharted the fiction writing adventure can be, O'Connor observes: "If you start with a real personality, a real character, then something is bound to happen; and you don't have to know what before you begin. In fact it may be better if you don't know what before you begin" (MM 106). This statement seems to imply that knowing where one is going in writing fiction may not be so hazardous after all. But O'Connor continues: "You ought to be able to discover something from your stories. If you don't, probably nobody else will" (106).

In an interview, when asked whether she worked on her novels from an outline, O'Connor could hardly have provided a more vivid answer: "Well, I just kind of feel it out like a hound-dog. I follow the scent. Quite frequently it's the wrong scent, and you stop and go back to the last plausible point and start in some other direction."<sup>6</sup> In this same interview, O'Connor at most concedes knowing in advance the direction she is going in, "but you don't know how you'll get there" (quoted in Magee 19). And, certainly, to establish its theme before telling a story is an inversion in the order of procedure: "the theme is more or less something that's in you, but if you intellectualize too much you probably destroy your novel" (19). It's necessary to begin with the story, because "then you've got something" (19). The corollary, of course, is that without the story, one has nothing.

O'Connor's experience as a fiction writer obviously persuaded her that, in venturing through the thicket, the writer of fiction should be the lightest of travelers: "I don't have [Wise Blood] outlined and I have to write to discover what I am doing. Like the old lady, I don't know so well what I think until I see what I say; then I have to say it over again" (HB 5). Graphical-

ly she describes the struggles in the thicket, states their aim, and what they actually are: "I was five years on Wise Blood and seven on [The Violent Bear It Away], and in that time you turn and twist and try it every possible way and only one thing works. What you are really twisting about is in your limitations, of course" (HB 353).

O'Connor disclaims any other mode of procedure, again declaring: "I don't have any theory of literature", but "simply keep doing things the wrong way over and over until they suddenly come out right. . . . That's one reason why I'm such a slow worker."<sup>7</sup> O'Connor notes that in the seven years which went into the writing of The Violent Bear It Away, other literary projects were also undertaken which, however, never resulted in more than two short stories yearly.

Prior to setting out to the literary struggle, the creation of the "formal piece", O'Connor does, however, admit to requiring a certain minimum: "I have to have a 'story' in mind - some incident or observation that excites me and in which I can see fictional possibilities" (qtd. in Donner 47). An example of what O'Connor means is in her account of the origins of her short story "Good Country People":

When I started writing that story, I didn't know there was going to be a Ph.D. with a wooden leg in it. I merely found myself one morning writing a description of two women that I knew something about, and before I realized it, I had equipped one of them with a daughter with a wooden leg. As the story progressed, I brought in the Bible salesman, but I had no idea what I was going to do with him. I didn't know he was going to steal that wooden leg until ten or twelve lines before

he did it, but when I found out that this was what was going to happen, I realized that it was inevitable.

(MM 100)

Thus "Good Country People" sprang from a description of two women, known somewhat. Fully bloomed, it had required almost no rewriting: "It is a story that was under control throughout the writing" (MM 100), a control that O'Connor describes as not entirely conscious, just as, according to Maritain, the rules of art themselves are hidden and obscure (and, therefore, mysterious).

Arranging her modest working material--the incident or observation with fictional possibilities--does not dispense O'Connor from what corresponds for writers to the daily gymnastics practiced by an athlete: "I do try to write at least three hours every morning, since discipline is so important" (qtd. in Donner 47). In fact, according to O'Connor, these are the only preparations possible, prior to the struggle in the thicket itself, where technique can only be described, at least in the best stories, as "something organic that grows out of the material and . . . is different for every story of any account that has ever been written" (MM 67), "not something you learn and apply to what you have to do; it is a way of making something."<sup>8</sup> Approaching the same subject from a different angle, she says: "The only way, I think, to learn to write [fiction] is to write [it], and then to discover what you have done. The time to think of technique is when you've actually got the [work] in front of you" (MM 102).

Describing the writing of her second novel, she reflects on how the active participation of the Divine might affect the process and reaches a characteristically earthy conclusion:

Stories get to be written in different ways, of course,

but The Violent Bear It Away was discovered in the process of finding out what I was able to make live. Even if one were filled with the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost would work through the given talent. Even if [He] dictated a novel, I doubt very much that all would be flow . . . [or] that the writer would be relieved of his capacity for taking pains (which is all technique is in the end); I doubt that he would lose the habit of art. (HB 387)

But, paradoxically, the ultimate results of the habit of art, i.e., the exercise of the will and the capacity to take pains of a certain sort, are by no means rationally predictable at every step in the process. On the contrary, they are bound to be a revelation: "If a writer is any good, what he makes will have its source in a realm much larger than that which his conscious mind can encompass and will always be a greater surprise to him than it can ever be to his reader" (MM 83). A concrete example of what O'Connor means follows:

From my own experience in trying to make stories "work," I have discovered that what is needed is an action that is totally unexpected, yet totally believable, and I have found that, for me, this is always an action which indicates that grace has been offered. And frequently it is an action in which the devil has been the unwilling instrument of grace. This is not a piece of knowledge that I consciously put into my stories; it is a discovery I get out of them. (MM 118)

Finally, the experienced O'Connor confesses the strict limits within which she feels capable of saying something about her art:

I have very little to say about [fiction] writing. It's one thing to write [fiction] and another thing to talk about writing [it], and I hope you realize that . . . asking me to talk about [fiction writing] is just like asking a fish to lecture on swimming. The more [fiction] I write, the more mysterious I find the process and the less I find myself capable of analyzing it. Before I started writing [fiction], I suppose I could have given you a pretty good lecture on the subject, but nothing produces silence like experience, and at this point I have very little to say about how [fiction is] written. (MM 87)

The little O'Connor does have to say speaks for the hidden nature of the process, which mirrors the hidden nature of what, for Maritain, are the rules to which the process corresponds. Furthermore, these rules of difficult access must be sought and sought again. Like fingerprints, they do not repeat themselves but rather are "determined according to the contingency of singular cases . . . in an always new and unforeseeable manner" (A&S 47-48). Only the next work of art will reveal, at least in effect, what the latest ones have been. The fiction writer will have found them in the only way he can: by taking pains.

## 2.8 On Art as a Gift

Flannery O'Connor understood as the "peculiar burden of the fiction writer [the fact] that he has to make one country do for all and that he has to evoke [it] through the concrete particulars of a life that he can make believable" (MM 27). But the ability to do this she regards as a vocation, i.e., "a limiting factor which extends even to the kind of material that the writer

is able to apprehend imaginatively" (27). Thus, the writer is not free to make live the object of his choice, but only that which falls within the capacity of his imagination's intuitive understanding. That within these limits he can confer life constitutes both vocation and gift.

According to O'Connor, "The Christian writer particularly will feel that whatever his initial gift is, it comes from God" (MM 27) and "is a mystery in itself, something gratuitous" (81). Thus, the capacity to confer life imaginatively precedes any and all effort and education, "there [being] no excuse for anyone to write fiction for public consumption unless he has been called to do so by the presence of a gift" (81). Absolutely nothing can make up for its lack: "no amount of sensitivity can make a story-writer out of you if you just plain don't have a gift for telling a story" (77). Or then: "the ability to create life with words is essentially a gift. If you have it in the first place, you can develop it; if you don't have it, you might as well forget it" (88).

The following anecdote shows O'Connor at her most matter-of-fact in addressing this subject:

[While talking to a group of students] one of the (them) asked me, "Miss O'Connor, why do you write?" and I said, "Because I'm good at it," and at once I felt a considerable disapproval in the atmosphere. I felt that this was not thought by the majority to be a high-minded answer; but it was the only answer I could give. I had not been asked why I write the way I do, but why I write at all; and to that question there is only one legitimate answer. (MM 81)

As for the peculiar nature of her fiction, O'Connor ex-

plained it in an equally homely manner: "a graduate student . . . wants to know why my stories are grotesque: are they grotesque because I am showing the frustration of grace? It's very hard to tell these innocents that they are grotesque because that is the nature of my talent" (HB 328).

O'Connor writes that the novelist, if he is "to portray reality as it manifests itself in our concrete, sensual life," besides having "been given the initial instrument, the talent" (MM 170), must ceaselessly cultivate it:

no matter how long [the novelist] has written or how good he is - [he is always involved in] the endless process of learning how to write. As soon as the writer "learns to write," as soon as he knows what he is going to find, and discovers a way to say what he knew all along, or worse still, a way to say nothing, he is finished. (MM 83)

On the other hand, since "possibility and limitation mean about the same thing" (MM 170) the fiction writer, although called to develop to its highest possibilities his gift, cannot exceed its limits. Thus, in utilizing the novel as their form, "Hemingway had to test his manhood . . . and V. Woolf had to make it a laboratory, and A. Huxley a place to give lectures in. Given themselves I don't suppose any of them could have written any other way" (HB 451).

But, according to O'Connor, neither would attempting to exceed the real limits of their gifts have served any good purpose, since "the novel [can only be] a product of our best limitations. We write with the whole personality, and any attempt to circumvent it, whether this be an effort to rise above belief or above background, is going to result in a reduced approach to reality" (MM 193). Thus, the good of the artist's work requires



that the natural gift be both exercised in the plenitude of its reality and respected in the reality of its limits.

For his part, Maritain had written: "[a] natural gift is . . . a pre-requisite of art, or again a rough outline . . . of the artistic *habitus*" (A&S 41). Aquinas, before him, had ascribed the disposition, the prevailing tendencies natural to each individual and distinguishing one from the other, to the physical makeup peculiar to each.<sup>9</sup> Rooted in that, says Maritain, is the imagination, the principle provisioner of art, the *gift par excellence* by which the artist is born - and which the poets gladly make their main faculty, because it is so intimately bound up with the activity of the creative intellect that it is difficult in the concrete to distinguish the one from the other. (41)

On this point, as seen above, O'Connor in her terse language obviously agreed.

## 2.9 On the Necessity of Knowing the Tradition

Although for Maritain apprenticeship is the type of education eminently proper to art as a virtue of the practical intellect, the fact remained that "for the immense amount of rational and discursive work that art involves, the tradition of a discipline and an education by the masters . . . is absolutely necessary" (43). O'Connor manifests a similar point of view, first, by denying the legitimacy of including in the study of literature incursions into either the psychology of the author, or the sociology of his work: "a work of art exists without its author from the moment the words are on paper, and the more complete the work, the less important it is who wrote it or why" (MM 126).

As an example of the shape that grounding in the tradition might take for a writer of fiction, the experience of O'Connor herself is recorded in a letter to "A.": "The only good things I read as [a fledgling] . . . were the Greek and Roman myths which I got out of a set of child's encyclopedia called The Book of Knowledge" (HB 98). Later on in her early years, O'Connor went through a period when her reading "consisted chiefly in a volume called The Humerous (sic) Tales of E. A. Poe" (98).

In the same letter, O'Connor writes that her serious reading began at the same time she began writing in graduate school: "when I went to Iowa I had never heard of Faulkner, Kafka, Joyce, much less read them. Then I began to read everything at once" (HB 98). Considering the extremely lean literary diet upon which O'Connor had theretofore subsisted, the list of authors which she then read is impressive: among the Catholics, first mentioned, are Bernanos, Bloy, Greene, Mauriac, and Waugh. She read "all the nuts like . . . Va. Woolf (unfair to the dear lady of course)," as well as "the best Southern writers like Faulkner and the Tates, K.A. Porter, [and] Eudora Welty" (98). There were the Russians: "not Tolstoy so much but Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Chekhov and Gogol" (98-99). She "totally skipped such people as Dreiser, Anderson (except for a few stories) and Thomas Wolfe" (99), but declares she "learned something from Hawthorne, Flaubert, Balzac and . . . Kafka, though I have never been able to finish one of his novels" (99). As for Henry James, she read almost all of his work, although "from a sense of High Duty and because when I read [him] I feel something is happening to me, in slow motion but happening nevertheless" (99). She admired "Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets". But always the largest thing that looms up is The Humerous Tales of Edgar Allan Poe" (99).

None among those whose work she read, however, does O'Connor

single out as being the major influence on her own work, for she had begun "to read everything at once, so much so that I [suppose I] didn't have time . . . to be influenced by any one writer" (HB 98). She had begun rather late her broad and intense explorations as a reader, yet interspersed as they were with writing, O'Connor underwent a highly concentrated apprenticeship, of the type described by Maritain as indispensable to the development of the artist.

In her own considerations about the necessity of knowing the tradition, O'Connor of course speaks as a writer of fiction. Concerned with the literary education of young readers in general (among these are the future writers), she recommends that the school system supply "a guided opportunity, through the best writing of the past, to come, in time, to an understanding of the best writing of the present" (MM 140). For her, fiction, "if it is going to be taught in high schools, should be taught as a subject, and a subject with a history" (138). She understood that "the effect of a novel depends not only on its innate impact, but upon the experience, literary and otherwise, with which it is approached" (138). Without such experience, the student, immersed thoroughly in the realities of his own time, "has no perspective whatever from which to view [other ones]" (138). As for the possibility of, in providing him with a broader perspective, coming into conflict with the student's taste, it disturbs O'Connor not at all: "His taste should not be consulted [anyway]; it is being formed" (140).

## 2.10 On the First Duty of the Artist

Maritain had written in a variety of ways that the artist's

first duty is to the good of his work. First, he hearkened back to the Schoolmen's distinction between Making and Doing, the former defined as "*productive action*, considered not with regard to the use which we therein make of our freedom, but merely *with regard to the thing produced* or with regard to the work taken in itself" (A&S 8). But when working with regard for the thing produced, *ad bonum operis*, "productive action" is synonymous with art. (In contrast, "all that turns [art] from this end perverts it and diminishes it" (15).)

However, to labor towards the good of anything is to love it. Therefore the artist's work constitutes an act of love: "the artist has to love, he has to love *what he is making* . . . so that his work may come forth from his heart and his bowels as well as from his lucid spirit" (A&S 47).

O'Connor, in prose of another flavor, demonstrates a like conviction: "No art is sunk in the self, but rather, in art the self becomes self-forgetful in order to meet the demands of the thing seen and the thing being made" (MM 82). In addressing a group of writing students, she speculates about their motivations: "To make money or to express your soul or to insure civil rights or to irritate your grandmother" (66), in contrast with her own: "[to bring about] the good of the written work" (66). Some of her most mordant criticism is reserved for writers with (from her point of view) lesser motivations: "I think it is usually some form of self-inflation that destroys the free use of [the writer's] gift.\* This may be the pride of the reformer or the theorist, or it may only be that simple-minded self-apprecia-

\* The writer is free to do whatever he chooses, but only as this is ordered to *the good of his work*. Similarly, "freedom is of no use without taste and without the ordinary competence to follow the particular laws of what we have been given to do" (MM 153).

tion which uses its own sincerity as a standard of truth" (82).

She effusively scorns writers who, having cast off the burden of reason's demands (and "St. Thomas [had] called art 'reason in making'" (MM 82)), fill the vacuum entirely with feelings' flux, whatever the form it may take:

If you have read the very vocal writers from San Francisco, you may have got the impression that the first thing you must do in order to be an artist is to loose yourself from the bonds of reason, and thereafter anything that rolls off the top of your head will be of great value. Anyone's unrestrained feelings are considered worth listening to because they are feelings. (MM 82)

But art is first *habitus*, consistent acts of judgment, from which the ego's noisy demands must be excluded:

Maritain says that to produce a work of art requires the constant attention of the purified mind, and the business of the purified mind in this case is to see that those elements of the personality that don't bear on the subject at hand are excluded. Stories don't lie when left to themselves. Everything has to be subordinated to the whole which is not you. Any story I reveal myself completely in will be a bad story. (HB 105)

Thus, a major obstacle to becoming a decent writer of fiction stands in the way of "a good many shiftless people" attracted to the activity but "burdened with poetic feelings or afflicted by sensibility" (MM 85), for art requires none of these.

Rather, according to Aquinas, it "is wholly concerned with the good of that which is made" (171). And when, says O'Connor,

the writer's attention is on producing a work of art, a

work that is good in itself, he is going to take great pains to control every excess, everything that does not contribute to this central meaning and design. He cannot indulge in sentimentality, in propagandizing, or in pornography and create a work of art, for all these things are excesses. They call attention to themselves and distract from the work as a whole. (MM 187-88)

Fervent Catholic that she was, O'Connor sees the discipline implied by the practice of the art of fiction as, at the minimum, a safeguard against forays of the devil: "[the] best defense against his taking over [prospective writers'] work will lie in their strict attention to the order, proportion and radiance of what they are making" (189). (Recall that order, proportion and radiance are beauty's three characteristics (A&S 24).) Indeed, fiction, made according to its own laws is an antidote to [the tendency to compartmentalize the spiritual and make it resident in a certain type of life only], for it renews our knowledge that we live in a mystery from which we draw our abstractions. The Catholic fiction writer, as fiction writer, will look for the will of God first in the laws and limitations of his art. (MM 151-152)

Thus, the artist's first duty, which is to the good of his work, when fulfilled results not only in art, but for O'Connor also conduces to a dimming of the line dividing the spiritual and material realms. In greater possibilities for perceiving both the divine will and the unity of creation, dedication to her art and fidelity to the duty it imposed seems to have yielded O'Connor something of the dividend suggested in A&S: "[the artist] in a way . . . is not of this world, being, from the moment that he works for beauty, on the path which leads upright souls to God

and manifests to them the invisible things by the visible" (37).

## 2.11 On Form and Literary Art

Form had been defined by Aquinas as that principle constituting the "proper perfection of all that is . . . in their essences and qualities" (A&S 24), a definition elaborated further by Maritain, who calls form "the ontological secret" borne within things, the "spiritual being, [the] operating mystery" and, above all, "the proper principle of intelligibility, the clarity of every thing" (24-25). Incarnate, form resides in, and is inseparable from, intelligibly arranged matter.

An example of literary work lacking form, in O'Connor's view, are the first eighty pages of Boris Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago:

There were a lot of wonderful things in [them] but I don't think I could have stood that much formlessness for however many hundred pages there were. A friend of mine reviewed it and said it was like a huge shipwreck with a lot of beautiful things floating in it. You are not supposed to feel at home or at ease in any of the forms you see around you. Create your own form out of what you've got, let it take care of itself. (HB 349)

At the other extreme, neither is art imitation, reflecting "with fidelity . . . the way things look and happen in normal life" (MM 39), within the context of existing social, economic, or psychological forces. (As Maritain had written: "Imitation is . . . precisely what art is not" (A&S 53).)

But if it is true that "all novelists are fundamentally seekers and describers of the real" (MM 40), it is also true

that reality is perceived and interpreted by individual subjectivities: "What one sees is given by circumstances and by the nature of one's particular kind of perception" (179). Furthermore, "the realism of each novelist will depend on his view of the ultimate reaches of reality" (40-41). At any rate, to whatever it may extend or whatever it may include, in communicating his particular vision, the fiction writer, by O'Connor's lights, is as free to be exactly as orthodox or innovative as his work demands, so long as it has vitality, "presents something that is alive, however eccentric its life may seem to the general reader" (39).

To illustrate concretely what she understands by vitality, O'Connor singles out that which for her is captured in children's drawings: "When a child draws, he doesn't intend to distort but to set down exactly what he sees, and as his gaze is direct, he sees the lines that create motion" which, for the writer, are usually "invisible . . . lines of spiritual motion" (MM 113). Such lines result from art's truthfulness: "the truthfulness of the essential that creates movement" (70), movement created when the storyteller "renders his vision" (162), i.e., "what he sees and not what he thinks he ought to see" (131). Such work requires an intrusion "on the timeless, and that is only done by the violence of a single-minded respect for the truth" (83). But this attitude and procedure for O'Connor is simply the artist's way of being reasonable, enabling him "to find, in the object, in the situation, in the sequence, the spirit which makes it itself" (82), in other words, the form, which may or may not require for its successful transmission the instrumentation of distortion and exaggeration (162). (For Maritain, the integrity and proportion of art can be understood "solely *in relation* to the end of the work, which is to make a form shine on matter" (A&S 28).)



This form, however, cannot be imposed, "as if [it] were something that existed outside of each story" (MM 101); rather, it grows organically out of the material. Therefore, if the story is good, it cannot be reduced, so integrally bound up is it with its matter:

In the act of writing, one sees that the way a thing is made controls and is inseparable from the whole meaning of it. The form of a story, determined step by step through the exercise of reason in art's characteristic act, gives it meaning which any other form would change. (129)

But meaning, for O'Connor, ultimately exceeds whatever the form in which it begins, just as mystery overflows from reality. Thus, "the fiction writer presents mystery through manners, grace through nature, but when he finishes there always has to be left over that sense of Mystery which cannot be accounted for by any human formula" (MM 153). Nevertheless, each instance of meaning's disembodying into mystery begins with meaning interwoven into, coming into existence simultaneously with, a specific form, that which is exactly the "proper perfection of all that is . . . in their essences and qualities" (A&S 24), or, in more familiar language, that which makes things what they are, wherever it is found, fiction included.

## 2.12 On Art and the Identity of Vision and Moral Judgment

For Maritain, the nature of art determines what morality is for the artist qua artist:

The sole question for the artist is not to be a weakling; it is to have an art which is robust enough and

undeviating enough to dominate at all events his matter without losing anything of its loftiness and purity, and to aim, in the very act of making, at the sole good of the work, without being turned aside or distracted by the human ends pursued. (A&S 73)

But if the artist's sole concern is the good of his work, the moral values reflected in it cannot have been, in a separate act, appended. Rather, since at least "in the greatest fiction, the writer's moral sense coincides with his dramatic sense, . . . moral judgment [can only be] part of the very act of seeing" (MM 31), i.e., perceiving whatever it is that in the course of his work the writer will render.

O'Connor admits the complexity of the moral basis of fiction as a concept and confesses: "I don't doubt that I contradict myself on it, for I have no foolproof aesthetic theory . . . [however] I continue to think that art . . . [has] a moral basis" (HB 123). This moral basis O'Connor identifies with "James' *felt life*, and not with any particular moral system" (124). The power to perceive it, O'Connor, however, attributes to belief, and therefore values\*: "Your beliefs will be the light by which you see [although] they will not be a substitute for seeing" (MM 91). Inversely, "for the fiction writer, to believe nothing is to see nothing" (HB 147).

On the other hand, O'Connor denies that she writes to convey a message, since "this is not the purpose of the novelist . . . . Rather, the message I find in the life I see is a moral message"

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\* "All our values depend on the nature of our God" (Maritain 75). The divine Christ, for example, is symbolized by a lamb, or a cross, which in turn symbolize qualities prized by Christians: docility, trusting submission to the designs of Providence, patience in suffering, etc. A god of war would obviously represent other values and be symbolized accordingly.

(147). Thus, just as the moral basis revealed in the light of belief and inseparable from observed life precedes fictional rendering, so also must "a piece of fiction . . . be very much a self-contained dramatic unit" (MM 75), "[carrying] its meaning inside it . . . [whereas] any abstractly expressed compassion or piety or morality in a piece of fiction is only a statement added" (75). For O'Connor,

you can't make an inadequate dramatic action complete by putting a statement of meaning on the end of it or in the middle of it or at the beginning of it. It means that when [writing fiction] you are speaking *with* character and action, not *about* character and action. The writer's moral sense must coincide with his dramatic sense. (75-76)

When Maritain described the artist's attempt to separate himself from his belief "absurd," he was writing of the Christian artist in particular, whose work is wholly derived from both belief and soul, of which he also wrote: "they are one" (A&S 66). O'Connor, for her part, in addition to extending Maritain's observation to fiction writers generically, emphasizes that for the writing of fiction religious fervor alone will not suffice: "Poorly written novels - no matter how pious and edifying the behavior of the characters - are not good in themselves and are therefore not really edifying" (MM 174). In these cases, the main work has not been done: "The novelist is required to create the illusion of a whole world with believable people in it", but a world in which "half or three-fourths of the facts of human existence" (175) are left out is not true, no matter which eminence may have created it. Such a work may manifest belief, but as the dramatic sense in which this is embedded is deficient, the

work itself testifies to its author's having "committed a grave inconsistency, for he is trying to reflect God with what amounts to a practical untruth" (174).

Another guarantee of division between the dramatic and the moral sense is created when the writer of fiction fails to make himself impervious to the modern reader's need for the "redemptive act, [the demand] that what falls at least be offered the right to be restored" (MM 48), but at bargain rates. Although, according to O'Connor, "the reader of today looks for this motion, and rightly so, . . . he has forgotten the cost of it", either because his "sense of evil is diluted or lacking altogether" (48). In reading a novel, "he wants either his senses tormented or his spirits raised. He wants to be transported instantly, either to mock damnation or a mock innocence" (48-49). But the fiction writer cannot labor solely for the good of his work, while keeping one eye on opportunities for satisfying such readers.

An example of artistic unity, threats to which O'Connor here specifies, was presented by Maritain when he described the attitude of the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages:

The cathedral builders did not harbor any sort of thesis. . . . They neither wished to demonstrate the propriety of Christian dogma nor to suggest by some artifice a *Christian emotion*. They even thought a great deal less of making a beautiful work than of doing good work. They were men of Faith, and as they were, so they worked. Their work revealed the truth of God, but without *doing it intentionally*, and because of not doing it intentionally. (A&S 63)

When O'Connor insists on the necessity of unity in the fiction writer's moral and dramatic sense, she implies in liter-

ary terms the necessity for the same characteristics attributed by Maritain to the medieval cathedral builders: good workers, at one with their beliefs.

### 2.13 On Art and Propaganda

The literary artist's requisite unity of moral and dramatic sense for O'Connor renders art and propaganda, as products of a writer's labor, mutually exclusive. While she agrees that Catholic writers may be (as she concedes Catholics generally suppose) "out to use fiction to prove the truth of Faith, or at the least, to prove the existence of the supernatural", she declines to impute such motives to any given writer, "except as they suggest themselves in his finished work" (MM 145). However, "when . . . finished work suggests that pertinent actions have been fraudulently manipulated or overlooked or smothered, whatever purposes the writer started out with have already been defeated" (145). For the fact is that the fiction writer "cannot move or mold reality in the interests of abstract truth" (145). On the contrary, "he learns, perhaps more quickly than the reader, to be humble in the face of what-is. What-is is all he has to do with; the concrete is his medium; and he will realize eventually that fiction can transcend its limitations only by staying in them" (MM 146). Nothing, the urge to proselytize included, justifies exceeding them.

For O'Connor, the writer who is Catholic and by that very fact already viewed with suspicion\* by many non-believers and

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\* As an example of this attitude, O'Connor presents, from an unspecified source, the following statement of writer Philip

believers of other persuasions, as well as potentially oppressed by the unjustifiable expectations of large numbers of his fellows in faith, "will be more than ever concerned to have his work stand on its own feet and be complete and self-sufficient and impregnable in its own right" (MM 146). But, again, such work demands that the moral sense be attached both to the dramatic sense and the "vision of what-is", and that none of this be separated from faith. Propaganda may result from such splits; artful fiction, which results only from the work of a "whole personality" (MM 156), cannot.

The making of great fiction for O'Connor requires the involvement of the "whole range of human judgment; it is not simply an imitation of feeling" (MM 156) but an arduous hunt, which must totally involve the writer, writing "neither for everybody, nor for the special few, but for the good of what he is writing", and who "looks on fiction as an art and . . . has resigned himself to its demands and inconveniences" (171). This hunt, rather than being for prospective converts to a given religion or ideology, has as its sole objective "a symbol for feeling . . . and a way of lodging it which tells the intelligent reader whether this feeling is adequate or inadequate, whether it is moral or immoral, whether it is good or evil" (156).

For O'Connor, both reality in itself and as re-presented in great fiction seems to be adequate enough testimony, propaganda sufficient for the existence of that which is unseen, to enable her to accept, together with Aquinas, "the work of art [as] a good in itself" (MM 171). She observes that Catholic novelists,

.....  
...Continued...

Wylie: "a Catholic, if he is devout, i.e., sold on the authority of the Church, is also brain-washed, whether he realizes it or not" (MM 144). From such an individual, first rate artistic creation could certainly not be expected.

because they have forgotten this truth, are not content "to stay within [their] limitations and make something that is simply a good in and by itself", but yearn to fabricate something "utilitarian" (171). Satisfying such a yearning O'Connor perceives as a defect, not only artistic but also of faith. For if one truly believes that "what is good in itself glorifies God because it reflects God", one should feel perfectly free to do his duty and attend to his art, to "safely leave evangelizing to the evangelists" (171), instead of "distorting [one's] talents in the name of God for reasons [judged] good - to reform or to teach or to lead people to the Church" (174).

Thus, for O'Connor, J. F. Powers, a born Catholic, is an example of a fine writer, despite writing about Catholics who are "vulgar, ignorant, greedy, and fearfully drab", characteristics which O'Connor admits "have an unmistakable Catholic social flavor" (MM 173). Far from wanting to embarrass the Church, Powers writes about such people "because, by the grace of God, he can't write about any other kind". And again she reminds us: "A writer writes about what he is able to make believable" (173), and if this is not always very pleasant, the writer has no business trying to "tidy up reality" anyway (177). To presume to do so, for O'Connor, is "certainly to succumb to the sin of pride" (178).

But should he want to show the supernatural in action, for O'Connor, again, the only way the writer can do it is "on the literal level of natural events, and . . . if he doesn't make these natural things believable in themselves, he can't make them believable in any of their spiritual extensions" (MM 176). O'Connor, in this connection, cites St. Gregory, who "wrote that every time the sacred text describes a fact, it reveals a mys-

tery" and it is this, she continues, that "the fiction writer on his lesser level hopes to do" (184). However, the danger exists for the writer who is spurred by the religious view of the world . . . that he will consider this to be two operations instead of one. He will try to enshrine the mystery without the fact, and there will follow a further set of separations which are inimical to art. Judgment will be separated from vision, nature from grace, and reason from imagination. (MM 184)

As for the consequence of being a Catholic for the writer of fiction, O'Connor regards it as a unique liberation:

Those who have no absolute values cannot let the relative remain merely relative; they are always raising it to the level of the absolute. The Catholic fiction writer is entirely free to observe. He feels no call to take on the duties of God or to create a new universe. He feels perfectly free to look at the one we already have and to show exactly what he sees. He feels no need to apologize for the ways of God to man or to avoid looking at the ways of man to God. (MM 178)

As has been seen, Maritain, in writing about the undivided purpose of the cathedral builders of the middle ages, had observed that they harbored no theses. For him, their only purpose was to do good work, but since they were "men of Faith, so they worked. Their work revealed the truth of God, but without *doing it intentionally*, and because of not doing it intentionally" (A&S 63). For Maritain, any constriction of the intellect which impedes the artist from working single-mindedly for the good of his work constitutes a threat to art, a threat which is mortal when it proceeds from a "*metaphysical and religious* cult of the nation which would seek to enslave the intellect to the physiolo-



gy of a race or to the interests of a State" (75). But religion can bind intellect just as effectively, and Maritain seems to have admired the cathedral builders precisely because, for him, this had not been their case. On the contrary, their intellects were entirely absorbed in accomplishing as best they could their work, for its own sake, and certainly it must have been from contemplating the medieval cathedrals that Maritain reached the conclusion multiply echoed in O'Connor's writings: "If you want to make a Christian work, then *be* Christian, and simply try to make a beautiful work, into which your heart will pass; do not try to 'make Christian'" (66).

#### 2.14 On Art's Human Roots

Although art, like civilization, philosophy, and science, is universal, transcending as does the spirit, "every frontier of space or time, every historical or national boundary", Maritain affirms that "it does not reside in an angelic mind . . . [but] in a soul which animates a living body" (A&S 74). If, therefore, the artist is dependent for his learning and progress on the existence and support of the society of which he is a part, so is his art unthinkable without "everything which the human community, spiritual tradition and history transmit to the body and mind of man". Consequently, "by its human subject and its human roots, art belongs to a time and country". Furthermore, the clearer the mark of its country, the more universal and greater the work (74). About the fundamental importance of this relationship Maritain manifested no doubt: "attachment to the natural environment, *political and territorial*, of a nation is one of the conditions of the proper life and therefore of the very univer-

sality of the intellect and art" (75).

On this same point, Flannery O'Connor writes, for example, that if, on one hand, "to call yourself a Georgia writer is certainly to declare a limitation," on the other it is a limitation which, like all [others], is a gateway to reality" (MM 54). Then, too, for the writer "perhaps the greatest blessing . . . [is] to find at home what others have to go elsewhere seeking," and O'Connor offers the examples of Faulkner ("at home in Oxford") and Eudora Welty ("locally underfoot, as she puts it, in Jackson" (54)) as two of the many, including herself, who are "part of what [they] write about and . . . recognized as such" (56), as well as "sustained in [their] writing by the local and the particular and the familiar" (54). It is from within the community, in all of its peculiarities, that is drawn the "true audience, the audience [by which each writer] checks himself" (54), and from which are likely to appear at least "two or three of an honest and unpretentious bent", whose favorable opinion, as denizens of the same reality, is worth more (at least it was to Faulkner) than that of "all the critics in New York City" (55).

In his community, the writer shares a common past, "a sense of likeness", and finds the "possibility of reading a small history in a universal light" (MM 58). For O'Connor, this is particularly true in the South, which has "gone into the modern world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and a sense of mystery which could not have developed in our first state of innocence - as it has not sufficiently developed in the rest of the country". The particularity of the writer's knowledge, bequeathed to him in its wealth and poverty by membership in his community, supplies the raw material, on which he draws in order

to write, and it is from this, with both the possibilities and limitations that it implies, that he will find the material of enduring writing (MM 59).

O'Connor observes that many a young writer feels himself stymied by his cultural inheritance, and obliged, if he is to succeed, "to shake off the clutches of [his] region", situating his stories "in [one] whose way of life seems nearer the spirit of what [he thinks he has] to say" (MM 198). She affirms that "[such writers] would like to eliminate the region altogether and approach the infinite directly. But this," she concludes, "is not even a possibility" (198).

For O'Connor, when a writer is cut off "from the sights and sounds that [develop] a life of their own in [the] senses" (MM 198), writing, for lack of raw material, withers. Of course, today there are those who, although bereft of a community within which to cultivate over time common tastes and interests, write anyway. But for O'Connor, this is only because the alienation that was once a diagnosis "has become an ideal", materializing in rootless heroes belonging nowhere. Of such writers, O'Connor observes, "The borders of [their] countries are the sides of [their skulls]" (200), enclosing too insignificant a territory, however rich, since for fiction "the social is superior to the purely personal. Somewhere is better than anywhere. And traditional manners, however unbalanced, are better than no manners at all" (200).

In addition to whatever else the writer's social legacy may provide, O'Connor cites as indispensable to story-making "stories in our background", mythically dimensioned stories common to the entire community, which "affect our image and our judgment of ourselves". Again, her emphasis is on the necessity of the concrete: "Abstractions, formulas, laws will not serve here" (MM

202).

Another element of the social inheritance indispensable in the writing of fiction is knowledge of a particular idiom: "An idiom characterizes a society, and when you ignore the idiom, you are very likely ignoring the whole social fabric that could make a meaningful character" (MM 90). For of characters apart from their society, according to O'Connor little can be said: "You can't say anything meaningful about the mystery of a personality unless you put that personality in a believable and significant context. And the best way to do this is through the character's own language" (90).

O'Connor, in her own fiction, provides an example of implementing recognition of her own particular kind of ignorance. When asked why Black characters seldom appear in her work, she replied "I don't understand them the way I do white people. I don't feel capable of entering the mind of a Negro. In my stories they're seen from the outside" (qtd. in Feeley 91). Here, although she has given evidence in her writing of adequate knowledge of the Black idiom, she confesses to a more significant lack, for which not even sufficient knowledge of an idiom can compensate: knowledge of the person himself, within his own immediate social context, of which the idiom is only a means of expression.

Of course, in this matter of whom she did and did not know sufficiently to make real in fiction, O'Connor's judgment was not infallible, a fact which she herself recognized, as the following anecdote, related by Richard Gilman demonstrates:

I wasn't surprised when [O'Connor] asked me if I thought she had "gotten right" the intellectual [Rayber] in The Violent Bear it Away. "I don't reckon he'd be very convincing to you folks in New York," she said.

I said, after wondering for a moment where I stood, no, he wasn't a very convincing intellectual and, growing bolder, that in fact I thought he was one of the few occasions when her art failed because she hadn't sacrificed what she thought she knew. She was silent and then said she thought I was probably right (Conversations with Flannery O'Connor 55).

Both of these brief incidents show how deeply O'Connor as a writer of fiction prized a thoroughly assimilated social environment which, for her, finally exists as much inside the writer as out, "in such a way that without changing their nature, they can be seen through one another" (MM 34). She writes that Art cannot exist without a "delicate adjustment" of this inner and outer world, an adjustment by which knowledge of oneself and knowledge of one's region and the world become identical. With the loss of such knowledge, and the writer's consequent inability to see his country as part of himself, for O'Connor his value, both to himself and to his country, is also lost.

Such considerations demonstrate that, for O'Connor, as for Maritain, the universality of art can only materialize "at a peculiar crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet" (MM 59). There, the writer's "true country", the "eternal and absolute", will be made manifest, in the writer's portrayal of "the actual countryside . . . on to and through the peculiar characteristics of his region and his nation" (27).

## 2.15 On Asceticism and the Artist

For Maritain, the notion of a necessity for submission to a certain ascetic practice is tacit in the very word "artist." Without having acquired a formidable array of virtues--"humility

and magnanimity, prudence, integrity, fortitude, temperance, simplicity, ingenuousness"-- (A&S 78), not much is to be hoped for from a worker condemned to a nomadic existence, on terrain ever more difficult, presenting problems ever new. The same insecurity, from which others flee, must by him be sought as ceaselessly as he must cultivate his gift, resisting at any price the poison of easy success (A&S 78).

O'Connor strongly echoes these convictions, particularly in her statements about the artist's first duty being to his art. She stresses that the ego's clamoring must be ignored when the artist, "usually [having] to suffer certain deprivations in order to use his gift with integrity" (MM 81), goes about his work. But if this gift become *habitus* is also a virtue, it is one for the practice of which other virtues (i.e., those listed above) are necessary. The acquisition of any virtue, however, "demands a certain asceticism and a very definite leaving-behind of the niggardly part of the ego" (81). This is a task which the literary artist, in O'Connor's view, cannot escape, for "the writer has to judge himself with a stranger's eye and a stranger's severity. The prophet in him has to see the freak" (81-82), a feat of vision requiring selflessness of a rare order, and a generous dose of that "violence of a single-minded respect for the truth" which O'Connor says is necessary to find in a thing "the spirit which makes it itself" (82). If "writing a novel is a terrible experience, during which the hair often falls out and the teeth decay" (77), certainly one may suspect that some part of the suffering stems from the periodic or constant high or low-level skirmishing involved in keeping the ego at bay, if art is ultimately to emerge, like a triumphant army, from the fray.

## 2.16 Conclusion

Reading in sequence A&S and the essays and letters of Flannery O'Connor suggests that a mutually comfortable dialogue about art could have existed between her and Maritain, in spite of the great difference in background, education, and vocation. A point-by-point comparison of what the two had to say on the same subjects immeasurably strengthens this impression, simultaneously affording delight in the contrast between Maritain's precise and restrained, although not infrequently poetic and imaginatively expressed considerations, and those of O'Connor, terse and matter-of-fact, on exactly the same subjects. Often, only the stylistic wrappings vary, e.g., the tone of the references, with Maritain employing cathedral builders and shoemakers, while O'Connor found useful mules, yard dogs, and owls (MM 104-105).

What, of real significance, does vary from Maritain to O'Connor is that she is writing not as a philosopher but as a practitioner of the art of fiction. And just as her fiction is rooted in what she knows, so also is what she has to say about the art she practices. She therefore confidently expands, within her own bailiwick, on what Maritain has written; he, however, certainly appears to be her springboard.

The impressive quality of the thinking of both Maritain and O'Connor on the specific subjects presented throughout this chapter, for all the evident depth of learning, reflection, and experience which grounds it, is its clarity. And if Maritain and O'Connor convey their meaning successfully in part by employing references to shoemakers or mules, at the same time they show us that these are no less dustily pedestrian than art itself, nor

less, from another but not incompatible point of view, mysterious and sublime.

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#### Notes

- (1) Mystery and Manners is cited as MM in the text hereafter.
- (2) Art and Scholasticism is cited as A&S in the text hereafter.
- (3) The Habit of Being is cited as HB in the text hereafter.
- (4) Quoted from "An Afternoon with Flannery O'Connor" in *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine* (1 November 1949), 38-40, an interview by Betsy Lockridge, reprinted in *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*, edited by Rosemary M. Magee (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987).
- (5) From a letter to Brainard Cheney in *The Correspondence of Flannery O'Connor and the Brainard Cheneys*, edited by C. Ralph Steven (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), p. 6.
- (6) Quoted from "An Interview with Flannery O'Connor and Robert Penn Warren" in *Vagabond* (Vanderbilt University) (6 February 1960), edited by Cyrus Hoy and Walter Sullivan; reprinted in *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*.
- (7) Quoted by Richard Donner, "She Writes Powerful Fiction" in *The Sign*, 40 (March 1961), 46-48.
- (8) Quoted by Margaret Turner, "Visit to Flannery O'Connor Proves a Novel Experience" in *The Atlantic Journal and Constitution*, (29 May 1960) sec. 6, 2, reprinted in *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*.
- (9) *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 51, 1, ctd. in Maritain.



### Chapter III: Art and Scholasticism Assimilated:

#### The Struggle and Its Fruit

In his book The Art of Fiction, John Gardner observes:

"Trustworthy aesthetic universals do exist, but they exist at such a high level of abstraction as to offer almost no guidance to the writer" (3). Certainly, therefore, (and as a reading of A&S implies) these universals cannot be imagined as formulas, technique, or method, making conveniently explicit those which according to Maritain are hidden rules, different for every work of art ever produced, comparable to "preexisting paths through a tangled thicket". To find these, in carrying through to its conclusion each of his projects, an artist must be willing to shun shortcuts, endure a certain amount of frustration, and accept a perhaps uncomfortable and prolonged proximity with his own limitations. Such an effort can only be sustained by the power of a single-minded love for the good of that which is coming into being, and which--once birthed--can begin to be perceived only insofar as it appeals to the senses.

In seeking the meaning of Flannery O'Connor's "cutting her aesthetic teeth" on A&S, reference will be made to three points therein, as summarized above, i.e., 1) art always implies a struggle; 2) the completed project must appeal through the senses; 3) the power sustaining the will to struggle is a single-minded love for the project.

A practical demonstration of what Point 1 means in O'Connor's case is presented first, based on a dispersed account of her own struggle, contained in the letters O'Connor wrote throughout both the writing and publication of the first of her

two novels: Wise Blood. Point 2 will be developed by showing multiple examples from Wise Blood of O'Connor's capacity as a writer of fiction to appeal through the senses. Point 3 is demonstrated in its effects, i.e., the conflicting interpretations generated by Wise Blood, which preclude its classification as propaganda for Catholicism.

### 3.1 Wise Blood: The Struggle

Wise Blood is the story of Hazel Motes, the descendent of a vociferous prophet/preacher grandfather, who ultimately fails in spite of vigorous efforts to reject the vocation corresponding to his spiritual legacy. O'Connor first refers to the novel<sup>1</sup> (HB 4) in a letter to Elizabeth McKee, the literary agent with whom she would be both associated professionally and linked in friendship throughout the remainder her life. Dated June 19, 1948, the letter mentions that she has been working on WB, two chapters of which have already appeared in magazines with a third about to do so, for a year and a half. O'Connor estimates that she will finish the novel in two more years. In passing, she characterizes herself as "a very slow worker" (5), emphasizing the point in the next letter to McKee (July 4, 1948): "I am a slow six months before the end of a first draft, and after that, I will be at least a year cleaning up" (5).

In the next letter (July 21, 1948) to McKee, O'Connor, perhaps because reference has been made to the possibility of an advance payment from the publisher, apparently feels it necessary to explain how she works:

I don't have my novel outlined and I have to write to discover what I am doing. Like the old lady, I don't know so well what I think until I see what I say; then

I have to say it over again.\* I am working on the twelfth chapter now. I long ago quit numbering the pages but I suppose I am past the 50,000 word mark. Of the twelve chapters only a few won't have to be re-written; and I can't exhibit such formless stuff. It would discourage me to look at it right now and anyway I yearn to go about my business to the end. . . . The chapters I enclose should give you some idea. They are the best chapters in it. (HB 5-6)

On Feb. 3, 1949, O'Connor advises McKee that her main desire as far as publishing houses is concerned is to be "where they will take the book as I write it" (HB 9). Unfortunately, the attitude described did not match that of Rinehart (the company holding an option on WB as a result of O'Connor's having won the Rinehart-Iowa Fiction Award in 1947 (HB 4)). This becomes clear to O'Connor after reading a letter from John Selby (editor-in-chief of Rinehart), about the contents of which she comments to McKee: "The criticism is vague and really tells me nothing except that they don't like [WB]. I feel the objections they raise are connected with its virtues, and the thought of working with them specifically to correct these lacks they mention is repulsive to me" (9). She has the impression, furthermore, that Selby's letter has been addressed to a "slightly dim-witted Camp Fire Girl, and I cannot look with composure on getting a lifetime of others like them" (9). The letter leads O'Connor to believe that "Rinehart will not take the novel as it will be if left to my

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\* O'Connor reiterates this point, among other places in a letter (Nov. 25, 1955) to "A.": "I never have anything balanced in my head when I set out; if I did I'd resign this profession from boredom and operate a hatchery" (HB 117).

fiendish care (it will be essentially as it is) or that Rinehart would like to rescue it at this point and train it into a conventional novel" (9).

In her reply (Feb. 18, 1949) to Selby, O'Connor clearly affirms that hers must be the final word over the form WB will ultimately take:

I feel that whatever virtues the novel may have are very much connected with the limitations you mention. I am not writing a conventional novel, and I think that the quality of the novel I write will derive precisely from the peculiarity or aloneness, if you will, of the experience I write from. I do not think there is any lack of objectivity in the writing, however, if this is what your criticism implies; and also I do not feel that rewriting has obscured the direction. I feel it has given whatever direction is now present. (10)

This crisp rejection of Selby's analysis (with whatever loss it might imply for someone who was not financially independent) recalls Maritain's description of the artist's characteristic irritability: "all that deviates from the straight line of their object galls them; hence their intransigence - what concession could they admit of? They are fixed in an absolute" (A&S 12).

In this same letter, however, O'Connor also shows the other side of herself as artist, for whom the highest value is the good of the work, rather than the fact that the work is hers, the offspring of her own sovereign and self-sufficient creativity: "I am amenable to criticism but only within the sphere of what I am trying to do; I will not be persuaded . . . otherwise" (10).

These were not empty words. On April 7, 1949, she writes to Paul Engle (conductor of the School for Writers O'Connor had attended at the State University of Iowa) that before responding

to Selby's letter, "rather than trust my own judgment entirely" (HB 13) she had shown it to the poet Robert Lowell.

Lowell had already read the manuscript sent to Selby, and pointed out faults which O'Connor evidently recognized as such but which obviously did not coincide with those cited by Selby. Nor did Lowell concur with Selby's opinion. As for the fact that O'Connor had sought Lowell's counsel, it is used in the letter to Engle as a defense against Selby's insinuation that she was "working in a vacuum" (13). Obviously she took umbrage not only with those who would in her judgment mutilate her work, but also with suggestions that she was indiscriminately indifferent to criticism.

On October 17, 1949, six months after the letter to Engle, O'Connor writes to close college friend Betty Boyle that her only real desire is to finish WB, on which "[I am] writing about four hours every morning which I find is the maximum" (HB 16). Her concern continues during O'Connor's hospitalization, following her return to Georgia in December of 1950. Although O'Connor had been sick enough for her mother, Regina, to have notified the Fitzgeralds that her daughter was dying, Sally Fitzgerald notes that "as she emerged from the crisis, debilitated by high fevers and the treatment alike" (HB 22), O'Connor began to write to her friends again, "chiefly on the subject of her novel, which had never been much out of her mind, even when the lupus attack was most severe" (22).

A brief letter to Elizabeth McKee illustrates Fitzgerald's point. Inexactly dated, but written while she was still interned in Atlanta's Emory University Hospital in January, 1951, O'Connor's letter mentions her illness only in passing, describing it in a tidy, hardly foreboding little phrase: "the cortisone peri-

od". During this, she explains, she "[managed] to finish the first draft of the novel" (HB 23), sending it thereafter to Sally Fitzgerald's husband. "He is satisfied that it is good and so am I," comments O'Connor, adding that when she gets home she "[plans] to add an extra chapter and make some changes on a few others," observing that "it will all just take some time" (23).

On March 10, 1951, O'Connor writes to Robert Giroux, editor-in-chief of Harcourt, Brace and Company, which, because she found its attitude more congenial to her artistic convictions than Rinehart's, was now to publish WB. In her letter O'Connor expresses the hope that Giroux will both like and publish the manuscript she has enclosed. Although anxious to see the book on the market that fall, she states: "I'm still open to suggestions about improving it and will welcome any you have" (HB 23).

On that same day in 1951, O'Connor writes to Elizabeth McKee that, as far as she is concerned, the draft that she has sent to Giroux is the last, "unless there is something really glaring in it that may be pointed out to me" (HB 24). This wording suggests that, at least at the moment of writing, O'Connor felt a bit less patient about being done with WB than she had given Giroux to understand.

Almost a full six months later (Sept. 1, 1951), however, in a letter to Mavis McIntosh, literary agent and partner of Elizabeth McKee in the firm of McIntosh and McKee, O'Connor reports that Giroux and her friend the novelist Caroline Gordon had made suggestions for improving the book, of which she has been producing a new draft "in spite of [having] been in and out of the hospital this summer and . . . too decrepit to type a hundred and fifty pages under a month" (HB 25).

In mid-September of 1951, O'Connor writes the Fitzgeralds, enclosing what she calls "Opus Nauseous No. 1", and commenting

that a day she had spent reading it "was like . . . [a] day [spent] eating a horse blanket" (HB 27). Even so, she finds the manuscript "better than it was before" (27). She announces that it has been dispatched to Giroux, expresses doubt about his willingness to read it again, and asks the Fitzgeralds' opinion about whether Caroline Gordon might agree to: "All the changes are efforts after what she suggested . . . and I am much obliged to her. If you think she wouldn't mind, would you send this copy on to her . . . as I don't have another copy or her address" (27). This last she requests in order to thank Gordon for having read the manuscript the first time, and adds, "I am also obliged . . . for your reading it again" (27). Certainly Flannery O'Connor valued greatly the opinion of these people, and did not intend to leave her gratitude to them in doubt.

The Fitzgeralds, for their part, quickly forwarded O'Connor's manuscript to Gordon, whose response reached O'Connor shortly thereafter in the form of "some nine pages of comments" (HB 28). These, O'Connor presently reports back to the Fitzgeralds, "certainly increased my education . . . . So I am doing some more things to [WB] and then I mean to send it off for the LAST [sic] time" (28).

But by Oct. 16, 1951, together with the revised manuscript being sent to Giroux, a brief note states that, having "tried to clear up the foggier places" and to make the changes suggested by Gordon, O'Connor considers WB better, although she has "no one to read it who could tell me" (HB 28). She adds that, if he is not satisfied, "I'd like to work on it again," mentioning in a postscript that the Fitzgeralds "have agreed to undergo another session with it" (28).

One month later, on Nov. 23, 1951, in yet another letter to

Giroux O'Connor declares that, in accordance with yet more recent suggestions of Caroline Gordon, she wants to "do some more to . . . three or four places she has mentioned" (HB 29) if the novel has not yet been set up for printing, beyond the point where alterations are possible. Evidently Giroux was able to accommodate her, because on Dec. 3, 1951, she writes him again: "I am enclosing the changes and I will be much obliged . . . if you can get them substituted at the printers. I think they make a lot of difference" (29). She adds, "I had a good many more for the first chapter but I presume it is too late for that. Caroline [Gordon] thought that some places went too fast for anyone to get them" (29).

O'Connor is even prepared, within the limits of her possibilities, to suffer a financial loss if these changes can be implemented: "About how much can I mess around on the proofs without costing myself a lot of money? Fifteen percent of the cost of composition doesn't mean anything to me" (HB 29). But, while simultaneously trying to avoid exasperating Giroux, she is precise in negotiating: "What I want to know is: how many paragraphs (approximately) could I insert?" (29).

On Jan. 23, 1952, O'Connor sends Giroux the galleys and manuscript, expressing the hope that the "corrections and insertions are plain and not too numerous" (HB 30), and giving credit to Gordon for all of these most recent changes. She says she likes the sample page and ends her note with a likely question (the novel was to have been finished by June, 1951): "When is this book supposed to come out?" (30).

But however anxious she is to see WB finally in print, on Feb. 24, she returns both galleys and marked page proofs to Giroux, announcing that she has made "insignificant changes on pages 20, 26, and 185, which you can dispense with if they would



cost the printer any unhappiness or me any money" (HB 32).

Finally, on March 12, 1952, O'Connor adds the final touch to WB: in response to a query of Giroux, she dedicates the book to her mother, Regina. Two hundred thirty pages in the twenty-third printing (1990), WB had been distilled from two thousand pages of manuscript (Montgomery 23).

As the excerpts from O'Connor's letters thus far presented show, producing her first novel had required mammoth effort. A great deal of writing had been done, of which apparently everything in the final product had previously been submitted by O'Connor, in successive drafts, to the judgment of her esteemed interlocutors, as her letters until the time of WB's publication demonstrate. At the same time, they make clear O'Connor's single-minded determination that the project be brought to a fruition satisfactory in the first place to herself. If rejecting what she regarded as irrelevant criticism, at whatever cost and no matter from whom it came, while frankly seeking other criticism and implementing suggestions until virtually the eve of publication, was part of the price of bringing about the maximum good of WB, O'Connor evidently was prepared to pay it without hesitation. On behalf of WB, she appeared to be as tireless as she was fearless.

Even so, and in spite of the great effort she had put into her novel, more than three years later O'Connor writes to "A." (Nov. 25, 1955): "I was five years writing that book, and up to the last I was sure it was a failure and didn't work" (HB 117). She writes here of a feeling for which she does not specifically account. What she does reveal, however, is the extent to which her health had been debilitated by the campaign to get WB into print:

When WB was finished I came down with my energy-de-

priving ailment and began to take cortisone in large doses and cortisone makes you think night and day until I suppose the mind dies of exhaustion if you are not rescued. I was, but during this time I was more or less living my life and H. Mote's [sic] too and as my disease affected the joints, I conceived the notion that I would eventually become paralyzed [sic] and was going blind and that in the book I had spelled out my own course, or that in the illness I had spelled out the book. (HB 117-18)

Following recovery, and with WB now available to the reading public, O'Connor acquired additional interlocutors with whom she could consider at leisure some of the difficulties with which she had battled during the novel's five-year gestation (HB 81). For example, in a letter (November 25, 1955) to her friend "A.," O'Connor cites as a problem Hazel Motes, in contrast with his double Enoch Emory, of whom she writes, "[about him] I never had a moment's thought" (117), for "everything Enoch said and did was as plain to me as my hand" (117).

Hazel, on the other hand, "seems to be the failure of the novel" (HB 116). O'Connor comments in a previous letter to "A." (Oct. 20, 1955) that a writer named George Clay has written, in response to her request that he read WB, that it had "bored and exasperated him because H. Motes was not human enough to sustain his interest" (HB 111). O'Connor writes, "I think he is in a sense correct," explicating no further. (She does, however, declare that she is trying "to make this new novel [The Violent Bear It Away] more human, less farcical," (111) which effort she describes as "a great strain for me.")

In another letter (Nov. 10, 1955) to "A.," O'Connor writes that Motes "is not believable enough as a human being to make his

blinding himself believable for the reasons that he did it," i.e., as a sacrifice to which he was called by God, in the same way that Abraham was called to sacrifice his son. As O'Connor analyzes the trouble, "for the things . . . I want them to do, my characters apparently will have to seem twice as human as humans" (HB 116). But arriving at this perception is, O'Connor recognizes, as far she can go: "it's a problem not solved by the will; if I am able to do anything about it, it will simply be something given."\* And she admits: "I never understand how writers can succumb to vanity - what you work the hardest on is usually the worst" (116).

As previously seen, WB had been started in January of 1947, whereas not until December, 1950, is any reference made in HB to A&S. Therefore, at least for something more than forty percent of the time spent in writing WB, O'Connor had been aware from her reading of Maritain that struggle is simply the artist's lot, a consequence of art's nature or, in today's parlance, part of the process. Therefore, armed with the theory necessary to be able to manage her difficulties without undue discouragement, she had been prepared to attack them rationally, rather than allowing them to undermine her confidence in her gift and, consequently, her capacity to see WB through to a sufficiently satisfactory conclusion. If she had occasion to reflect on her experience as it accumulated during the writing of WB, perhaps she herself may

\* O'Connor expresses this same belief in a subsequent letter to "A" (Nov. 25, 1955): after explaining why the category of male-female relations have not entered her fiction thematically ("My inability to handle [this] so far in fiction may be purely personal, as my upbringing has smacked a little of Jansenism even if my convictions do not"), she states her intention to continue avoiding the subject, regarded by her as "the center of life and most holy, . . . until I feel that what I can do with it will be right, which is to say, given" (HB 117).

have perceived in it a clear image of what Maritain had so vividly described in A&S, and found consolation in the relationship.

### 3.2 Wise Blood: Assault on the Senses

Recall that Maritain, after his initially reluctant attribution of a role to the senses in the perception of beauty, concludes by admitting that "the beautiful . . . *connatural* to man is the beautiful that delights the intellect through the senses and through their intuition" (24). O'Connor frequently refers to the consequences of this principle--one which she fully shared--as has been seen in chapter two.

Perhaps this certainty can in part be ascribed to O'Connor's known ability for painting and cartooning, examples of the latter of which appear, during her undergraduate years, in Georgia College's student publications. Years later, in a letter dated August 27, 1963, addressed to her Catholic schoolteacher friend, Janet McKane, O'Connor refers to her fondness for cartoons, making this disclosure: "I used to try to do [cartoons] myself, sent a batch every week to the *New Yorker*, all rejected of course. I just couldn't draw very well. I like the ones that are drawn well better than the situations" (HB 536).

O'Connor's letters also reveal her permanent interest in painting, both her own and others'. In the same letter to Janet McKane, for instance, O'Connor expresses her thanks for some "museum bulletins with devilish dogs" and comments on a dog she particularly likes in an unnamed painting of Rousseau: "[T]he family is in a wagon, all looking ahead and there is one dog in the wagon and one underneath, kind of prim diabolical dogs. It's very funny" (HB 536). Another comment to McKane (June 19,

1963), made on O'Connor's self-portrait in the company of a pheasant cock "with horns and a face like the Devil", besides demonstrating her continuing activity as a painter, suggests a grimmer layer to O'Connor's humor:

[It] was made ten years ago, after a very acute siege of lupus. I was taking cortisone which gives you what they call a moon-face and my hair had fallen out to a large extent from the high fever, so I looked pretty much like the portrait. When I painted it I didn't look either at myself in the mirror or at the bird. I knew what we both looked like. (HB 525)

Other remarks in HB indicate a wry, benignly self-deprecating attitude towards her own ability as a painter, consonant with O'Connor's interpretation of her point of view of reality, as expressed in a letter to the writer John Hawkes: "I think the basis of the way I see is comic regardless of what I do with it" (HB 400).

O'Connor's comic way of seeing things plus talent for cartooning and painting blend in what is at least partially their product: WB. In virtually every paragraph, in almost every character and situation, O'Connor seems to cartoon in words what she finds herself perhaps inadequately equipped to represent by drawing. Thus, although in using the resources of writing she of course achieves effects that go beyond what would be communicable in cartoons, when one imagines WB dramatized, cartoon animation suggests itself immediately. The first chapter alone, for example, seems to cry out for such treatment.

Hazel Motes, a recently discharged veteran, sits on a "green plush train seat" (9), face to face with Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, a matron en route to Florida for a visit with her married daughter's family. O'Connor describes Mrs. Hitchcock in her

habitually brief strokes: "a fat woman with pink collars and cuffs and pear-shaped legs that slanted off the train seat and didn't reach the floor" (9).

The second sentence preceding this description shows, outside the train window, plowed fields, in the furrows of which nose a "few hogs . . . [looking] like large spotted stones" (9). Hogs, however, are not as easily associated with "large spotted stones" as they are with three elements--"fat", "pink", "pear-shaped"--in Mrs. Hitchcock's description. Therefore, the fresh echo of the word "hogs", comparatively weakly linked to "large spotted stones", clicks instantly in the reader's mind into the firm niche provided by Mrs. Hitchcock's description. Thus, in this indirect way, the reader is led to perceive her as more porcine than the hogs themselves. But portraying Mrs. Hitchcock requires borrowing yet a further characteristic from another member of the bestiary: O'Connor describes Mrs. Hitchcock's face as "reddish, under a cap of fox-colored hair" (11).

When Motes collides with Mrs. Hitchcock, her eyes "squinted nearly shut"--therefore small, like pigs' eyes--in a corridor of the train after dinner, she has prepared to retire, and is dressed in "a pink wrapper, with her hair in knots around her head" (18). On second glance, however, the "knots" resemble more closely "knobs [which frame] her face like dark toadstools", a simile suggesting not only poison but also dampness and the smell of decaying vegetation. This sinister association, combined with the rage evidenced by the purpling of Mrs. Hitchcock's face "except for little white marks over it that didn't heat up", reveals the matron completely shorn of her persona.

Mrs. Hitchcock's speech is similarly reduced to the bare bones customarily found in cartoon balloons as, "drawing herself

stiff", she demands: "What is the matter with you?" (18). In fact, the whole of Mrs. Hitchcock's discourse is eminently suited to animation. Even reported, it is obviously composed of conversational clichés, expressed in brief sentences of corresponding grammatical simplicity, gushingly delivered:

[Mrs. Hitchcock] told [Hazel] she had been a Miss Weatherman before she married and that she was going to Florida to visit her married daughter, Sarah Lucile. She said it seemed like she had never had time to take a trip that far off. The way things happened, one thing after another, it seemed like time went by so fast you couldn't tell if you were young or old. (13)

Communications of similar style and content are addressed to Motes during the novel's first scene, despite his obvious lack of interest, and in spite of Mrs. Hitchcock's evident indifference, and even hostility towards Motes himself, about whom--certainly for lack of any other entertainment--she merely indulges a curiosity as trivial as it is vigorous.

When Motes simply ignores Mrs. Hitchcock's second conversational overture (he had done likewise with the first), the level of her response shows more about her than it does about Motes: irked by his aloofness, she "wrenched her attention [from his face] and squinted at the price tag [on the sleeve of his jacket]. The suit had cost him \$11.98. She felt that placed him and looked at his face again as if she were fortified against him now" (10). This sequence of primary action and matching emotion--Hitchcock's sublime complacency, the sudden contortion of her features, the eyes trained on the price tag, smug satisfaction at the sight of "\$11.98" suddenly smoothing her face--constitute the very type of elementary material appropriate for animation, as is, for example, the description of the singu-

lar Hazel Motes.

Although Mrs. Hitchcock estimates Motes to be "not much over twenty", no other detail either of his appearance or his behavior supports her calculation. On the contrary, he could easily be middle-aged: "The outline of a skull under his skin was plain and insistent" (10). His eyes are "the color of pecan shells and set in deep sockets", and his nose resembles "a shrike's bill" which is, according to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, strongly notched and hooked at the tip, and often used to impale insects on thorns. In addition, he had "a long vertical crease on either side of his mouth", and "his hair looked as if it had been permanently flattened under [his] heavy hat" (10). As for his outfit, besides the hat, "stiff black [and] broad-brimmed . . . [like one] an elderly preacher would wear", there was the suit, of "glaring blue" (10), with the price tag still on the sleeve.

Motes's utterances, consistently curt and uncivil, show him thoroughly absorbed by some inner debate, both sides of which he seems to argue unceasingly. Thus, except as he can relate them to his own conflict or interests, Motes is virtually inaccessible to others, e.g. his first words to Mrs. Hitchcock, after her three futile attempts to engage him in conversation, only announce his departure: "I got to go see the porter" (11).

Motes is less niggardly of speech in his interaction with the black porter, who is, incidentally, the only figure in the first chapter who is not described with allusions to animals. The porter--as reluctant to converse with Motes as Motes is to converse with Mrs. Hitchcock--in accordance with his professional duties withstands as best he can Motes's bullying invasion of his privacy. For Motes's bullet-like assertions aim at extracting from the porter a confession that he is "a Parrum nigger from



Eastrod" (12). This appalling attempt to label the porter drives him at length out of his retreat to silence: "I'm from Chicago . . . . My name is not Parrum" (18). To which Haze cynically responds, "Cash (the name of the porter's purported father) is dead. . . . He got the cholera from a pig" (18). The porter's mouth, "[jerking] down", reveals an emotion concealed by the simple dignity of his reply: "My father was a railroad man" (19). Hazel's basic hostility to others, conveyed only by his leaden silence in the presence of Mrs. Hitchcock's chirping, is here fully expressed in discourse typical, in both form (terse) and content (noxious), of what emanates from Haze's mouth throughout the novel. His share in the dining car dialogue provides another example.

With his stiff black hat still planted on his head (it remains there, fixed solid, throughout the dining car episode), Motes--after an awkward half-hour's wait which he spends staring at the wall while Mrs. Hitchcock chatters on at his side with a new partner in conversation--is conducted to a seat in the rear of the car by a waiter compared by O'Connor to a crow. Although this simile is formally applied only to the waiter's "darting" movements, the previous sentence describes him as "a white man with greased black hair and a greased black look to his suit" (15). Thus, the reader's imagination, rather than the text itself, links this description to "crow", in the same way that it does "hog" to Mrs. Hitchcock.

Hazel Motes, in the company of his somewhat lurid table mates, "three youngish women dressed like parrots", whose hands rested on the table "red-speared at the tips", quickly demonstrates through his behavior a Puritan streak combining neatly with his preacher's hat. On the other hand, as far as insolence is concerned, in these women he more than meets his match. The

woman opposite him, with a "bold game-hen expression and small eyes pointed directly at him", at intervals blows cigarette smoke directly into Hazel's face, while he--"glum and intense"-- observes fixedly her neck.

In the subsequent exchange, Motes finds himself in a worse position than Mrs. Hitchcock had been with him. Like her, he speaks three times before a reply is conceded, perhaps unexpectedly so to the reader, considering that his conversational gambits are a good deal less conventional than Mrs. Hitchcock's: 1) "If you've been redeemed, . . . I wouldn't want to be"; 2) "Do you think I believe in Jesus?"; 3) "I wouldn't believe even if He existed. Even if He was on this train" (16). In reply, a "poisonous Eastern voice" asks, "Who said you had to?" (16). At this point the conversation terminates, because the sole issue that interests Motes has been dismissed as insignificant.

Hazel's intense state of inner absorption is further suggested in this scene by the inexact description of his dinner, as if "something spotted with eggs and livers" (17) represents the clearest perception he was at liberty to register. This image, on one hand too unusual and precise not to be visualized by the reader, and on the other suggesting something amorphous and perhaps ill-smelling\*, combines harmoniously with the other unpleasant details making up the episode in the dining car.

Throughout WB, curt references to Jesus abound (relatively few pages have no reference at all to religion). These begin in

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\* Another sketch describes "something in [Hazel's] throat like a sponge with an egg taste", and sufficiently substantial that "he didn't want to turn over for fear it would move" (19). Again, this description is so graphic and unusual that the attentive reader cannot escape imagining it and, if he is also the least bit empathetic, feeling it in his throat as well.

the uncivil exchange at the table in the dining car and continue in the report, in chapter one, of Hazel's dream, in which figures his grandfather, a circuit preacher described as "a waspish old man who had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (20). In the case of Hazel, however, the relationship with Jesus is more ominously imagined:

Jesus [is moving] from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on the water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown. (22)

Thus, Hazel's Jesus is a threat to himself, whereas his grandfather's Jesus is a threat to others. But both versions are as sharply drawn as those of the other hostile characters met so far.

WB's females throughout the entire novel are evoked with the same sharp strokes used in the creation of Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock. Mrs. Leora Watts, for example, advertised "in a drunken-looking hand" (30) on the wall next to the toilet paper in a public bathroom stall as having "the friendliest bed in town", is first presented as seen by Hazel through an opening in a door, sitting on her white iron bed "cutting her toenails with a large pair of scissors" (33). She is a "big woman with very yellow hair and white skin that glistened with a greasy preparation. She had on a pink nightgown that would better have fit a smaller figure" (33). In spite of her subject, O'Connor's reporting seems thoroughly objective, as if she were describing the appearance of a judge, a senator, or a prelate.

From his hiding place behind the door, Hazel makes a noise, heard by Mrs. Watts. Her reaction shows her to be both brazen and lackadaisical, resembling therefore the three "youngish" women on

the train, who were parrot-like in dress: "She had a bold steady penetrating stare. After a minute, she turned it away from [Motes] and began cutting her toenails again" (33).

Once in the room, Motes observes "the bed and a bureau and a rocking chair full of dirty clothes" (33). He "fingered a nail file and then an empty jelly glass while he looked into the yellowish mirror and watched Mrs. Watts, slightly distorted, grinning at him" (33). In spite of the dishevelment of both Mrs. Watts and her room, Hazel finds "[h]is senses stirred to the limits" (33) and commences his amorous approximation by sitting on the far corner of her bed, while sliding his hand along the sheet until it encounters her foot, "heavy but not cold" (33). Mrs. Watts mouth then "[splits] in a wide full grin that showed her teeth. They were pointed and speckled with green and there was a side space between each one" (33-34). (Evidently nothing, either in Mrs. Watts' appearance, the scene, or the episode as a whole would offer much of a challenge to a cartoon animator.)

Another woman, a daily swimmer in the public pool of the city park, and always accompanied by two small boys, is described as wearing "a stained white bathing suit that fit her like a sack" (81-82). Her face is "long and cadaverous, with a bandage-like bathing cap coming down almost to her eyes, and sharp teeth protruding from her mouth" (84). Her foot, as seen emerging from the pool, is "large", and once out of the pool, she "[squats] . . . , panting" (84-85). She stands up "loosely and [shakes] herself, stamping in the water dripping off her", then, grinning at Hazel and his companion Enoch Emory, she "[pads] over to a spot almost directly under where they [are] sitting" (85). This nameless woman, dog-like in her movements (loose shaking, stamping, squatting, panting, padding), careless, suggestive of

sickness and death in her appearance and of licentiousness in her behavior, does not improve upon closer inspection. The bathing cap removed reveals her hair to be "short and matted and all colors, from deep rust to a greenish yellow", and when she again grins at Hazel, it is through "pointed teeth" (85). (Mrs. Leora Watts's teeth, as has been seen, are also pointed.)

Hazel's landlady hardly compels more admiration: "[She was] past her middle years and her plate was too large but she had long race-horse legs and a nose that had been called Grecian by one boarder. She wore her hair clustered like grapes on her brow and over each ear and in the middle behind" (220).

In the course of WB, O'Connor presents three scenes involving waitresses, and these fare no better than the other women as far as their appearances or manners are concerned. The first waitress works in a place called the "Frosty Bottle", inside of which is "a dark room with a counter across the back of it and brown stools like toad stools in front of the counter" (88). In front of the entrance, on the opposite wall there was a "large advertisement for ice cream, showing a cow dressed up like a housewife" (88). The waitress, in brutal contrast, is described as having "bobbed hair like a man's", as well as "a man's face and big muscled arms" (88-89). Clad in a "once-white uniform clotted with brown stains" (88), she acknowledges Hazel's presence with a "sour" look. Before he can give her his order, however, Enoch announces in a soft voice, "I want a chocolate malted milk, babygirl" (89).

This woman is graceless as the swimmer in the park, but whereas licentiousness is hinted at by the swimmer's grinning, ferocity distinguishes the waitress's manner: she turns "fiercely", she "glares", she "thumps the malted milk on the counter" and "roars" (90). Her name is Maude, she "[drinks] whiskey all

day from a fruit jar under the counter", and she talks like a thug, e.g. "I know a clean [boy] when I see him and I know a son a bitch [sic] when I see him and there's a heap of difference and that pus-marked bastard zlurping [sic] through that straw is a goddamned son a bitch" (91).

But these words, addressed to Hazel, meet with the same indifference met by Mrs. Hitchcock's. In response to the single word "clean", however, Hazel again returns indirectly to the subject of Jesus, saying, "I AM clean", though "without any expression of his face or in his voice, just looking at the woman as if he were looking at a wall" (91). Whereupon the waitress stares at him, "startled and then outraged. She "[yells]", she swears, she screams: "You bastard! . . . what do you think I care about any of you filthy boys?" (92).

The second waitress is part of a scene in a drugstore in which the combination of pink and green is repeated four times in a single paragraph. Thus, 1) the fountain counter was of "pink and green marble linoleum"; 2) the waitress behind it had "a lime-colored uniform and a pink apron"; 3) she was red-headed and had "green eyes set in pink"; and 4) the picture in back of her showed a "Lime-Cherry Surprise", that day's special, at ten cents each (136-37). The posture of the waitress, however, suggests something of the aggressiveness of her masculine predecessor in the "Frosty Bottle": "she laid her chest on the counter and surrounded it by her folded arms" (137). When the speech of Enoch--an eighteen-year-old newcomer to the city, employed as a public worker in the zoo--begins to escape her comprehension, the waitress's movements wax unruly: she "jerks" a stale Lime-Cherry Surprise from under his nose, begins "slapping things together", and presently "[slams] another" in front of him (137).

The third waitress is employed in the "Paris Diner", described as "a tunnel about six feet wide, located between a shoe shine parlor and a dry-cleaning establishment" (192). In the diner, Enoch orders something as colorfully appetizing as the Lime-Cherry Surprise he left untouched in the drugstore: "a bowl of split-pea soup and a chocolate malted milkshake" (192).

The waitress is described as "a tall woman with a big yellow dental plate and the same color hair done up in a black hairnet" (192). One of her hands seems permanently affixed to her hip, while the other writes down orders. But in Enoch's case she simply ignores his request, and proceeds to fry bacon, apparently for herself, since the only other customer in the house has already finished dinner. When Enoch tells the waitress that he is in a hurry, she says, "Go then" and "her jaw [begins] to work [as she stares] into the skillet with a fixed attention" (192). Tailoring his order to her lack of interest, Enoch requests a "piece of theter [sic] cake yonder", described as "pink and yellow . . . on a round glass stand" (193), which the waitress at length "[torpedoes]" down the counter to him. Preceding Enoch's departure, the waitress--in response to his announcing that she may not see him again--says: "Any way I don't see you will be all right with me" (194).

The other characters presented throughout the novel are equally unpleasant, and drawn with identically brief strokes. Thus, the welfare woman who "traded [Enoch] from [his] daddy": "[S]he was forty year old-but she sho was ugly. She had theseyer brown glasses and her hair was so thin it looked like ham gravy trickling over her skull" (47).

In a street, an unnamed little man makes his transient appearance: "lost in a pair of faded overalls", he "jostled" Enoch, who "growled", "Whyn't you look where you going?" (46-

47). In response, "[t]he little man stopped and raised his arm in a vicious gesture and a nasty-dog look came on his face. 'Who you tellin' what?' he snarled" (47).

Hoover Shoats, alias Onnie Jay Holy, is described, initially at least, as ever-smiling. He is "plumpish", with "curly blond hair . . . cut with showy side burns", and wears "a black suit with a silver stripe in it and a wide-brimmed white hat pushed onto the back of his head" (147). With his "tight-fitting black pointed shoes and no socks", he looks like "an ex-preacher turned cowboy, or an ex-cowboy turned mortician. He was not handsome but under his smile, there was an honest look that fitted into his face like a set of false teeth" (148).

The supposedly blind preacher, Asa Hawks, is a "tall, cadaverous man with a black suit and a black hat on" (39). He wore dark glasses and "his cheeks were streaked with lines that looked as if they had been painted on and had faded. They gave him the expression of a grinning mandril" (39).

The only relatively savory character in the entire cast of WB is the black--he is otherwise spared description--porter in chapter one. This figure who, as has been seen, retains his dignity throughout Hazel Motes' degrading interrogation, yields only once to the temptation to be ironic, and even then, with elegant brevity. The remainder of the characters are portrayed as ugly, either in behavior or appearance, if not both. In short, humanity in general, as well as its habitat, comes off as rich material for enterprising animators: the world is a one-dimensional place; objects are glaringly presented in primary colors; creatures bereft of nuance speak in language the grammatical level of which hardly exceeds in complexity that found in a first-grade reader; action tends towards various gradations of



the violent. And it is continuous, vigorous, lunatic as the action in a disturbing dream: a car (the Essex), pushed by a patrolman, plummets from an embankment (209); a tubercular false prophet (Solace Layfield), having been judged a liar by another false prophet (Hazel Motes), is murdered in ghastly steps (204-05); a mummy is stolen from a glass case in the zoo and installed in a "tabernacle-like cabinet . . . meant to contain a slop-jar" (131); a woman, "white . . . [and] squirming a little" (62) lies in something looking very much like a coffin, lined in black, inside a circus carnival tent, impressing the twelve-year-old Hazel for a second as "a skinned animal . . . . She was fat and she had a face like an ordinary woman except there was a mole on the corner of her lip, that moved when she grinned, and one on her side" (62); a nasty man in a gorilla suit is murdered (195) because Enoch, the unfortunate zoo employee, both hates him and envies the "popularity" of Gonga, the gorilla he impersonates. Finally, an episode, as stunningly cruel as it is most easily visualized, from Enoch's childhood: at the age of four, he had received a tin box from his father, returned from a penitentiary. This box was "orange and had a picture of some peanut brittle on the outside of it and green letters that said, A NUTTY SURPRISE! When Enoch had opened it, a coiled piece of steel had sprung out at him and broken off the ends of his two front teeth" [178].

If art must first appeal through the senses, WB does so from the first paragraph to the last. The novel's images continually bombard the eyes of the reader's mind; the staccato of the speech drums at the ears; the rhythm of the prose is never lost: unflinching, it lures the reader on, perhaps in many cases in spite of his revulsion to the world WB describes.

Nothing slows the novel's vigorous pace. To find an even conceivably unnecessary word in such a concisely wrought text

would surely be a feat, for O'Connor had weeded her prose with unwavering attention and very well-kept tools, a capacity which Robert Fitzgerald attributed to a quality regarded by Maritain as indispensable to the artist:

Ascesis . . . seems to me a good [word] for the peculiar discipline of the O'Connor style. How much has been refrained from, and how much else has been cut out and thrown away, in order that the bald narrative sentences should present just what they present and in just this order. (36)

Surely, then, O'Connor knew her way, in every word and phrase, to the reader's senses, a capacity which by the propositions of A&S itself, must be attributed solely to O'Connor's *habitus*: that indelible consequence of the steady exercise of her gift. Her art compels the constant attention of her reader's eye and ear as she relentlessly engages his imagination with her bizarre comedy. Having become the artist that she had made of herself, no other result was possible.

### 3.3 Wise Blood: Offspring of an Undivided Will

Besides her lingering doubts about the effectiveness of her portrayal of Hazel Motes (discussed in section 3.1, pages 104-05), O'Connor's other post-publication concern has to do with WB's "[standing] on its own feet" (HB 442). Apparently "A." has been trying to persuade her to supply the second edition with an introduction announcing "the religious significance of the book" (442). O'Connor, in reply (June 10, 1961), sharply limits the distance she is willing to go in that direction: "I would want no more said about that than that the book is seen from the stand-

point of orthodox Christianity" (442). She continues: "Explanations are repugnant to me and to send out a book with directions for its enjoyment is terrible" (442). And if she does write a note to the second edition of WB, "it will be very light and oblique. No claims and very few assertions" (442), and this she writes in spite of her readiness to say of Catholics "we possess the truth in the Church" (MM 151). For O'Connor had learned in A&S that an artist's sole duty is to his work, rather than to edify readers--however pious--who lack the "fundamental equipment to read in the first place" (MM 151). This principle, which O'Connor seems to have grasped immediately and adopted irreversibly, certainly influenced the elaboration of what she finally delivered for publication.

This much mulled-over note preceding the second edition characterizes WB as a "comic novel about a Christian *malgre lui*" (5), written by an author "congenitally innocent of theory". O'Connor does, however, attribute to herself "certain preoccupations", which--one deduces from the next line--include "belief in Christ . . . [as] a matter of life and death" (5). As for a comic novel's including weighty matter, that is a simple condition of its existence, at least if the novel is any good.

In the case of WB, the readers' attitude towards its specific "matter of life and death" for O'Connor divides them into two groups: those for whom Motes' efforts to free himself from an unwanted vocation constitute his integrity, and those for whom his integrity is the consequence of his failure to do so. But she pursues this line of thought no further, preferring simply to state her own belief: integrity can in fact consist in failure, "for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man" (5). In any case, she concludes: "Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a

comic novel, can only be asked to deepen" (5). If readers interpret WB in opposite ways, that is only to be expected, for a mystery amounts to just that: something about which no final agreement is possible.

Considering the fervent Catholic O'Connor was, the note, in which she identifies herself only indirectly as a Christian, ultimately evidences a certain ease in acknowledging and dealing with the differences between the reading given her novel by fellows in faith and that of readers of no, or other, religious persuasions. She hardly seems surprised that WB is ample enough, in its possibilities for interpretation, to accommodate both groups, even if for her a "stumbling block" (of undescribed consequences and consequently unknown gravity) exists for readers who attribute no importance to the life and person of Jesus Christ. But O'Connor, by terminating her note in considerations about free will as mystery, simply removes the discussion to a level at which belief suddenly becomes irrelevant. Mystery by its nature defies human understanding, and the function of comic novels, she implies, is not to decipher puzzles of such magnitude.

Even this open-ended note seems, however, to have been written only after a long reluctance only gradually overcome. O'Connor confides in a letter dated Nov. 28, 1961, (WB's second edition was published in 1962) to the writer and her personal friend John Hawkes, that she has not yet written the note, having thought "I am wasting my time saying what I've written when I've already written it . . . . I couldn't hope to convince anybody anyway" (HB 457).

Whether convincing others interested her or not, she does not mention. But the evidence suggests that O'Connor would have

been happy to remain mute, letting the book come through as it would to each of its readers, as does a painting, a sculpture, or the very universe itself: open to interpretation, its creator discretely concealed. The note that O'Connor finally writes, in its inconclusiveness, evidences her belief in WB's power to stand alone, and in its brevity implies that, if for whatever reason she was not able to remain discretely concealed, at least-- having paid tribute to her own belief--she would ultimately leave her readers free to interpret, each one in his own way, the story of Hazel Motes. After all, that is what she, a Christian writer, had intended to write.

Critics of WB testify to her success, because while some see the novel as Christian in virtually every line, others discover no evidence anywhere of Christian belief. Thus, Marion Montgomery sees allusions to Roman Catholicism peeping out of O'Connor's fiction at every turn, e.g.: "Haze goes in [the Virgin] Mary's colors, [and] his blue suit progressively fades as [he] moves closer and closer to Bethlehem" (30-31). For Isaac Rosenfeld, in contrast, "everything [O'Connor] says through image and metaphor has the meaning only of degeneration" and Hazel Motes is "nothing more than the poor, sick, ugly, raving lunatic that he happens to be."<sup>2</sup>

A comrade in Montgomery's camp sees in O'Connor's audacity as image-maker the consequence of a coherent vision of art as "eminently incarnational", comparable in its effects to the art of Samuel Beckett "for whom the absence of faith tends to create an image as distinct, with edges as clear-cut or . . . as aflame, as that of the revelation in . . . O'Connor" (Gresset 108). As for the "initial ferocity of [her] vision", how else could her faith--"intransigent [and] pure"--withstand the challenge of "a puny world of tepidness, self-importance, foolishness, compro-

mise, [and] mediocrity" (106)? How else if not by a fierce will was she to "reconcile the scandal of suffering with a vision of the world"?

As for the great variety of misfortunes and/or self-inflicted sufferings her characters withstand, sympathetic critics have no difficulty at all in squaring them with O'Connor's Christian belief. Miles Orvell, for example, finds precedent in medieval Christian optimism, as described by J.L. Styan:

For the devout Christian, happiness lay in the next world. Thus poverty, bad weather, bad crops . . . or hate, cruelty, murder and crucifixion were part of the divine comedy. In a divine order of things the incongruity of man's baseness and stupidity was part of the sacred pattern.<sup>3</sup>

By this sort of reasoning, no amount of violence puts into question the orthodoxy of O'Connor's Christianity and, certainly, of violence there is no shortage: Hazel Motes, for instance, blinds himself, invites illness through neglect, binds his chest in barbed wire, and sprinkles his inner soles with gravel. André Bleikasten refers to "the enormous amount of suffering and humiliation which is inflicted on most of O'Connor's characters, and the inevitability of their defeat and death" (147).

But Josephine Hendin finds it outright impossible to interpret episodes, such as Solace Layfield's murder and the callous rejection of the pathetic Enoch Emory, as merely customary episodes on the rocky road to heaven, unless by readers whose "simplistic view", rather than textually justified, requires permanent use of "dogmatic glasses" (The World of Flannery O'Connor 54-55). She declares flatly: "O'Connor's assertion of Christian orthodoxy does not accurately describe her art", nor is

Hendin satisfied that O'Connor's version of her religion contains the whole truth: "It is at least a possibility that her religion provided a legitimate sanction for violent and destructive impulses, impulses which became acceptable when they were called righteous and directed at the 'godless'" (The World of Flannery O'Connor 16). In fact, "religion could have been an effective way to express and contain fury of a very irreligious kind." (One wonders how O'Connor herself would have been able to offer proof to the contrary, she who, in spite of affirming that the direction her gift had taken "has been because of the Church in me or the effect of the Church's teaching", had to admit (Aug. 2, 1955) to her friend "A.": "I won't ever be able entirely to understand my own work or even my own motivations" (HB 92).)

As for employing the conventions of the grotesque, O'Connor had written (April 18, 1959) to her friend "A." that that "is the nature of my talent" (HB 328). Some of O'Connor's critics, however, do not let that statement pass unexamined. For Bleikasten, for example, the grotesque, with its "power of revelation, [and capacity to manifest] the irruption of the demon in man" was used by O'Connor very deliberately, and if it became one of her "privileged modes, it was because she thought it fittest to express her vision of reality" (141). Furthermore, "even though [she] defended her use of the grotesque as a necessary strategy of her art, one is left with the impression that in her work it eventually became the means of a savage revilement of the whole of creation" (142).

Claire Katz examines even more deeply O'Connor's predilection for the grotesque:

The writer does more than assimilate the outer world to his purposes; he also projects his own corresponding impulses onto the microcosm, shaping through his world

a specific vision. For the writer, the inner and outer worlds merge in an imaginatively extended country, and in the fiction of [O'Connor] that country is dominated by a sense of immanent destruction. (54)

Over all O'Connor's haunted land presides a God found frightening, for instance, by the critic Frederick Asals:

Demanding everything, valuing only our diminishments, bringing not peace but a sword, [O'Connor's] Deity corresponds to no recognizable humanistic value. A Christian version of the fierce and awesome God of the prophets, He requires of man the total surrender of "his own inclinations." Little wonder, then, that in the face of such a divinity her characters all run the other way: it is a fearful thing indeed to fall into the hands of the living God. (228)

With a God such as this, comments Bleikasten, "one may wonder whether O'Connor's Catholicism was not, to some extent, an alibi for misanthropy" (142). Then again, is "so much black derision . . . compatible with Christian faith, and . . . what distinguishes the extreme bleakness of [O'Connor's] vision from plain nihilism?" Bleikasten notes that "Peguy and Bernanos were just as hostile to the secular spirit of modern times and no less vehement in their strictures," but even so, "Peguy also celebrated the theological virtue of hope, and Bernanos was also the novelist of Easter joy" (142). In O'Connor, however, no such celebration occurs; there is no Easter: "the most arresting feature, as in Swift, Kafka, or Beckett, is a compulsive emphasis on man's utter wretchedness, and what gives her voice its unique quality is a sustained note of dry and bitter fury."

In A&S Maritain writes that the inevitable conflicts occur-



ring between Art and Prudence can be perfectly reconciled only by wisdom (81). Similarly, in the conflicting interpretations surrounding WB and extending even to its author, reconciliation is not possible except by resorting to a point of view within which all of these interpretations can be encompassed. This is ultimately how André Bleikasten, for example, arrives at calm within the storm: for him, "[w]hile the Christian reader quite naturally takes his cue from the author and translates the psychological conflict into religious drama, the non-Christian reader is tempted just as naturally to discuss the religious allegory in psychological terms" (151). For them, O'Connor's God is resolved into a "magnified fantasy - [a] projection of her overpowering parent figures."

But which of these approaches is correct? Bleikasten's answer is highly relevant to the subject of this thesis: "Both may be considered valid insofar as they provide operational procedures of analysis which are not contradicted by the evidence of the work under consideration" (151). On the other hand, "both may also become reductive to the extent that they pretend to have the monopoly of a 'correct understanding'" (151). Thus, it is impossible to determine "by whom O'Connor's . . . driven souls [are] possessed," for her work raises questions but provides no answers. Nor, says Bleikasten, is it "the critic's task to provide them. He reverberates her questioning in his own language and tries to do justice to its complexities, and this is about all he can do without exceeding his prerogatives" (151).

Teilhard de Chardin observed that "the universe as we know it is a joint product of the observer and the observed."<sup>4</sup> Bleikasten states about the same with respect to the result of the interaction between literature and the reader: "Literature has its own truths, elusive and modest, truths it generates in close

cooperation with each individual reader outside the massive certainties and ready-made patterns of fixed beliefs" (156). For him, these are the kind of truths generated in the case of O'Connor's fiction, because if it indeed implicitly refers to a specific theology, "the Catholic orthodoxy of her work is at least debatable", and her "version of Christianity is emphatically her own" (156-57). Thus, room exists within the consequent ambiguities for all manner of readers to arrive at their separate and even mutually exclusive truths. This is only possible, says Bleikasten, because "the truth of O'Connor's work is the truth of her art, not that of her church," for, if O'Connor was a Catholic, she was not a Catholic novelist: "She was a writer, and as a writer she belongs to no other parish than literature" (157).

Alice Walker, in prose earthy as O'Connor's own, by a shorter route comes to a similar conclusion:

As one can tell a Beardon from a Keene or a Picasso from a Hallmark card, one can tell an O'Connor story from any story laid next to it. Her Catholicism did not in any way limit, by defining it, her art. After her great stories of sin, damnation, prophecy, and revelation, the stories one reads casually in the average magazine seem about love and roast beef. (79)

As Bleikasten's argument recalls the following stricture of Maritain's: "The entire soul of the artist reaches and rules his work, but it must reach it and rule it only *through the artistic habitus*" (67), Alice Walker's reference to the distinctiveness of O'Connor's work recalls another: "No doubt art always keeps its *viae certae et determinatae*, and the proof of this is that the works of the same artist . . . are all stamped with the same fixed and determined characteristics" (47), that is to say "the

full stamp, sensitive and spiritual, not only that of the hands, but of the whole soul" (60).

But if, as Walker claimed, Catholicism "did not limit, by defining it, O'Connor's art," and if "the truth of her work is the truth of her art", then O'Connor can be said in this respect to exemplify an artist concerned only with the good of her work. In effect, she had taken Maritain's words to heart: "If you want to make a Christian work, then *be* Christian, and simply try to make a beautiful work, into which your heart will pass; do not try to "make Christian" (66).

On the other hand, perhaps she had already perceived herself unequipped to produce the kind of fiction that pious people unexperienced in the ways of literature could understand anyway, and Maritain simply provided her with the justification she needed to put religion behind her as she went about her work.

As has been mentioned before, Flannery O'Connor recognized the basis of her viewpoint as "comic regardless of what I do with it" (HB 400). In a letter, to "A." (April 18, 1959) she described her stories as grotesque "because that is the nature of my talent" (328). Freed by Art and Scholasticism to forget about the Catholic Church and to let her unique combination of "comic" and "grotesque" develop as it would, and having been convinced that, as an artist, her only responsibility was to her work, she could go about her task single-mindedly. If some would see her fictional world as impregnated by God and some would not, she could allow herself, perhaps blissfully, to let that matter remain beyond her control.

## Notes

(1) Wise Blood, 2nd ed., with an introduction by the author. (New York: The Noonday Press-Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962) is cited as WB in the text hereafter.

(2) Quoted in Montgomery, Why Flannery O'Connor Stayed Home (LaSalle, Illinois: Sherwood Sugden and Company, 1981), 410.

(3) Quoted in Orvell, Invisible Parade: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), 59.

(4) Quoted in Steinem, Revolution from Within (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 8.

#### 4. Conclusion

At least four references to the teeth of her woman characters appear in WB: Mrs. Watts small, pointed ones, speckled with green, a space between each (33-34); the bathing-suited lady's pointed ones (85); the "big yellow dental plate" (192) of the waitress in the Paris Diner; and the plate of the landlady which was "too large" (220). In a letter to "A." (Sept. 24, 1955, the year of WB's publication), O'Connor also mentions teeth:

If I were to live long enough and develop as an artist to the proper extent, I would like to write a comic novel about a woman - and what is more comic and terrible than the angular intellectual proud woman approaching God inch by inch with ground\* teeth.

(WB 105-06).

Teeth, therefore, seem to have been especially useful to her as a means for dealing with women, whether herself or her characters: to make them ugly, or old, or both; to suggest that they are slovenly or licentious; to imply that they are prepared for war, with their pointed teeth like those of carnivorous animals. In another letter written less than two years later (April 20, 1957) to "A." (HB 216), O'Connor employs "teeth" again, this time "aesthetic teeth", saying that she had cut them on A&S. The contexts of her previous usage have loaded this word symbolically, making this statement even more intriguing than it already is, having come forth from a country person averse to melodrama, and distrustful of bombast and hyperbole.

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\* "Pointed" can be conceived as a synonym of "ground".

In trying to decipher its meaning, one first recalls that O'Connor's family, social, educational, and literary background seem to have been eminently suitable to the production of one more genteel female member of local society. O'Connor herself, apparently permanently intimidated by what was conveyed to her by the simple name "New York", seemed to have felt at some level just such a product and thus unequipped to venture forth into the world of writing. To take herself seriously as a candidate for membership in the "parish" of literature, therefore, O'Connor would first have had to grasp the profound distinction between whatever the phrase "New York" represented to her, and the meaning of Art.

Maritain's definition of an artist is extremely simple: a person with an innate capacity, a gift, and the dedication to develop it to the point where he has created a *habitus*, which further effort strengthens and refines indefinitely. Among the definition's terms, therefore, neither birthplace nor schooling figure. Further on in the text, Maritain does, however, stress the importance of roots: they must be sunk somewhere, anywhere, Asheville, NC, will do as well as Florida, MO, as long as they are strong, and sunk deeply into a community. Furthermore, an artist must have the discipline that makes love possible, for only love can engender art. And he requires courage, for art materializes only as the result of arduous quest. Then, certainly, he must be able to withstand the demands of a solitary life: in no one's hire, speaking for no one, not even himself, he births something which must be preserved at all cost from such deadly influences as ego's braying, for as Maritain had warned: "Art tolerates no division" (A&S 67).

For her part, O'Connor knew she had a gift: an artist's eye,

a cartoonist's concision, and the capacity to render things almost visible with words. Surely Art and Scholasticism enabled her to perceive herself as equipped with an artist's essential requirements. From Maritain she also discovered that warfare must be waged if her gift were to be developed, her *habitus* created, and she knew that, if war was necessary, war she would.

Maritain's role in this process of awakening was that of a facilitator, an educator functioning in the manner described by Aquinas, summarized in A&S: "In every discipline and in all teaching the master only assists from the outside the principle of immanent activity which is in the pupil" (A&S 43). Thus, Maritain in effect had said: "Look - an artist is only a person with a gift and a will to cultivate it tirelessly." To which O'Connor responded, "I can be that." Maritain had told O'Connor what she wanted and needed to know, to be able to release with confidence all her energies to the service of her will-to-art, in other words, to start developing her own aesthetic "teeth".

"It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence" (Huxley 364), and O'Connor's will in all its force was behind her reading of Art and Scholasticism, as it was subsequently behind her writing. What else, in her background as she describes it, could have enabled her to channel her energy with such formidable determination throughout the remainder of her brief, illness-ridden life, for she seems to have been well aware all along that a gift and the desire to work it were all she had. Maritain was saying precisely what she needed to hear: "They are enough. Go forth and struggle in thy thickets."

Artists in general seem to agree: no other way exists. In spite of a widely diffused, nagging desire to discover the "tricks" and "secrets" of great artists, one and all they assure

us that "there is no esoteric cook book, full of literary recipes, which you have only to follow attentively to become a Dickens, a Henry James, a Flaubert" (Huxley 77). Their counsel amounts to this (and squares with what O'Connor herself eventually had to offer by way of advice to aspiring literary artists): "Buy quite a lot of paper, a bottle of ink, and a pen. After that you merely have to write" (77). O'Connor, on the authority of the ancients, of Aquinas and Maritain, had done exactly that, with faith and determination. By the time she died, on August 3, 1964, at the age of thirty-nine, not even a sober country person such as herself would have been likely to deny that, by means of diligent, even heroic, dedication to the good of her work, she had made of herself an artist with (even by New York standards) a very sharp bite indeed.



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