TIRESIAS IN TAULKINHAM:
The Waste Land in Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Despite vast differences in their cultural backgrounds, T. S. Eliot and Flannery O'Connor share a remarkable similarity in the way they view their contemporary world. This paper explores the similarities between the wasteland visions of Eliot and O'Connor, focusing on two crucial works, Eliot's The Waste Land, and O'Connor's Wise Blood. It concerns itself primarily with issues raised by both writers, the breakdown and possible renewal of modern society.

Societal breakdown is depicted in both works by cities which are places of unreality and hell, symbolic of the inner state of their inhabitants— the boredom, isolation, and sterility surrounding each city dweller. Modern prophets are exposed as being mere charlatans; and modern saviors, such as sex and technology, prove equally ineffective. In each work, amid a milieu of decadence, a quester sets out to solve the mystery of spiritual rebirth, symbolized by a "sea change" and a
change in seeing. However, O'Connor's novel seems to exceed limits set in *The Waste Land*. Whereas the poem at its conclusion concentrates on the quester's preparation for spiritual renewal, the novel ends in a renewal which has already been accomplished. And while in the poem the influence of the quester on his contemporaries remains speculative, in the novel that influence is actually explored in a final chapter which focuses entirely on the reaction of modern society.

In the preface to the third edition of *Wise Blood*, O'Connor claims that if comic novels are to be good, they must be about matters of life and death. She pursues this issue further by stating that "*Wise Blood* was written by an author congenitally innocent of theory, but one with certain preoccupations. That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence." As *Wise Blood* is a novel about a Christian *malgre lui*, O'Connor continues, its subject matter is life and death, despite the comic overtones. Hazel Motes' bizarre obsession with the "wild ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind" must be taken into consideration just as seriously as the ominous warning in *The Waste Land*:

I will show you fear in a handful of dust. ²

Both T. S. Eliot and Flannery O'Connor insist that Christian
theology is essential to modern literature. In one of his essays Eliot observes that the Christian element is all too often ignored:

... the whole of modern literature is corrupted by what I call Secularism, that it is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life: of something which I assume to be our primary concern. 3

Conveying the priority of the supernatural over the natural in a thoroughly secularized world is a serious problem. O'Connor doubts that great religious fiction is possible unless there is a combination of believing artist and believing society. Until then, "the artist may reflect not the image at the heart of things but only man's broken condition, the face of evil we are possessed by." 4

Here, then, is the meeting ground of Eliot and O'Connor. Both artists are deeply concerned with Christian belief, and both are confronted with the difficulty of making that belief comprehensible to their readers. As a result they employ the method suggested by O'Connor in the quote cited above: to allude to the heart of things while rendering man's broken condition. There is a remarkable similarity between the wasteland visions of Eliot and O'Connor. It will be instructive, I believe, not only to detail the similarity in vision, but also to focus on the two crucial works, Eliot's The Waste Land, and O'Connor's Wise Blood.

Set within the framework of ancient fertility rites and the Grail
legend, The Waste Land is the story of a quest. The quester is Tiresias who, even though he is a mere spectator, is nevertheless the most important figure in the poem. Eliot gives us that clue in the famous note which states, "What Tiresias sees is the substance of the poem." Tiresias' role is that of a seer. Like the prophet Ezekiel, the "son of man," he is to make the inhabitants of the wasteland aware of their broken condition. What he encounters, however, is an atmosphere of sterility and indifference. The wastelanders have no use for reality; they prefer death-like existence to the sharp joys and agonies of living. To them, April, the month of renewal of life, is

the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers (11.1-7).

Wise Blood also takes as its central theme the quest. The quester is Hazel Motes, a young man who, upon being released from the army and finding his home deserted, sets out for Taulkinham, the nearest city. Like Tiresias, Haze has a mission: ever since childhood he had known he was going to be a preacher. He too is an observer, separated from the rest of society by his preoccupation with Christ whom he is desperately trying to avoid. Hazel Motes encounters among his contemporaries the indifference displayed by the wastelanders. His society resents any spiritual awakening, preferring the obscurity of "forgetful snow" to conscious living. Mrs. Hitchcock, a passenger on the train to the city, only reluctantly concedes to being "redeemed," shifting within the same
sentence to a less threatening subject, food. When Haze confronts some young women in the dining car with, "Do you think I believe in Jesus?" one of them replies, "Who said you had to?" (13). Later in his berth Haze has a nightmare of being trapped in a coffin. Dazed and ill, he calls for help, moaning, "Jesus, Jesus." The porter, watching Haze from the other end of the car, refuses to come to his aid. "Jesus been a long time gone," he answers "in a sour triumphant voice" (19).

Unlike the people around him, Haze is aware of the reality of death. On the way to the city he recalls in a dream the death of several members of his family. He remembers observing his grandfather laid out in his coffin, thinking that the old fiery preacher would prevent having the coffin lid close in on him; but death had rendered the strong-willed man helpless. Apparently obsessed by fear of being closed in, Haze's father had requested to be buried hunched on his hands and knees. "If I keep my can in the air," he insisted, "nobody can shut nothing on me"; yet Haze recalls that when the coffin was dropped into the grave his father "flattened out like anybody else" (15). At sixteen Haze lost his mother. She had been an austere, frigid woman who looked as dissatisfied lying in her coffin as she had throughout life. Haze expected her to "spring up and shove the lid back and fly out and satisfy herself: but they shut it" (p. 19). Death is for Haze an actuality which makes him apprehend his own coffin confinement.

In Haze's fundamentalist upbringing, death is an essential part of redemption. Christ had sacrificed himself for mankind; in turn he demands that man give up his old life in order to gain the new. Haze imagines Christ as a devourer, the wild ragged figure who pursues him, threatening to annihilate him. To be redeemed by Christ means to die in
Christ; but by repudiating the need for redemption Haze hopes to escape this predicament. Claiming to be "converted to nothing," he preaches the Church Without Christ, a church dedicated completely to the temporal, one without heaven or hell, past or future, sin or conscience.

Ironically, the new religion Haze advocates is not at all news to the city dwellers--it is only Haze's fanatical insistence upon truth which seems unusual to them. Like death, religion had lost the edge of reality, becoming a matter of esthetics rather than vital belief. "A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living," is one columnist's advice to the Taulkinham lovelorn, "if you put it in the proper perspective and do not let it dwarf you" (p. 67). In an essay on Arnold and Pater, Eliot voices similar criticism of modern society, claiming that the excessive emphasis on culture has produced an "aesthetic religion," a religion which has lost all its vitality. Spiritually ignorant, confused about the nature of esthetics and religion, the people exist in banal unreality, a condition explored by both O'Connor and Eliot. In The Waste Land, for instance, the state of society is indicated by the Unreal City, a fusion of references to Baudelaire's descriptions of Paris with the familiar landmarks of London. Because the Unreal City lacks specific geographical and historical location, it is the city of all people in all ages.

Symbolizing the unreality of Taulkinham are the numerous movie houses. Haze preaches in front of various theatres because they are the places where large crowds gather. Sharply contrasted with the movie houses is the lack of interest in the churches. As in Eliot's Unreal City, where Saint Mary Woolnoth is reduced to "keeping the hours," the Taulkinham church serves merely as a landmark on Haze's way to a house
of prostitution.

Supplanting the church as a spiritual center is the park, depicted as the heart of the secularized city. It's name, City Forest Park, links the unreal city with the forest, often treated in literature as the region of devil and devil worship. The park serves indeed as a site for a Black Mass, a grotesque parody of religious function. We need only follow Enoch, *Wise Blood*'s other quester, in his daily excursion to be aware of ritualistic behavior. Enoch's first stop is at the swimming pool, where he observes a woman in a white but stained bathing suit dip in and out of the water in a sort of unholy baptism. While Enoch, hiding in the bushes resembles the devil ("Anyone who parted the abelia sprigs at just that place, would think he saw a devil and would fall down the slope into the pool" (p.47), the woman is described in animalistic terms: a cadaverous face, sharp pointed teeth, squatting, panting like a dog. Enoch's next step in the worship ritual is the Frosty Bottle, a hamburger stand, where he is compelled to partake in a mock communion service. Signifying the asexuality of a priest, the waitress presiding over the ceremony is described in masculine terms, with a man's face, bobbed hair, and large muscular arms. She is wearing a white but stained uniform and drinks whiskey from a fruit jar, a jarring parody of vestment, sacramental wine, and chalice. Furthermore, the ritual of confession and absolution is parodied--Enoch makes suggestive remarks, and the woman showers him with abuse.

The next religious observance takes Enoch to the zoo. His feelings toward the pampered, well-fed animals are ambivalent, a combination of fear and hate, of envy and awe. Like the Golden Calf to the Israelites, they represent false idols to Enoch, whose greatest reward
occurs later in the story when he dons a gorilla suit and becomes one with the animals. Only when he has passed the three stages of worship—baptism, communion, and idolatry—does he dare enter the inner sanctum, the museum. It contains the mystery, Enoch's "new jesus," a mummy in a coffin-like glass case, flanked by two similar enclosures as a mocking recreation of the crucifixion scene. Before this newly discovered god Enoch stands in reverence, "his neck thrust forward and his hands clutched together," bowing to the sinister forces. The bestialization and parody of religious ritual in Enoch's excursion in Wise Blood is in a number of ways an echo of a similar debasement portrayed by Eliot in the inferno of The Waste Land.

Eliot's reference to Dante's Inferno,

I had not thought death had undone so many (1.63),

discloses the reality of man's fallen condition, a condition which the spiritually ignorant will not recognize. It becomes necessary, therefore, to depict man's damned state in more graphic examples. As Eliot observes in his essay on Dante, "Hell, though a state, is a state which can only be thought of, and perhaps only experienced, by the projection of sensory images." O'Connor in part agrees with Eliot when she asserts that the supernatural can be portrayed only on the literal level of events. Although Eliot's symbolic world may differ from O'Connor's naturalistic one, both unreal cities are described as places of hells which reflect the inner state of their inhabitants. The terror of destruction, depicted in The Waste Land by the upturned graves and the empty windowless chapel, finds its counterpart in a Taulkinham used car lot, filled with broken machinery and bordered by two deserted
warehouses, one "reddish with black empty windows," the other "without any windows." Perhaps the most fitting example of Dantesque hell is Enoch's reluctant visit to the theater. Against his will he has felt compelled to enter this particular movie house. Analogous to the upside-down condition encountered in The Waste Land, Enoch's descent into hell is depicted as an upward movement: "Two doors flew open and he found himself moving down a long red foyer and then up a darker tunnel and then up a higher, still darker tunnel" (p. 77).

The city as Dantesque hell receives particular attention in one of O'Connor's short stories, "The Artificial Nigger." There Mr. Head takes his grandson Nelson to Atlanta to convince him once and for all that the city is no great place. En route to the city, Mr. Head shows the boy the marvels of modern plumbing in the train lavatory. When they arrive in Atlanta they continue their exploration, getting down on their hands and knees to examine the city's sewer system:

Mr. Head explained the sewer system, how the entire city was underlined with it, how it contained all the drainage and was full of rats and how a man could slide into it and be sucked into the sewer and never heard from again. He described it so well that Nelson was for some seconds shaken. He connected the sewer passages with the entrance to hell and understood for the first time how the world was put together in its lower parts (204).

Soon, however, Mr. Head and Nelson discover that hell is not merely confined to the lower places—it is all around them. Like the waste-landers, they walk at first in a circle in the city, but they presently get lost. Their desperate struggle through narrow streets, dark tunnels, and strange black places signifies their inner struggle through the labyrinth of hell, a hell caused by Mr. Head when in a crucial
moment he denies any relationship to Nelson, thus effecting estrangement and isolation between them.

Estrangement and isolation are evidence of man's broken condition, and man's condition is of vital concern to O'Connor and Eliot. Repeatedly both writers utilize surface appearance for the purpose of inner illumination. Referring to Eliot's Harvard lecture on Arnold's "beautiful world," Cleanth Brooks cites Eliot as stating, "... the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory."10

Boredom is a continuous problem for wastelanders. Repeating the same life pattern over and over, their drab existence is symbolized by circular movement: people walk in a ring in pursuit of their daily tasks; a typist's routine is reflected by the turning of her gramophone record. A flurry of pointless activity fails to compensate for the lack of meaningful experience. The lady in "The Chess Game" is a typical failure:

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"
"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
"With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
"What shall we ever do?" (11.131-4).

Possible alternatives to walking the streets disclose only more of the daily routine: a hot bath at ten, a car ride at four, another chess game ... Such flurries of nervous excitement are depicted in Wise Blood when Enoch, pursuing Haze through the streets of Taulkinham, suggests in brief succession a variety of entertainments: buying a soda, taking in a night club act, seeing a movie, and visiting a prostitute.
Equally trite activities are proposed by Tanner's daughter in "Judgment Day," O'Connor's last story. Tanner, an old man from Corinth, Georgia, is visiting his daughter in New York. After one day of riding on crowded escalators and underground railways he decides that the city is a "no-place," so he sits by the window, looking at a brick wall and dreaming of the day when he may return home, alive or dead. Frequently he imagines arriving in Corinth in a coffin, springing the lid open and proclaiming to his astonished cronies, "It's Judgment Day!" Having assimilated all the characteristics of the city dwellers, his daughter cannot understand the old man's absorption with death and the afterlife. Disturbing ideas like these are best remedied by keeping oneself occupied. "The trouble with you is," she insists, "you sit in front of the window all the time where there's nothing to look out at. You need some inspiration and outlet. If you would let me pull your chair around to look at TV, you would quit thinking about morbid stuff, death and hell and judgment," (p. 216). Television fulfills in this story the same purpose as the chess game in The Waste Land and the movies in Wise Blood, keeping the people from realizing the horror of a spiritually empty existence.

Tanner's daughter warns her father not to talk to the negro who has moved next door: "Up here everybody minds their own business and everybody gets along" (p. 218). Minding one's business and getting along is a disguise for the real predicament of the city dwellers--isolation. The horror of isolation is clearly depicted in both Eliot's poem and O'Connor's novel. We need only follow the illogical conversation between the chess lady and her husband to recognize the ironic use of "minding one's business": no one listens to the other person because no
one cares. A similar incident occurs in *Wise Blood*, when Mrs. Hitchcock fails to respond to anything Haze is saying because she lives in her own mental bubble:

"I guess you are on your way to visit somebody?" she asked.
"Going to Taulkinham," he said and ground himself into the seat and looked at the window. "Don't know nobody there, but I'm going to do some things. "I'm going to do some things I never done before," he said and gave her a sidelong glance and curled his mouth slightly.
She said she knew an Albert Sparks from Taulkinham. She said he was her sister-in-law's brother-in-law and that he . . .
"I ain't from Taulkinham," he said. "I said I'm going there, that's all." Mrs. Hitchcock began to talk again but he cut her short and said, "That porter was raised in the same place where I was raised but he says he's from Chicago."
Mrs. Hitchcock said she knew a man who lived in Chicago . . .
"You might as well go one place as another," he said. "That's all I know."
Mrs. Hitchcock said well that time flies. She said she hadn't seen her sister's children in five years . . . (pp. 11-12).

The horror of isolation is revealed less amusingly in Enoch's futile attempt to make friends. He had lived in the city for two months without knowing anybody. The first hand he finally shakes belongs to a man posing as a gorilla.

The isolation which permeates the most intimate relationship of the wastelanders reduces love-making to mere copulation. Even though they profess to be lovers, the "young man carbuncular" and the bored, tired typist display total lack of concern for one another. Sex has for each of them a different connotation, for him the satiation of animalistic passion, for her the performance of daily routine. As Audrey Cahill observes, the greatest tragedy of *The Waste Land* is that things
are no longer tragic.\textsuperscript{11} The typist's note of detachment,

"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over" (1.251),

is reemphasized by the Thames daughter who "can connect nothing with nothing," who after being sexually assaulted merely remarks, "What should I resent?"

The Taulkinham counterparts to typist and Thames daughter are Leora Watts and Sabbath Lily. Mrs. Watts is the city's prostitute. Like the typist, described as "the human engine," Mrs. Watts too is portrayed in non-human terms. Her teeth are pointed, speckled with green, and spaced far apart; and her grin resembles the curved, sharp blade of a sickle. Of this creature, part monster and part cutting tool, the author makes the ironical comment, "It was plain that she was so well adjusted that she didn't have to think any more" (p. 37).

Leora Watts is indeed well adjusted in the pursuit of her profession, for when Haze tells her he had come for "the usual business," she considers it a waste of words. Beyond the mere physical relationship, she is unresponsive. Haze's desperate denial, "I'm no goddam preacher," is met complacently, with only a slight smirk. "That's okay, son," she answers, "Momma don't mind if you ain't a preacher" (p. 23).

Hoping to arouse the attention of Asa Hawks, Haze decides to seduce his daughter Lily whom he believes to be a virgin. Instead, Lily seduces him. After several unsuccessful attempts she finally snares him by hiding in his bed. No mutual concern is involved in their unsavory relationship. Hardly could the deplorable state of O'Connor's wasteland be demonstrated more effectively than in the callous, animalistic passion displayed by the fifteen year old girl:
"... from the minute I set eyes on you I said to myself, that's what I got to have, just give me some of him! I said look at those pee-can eyes and go crazy, girl! That innocent look don't hide a thing, he's just pure filthy right down his guts, like me. The only difference is I like being that way and he don't. Yes sir!" (p. 92)

No new life can evolve from these love-less, self-centered relationships. Sterility is pervasive, reflected in the land, the city, and the people. Regardless of the season, Eliot's wasteland remains a barren desert, filled with dry rocks, dead trees, and broken images. O'Connor's wasteland looks no less desolate, and like its precursor it transcends place and time. As Haze drives past the monuments of sterility--red gulleys, gray boulders, and "patches of field buttoned together with 666 posts," he feels that everything he sees is "a broken-off piece of some giant blank thing that he had forgotten had happened to him" (p. 44). And as in the latter part of the poem the imagery of drought is accelerated,

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road (11.331-2),

so do images of death and sterility become more pronounced toward the end of the novel. Haze is asked by a policeman to drive up an embankment to overlook the valley, the "puttiest view you ever did see." The vista that Haze beholds is a nightmare of waste and decay:

The embankment dropped down for about thirty feet, sheer washed-out red clay, into a partly burned pasture where there was one scrub cow lying near a puddle. Over in the middle distance there was a one-room shack with a buzzard standing hunch-shouldered on the roof (p. 113).
The characteristics of sterility in the unreal cities are depersonalization and death. A brown fog blankets the streets and structures of the European metropolis, rendering each individual an undistinguishable part of the crowd that flows over London Bridge. In Taulkinham, the depersonalization is portrayed by the drab, oppressive uniformity of its dwellings. Haze drives past long blocks of gray houses, then past blocks of better, yellow houses, and finally past "blocks of white houses, each sitting with an ugly dog face on a square of grass" (p. 44). In London, Saint Mary's keeps the hours "with a dead stroke of nine," and later in Part V, the destroyed church with its upturned towers tolls "reminiscent bells." Death is also the predominant image in the description of Taulkinham's pseudo-spiritual center, the museum. Ornamented with statues of "eyeless stone women," the building seems to "shrink suddenly" as Haze and Enoch approach. Soot-colored on the exterior, it has a black front door which is guarded by an old man looking "like a dried-up spider." An "undersmell" pervades the interior, obviously the smell of decay. The main room harbors the three glass coffins, the center coffin containing Enoch's shrunken "new jesus."

The theme of sterility ranges from land to city to city dweller. A poignant example of barrenness in The Waste Land is Lil' who, having undergone an abortion, now suffers from the loss of her teeth. Equally sterile is the motherhood of her namesake in Wise Blood. On the morning following Lily's seduction of Haze, Enoch delivers the new jesus he has stolen from the museum. Lily cradles the mummy in her arms and, rocking her "baby," exclaims to Haze, "Call me Momma now" (p. 102). Lifeless as Lil's stillborn child, and shrivelled up as the wasteland itself, the mummy is symbolic of all men. As Lily inspects the corpse, she detects
a resemblance between him and all of humanity: "... there was something in him of everyone she had ever known, as if they had all been rolled into one person and killed and shrunk and dried" (p. 100). However, Lily's recognition remains limited; like the Thames daughter she "can connect nothing with nothing." The pale dust seeping out of the mummy's split eyelid holds for her no warning, no prediction of her own fate. Her capacity for understanding does not exceed her unexplained feeling of kinship with the shrunken image.

The gospels postulated by the false prophets of the Unreal City are also sterile, offering no hope of spiritual renewal. Madam Sosostris' clairvoyance is evidently impaired by her cold. Even though she has knowledge of Christ, the "Hanged Man," she cannot find him in her deck of cards. Stetson's endeavors too are unfruitful; the god he has planted in his garden cannot sprout, cannot renew himself. Eugenides, the one-eyed merchant, is only a half-seer. Cleanth Brooks notes that the burden Eugenides carries on his back (the one card Madame Sosostris is forbidden to see) is evidently the knowledge of the mystery of life. However, Eugenides has made a commodity of the mystery, as indicated by his sale of currants, the dried, shriveled remains of fertility. Finally, Eugenides' encounter with the quester is barren; instead of conveying the mystery of life, he proposes a weekend of sexual perversion.

Sharing many similarities with Eliot's charlatans is Asa Hawks, Taulkinham's false prophet. Aided by his daughter Lily, he hands out tracts and solicits for his gospel in the streets. All the underhandedness of his work is exposed when he takes advantage of a crowd gathered by a man selling potato peelers; the parallels drawn between the man
peddling machines and the man peddling religion are grotesque. The salesman standing before his "altar" of potato peelers adopts the rhetoric of an evangelist: "You'll thank the day you ever stopped here, you'll never forget it. Ever' one of you people purchasing one theseyer machines'11 never forget it!" (p. 25). Asa, on the other hand, stresses the value of a bargain: "If you won't repent, give up a nickel. I can use it as good as you. Help a blind unemployed preacher. Wouldn't you rather have me beg than preach? Come on and give a nickel if you won't repent" (p. 26).

Despite Madame Sosostris' inability to see clearly there are some things she is able to predict. She does see people walking aimlessly in a ring, and she does warn the quester to fear death by water, even though she is unable to connect drowning with rebirth. Similarly, Asa predicts Haze's condition, even though he does it to mock the quester. "Some preacher left his mark on you," he snickers, unwittingly referring to the old circuit preacher whom Haze closely resembles. "Jesus loves you," he repeats time and again, "in a flat mocking voice." When Haze protests that Jesus does not exist, Asa inadvertently reveals the truth: "You got eyes and see not, ears and hear not, but you'll have to see some time" (p. 33). Haze will indeed learn to see when he gives up his physical sight, as, judging by outer appearance, Asa Hawks has done.

Eliot's reference to Stetson--"There I saw one I knew"--stresses again the connection between the Unreal City and Dante's Inferno. The entire passage reads, "After I had distinguished some among them, I saw and I knew the shade of him who made, through cowardice, the great refusal." Asa, like Stetson, is guilty of refusal through cowardice.

Once a sincere though fanatical believer with "eyes that suggested
terror," he had vowed to blind himself as proof that Christ had redeemed him. A large crowd had gathered to witness the blinding, but at the last minute his courage had failed. When he had envisioned Christ standing before him, beckoning to him, Asa had fled from the tent. Hiding behind dark glasses since that time, the ex-evangelist is a fraud who makes a mockery of religion. Like Stetson, he has the knowledge of the mystery of life but refuses to allow that mystery to germinate.

Asa's pseudo-blindness bears some similarity to Mr. Eugenides' single vision. Brooks mentions that the reason Madame Sosostris sees him as one-eyed is most likely because his face is shown in profile on the card, but that Eliot applies the term for different effect: Eugenides is a prophet with defective vision. The two levels of meaning are applicable also to Asa, whose dark glasses give him the appearance of blindness and at the same time symbolize impaired vision. The dual role of glasses is consistent throughout the novel. Wishing to appear incognito, Enoch dons a long black raincoat and a pair of dark glasses when he delivers the new jesus to Haze. Though rather thinly disguised, he is described simply as "a person," and only when he lowers his glasses is his identity revealed. At the same time the glasses obscure Enoch's vision, causing him to squint for clearer focus. Haze wears his mother's glasses precisely because they blur his vision, and only after he disposes of them does he attain spiritual lucidity.

As long as Asa wears his glasses, Haze is unable to recognize him as a fraud. Despite the preacher's mocking tone and despite Lily's disclosure that she is a bastard, Haze sees in Asa a man of God. Once, spending the night in his Essex, Haze dreams that the car had become a coffin from which he is desperately trying to escape. He keeps
expecting Asa to come to his aid and break the windows with a wrench, but to his disappointment "the blind man didn't come." (Ironically, Enoch uses the same tool to free the new Jesus from his glass coffin.)

Like Eugenides, Asa deals in merchandising religion, and like the currants Eugenides sells, Asa's wares are the dried up remnants of faith. An unbeliever himself, Asa's message can have no spiritual effect on his apathetic listeners. To an earnest searcher like Haze he can offer no guidance. Instead of conveying spiritual knowledge, he schemes jointly with Lily to entrap Haze in a sexual liaison so that he, Asa, may be rid of his daughter. His role as procurer is no less debased than Eugenides' invitation for a weekend at the Metropole.

Another merchandiser of religion, Onnie Jay Holy, is by far more viperous than Asa Hawks. While Asa peddles a mere ineffectual faith, Onnie corrupts it altogether. Assessing correctly the oppressing isolation of each city dweller, his salespitch assumes the guise of compassion: "Do you know what it's like not to have a friend in the world?" (p. 83). Onnie's remedy for loneliness is to release "the nature of sweetness" with which everyone is born—a total distortion of the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. Equally perverted are the reasons he cites for trusting his church. "First, there is nothing foreign connected with it," he says, "you don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it, it ain't true and that's all there is to it" (p. 84). Subject to human approval, Onnie's religion completely rejects the mystery of grace, a mystery which transcends all human understanding. Another reason he offers for having absolute trust in his church is that "It's based on your own interpretation of the bible, friends" (p. 84). Again, the bible caters
to human approval: whatever is comforting may be accepted as truth, whatever cumbersome discarded as falsehood. The comforts of the modern faith may be bought: "It'll cost you each a dollar but what is a dollar? A few dimes! Not too much to pay to unlock that little rose of sweetness inside you!" (p. 85).

Onnie Jay Holy is of course far more successful with his mode of persuasion than Haze with his honest categorial denial of Christ. The latter's protests that Onnie is a fraud, that the truth cannot be bought, are completely ignored by the bystanders. Onnie gives the people of Taulkinham exactly what they wish to hear, filling the void created by isolation with his undemanding gospel of "Soulsease," a creed easily adapted to each particular life style. In the faith he advocates, the violence of grace is erased. There is no Original Sin, no fear of death, no demanding Christ--nothing but sweetness and compassion. Onnie's watered-down religion which appeals so greatly to the Taulkinham population may not be confined to the realm of fiction, however; it may appeal to the modern reader as well. In one of her lectures O'Connor makes the following statement: "Today's reader, if he believes in grace at all, sees it as something which can be separated from nature and served to him raw as Instant Uplift. This reader's favored word is compassion."15 The affinity between the reader and the citizens of Taulkinham brings to mind Eliot's direct linking of the modern reader with the population of the Unreal City:

"You! hypocrite lecteur!--mon semblable,--mon frere!"

(1.76).

Onnie Jay Holy seems more than just a con man. His alias is Shoats, probably a reference by O'Connor to the biblical account of
Jesus' driving some devils into a herd of swine. Shoats' perversion of the Christian faith appears to be indeed the work of Satan. Although not as clearly defined as the representative of the devil in O'Connor's second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, Shoats nevertheless seems a forerunner of Tarwater's "friend." In both novels, friendship is a guise for deception. Also in both novels are descriptions of clothing which connect the villains—the black suit, the white hat which each wears pushed back, and, most important, the lavender handkerchief. In *Wise Blood*, Shoats uses it merely to conceal his annoyance with Haze; in *The Violent Bear It Away*, it takes on significant symbolic meaning when Tarwater's "friend" uses it to tie his victim's hands.

Even though Shoats is his real adversary, Haze does not attempt to exterminate him. Instead, he kills Solace Layfield, a lazy, dishonest man Shoats had hired as Haze's double. If Shoats does indeed represent the devil, then Haze's choice is justifiable. The very source of evil cannot be eliminated; all Haze can do is shut it out. Wanting no part of either Christ or the devil, he attempts to get away from Shoats as he had from the pursuing Christ, by seeking refuge in the one thing he trusts, his Essex.

Technology, symbolized by the car, is one of the modern saviors of the secular city; sex is another. Both have superseded the mystery of rebirth. In *The Waste Land* the quester observes them herald the coming of spring:

> But at my back from time to time I hear
> The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
> Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring (11.196-9).

In the Talkinham wasteland, technology and sex are no less esteemed.
Haze has complete confidence in the saving powers of his rat-colored Essex. Despite its obvious defects—the leaky roof, leaky radiator, leaky gas tank—he believes that the car offers complete shelter, and that it can get him anywhere he wishes to go. When he first hears of Asa's alleged blinding as justification of belief in Christ, Haze defiantly replies, "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (p. 65).

Also supplanting Christian belief is Leora Watts, the Taulkinham envoy of animalistic lust. Denying any need for redemption, Haze claims, "What do I need with Jesus? I got Leora Watts" (p. 34).

Obviously the spring welcomed by the sound of horns and motors offers no renewal of the wasteland, just as no new life can evolve from the sexual embraces of Sweeney and Mrs. Porter. In Wise Blood, too, technology and sex prove inadequate saviors. Instead of liberation they denote entrapment for Haze, illustrated by a succession of coffin dreams. During his second night with Leora Watts he recalls a childhood experience at a carnival sideshow, advertised as "SINsational." What the boy sees when he finally persuades the Barker to allow him into the tent is a nude woman, squirming in a casket. Afterward he is punished by his mother for having seen evil, but he realizes that the sin of the tent is insignificant in comparison with the "unplaced guilt that was in him," the dim awareness of Original Sin. Leora Watts, who later embodies the woman in the casket, represents not only the paganism associated with her profession, but also the corrupt condition of the world that signifies Original Sin, a reminder of Haze's own fallen state. When he spends a night in his Essex, Haze dreams that his car has become a coffin from which there is no escape. As he repudiates heaven and hell, he is doomed to the half-existence shared by his contemporaries: in his
nightmare he is not dead but buried, "waiting on nothing."

In a society where technology and animalistic lust are considered sufficient saviors, the individual becomes as dehumanized as the gods he worships. The people of the modern wasteland function like machines. Mrs. Hitchcock and her husband are called Mammadoll and Papadoll by her sister's children; Lily turns her head "as if it worked on a screw"; Enoch's heart beats so fast it resembles "one of the motorcycles at the fair that the fellow drives around the walls of a pit." The machines, on the other hand, take on human characteristics. Haze's car sounds "like a person gargling without water," and later, when Haze runs the Essex over Solace Layfield, it becomes the hunter, standing over the victim's body "as if it were pleased to guard what it had finally brought down." At the drugstore, Enoch enters in pursuance of his quest, the popcorn machine "belches" its products into a cauldron, and the boy serving the machine feels around in its "vitals" to fill up a bag of corn for Enoch. Often the dehumanizing process is exemplified by a complete lack of personality. The countergirl at the drugstore becomes undistinguishable from the merchandise she sells: "The fountain counter was pink and green marble linoleum and behind it there was a red-headed waitress in a lime-colored uniform and a pink apron. She had green eyes set in pink and they resembled a picture behind her of a Lime-Cherry-Surprise, a special that day for ten cents" (p. 76).

Animal imagery depicting the people of Taulkinham is also used for dehumanizing effect. Immediately following the description of some hogs is the description of Mrs. Hitchcock, a fat woman, dressed in pink, with short pearshaped legs. The rest of the people on the train resemble a flock of birds--crows, parrots, gamehens. Leora Watts, whose address
Haze finds in a toilet stall decorated with a welcome sign and the drawing of a snake, is described in nonhuman terms, and her response to Haze's timid advances is that of an animal: "You huntin' something?"

Similarly, animals are portrayed as humans. The advertising in the Frosty Bottle shows a cow dressed up as a housewife, serving ice cream.

In the zoo, two bears mirror the isolated people of the city. They sit in their cage, "facing each other like two matrons having tea, their faces polite and self-absorbed" (p. 54).

Enoch, the other quester in Wise Blood, is described predominantly in animalistic terms. He is compared to a friendly hound dog, with typically poor eyesight but keen sense of smell. During his daily visits to the museum his awareness of the "undersmell" is remarkable. Equally well developed is his sense of hearing; one instance relates him as "walking down the streets as if he were led by a silent melody or by one of those whistles that only dogs hear." Enoch acts entirely upon instinct, following the wise blood inherited from his father, a thoroughly disreputable man who had once traded his son to a welfare woman, and who had now abandoned him again in favor of another female. Nevertheless Enoch venerates his father, claiming that he looks like Jesus.

In emulating his father's values, the materialistic and the animalistic, Enoch's quest takes on a purely physical nature. He seeks social recognition, dreaming of the day when he might become "THE young man of the future," standing before a line of people who are waiting to shake his hand.

The one hand the people of Taulkinham are eager to shake belongs to Gonga, the gorilla. Actually the city dwellers are of the same breed as Enoch's father, and their materialism is symbolized by their
inclination toward the lower forms of life. Animals are treated with far greater care than people—we need only compare their air-conditioned living quarters at the zoo to the shabby boarding rooms in the city to see the difference.

In his search for recognition, Enoch becomes completely immersed in animalism. His daily ritual at the park accentuates man's lesser attributes: lasciviousness, greed, envy. The acceptable god for a materialistic world is the mummy, a god who is all man, but one who has no blood to spare for atonement. When Enoch releases the new jesus from his glass coffin he expects to be rewarded, but, just as he had to steal the new savior, he fears he might have to "snatch his honor." The nature of his reward is revealed to him when he reads an advertisement of Gonga's last appearance in one of the local theaters, quite aptly named the Victory. Enoch's course to the Victory becomes a pathway to hell, a journey through dark passages, narrow alleys, and unlit back streets, culminating with his hiding in "a narrow stair cavity" opposite the theater which in hellish semblance is "glittering in its darker setting." The Victory is described as "suited to the needs of the family," and the line of people waiting at the entrance does indeed consist of all ages and socio-economic levels. Enoch watches them shake Gonga's hand with envy. Having slipped into the movie van and having killed the actor posing as the beast, Enoch's victory becomes complete when he puts on the gorilla suit and sets out toward the highway at the outskirts of the city: "No gorilla in existence, whether in the jungles of California or in New York City in the finest apartment in the world, was happier at that moment than this one, whose god had finally rewarded it" (p. 108). Leon Driskell and Joan Brittain observe that Enoch, by
donning the gorilla suit becomes a symbolic new jesus in bestial form, created by a modern, materialistic world, watching over a city where spiritual fulfillment is denied. Driskell and Brittain's analogy gains significance when we consider the wound Enoch receives in the death struggle with the actor, a gash across his chin which parallels his father's scar. Earlier Enoch had told Haze, "My daddy looks just like Jesus . . . only difference is he's got a scar across his chin" (p. 32). Enoch, in assuming the facial disfigurement that distinguishes his father from the real Jesus, becomes himself a pseudo godhead, in short, the new jesus of the material world.

The story of Enoch parodies the story of Haze, designed to draw a contrast between spiritual quest and material pursuit. Both are newcomers to the city, both reach their goals by means of murder, and both use products of technology as murder weapons: Haze a car, Enoch an umbrella. However, while Enoch's concern is with the physical, Haze seeks truth; while Enoch hails the mummy as the new god, Haze destroys the shriveled image; finally, while Enoch accepts his beastly role, Haze refutes his lower nature, blinding himself for greater spiritual insight. At the end each of the questers has a view of his chosen destination, Enoch of the secular city, Haze of the wide spaces of his newly found spiritual country.

The true meaning of Enoch and Haze's quests is revealed only in the symbolic significance of each character's overt action. In an essay, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," O'Connor cites as an example of the
multi-levelled function of symbolism Haze's car, which serves the hero as a pulpit, a coffin, and, he erroneously assumes, as a means of escape. Actually Haze does not escape his predicament until the automobile is destroyed; it therefore becomes a symbol suggesting death in life. Conversely, Haze's blinding himself gives him inner vision, and thus the blinding takes on a life-in-death meaning. The importance of the anagogical method is stressed by O'Connor in the following statement: "The kind of vision the fiction writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is called anagogical vision, and that is the kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image and one situation."

Eliot utilizes the anagogical method in *The Waste Land*, for even though he does not discuss the need for Christ openly, his descriptions of the arid desert mirror the dilemma of spiritual drought; his rendering of social banality reveal the plight of spiritual waste. Similar is the double function of symbols, each representing secular and spiritual elements. As an example of shifting meaning Brooks cites the rock, used throughout the poem to represent the desert and at the same time a place of refuge and spiritual stability:

Only
There is the shadow of the red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock) (11.24-6).

Brooks states further that the rock may also be a direct reference to the grail itself. In *Parzival*, for instance, the grail is depicted as a stone. In O'Connor's work, the rock takes on the same double meaning. While the gray boulders at the outskirts of Taulkinham are symbols of barrenness, the bible in Haze's duffel bag is also described
as a rock, a symbol of spiritual certainty and refuge.

Two recurring images which change their meaning in both Eliot's poem and O'Connor's novel are fire and water. Fire as the symbol of lust in "The Fire Sermon" finds its counterpart in the "warm glow" coming from Mrs. Watts' window. Beside the consuming flame of desire, fire is also a symbol for refinement, as indicated by Eliot's allusion to Arnout in Dante's Purgatorio, and O'Connor's mention of the fire escape behind the "extra door" in Haze's room. Although Haze's landlady recalls the existence of a fire escape, she has no knowledge of whatever happened to it. At present the door opens to a sheer drop of about thirty feet into a narrow yard where garbage is collected. For Haze, however, the treacherous pit becomes a life-saving device when he uses it to throw out the new jesus and his mother's glasses, thus symbolically ridding himself of false ideology and impaired vision. It is at this point that the imagery of fire and water merge for greater emphasis upon Christian meaning.

Water is the life-giving flow, the symbol of rebirth which in Christianity is the rebirth in Christ. To gain the new life, however, man must give up his old one. When Madame Sosostris warns the quester to fear death by water, for instance, she is evidently unaware that the way to life may be through death. A similar fear is expressed by Haze when he feels that Christ might lead him into a dark, unfamiliar place and cause him to drown.

An outward sign of the new life in Christ is baptism, the symbolic drowning of the Old Adam and the subsequent emergence of the new man. Rain, so urgently needed in the wasteland, is used in Wise Blood as the agent of baptism. At first Haze is not at all aware that it is raining;
his only concern is his automobile, considered then as a means of escape. O'Connor is very emphatic in stressing that point: "He looked out the window at the Essex. It sat high and square in the pouring rain. He didn't notice the rain, only the car; if asked he would not have been able to say that it was raining" (p. 101). As soon as Haze opens the door of the fire escape and discards the new jesus, he becomes keenly aware of the rain, retreating at first "as if he were bracing himself for a blow," then leaning out of the door to let the rain fall over him. Lily concludes at that moment correctly that he wants nothing but Jesus, and his futile attempt to deny Christ further ends in a cough which sounds, quite appropriately for a newly born, "like a little yell for help at the bottom of a canyon" (p. 103).

Another baptism occurs earlier in the chapter, the mock-baptism of the new jesus. As Enoch enters the street with the bundle in his arm, large putty-colored drops of rain splatter over them, followed by "an ugly growl in the sky." This unholy observance is a jarring parody of the baptism of Jesus, where a voice from heaven proclaims, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Grotesque parallels are also drawn to Haze's baptism, but while the rain that falls on the mummy is putty-colored, symbolic perhaps of its recipient's earthy destination, the drops of water hanging from the brim of Haze's hat are sparkling.

In the introduction to *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Robert Fitzgerald was the first to notice the similarity between Eliot's rendition of the drowned Phoenician sailor whose bones had been "picked in whispers,"

Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you (1.321),
and O'Connor's account of Enoch showing Haze his new Jesus,

"See theter notice," Enoch said in a church whisper, pointing to a typewritten card at the man's foot. "It says he was once as tall as you or me. Some A-rabs did it to him in six months (p. 57).

In a more recent study of O'Connor's fiction, Driskell and Brittain extend the comparison between the two works, claiming that O'Connor, through allusions to Part IV of The Waste Land, heightens the reader's awareness of the double function of water. Whether or not Phlebas experiences rebirth remains speculative, complicated by Eliot's linking the drowned sailor with the depraved Eugenides and with Ferdinand of The Tempest. While the picking of Phlebas' bones "in whispers" does not indicate the sea change described in the Ariel song,

Of his bones are corals made,

his entering the whirlpool does suggest regeneration. No such ambivalence exists concerning the new Jesus. In a sense he does pass "the stages of his age and youth," as had Phlebas, when Lily adopts the shrivelled image as her baby. However, when Haze throws him against the wall, the mummy's head splits open, spilling its contents in "a little cloud of dust." Unlike Phlebas, the mummy does not enter the whirlpool; his transformation ends with the reality of death, the "fear in a handful of dust." As in The Waste Land in rat's alley,

Where dead men lost their bones (1.118),

all that remains of the corpse is a flaccid skin which Haze throws onto the pile of rubbish below his apartment.
In the Ariel song the eyes of the supposedly drowned Alonso undergo a change,

Those are pearls that were his eyes,^{23}

and as the play unfolds, Alonso does indeed learn to see his mistakes. Eliot's repeated allusion to this particular line in *The Tempest* indicates the relationship of sea change and the change in seeing. As the symbolic drowning is a necessary process of rebirth, so is the loss of physical sight often essential for spiritual vision. The quester Tiresias had received his prophetic powers because he had been blinded by Juno. His recollection of the visit "among the lowest of the dead" brings to mind also Oedipus, whose failure to see his incestuous relationship with Jocasta leads to self-blinding as atonement for his crime, and thus to greater spiritual insight.

Haze, too, is unable to see until he loses his physical sight. The mission he comes to accept only at the end is to follow Jesus, a painful, demanding task he is trying to avoid by blasphemy and sinning. Yet his earnest search for truth makes him suspect to the city dwellers who repeatedly accuse him of wanting nothing but Jesus. Haze does indeed desire extraordinary sight, wearing his mother's glasses because they hurt his eyes. But the glasses only serve to obscure; while giving him a "look of deflected sharpness," they also distort his view of the outside world. Because Christ is the truth, and because Haze seeks the truth, there can be no compromise—he must either be for Christ or against Christ. Hence he cannot be satisfied with half-vision; he must blind himself to find a truth he could not see "without being blind to everything else."
The surrender of physical sight for spiritual insight is an underlying theme in many of O'Connor's stories. Even when the overt act of blinding does not occur, there is a change in vision following the moment of epiphany experienced by a character. In her second novel, for instance, Tarwater's specific mission is to baptize Bishop, Rayber's idiot son. Even though he involuntarily speaks the word of baptism while drowning the boy, Tarwater refuses to accept the truth until he is violated by his "friend," the devil. As he awakes from his drugged sleep, his eyes have undergone a change. They look "as if, touched with a coal like the lips of the prophet, they would never be used for ordinary sight again" (p.422).

In *The Waste Land*, the blind Tiresias is linked with Ezekiel, the prophet chosen to lead the Israelites back to God. However, the warning to "remember God before the time of the grasshopper and the day of evil" is too late. What Tiresias finds is an already fulfilled prophecy, a world of desolated altars and broken images. Spiritually blind, the people of the wasteland are incapable of comprehending Tiresias' message. Haze becomes the blind seer who serves as a guide to Mrs. Flood, his landlady, but even though she takes pride in having excellent eyesight she is unable to see what he is trying to convey. The confrontation of physical and spiritual sight is pointedly delineated when Mrs. Flood discovers rocks in Hazes shoes:

"Mr. Motes," she said that day when he was in her kitchen eating his dinner, "what do you walk on rocks for?"
"To pay," he said in a harsh voice.
"Pay for what?"
"It don't make any difference for what," he said. I'm paying."
"But what have you got to show that you're paying for?" she persisted.
"Mind your business," he said rudely. "You can't see."
The landlady continued to chew very slowly. "Do you think, Mr. Motes," she said hoarsely, "that when you're dead, you're blind?"
"I hope so," he said after a minute.
"Why?" she asked, staring at him.
After a while he said, "If there's no bottom in your eyes, they hold more."
The landlady stared for a long time, seeing nothing at all (p. 121).

Physical blindness is linked with spiritual insight, physical sight with spiritual blindness. While Haze is fully aware of the "sea-change," the change of vision through death, the landlady's comprehension breaks down entirely. In a reversal of roles the blind man denotes vision, the seeing woman blindness.

The inability to see is aptly illustrated in a story discussed earlier, "The Artificial Nigger." There Mr. Head is the seeing guide who fails dismally. He wants to show Nelson the evils of the city so that he will never wish to go there again; instead Mr. Head himself sins when he denies his support to the boy when it is most needed. It is only through "the action of mercy" that grandfather and grandson become reconciled. Mr. Head learns not only of his own sinful state and his need for mercy, but also of God's love, granted in proportion to transgression and forgiveness.

Mr. Head's repudiation of Nelson and the subsequent recognition of his sinful state bring to mind the most famous biblical account of denial, the denial by Peter. During the night of Jesus' capture, Peter on three occasions swears to have no connection with the prisoner. Only after he hears a cock crow does he remember Jesus' words, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times," and only then does he recognize his transgression. In The Waste Land, the cock's crow in the
midst of death and destruction also serves as a reminder of denial. Earlier in the poem the quester had been offered flowers, symbols of renewal of life, by the Hyacinth girl, but he had faltered and turned away, leaving the wasteland unrestored.

Haze denies his affiliation to Jesus three times on several occasions. On his way to Leora Watts, the cab driver addresses him as a preacher. "I ain't any preacher," Haze replies. The Cab driver points to Haze's hat, observing that it looks like a preacher's hat. "It ain't," Haze retorts, rather agitated, "It's just a hat." The cab driver is still not satisfied, claiming that it is not only the hat but a look on his face as well that gives him away. Haze angrily makes his denial for a third time. "Listen," he says, "I am not a preacher." On another occasion, while accompanying Enoch on his daily tour of the park, he insists three times, "I AM clean," recognizing at once that "If Jesus existed, I wouldn't be clean" (pp. 21, 53, and 55).

Haze preaches his Church Without Christ with the same force his grandfather had preached the gospel of salvation. Standing on the nose of his Essex as the old man had on his Ford, Haze shouts to the bystanders that there is no Fall, no Redemption, and no Judgment, and that "nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar" (p. 60). Haze's violent abuse of Christ only proves the earnestness of his search for truth in a world where principles no longer matter. In his treatise, After Strange Gods, Eliot talks of the modern society where blasphemy is not considered immoral but a breach of good form, thus serving less and less as an agent of evil:

Where blasphemy might once have been a sign of spiritual corruption, it might now be taken rather
as a symptom that the soul is still alive, or even that it is recovering animation: for the perception of Good and Evil--whatever choice we may make--is the first requisite of spiritual life. 26

Haze recognizes that profanity endangers his gospel of nothingness. While at the outset of the novel he claims that the only way to truth is through blasphemy, he comes to the conclusion that it offers no salvation from Jesus because it serves as proof of believing in something to blaspheme.

That the perception of good and evil is essential to spiritual life is repeatedly stressed by Eliot. He extends this point even further when he comments in an essay on Baudelaire, "So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least we exist." 27 Brooks links this passage with The Waste Land, where the inhabitants, because they have lost the knowledge of good and evil, are prevented from being alive. 28 Surely the use of past tense in line 319 of the poem,

We who were living are now dying,

attests to the present moribund state of the wastelanders.

However, in the passage cited above, Eliot raises another important issue: doing evil is better than inactivity. The positive nature of evil is equally stressed by O'Connor when, quoting Saint Cyril, she equates evil with the dragon who must be passed on the road to salvation. Relating Saint Cyril's statement to her own work, she contends, "No matter what form the dragon may take, it is of this mysterious passage past him, or into his jaws, that stories of depth will always be
concerned to tell." Haze fears the salutary effect of evil, recognizing that to avoid Jesus he must avoid sin. In another of O'Connor's stories, Mrs. Shortley, who considered herself advanced in her thinking, maintains that religion is "for those people who didn't have the brains to avoid evil without it," ("The Displaced Person," p. 270).

Haze of course does not heed his predilection--on the contrary, he deliberately seeks the dragon. He does commit fornication, even though he rationalizes his visits to Leora Watts as proving that he does not believe in sin. Immediately after he warns the attendant at a gas station that blasphemy attests to belief, he begins to curse and blaspheme Jesus so intensely that the sleepy-looking attendant pauses to listen. Haze's transgressions only serve to further his awareness of the sinful state. When, along the highway he reads a sign condemning blasphemers and whoremongers, he muses, "There's no person a whoremonger, who wasn't something worse first. That's not the sin, nor blasphemy. The sin came before them" (p. 45).

What sets Haze apart from his contemporaries is not the degree of sinfulness but the awareness of it. Recognition of one's sinful state is the first step toward salvation. Having lost the knowledge of good and evil, the people of The Waste Land are prevented from taking that step, whereas Tiresias, in responding to the three commands posed by the thunder, does recognize his transgressions. Grover Smith contends that the quester's three negative replies deny the means of redemption because they are "refusals to descend and submit"; and that only if the quester had answered, "I have given, I have sympathized, I have controlled," would he have achieved restoration. But Smith overlooks the possibility that, rather than being refusals to descend and submit,
the quester's responses are utterances of regret and self-reproach. In the first answer he concedes to having led a life of self-centered sensuality:

What have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed

(11.401-5).

His second response is a recognition of the terrible state of isolation, caused by a lack of sympathy with others:

I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

(11.511-4).

The quester realizes that the prison of isolation could have been overcome, had he given and sympathized. Recalling the earlier unsuccessful encounter with real love, the Hyacinth girl, he voices his regret in the third reply:

The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands

(11.419-423).

Even though Tiresias must at this point answer in the negative, the very recognition of his dismal state stands in stark contrast to the wastelanders who have no insight at all, who repeat aimless activities, engage in mere gestures of love-making, and feel no resentment even at sexual outrage. Furthermore, the quester's discourse with the thunder
happens before he confronts the issue of setting his lands in order, thus indicating an initial step toward salvation rather than the final denial of it.

For those who have the knowledge of good and evil, evil can actually become an instrument of grace. When Haze succumbs to the corruption of Lily, he succumbs to the darkness of sin. However, he emerges from the experience determined enough to reject all fraudulence around him, and to pursue his search for truth. His first decisive act is the destruction of the new Jesus; his second, the murder of Solace Layfield who, claiming not to believe in Christ when he actually does, represents to Haze the lowest form of dishonesty. Haze commits the murder as proof that he has no conscience; instead, the gruesome act leads to the recognition of his sinfulness and thus to salvation. Whereas before he had vehemently insisted, "I AM clean," he must now admit, "I am not clean" (p. 122). The positive effect of evil becomes evident even during the deed itself, depicted in a discharge of churchly function. As soon as Haze has run his car over Layfield, he leans down to hear the dying man's confession. Similarly Tarwater in O'Connor's second novel speaks the words of baptism over Bishop while drowning the boy. Even though actively engaging in evil, both protagonists inadvertently perform the service of their appointed missions.

In no other story is the action of grace so clearly depicted as in "The Artificial Nigger." There O'Connor gives a step by step account in the stages of Mr. Head's salvation:

He stood appalled, judging himself with the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed it. He had never thought himself a great sinner before
but he saw now that his true depravity had been hidden from him lest it cause him despair. He realized that he was forgiven for sins from the beginning of time, when he had conceived in his own heart the sin of Adam, until the present, when he had denied poor Nelson. He saw that no sin was too monstrous for him to claim as his own, and since God loved in proportion as he forgave, he felt ready at that instant to enter Paradise (pp. 213-4).

Grace is a mystery which cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind. On man's part it requires the recognition of one particular sin, and through it the recognition of the entire sinful state of mankind. On God's part it is love, given overwhelmingly in proportion to individual need. Even though not always as distinctly portrayed as in the foregoing story, the action of grace is nevertheless the central theme in all of O'Connor's work. As she asserts about her role as a Christian writer, "The Catholic writer, insofar as he has the mind of the Church, will feel life from the standpoint of the central Christian mystery: that it has, for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for."32

The sacrifice of Christ is frequently mentioned in The Waste Land, from detached reference to the Hanged Man in the Tarot deck to the more direct allusions to Gethsemane at the beginning of Part V. Inherent in the sacrifice is the mystery of grace, equated with the restoration of the barren desert. In the poem, the cock's crow is promising rain, the life-giving flow, bringing to mind not only Peter's denial but also his subsequent repentence, and thus the attainment of grace. Brooks proffers an interesting connection between the cock in The Waste Land and the last lines of the stanza preceding the story of sea change in the Ariel song,
Hark, Hark! I hear
The strain of strutting chanticleer
Cry cock-a-diddle-dow.33

Linked with the life-through-death vision of the sea change, the image of the cock takes on added strength as a symbol of the mystery of rebirth.34

In a statement quoted earlier, Eliot stresses the importance of seeing man's inner condition rather than his external beauty or ugliness, of seeing the boredom, the horror, and the glory beneath the surface. Undoubtedly the boredom of the wastelanders has been sufficiently demonstrated throughout the poem; so has the horror of isolation—but is there any evidence of glory? The glory may perhaps exist only in the salvation offered, in the mystery itself, a truth which the wastelanders are too blind to grasp.

On the surface, Haze's conversion appears anything but glorious. As atonement for his misdeeds he blinds himself, wraps barbed wire around his chest, and walks on rocks. What the blind man has gained, however, is direction for life. At the outset of his quest Haze is a drifter, for whom, as he tells Mrs. Hitchcock, going to one city is as good as another. Throughout his interactions with the corrupt people of Taulkinham, he is counting on his Essex to get him to another place, although he does not know where. When his car is destroyed by an intervening deus ex machina, the policeman, Haze realizes that there is no other city, no other destination for him but a spiritual one. The "spaces" he has seen in his moment of grace the blind man pursues until the very end, when, lying in a drainage ditch, he utters his last words, "I want to go to where I'm going" (p. 126). Mrs. Hitchcock and Mrs.
Flood add significant symbolic meaning to Haze's quest when they unwittingly refer to his spiritual destination. At the beginning of the novel Mrs. Hitchcock asks, "Are you going home?" and Haze denies that he is. At the end Mrs. Flood, unaware that Haze is already dead, says to him, "I see you've come home." The fact that Haze, despite his unwillingness, has passed the dragon and has reached his destination, attests to the glory of his quest, the glory revealed in his homecoming.

But coming home is a painful process, requiring complete abnegation of the world and the self. Christ is for Haze a demanding Lord who tolerates no compromises. As in The Waste Land, where allusions to Augustine and Buddha suggest a way to salvation through asceticism, Haze renounces all worldly goods and interests. Sex no longer holds any attraction for him. He throws away his money, keeping only what he needs for survival. The special dishes Mrs. Flood prepares for him go completely unnoticed. Haze's sole interest is directed toward reaching his spiritual destination. Unlike Tiresias, who at the end of the poem is preparing for spiritual renewal, Haze at the end of the novel has already set his lands in order.

Many critics believe that there is no progression in The Waste Land, that the poem ends where it began: the quest has failed, and the country is in ruins. This interpretation has validity only when there is no distinction made between the quester and his society. Brooks stresses the importance of two relationships in the poem, a personal and a general one.35 Even though the towers of the Unreal City are crumbling, even though its bridges are collapsing, Tiresias has resumed his personal responsibility: setting his lands in order. His acceptance of the three commands given by the thunder have freed him
from his own prison—he can now perhaps fulfill his mission as "the son of man," the prophet who can make the inhabitants of the wasteland aware of their death-like existence.

The differentiation between personal and general relationships is equally important in Wise Blood. Hazel Motes has been able to attain salvation, even though the rest of his wasteland experiences no revival. However, O'Connor's novel seems to exceed the limits set in The Waste Land. While at its conclusion the poem concentrates on the quester and his preparation, the novel ends with the focus upon modern society. And while in the poem the influence of the prophet on the wastelanders remains speculative, in the novel that outcome is explored. The last chapter is narrated entirely from Mrs. Flood's point of view.

Mrs. Flood is indeed an appropriate representative of her society. Her name is symbolic of everyone's condition. Indicating destruction, it is also a reminder of God's covenant with Noah: man is doomed but he is also redeemable through grace.

Grace, however, is not one of Mrs. Flood's preoccupations. She prides herself with being "neither religious nor morbid," for which every day she is thanking her stars. Claiming to be an extremely clear-sighted person, she cannot understand why Haze would possibly wish to blind himself and not enjoy life any more. His decision seems to her an act of madness. It is interesting to compare Mrs. Flood's attitude with the passage in The Waste Land, "Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe," which Brooks interprets to mean that the quester's acceptance of the truth will seem mere madness to the present world.

Like the other people of Taulkinham, Mrs. Flood's materialistic nature is portrayed through animal imagery. Paralleling an earlier
scene where a young woman, holding a cat-faced baby, listens complacently to Haze's preaching, Mrs. Flood, rocking a cat like a baby, placidly receives the news of Haze's intention to blind himself. She does nothing to prevent an act she thoroughly deplores, and when she recalls that she herself will be blind when she dies, she promptly dismisses these disturbing ideas from her mind, "with no more change of expression than the cat."

Mrs. Flood's initial motivation for keeping the blind man as a boarder is greed. Knowing the amount of money he receives from the government (she had steamed open the envelope), she exploits him to the utmost. In Taulkinham money can buy anything; it certainly can buy morality. Outraged at Lily's sharing the room with Haze, Mrs. Flood tells him that she is conducting an orderly house, and that if the girl is to live with him he would have to pay double. Money is also the determining factor in matrimony; Mrs. Flood anticipates the financial gain in becoming the wife and subsequently the widow of Hazel Motes. She is greatly appalled when she discovers that Haze actually throws dollar bills into the wastepaper basket, money he claims he no longer needs.

Because Mrs. Flood is totally materialistic there are many things she does not understand about Haze. Her society adheres strictly to tangible values. When she discovers rocks in his boots she immediately searches "for a glitter that might mean something valuable." His confession, "I am not clean," means to her only a reference to his bloodstained night shirt and bed sheets. Haze's walking on rocks and wrapping his chest with barbed wire she rejects as unnatural and abnormal, and his notion of paying for something he has "nothing to show for,"
she considers of no value at all.

Like her contemporaries, Mrs. Flood substitutes restless activity for living. She thinks of her own head as a switchbox from which she controls her life, and since Haze's switchbox seems to be missing, she attempts to control his life as well. It troubles her that he limits his movements to walking and sitting on the porch. If he had something to do with his hands, she feels, it would help him to "get in connection with the real world again." His connection with the real world, according to Mrs. Flood's suggestions, includes strumming a guitar behind a screen of rubber plants; preaching ("It would give you something to do"), perhaps preaching with a seeing dog ("People will always go to see a dog")—anything that gives the appearance of animation; otherwise Haze's inactivity might appear to the bypassers as if she, Mrs. Flood, were "courted by a corpse." Haze has one answer to all her suggestions: "I don't have time."

Time, as the bartender in Eliot's poem suggests, is running out, for Mrs. Flood as well as for Hazel Motes. Her first awareness of Haze's mission is again motivated by greed: even though she receives most of his money she still feels she is being cheated in some uncanny way. She soon realizes that the secret lies in his dead eyes, that in destroying them he had gained extraordinary sight, a vision she would like to penetrate. She envisions his blindness as a "pinpoint of light" in a tunnel of darkness, similar to the star of Bethlehem on Christmas cards. (Ironically she thanks her stars for not being religious.) Determined at first to marry him for his money, she now resolves to marry him for his vision.

Hazel's daily presence becomes to Mrs. Flood an increasing reminder
of her own fate--she too will be blind when she dies. No longer able to put thoughts of death out of her mind, she learns to fear "the handful of dust," and, having faced the reality of death, she also faces the truth of her mediocre existence. Like the wastelanders who know neither torment nor joy, she is forced to admit that her life has been "without pain and without pleasure." Eventually her relationship with Haze changes from willful manipulation to dependence: "If she was going to be blind when she was dead, who better to guide her than a blind man? Who better to lead the blind than the blind, who knew what it was like?" (125).

Unaware that Haze is already dead, Mrs. Flood offers him free board and room, with or without marriage, and offers also to follow wherever he may go. In giving up greed and desire, she has taken one step toward salvation, but the mystery of spiritual life eludes the thoroughly secularized woman. Unable to recognize her own sinful state, she is like the wastelanders who hear the key turn in the door only once, and who remain in their prisons. At the end of the novel we find her still staring into Haze's life-less eyes, still seeing nothing, still feeling that she is "blocked at the entrance by something."

Finally, with her eyes closed, she sees "the beginning of something she couldn't begin," and the pinpoint of light eludes her once more.
NOTES

1 Flannery O'Connor, 3 by Flannery O'Connor (New York: n.d.), p. 8. All future references to this work will be cited by page number in the text.


5 Eliot, The Waste Land, note on l. 218, p. 50. My reading of The Waste Land is based primarily on the interpretations of Cleanth Brooks and Grover Smith. Not all critics agree with Brooks and Smith, and with Eliot's note that Tiresias is the central intelligence of the poem. Hugh Kenner, for instance, claims that in addition to Tiresias, a number of "personages" function as the central consciousness: the Fisher King, Phlebas, Ferdinand, etc. Whether the point of controversy is resolved or not, Tiresias remains the symbol of whatever unity of voice the poem achieves.


9 O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 176.


11 Cahill, p. 47.


15 O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 165.


18 O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 72.


20 Matth. 3:17.

21 The Eternal Crossroads, p. 218.

22 The Tempest I.II. 398.

23 The Tempest I.II. 399.


25 Matth. 26: 69-75.


29 O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 35.

30 Smith, p. 95.

31 Martin, pp. 123-4.

32 O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 146.

33 The Tempest I.II. 385-8.

34 Brooks, Modern Poetry and The Tradition, p. 162.


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