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Date September 14, 1977

Title of thesis: THE INTRUDING STRANGER IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S FICTION

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THE INTRUDING STRANGER
IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S FICTION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the School of Humanities
Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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September 1973
Accepted by the faculty of the School of Humanities, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

An intelligent and truthful account of Flannery O'Connor's fiction is a formidable task, especially if it is approached from a single perspective. Her art was complex, to say the least. In it exist various elements, or motifs—each of which play major roles in her fictional techniques. Her fiction abounds in elements of the grotesque—interwoven with subtle irony, comedy, biblical allusions and unflinching realism. Even the most talented and discernible critics are at odds on portraying her works justifiably to a reading audience.

Perhaps the difficulty in interpreting her works reasonably from one unique aspect (in this thesis, that of The Intruding Stranger) lies somewhere in the unusual circumstances surrounding her life. The particular milieu in which she found herself was that of the Roman Catholic writer writing in the Protestant South which H.L. Mencken contemptuously named the Bible Belt.

Being a southern writer, critics often found the best way to classify her art was to identify her "as another member of the Southern Gothic School," to which Poe, Caldwell,
Faulkner, McCullers, Capote and Williams are said to belong.\footnote{Robert Drake, Flannery O'Connor, A Critical Essay (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 6.} And although her work displays some resemblance to these southern writers, it is perhaps an error to place her in their particular category alone. Roman Catholic critics are also inclined to claim her as their own special property, and to place her in the tradition of modern Catholic writers like Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh.\footnote{Ibid.} There remain other critics who decline to attach convenient labels to her fiction. These discriminate scholars are aware of the difficulty of such an endeavor. The penchant in her writing for a blending of the grotesque, the comic, and the theological, seems to baffle them. Finally, there exist other critics who conclude that since Flannery O'Connor was a Roman Catholic writer, the Protestants whom she so vividly writes about are her means of interpreting the rash, non-sensical fanaticism of the Hard Shells, Holy Rollers and the like, who overflow the South.

Who are these critics who find Flannery O'Connor's fiction so puzzling? Josephine Hendin in The World of Flannery O'Connor attempts to identify them and their interpretation of O'Connor's works. She also states her beliefs on O'Connor's fiction.

\ldots critics so diverse as the indefatigable Sister M. Bernetta Quinn and Stanley Edgar Hyman
explained her work as so much new exegesis on traditional Christian theology. In general, O'Connor's short stories have been viewed as vignettes about the search for redemption in Christ . . . For example, Sister Bertrande Meyers writes only about the effects of redemptive grace in O'Connor's fiction and Bob Dowell reduces the action of her stories to a common sequence: an initial rebellion against belief, a crisis of faith, and resolution in a moment of grace. Albert Griffith discusses how such figures as Shiftlet, Guizac, and Star Drake partake of the Mystical Body and share a vocation to live the spiritual life. Sister Bernetta Quinn finds that each story in A Good Man is Hard to Find, "whether by explication or implication," embodies a sacrament—a visible sign of invisible grace. Sister Mariella Gable goes so far as to claim O'Connor's fiction is an embodiment of the ecumenical spirit of the second Vatican council. In his lengthy essay on Flannery O'Connor, Robert Drake claims O'Connor saw herself as an evangelist who had come "to call the wicked to repentance." . . . The French novelist, J.M.G. LeCleziou, sees her as a writer of existential tales of initiation, and her sometime correspondent John Hawkes goes so far as to say that her Catholicism and moral bias disappear in the creative process.3

As for Miss Hendin's analysis of Flannery O'Connor, she chooses to view her stories not for the religious dogma they contain, "but for the themes it suggests."4 Her feelings are that Flannery O'Connor wrote about redemption in order to explain her own self inherent contradictions, and created an art that was emotionally flat in which the spirit is crushed by the obtrusion of the material. It is an art in which things or objects are more important than ideas.

The agreement of those critics who believe Flannery


4Ibid., p. 17.
O'Connor's fiction deals primarily with the conflicts confronting man, and the often violent ends he meets when he tries to justify himself by his own works, rather than relinquishing himself to his Creator, stems from statements Flannery O'Connor herself made concerning the aims of her fiction. Flannery O'Connor was no disbeliever nor vague believer in spiritual purpose. She took her "stand" and maintained her initial position through all her stories and novels. The principles she firmly attained were reiterated in her statements on the craft of fiction.

I see from the standpoint of Christian Orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and that what I see in the world I see in its relation to that. I don't think this is a position that can be taken halfway or one that is particularly easy in these times to make transparent in fiction.\textsuperscript{5}

The difficulties Flannery O'Connor faced in writing fiction interpreted from a theological viewpoint were numerous. She was writing largely for a secular-minded reading public, many of whom were rationalists, and believed God was dead—if he had ever even existed. To Flannery O'Connor, He was a living presence from whom man could never escape. Aware of the task she encountered in implanting the idea of the omnipotence of God, she often utilized startling techniques in her fiction—a factor which obstructed the interpretation of her works, as she viewed them, by critics and a general reading public.

Flannery O'Connor envisioned the difficulty she encountered and clearly stated the concept in one of her articles, "Novelist and Believer."

The problem of the novelist who wishes to write about a man's encounter with this God is how he shall make the experience—which is both natural and supernatural—understandable, and credible, to his reader. In any age this would be a problem, but in our own, it is a well-nigh insurmountable one. Today's audience is one in which religious feeling has become, if not atrophied, at least vaporous and sentimental. 6

As to the manner of interpreting a man's encounter with God without sacrificing the credibility of the experience, Flannery O'Connor chose to use the technique of bending the language, structure and action of her stories. In this sense, her writings become distorted, but only to serve her ends—a moral awakening to the reality of God, Grace, Redemption, and Judgment. To accomplish her aims, she drew large figures for the partially blind, and shouted to those hard of hearing.7

In juxtaposition, then, any appropriate approach to her craft must necessarily rely on those goals and beliefs she has set forth. Any single vision of her work without the inclusion of the intricate elements which edify the complexity of her art and vision would do injustice. In compliance with this concept, the role of this thesis will


be to present an element that pervades much of Flannery O'Connor's fiction—that of the intruding stranger, the archetype of whom is often Christ, Himself a Great Intruder, whose entrance into the world left a remarkable and profound impact by re-ordering the existence of all mankind.

With but two minor exceptions, the intruding stranger takes three forms in her fiction. In the majority of instances, the intruding stranger takes the form of a person. As a rule, the person is categorized as a conscious worker of change or an unconscious worker of change. The kind of person the intruding stranger is—is elaborated on in the plot summaries of O'Connor's stories and in the commentaries following them. On occasion, however, the intruding stranger does not take a physical form, but appears as an idea or concept or event in the element functioning much like the intruding stranger as person. When the intruding stranger appears as this concept or idea described, the form is classified as transcendent. In two of the stories with which this thesis deals, there is no definite form of the intruding stranger, although there is sufficient evidence of an intrusion, or intruders. When this type of intrusion occurs, the intruding stranger is classified as obscure. The exceptions are the bull in "Greenleaf", and the unborn fetus in "A Stroke of Good Fortune", which are classified as persons.

Whatever the form, the intruding stranger leaves a profound influence on the character's life who feels the
intrusion. The effects of the intruder are always startling, often violent, and sometimes bring death or destruction. Interwoven with the impact of the intruder are religious overtones which echo Flannery O'Connor's belief that man achieves redemption through the grace of God, and not according to his own works. Thus, the shock, violence, or death become a necessary means through which her characters achieve a moral awakening.
CHAPTER II

THE INTRUDING STRANGER AS PERSON

The intruding stranger appears as a person in ten of Flannery O'Connor's short stories. Those stories in which the intruder is a person are "A Stroke of Good Fortune," (the intruder in this story is actually an unborn fetus) "A Good Man is Hard to Find," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "A Circle in the Fire," "The Displaced Person," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "Good Country People," "Greenleaf," (the intruder here is a bull), "The Lame Shall Enter First," and "Revelation". For a complete interpretation of these stories, a plot summary of each story will be included, followed by a commentary, identifying the intruding stranger, his role, and his impact upon the character who experiences his intrusion.

"A STROKE OF GOOD FORTUNE"

In "A Stroke of Good Fortune", Ruby Hill, age thirty-four, feels proud that she has maintained her relatively good looks, and youthful appearance. She remembers how her mother looked at thirty-four—"a puckered up old yellow apple, sour, she had always looked sour, she had always looked like she
wasn't satisfied with anything." Ruby remembers why her mother had aged so early in life—eight children, two of which were born dead, one that had died the first year, and one that had been crushed under a machine, all of which had caused her mother to get "deader with everyone of them." Ruby's goal in life is to escape the fate that befell her mother. She has no desire to have any children, because she believes children are indirectly the agency of early old age and death in women. But Ruby is satisfied with her husband Bill, and has confidence in him. They have been married five years, and in all that time she has not gotten pregnant.

Now, though, Ruby is aware of some sickness. A fortune teller, Madam Zoleeda, has told her the illness will be a long one, but will end in a stroke of good fortune. Ruby believes that Madam Zoleeda's information is an indication that Bill will move them to the subdivision, and out of the tight apartment they live in. "She had her eye on a place in Meadowcrest Heights, a duplex bungalow with yellow awnings." Ruby feels certain that the fortune teller means they will be moving and that the illness is perhaps a heart condition or gas. She finds it more difficult each day to climb the five flights of stairs

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9Ibid.

10Ibid.
because of an unusual shortness of breath. She is also getting fatter, but she isn't worried, because Bill Hill likes her that way.

It doesn't occur to Ruby that her illness is pregnancy (a more dreaded condition than heart trouble to her) until she has to stop at the third floor apartment of Laverne Watts, her friend, before attempting the ascent to her own apartment on the fifth floor. Laverne discerns immediately that Ruby is pregnant and displays it by her pose. "After a second she folded her arms and very pointedly stuck her stomach out and began to sway back and forth." Ruby, however, misses the intended implication, and Laverne has to take more drastic means to communicate the fact to her.

Laverne began to do a comic dance up and down the room. She took two or three steps in one direction with her knees bent and then she came back and kicked her leg slowly and painfully in the other. She began to sing in a loud gutteral voice, rolling her eyes, "Put them all together, they spell Mother! Mother!" And stretching her arms out as if she were on the stage.

Ruby comes to life in a dramatic protest of the life inside her.

Oh no, not me! Bill Hill takes care of that! Bill Hill's been taking care of that for five years.

Ruby leaves Laverne's apartment shocked and bewildered. As she ascends the stairs she feels movement inside her. The

\[1^{11}\textit{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 102. \quad 1^{12}\textit{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 104. \quad 1^{13}\textit{Ibid.}\]
full recognition that she is pregnant overwhelms her. Babies only make women older and deader, and she does not want any baby disrupting her life. The intruding stranger, the unborn child, has upset the balance in Ruby's life. That the intruder will triumph despite Ruby's hatred and selfishness becomes apparent at the end when the intruder makes its presence strongly felt.

Then she recognized the feeling again, a little roll. It was as if it were not in her stomach. It was as if it were out nowhere in nothing, out of nowhere, resting and waiting with plenty of time. Ruby has been much too concerned with the secular world. The realization that she is pregnant causes a terrible dreariness, and neutrality of spirit, yet it suggests her release from an obsession with the temporal. Her fanaticism, though not religiously inspired, is an index of her stunted immaturity.

"A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND"

It is The Misfit, a psychopathic killer, who is the intruding stranger in "A Good Man is Hard to Find". How the Misfit becomes entangled with a vacationing grandmother and her family is an ironic situation which ends in violent death for the whole family.

The family consists of Bailey Boy and his wife, (nameless in the story, but described as a passive individual)

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14 Ibid., p. 107.
"whose face was broad and innocent as a cabbage and was tied around with a green head-kerchief that had two points on the top like a rabbit's ears." An infant, and June Star and John Wesley, sassy and rambunctious, and the grandmother, who has her own distorted view of reality which she constantly tries to mold into her romantic view of the world, make up the remainder of the family.

The grandmother insists that the family not go to Florida, (their planned destination) but visit relatives in East Tennessee instead. Her reasoning is based on the fact that The Misfit, a mass killer, has escaped from a Federal Penitentiary and is headed towards Florida and she would not take her children in any direction where a chance encounter with this terrible character might occur. Besides, the grandmother argues, the children have been to Florida before . . . you all ought to take them somewhere else for a change so they would see different parts of the world and be broad. They never been to East Tennessee.

The family leave Atlanta, travelling through Georgia. The children sit in the back with the grandmother and alternate between exchanging facetious remarks and reading and exchanging comic books. The grandmother is dressed fashionably. "In case of an accident, anyone seeing her


17 Ibid.
dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady."¹⁸

She points out important landmarks to the disinterested children.

After stopping at Red Sammy Butts for lunch, the family drives off again. By this time, the grandmother is napping and waking. Outside of Toombsboro she awakens and recalls an old plantation she had visited in the vicinity when she was a young lady. She describes the pretentious home to the children and her desire to visit the place becomes so strong that she tells a lie to arouse sufficient interest in the children to persuade their father to visit the plantation. She tells the family that there was a secret panel in the old house and that it was rumored that a family treasure was hidden there, but never found. The children become quite enthusiastic at the idea of a hidden treasure and immediately badger Bailey Boy to take them to the place which the grandmother had said was only about a mile back.

To pacify the children, Bailey Boy concedes, and the family car turns down the country road where the plantation is supposed to be. The road is deserted, looking as if no one had travelled it in months. Just when the grandmother realizes that the plantation home was in Tennessee, not in Georgia, as she erroneously thought, Pitty Sing, the family cat the grandmother has sneaked along, jumps from its hiding place onto Bailey Boy's shoulder causing him to wreck. The car turns over into a ditch, but no one is injured—much to

¹⁸Tbid., p. 118.
the disappointment of the children, who were secretly praying for at least one death.

After a few moments the family sees a car coming slowly in their direction. "It was a big black battered hearse-like automobile. There were three men in it." The car stops and three men get out. The driver, wearing silver rimmed spectacles has "a scholarly look." The grandmother finds something hauntingly familiar about him. Later she recognizes him—the one character she wanted to avoid—The Misfit. "You're The Misfit!" she says, "I recognized you at once!"

Although, it is possible, the family may have met the same fate—a violent death for all—if the grandmother had not shouted her recognition of The Misfit, the story hints that their deaths were inadvertently a product of her stupidity. Judging from The Misfit's answer to the grandmother, "Yes'm; "but it would have been better for all of you, lady, if you hadn't of reckernized me," one receives the implication that perhaps the story would have taken a different turn.

"The Misfit" is the intruding stranger in a number of ways. Indirectly, he is an intruder before he encounters the family. The grandmother displays an awareness of him in

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19Ibid., p. 126.  
20Ibid., p. 126.  
21Ibid., p. 127.  
22Ibid.
the first paragraph of the story when she rattles her newspaper at Bailey Boy's bald head calling his attention to the callous criminal who calls himself The Misfit and who has just escaped from the "Federal Pen." It is The Misfit, whose presence the grandmother fears, that urges her to force the family to change their vacation route to supposedly avoid him. It is The Misfit, who by mere chance, happens to be on the deserted road the family travels to visit a plantation that was somewhere else anyway. And it is also The Misfit who intrudes because the grandmother recognizes him, thus causing him to kill her and her whole family.

Just as the intruder in Flannery O'Connor's fiction takes many forms, and the reasons for his actions are not easily comprehended, so it is with "The Misfit". Here we find a man imprisoned for a crime he claims to not remember (the murder of his father). Although, he seems callous and heartless, O'Connor portrays him with much sympathy. He is a man who protests a law where punishment seems more severe than the crime, especially a crime one cannot remember committing.

The Misfit compares himself with Christ who was unjustly Crucified because the Scribes and Pharisees wished it so. "It was the same case with Him as with me except He hadn't committed any crime and they could prove I had

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23O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find", *op. cit.*, p. 117.
committed one because they had the papers on me."\textsuperscript{24} Of course, The Misfit never saw any papers, and that's why he calls himself The Misfit. "I can't make what all I did wrong fit what all I went through in punishment,"\textsuperscript{25} he says. The Misfit is an example of the agnostic who cannot make up his mind whether Christ raised the dead or not. He tells the grandmother when she begs him to pray,

\begin{quote}
If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything, and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can--by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

The Misfit in some ways is more noble than the grandmother who takes a halfway position on faith in God. To him, one either believes and takes up his cross and follows Christ or else believes that it does not matter what one does in life, because after this life, there is only a vacuum--nothingness, and no one to be accountable to. The Misfit has apparently decided that he alone is accountable for his life, and will therefore take this viewpoint. However, underlying his diabolic decision is the uncertainty and doubt which disrupts the balance in his life, evidenced by his final remark to Bobby Lee, his partner, after the mass murders. "Shut up, Bobby Lee, . . . he says, It's no real pleasure in life."\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 131.
\item\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 132.
\item\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., p. 133.
\end{footnotes}
The Misfit's impact is felt perhaps more strongly by the grandmother than any of the other characters. Bailey Boy seems to be the only realist in the story: he is aware of the seriousness of the situation. His wife remains a passive by-stander who willingly agrees to follow The Misfit's henchmen into the wooded area to be shot. The grandmother is the self-righteous romanticist who believes she can prevent her death by bolstering the ego of The Misfit, and bribing him.

Jesus! . . . You've got good blood! I know you wouldn't shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got.\(^\text{28}\)

That the grandmother can make such a remark after her entire family has been slaughtered shows her false concept of reality. She is interested only in self preservation. She is really no lady. The Misfit, in killing her, reminds the reader of this fact. The impact of The Misfit on the grandmother is implied when the reader sees her "with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky."\(^\text{29}\) Perhaps her death has destroyed the old false precepts and prepared her for a rebirth in Christ.

"THE LIFE YOU SAVE MAY BE YOUR OWN"

In "The Life You Save May Be Your Own", we see the intruding stranger in the person of Tom T. Shiftlet, a

\(^{28}\)Ibid., pp. 131-132. \(^{29}\)Ibid.
drifting tramp, who enters the lives of Mrs. Crater, a widower, and her retarded daughter, Lucynell. Mrs. Crater and Lucynell live alone in a nameless section of the country on a small farm. Mrs. Crater's husband has been dead fifteen years, and Lucynell, who is also completely deaf, is her only companion.

When Mr. Shiftlet wanders toward the farm, Mrs. Crater gives no indication that she fears for the safety of herself or her daughter. "Although the old woman had lived in this desolate spot with only her daughter and she had never seen Mr. Shiftlet before, she could tell, even from a distance, that he was a tramp and no one to be afraid of."30

As the story unfolds, it seems apparent that Mrs. Crater's initial judgment of the drifter as harmless is correct. After conversing with Mr. Shiftlet, who appears impressed by the beauty of the sunset on the farm, (something Mrs. Crater takes for granted), "Does it every evening,"31 she says; Mrs. Crater offers Mr. Shiftlet a job, upon discovering he is a carpenter.

She agrees to feed him and give him a place to sleep, but tells him explicitly that she cannot pay him any wages. He eagerly agrees to her terms, proclaiming staunchly, "There's some men that some things mean more to them than money,"32 leading her to believe that he is this type.

31Ibid., p. 146. 32Ibid., p. 148.
The very next morning after his arrival Mr. Shiftlet starts repairing the farm. In only a week, he has made considerable progress in improving its appearance, much to the delight of Mrs. Crater, who begins to view him as an excellent prospective husband for her idiot daughter. Mr. Shiftlet shows unusual interest in Lucynell, too, by teaching her to say bird. Noticing his seeming devotion to her, Mrs. Crater who is "ravenous for a son-in-law," takes pains to approach the drifter with the subject of matrimony.

Being aware of his interest in the automobile, Mrs. Crater makes a deal with Mr. Shiftlet. She agrees to have the car painted (after Mr. Shiftlet got it in driving condition), and to give him a permanent home with them if he will marry Lucynell. Mrs. Crater utilizes all her persuasive ability in pointing out the better aspects of a marriage to her daughter. She tells him that Lucynell is innocent, and "can't sass you back or use foul language." Mr. Shiftlet agrees to the marriage on the condition that Mrs. Crater will provide sufficient funds for the two to have a weekend honeymoon, at a hotel, on the firm pretense that he "wouldn't marry the Duchesser Windsor, unless I could take her to a hotel and giver something good to eat." After bargaining, the old woman reluctantly provides seventeen dollars and

\[\text{33Ibid., p. 150. 34Ibid., p. 151. 35Ibid., p. 152.}\]
fifty cents for the trip.

On Saturday Lucynell and Mr. Shiftlet are married in the Ordinary's Office, with the old woman witnessing. After returning Mrs. Crater to the farm, Shiftlet and Lucynell leave. After driving about a hundred miles, Shiftlet decides to stop at The Hot Spot, described only as "an aluminum--
painted eating place,"\textsuperscript{36} to order ham and grits for Lucynell. As soon as he places the order, Lucynell, tired from the long ride, falls asleep on the stool. Shiftlet pays the waiter before her order is delivered, and departs, telling the youth that Lucynell is a hitchhiker, and he must be on his way.

The intruding stranger's action is abandonment of an innocent who is unable to cope with the world. Lucynell, the deserted one, has lived her entire life within the confines of the small, desolate farm under the protective eye of her mother. Whatever fate awaits her is left to the guess-work of the reader, since the story ends with her deserter racing towards Mobile in rhythm with a turnip-shaped cloud dispersing showers of rain which Mr. Shiftlet prays will "break forth and wash the slime from the earth."\textsuperscript{37} But, as in many of Flannery O'Connor's stories, the villains, (in this case, Mr. Shiftlet) experience a moment of recognition of evil which lends them an insight into themselves in relation to reality and truth. At this point, they become aware of

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 154. \textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 156.
their limitations—their human failings, which prepares them for an acceptance of grace and provides them with a chance for redemption which can be accepted or rejected. Mr. Shiftlet recognizes evil when he sees the turnip-shaped cloud, and feels "the rottenness of the world is about to engulf him." 38 That he accepts the grace offered him is implied by his plea that the water wash the filth from the world—which seems answered by "a guffawing peal of thunder from behind and fantastic raindrops, like tin-can tops...flooding the back of his automobile." 39

"A CIRCLE IN THE FIRE"

"A Circle in the Fire" explores the destructive effects wrought by three adolescent trespassers on the farm of Mrs. Cope. The intruders are led by Powell Boyd whose father had been previously employed by Mrs. Cope. Powell's overwhelming desire to return to the farm, visualized in his mind as an Edenic Paradise, where he spent the happiest time of his life leads him to persuade his two companions, W.T. Harper and Garfield Smith, to accompany him there.

Mrs. Cope, like so many of O'Connor's women, considers herself a self-sufficient widower. As her name suggests she falsely thinks she is able to withstand and overcome any situation. Her name "indicates her proud,

38 O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own", op. cit., p. 156.

39 Ibid.
selfish possessiveness." \(^{40}\)

Mrs. Pritchard, whose husband works for Mrs. Cope, is the realist in the story. She is suspicious of the strangers from the start. She calls Mrs. Cope's attention to the suitcase the boys bring with them and asks Mrs. Cope what she intends to do if they decide to spend the night. Mrs. Cope, startled by her queries, dismisses her question with the assertion she is "sure they'll go when [she] feeds them." \(^{41}\) Mrs. Cope has such intense convictions of her charity and benevolence that she cannot realistically surmise that the boys have stopped by for anything more than a friendly brief chat before journeying on to some other destination.

The self-righteous Mrs. Cope has only one prevailing fear—that a fire might destroy her farm and woods. She believes she is piously thankful to God and she must constantly remind Mrs. Pritchard. "Everday I say a prayer of Thanksgiving." \(^{42}\) And on windy nights she annoys her daughter with her prayers of Thanksgiving when she directs them more to the child than to God. "Oh Lord, do pray there won't be any fires, it's so windy." \(^{43}\)

The three intruders have come from a slum housing


\(^{42}\)Ibid., p. 177. \(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 176.
development in Atlanta which Mrs. Cope erroneously believes to be a nice new development, until the small boy W.T. Harper, shatters her illusions.

The only way you can tell your own is by smell . . . They're four stories high and there's ten of them, one behind the other.44

It takes some practically drastic means of expression before Mrs. Cope realizes her trespassers intend to ride the horses which Powell had so vividly described to his friends in Atlanta. The picture he had painted of Mrs. Cope's farm was an ideal world. Naively, Mrs. Cope believes that a plate of crackers will destroy their desire to stay, and she tries to cure what she thinks is a physical hunger. But the little boy again makes implicit that Powell's hunger is a mental or spiritual one when he indifferently takes a cracker and tells her.

He ain't ever satisfied with where he's at except this place here. Lemme tell you what he'll do lady. We'll be playing ball, see, on this here place in this development we got to play ball on, see, and he'll quit playing and say, 'Goddam, it was a horse down there name Gene and if I had him here I'd bust this concrete to hell riding him!'45

Mrs. Cope is shocked at the child's language. She can simply not see Powell using foul language and wants desperately to believe the intruders have merely friendly intentions.

Not until the boys tell Mrs. Cope that they intend to spend the night camping in the woods, does she become sincerely alarmed. Her abnormal fear of fire, and knowledge

44Ibid., p. 182. 45Ibid.
that the woods are extremely dry forces her to assert that
she cannot allow the boys to smoke in the woods, and that
they will have to camp out in the fields next to the house
and away from the trees. Powell grudgingly agrees to her
terms, but with his own assertion that he plans on showing
his friends around the farm that very afternoon.

Powell and his friends are determined to carry out
their plan which seems to be to stay forever on the farm they
view as a paradise free to everyone and not just Mrs. Cope's
farm. The little one says, "Man, Gawd owns them woods and
her too."\textsuperscript{46}

When Mrs. Cope realizes the impossibility of ridding
herself of Powell and his friends, she decides to enlist the
aid of the sheriff. She warns the boys who had continued
to linger on the farm, sneaking rides on the horses, and
smoking in the woods against her wishes, and who finally
begin destructive acts such as "rocking" her mailbox, that
if they are not gone by the time she drives to town and
back, she will call the sheriff.

The boys do appear to be gone when she arrives
from town. However, Mrs. Cope and her daughter wait
expectantly on the porch until ten o'clock for their \textsuperscript{47}
surprise return. Finally, Mrs. Cope decides the \"poor\" things are gone, and begins a litany of blessings on
everything she has to be thankful for, as her inattentive

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 186. \textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p. 190.
daughter anxiously listens for an unexpected return from the uninvited visitors.

The next morning brings no sign of the three intruders. The child, fearful that the boys are still on the premises, decides to investigate. Donning a pair of overalls, and an old felt hat, she stalks towards the woods with a toy pistol in each hand, imagining how effectively she would manage an encounter with them. Suddenly, she hears a laugh which causes her skin to prickle. From her viewpoint behind a tree, she sees the intruders bathing in a cow trough, and overhears the biggest one say that if he had the opportunity he would convert the area into a large parking lot. Powell, however, suggests something more appropriate and produces a box of matches from his pocket. The intruders, like wild Indians whooping, and hollering, gather brush and set afire Mrs. Cope's precious woods.

The child dashes home shrieking her findings, which by this time Mrs. Cope has already discovered herself. Mrs. Cope shouts to the Negroes for help as she sees the columns of smoke rising wildly and unleashed. It is then that the child sees "a new misery" which looks ancient and anonymous on her mother's face, and hears "in the distance a few wild high shrieks of joy as if the prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace, in the circle the angel had cleared for them." 49


49Ibid.
The intruders leave a profound impact on the unrealistic Mrs. Cope who had always managed to "cope" with anything, and was confident that she would always be able to. They shatter at least some of her vanity and independence.

Like Nebuchadnezzar, Mrs. Cope has worshiped the golden image of her farm and has tried to force the boys to bow down to it; unlike the Biblical king, she comes to no revelation as she witnesses the fiery event, for she feels only sorrow, loss, and misery. The intruders, not diabolical by nature, but by an inner frustration, brought about by being expelled from their Garden of Eden, take the hellish course of action and burn the paradise they cannot remain in. In the end they are likened to the prophets Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego whom God protected in the fiery furnace. Their destruction is perhaps the act of an angry God who forbids the worship of any God other than himself.

The intruders function as agents of God. They come to teach Mrs. Cope a lesson in self-knowledge. However, she fails to learn. The fire does not burn her virtues clean. She remains unchastised. The intruders test the generosity she professes, but obsession with fire, and the secularity of life prevail instead. At the story's end, we see Mrs. Cope unchanged spiritually, but her physical world changed drastically, as she "gropes" for some slight recognition of her own human frailty.

"THE DISPLACED PERSON"

In "The Displaced Person," considered by many critics to be one of Miss O'Connor's finest stories, Mrs. McIntyre is persuaded by a local Roman priest to hire a family of Polish immigrants from World War II to work on her farm. These refugees consist of Mr. Guizac, his daughter Sledgwig, son Rudolph, and his wife. The immigrants will join the other hired hands on Mrs. McIntyre's farm—Mr. and Mrs. Shortley, and two Negroes, Sulk and Astor.

Mrs. Shortley is suspicious of the Poles from the outset fearing that the tremendous numbers of them seeking entrance to the United States will displace good people like herself and Mr. Shortley, and even the shiftless "niggers" about whom she is hardly concerned.

Mrs. Shortley who had always been on good terms with Mrs. McIntyre is irked at the greeting the Poles receive when they arrive.

_Here was the owner of the place out to welcome them. Here she was, wearing her best clothes and a string of beads, and now bounding forward with her mouth stretched._

Mr. Guizac unknowingly begins to unnerve Mrs. Shortley. She tries to dismiss her fears of being displaced by others like him by making remarks to Mrs. McIntyre such as, "They can't

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talk. You reckon they'll know what colors is." However, Mrs. Shortley's ideas that the immigrants are lazy, ignorant, and will stay only long enough to get money to move on, turn out to be misconceptions. Mr. Guizac proves himself the most efficient hired hand Mrs. McIntyre has ever had. Despite all of Mrs. Shortley's clamorings and attempts to turn Mrs. McIntyre against him, the Pole continues to prove his versatility and efficiency.

Mr. Guizac could drive a tractor, use the rotary hay-baler, the silage cutter, the combine, the letz mill, or any other machine on the place. He was an expert mechanic, a carpenter, and a mason. He was thrifty and energetic.

All of these qualities impress Mrs. McIntyre who reflects on the hard times she had had until Mr. Guizac's arrival. Her "niggers" had stolen from her: they had been shiftless and trying, and the succession of white trash she had had were just as worthless. They had all taken something with them when they left. But with Mr. Guizac, Mrs. McIntyre feels saved. At last she has someone who has to work and wants to. She tells Mrs. Shortley, "That man is my salvation."

Mrs. Shortley's fears of being displaced by the displaced person mount each day. When Mr. Guizac catches Sulk stealing a young turkey and reports to Mrs. McIntyre by acting out the entire scene for her, Mrs. Shortley fears Mr. Guizac might find her husband's concealed moonshine still.

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52 Ibid., p. 196. 53 Ibid., p. 201. 54 Ibid., p. 203.
on the property.

Who's to say if he found it he wouldn't go right to her and tell? . . . How do you know they don't make liquor in Europe? That man prowls."

Mrs. Shortley's worries cause her to continue her verbal harrassment of Mr. Guizac, whom Mrs. McIntyre considers indispensibal. Hoping that her oral attacks on him will arouse suspicion of the Pole and Mrs. McIntyre will replace him, she continues her badgering, dropping statements to Mrs. McIntyre that the Pole will not work for seventy dollars a month--he will want more money, or he will leave.

Thinking that the thrifty Mrs. McIntyre will never increase Mr. Guizac's wages, Mrs. Shortley secretly hopes that Mrs. McIntyre will decide to rid herself of him. Ironically though, Mrs. McIntyre thinks Mr. Guizac is priceless, and Mrs. Shortley overhears her tell the priest that she will have to give the Shortleys their month's notice, since Mr. Guizac is so valuable and may want more money.

When Mrs. Shortley hears this startling news, she panics and rushes frantically to her shack and begins packing all her belongings. She tells Mr. Shortley that, "You ain't waiting to be fired!" Mr. Shortley who had never once "doubted her omniscience," gets the car, into which the family crowd themselves and their meagre possessions. They

55Ibid., p. 206. 56Ibid., p. 213. 57Ibid.
leave just before dawn because Mrs. Shortley does not intend for her husband to ever adjust another milking machine for Mrs. McIntyre.

With no particular destination in mind, Mr. Shortley drives off the place. Just when the sun rises, he and the girls begin to inquire where the family is going. However, Mrs. Shortley does not answer, because at the particular moment they ask their questions, she dies of an apparent stroke or heart attack.

When Mrs. McIntyre realizes the Shortleys are gone, she merely tells the old Negro "we can get along without them." She is aware, though, that the Shortleys were the best workers she had had next to the displaced person.

The Polish immigrant takes over Mr. Shortley's job and manages it well until Mrs. McIntyre makes the shocking discovery that he has arranged for his sixteen year old cousin to marry the Negro, Sulk, in order to escape from the refugee camp she has lived in for three years. Sulk is supposed to pay Mr. Guizac three dollars a week--half of the price for the girl's fare to the United States.

Mrs. McIntyre confronts Mr. Guizac with his hideous plan, but has great difficulty in getting her message across. Even the harsh language she directs at him

Mr. Guizac! You would bring this poor innocent child over here and try to marry her to a half-witted thieving black stinking Nigger! What kind of monster are you? 

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58 Ibid., p. 214.  
59 Ibid., p. 222.
evokes merely an indifferent response. He reacts to her anger as if he fails to understand why she should be upset over such trifles.

After she realizes she is making no progress in interpreting the social evil of his plan, she decides to fire him. But when she threatens him with dismissal, she faces the very same obstacle she had in attempting to explain why he could not marry his cousin to Sulk: His only replies are apathetic shrugs accompanied by "Ya."

Only then does Mrs. McIntyre recognize her predicament. Her talks to the priest, "He's extra and he's upset the balance around her," are to no avail. Her attempts to fire him come to naught. The displaced person becomes a stumbling block. Not until Mr. Shortley arrives back at the farm, does Mrs. McIntyre recognize the magnitude of her error in agreeing to hire the displaced person. Yet, she has tried every means at her disposal to make Mr. Guizac aware that she no longer needs him, with no success.

Mr. Shortley perceives her problem, and seeks to avenge his wife's death—for which he feels Mr. Guizac is indirectly responsible. The opportunity for revenge arises on a chill autumn morning when Mr. Guizac is working on one of the farm's small tractors. Only his feet, legs, and torso protrude from the tractor. Mr. Shortley backs the large tractor from under the shed and heads it toward the

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small one, but brakes it on a small incline, gets off and returns to the shed. It is then that Mrs. McIntyre gazes at Mr. Guizac's legs lying flat on the ground. There is a moment of mystery, when the brakes on the large tractor slip and it slowly "calculates its path" in the direction of Mr. Guizac. Neither Astor, Mrs. McIntyre, nor Mr. Shortley shout a warning to the unsuspecting Pole who is crushed beneath the large tractor; thus, ridding them of the displaced person.

The effect of Mr. Guizac on Mrs. McIntyre, the Shortleys, and the "niggers" is evident. He is thrust into a society whose social customs are entirely foreign to his own. In this respect, he is a foreigner in more than one sense. In his society, intermarriage of races is not scorned. He is characterized as hardworking, thrifty, and energetic; and because he has these worthy qualities, he poses a threat to the ignorant and shiftless Negroes, and the dependable, but not exceptional workers, the Shortleys.

Even though he is an intruder in their lives, he is a harmless one. The disruption he causes on the farm is not intentional, but is bred from the misconceptions his employer and her hired hands conjure. The displaced person is actually the pawn of these people, especially Mrs. McIntyre, whose motive for letting him come was not a charitable, but a greedy one. She believes he has no alternative but to work if he wishes to remain. She allows his presence for the

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61 Ibid., p. 234.  
62 Ibid.
purpose of selfish gains—the preservation of her farm. He will be economical, and save her expenses.

The Shortleys make Mr. Guizac an object of abuse too. They are jealous of his versatility and energy, and become obsessed that the new brought prosperity he brings to the farm will culminate in their displacement. They have a great distrust of immigrants whom they think will soon take over the white workers and "nigger's" jobs.

Flannery O'Connor pictures the displaced person with sympathy. He is an honest, sincere, ambitious man who unknowingly disrupts the farm life, and "upsets the balance." The upheaval he causes is not so much his fault as it is the fault of those he works for and with. Robert Drake compares Mr. Guizac with Christ.

In the Christian view, Christ is the Great Misfit, the Great Displaced Person, resented and scorned by the righteous and the self-justified but Himself a Great Displacer of those very same righteous: He does upset the balance in their lives. And Judgment comes to Mrs. McIntyre in a particularly shocking—and perhaps appropriate—form, as it had earlier to Mrs. Shortley, who had been all too inclined to fancy herself "a giant angel with wings as wide as a house," protecting her traditional way of life against those Poles who did not have an "advanced religion."

The intruder, Mr. Guizac, is intruded upon. A similar statement of The Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" seems appropriate here. Mr. Guizac's punishment does not fit the evil he has done. He is in no wise a malicious character,

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63Ibid., p. 225.

64Drake, Flannery O'Connor A Critical Essay, p. 27.
but has virtues that surpass Mrs. McIntyre, the Shortleys, and the Negroes who distort reality to serve the purpose of their selfish desires. Mr. Guizac seeks to change things for the better as Christ did, and like Christ is "Crucified," because a small narrow-minded society cannot accept his basic honesty for fear that he will expose the innate depravity that lies within them.

"A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY GHOST"

"A Temple of the Holy Ghost" portrays the weekend intrusion of two obnoxious fourteen year olds, Susan and Joanne, into the household of a mother and her twelve year old daughter. The girls prefer to call themselves Temple One and Temple Two, in religious mockery of Mount St. Scholastica, the convent school they attend. As soon as they arrive they discard their uniforms and deck themselves in red skirts and bright blouses. They put on lipstick and high heels and parade around the household much to the annoyance of the twelve year old who thinks they are stupid, and that "if only one of them had come, that one would have played with her, but since there were two of them, she was out of it."65 . . .

Susan and Joanne have a comical view of life in contrast to the lofty-mindedness of the daughter, who thinks their constant giggling only reveals their innate stupidity

and superficial outlook on life. The girls display an unusual interest in boys. They call themselves Temple One and Temple Two because Sister Perpetua had lectured them on the proper reply to any young man who might make improper advances to them if they found themselves in the backseat of an automobile. She had instructed them to say "Stop Sir! I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!"66 The girls' attitude toward her advice was that of a very funny joke, and they are unable to discuss the situation without bursting into fits of laughter.

Their twelve year old opposite decides it would be a good idea if she can find them "suitable dates" while they visit. She sarcastically suggests various grotesque characters; a two-hundred pound taxi driver, Alonzo Meyers, who "chewed a short black cigar and . . . had a round sweaty chest that showed through the yellow nylon shirt he wore,"67 or Miss Kirby's friend, Mr. Cheatem, "who was bald-headed except for a little fringe of rust-colored hair, . . . and a protruding stomach, . . . and teeth backed with gold."68 At last the child decides on the perfect dates for the "Temples of the Holy Ghost," two prospective Church of God preachers, Wendell and Cory Wilkins. The mother agrees that Wendell and Cory would be safe escorts and makes arrangements with the boys' grandmother, Mrs. Buchell, for them to accompany Susan and Joanne to the fair.

66Ibid., p. 238. 67Ibid. 68Ibid., p. 237.
But when the boys arrive and try to entertain the girls, by playing their harmonica and guitar, and singing religious hymns, the girls suppress their giggles, and beg to sing a song for their male companions. The song turns out to be a Latin hymn which the boys erroneously think is Jewish. The child, a hidden observer to the situation, is unable to contain her revulsion at Wendell and Cory's stupidity and shouts at them "You big dumb ox!" You big dumb Church of God ox!" After this outburst, the child adamantly refuses to eat supper with the girls and their dates, believing them to be "stupid idiots" and not nearly as smart as she.

She does not attend the fair with Susan and Joanne and their dates, but daydreams in her room about what career she will choose in life. She believes she has to be more than a doctor or engineer, because they do not know everything and she desires to know everything. Convinced that she is smarter than anyone else, the child considers becoming a saint, but discards the concept, because she is "a born liar and slothful and sassed her mother and was deliberately mean to almost everybody." She was also a mocker who ridiculed the Baptist preacher by imitating his devotional. Furthermore, the thoughts of martyrdom were overbearing. She simply could not tolerate the idea of being burned or

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fed to lions, or subjected to other tortures saints endured.

Joanne and Susan arrive home at twelve telling about their experiences at the fair. Of particular interest was a sideshow they attended whose main attraction was an hermaphrodite. The naive child is uncertain what an hermaphrodite is, but thinks it is someone with two heads. The girls explain that an hermaphrodite is both male and female, but the child still fails to understand and dares not ask for details.

The description of the freak whom the girls describe lingers in the child's mind; especially the speech he had delivered which the girls had quoted to the child.

God made me this away and if you laugh He may strike you the same way. This is the way he wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way . . . . I never done it to myself nor had a thing to do with it, but I'm making the best of it.72

When the girls leave for the convent, the child's revelation begins. The image of the freak and his acceptance of his fate have made an impression on her. For the first time, she realizes her own sinful pride and gains insight into the reasons for her obnoxious acts. The image of the hermaphrodite lingers in her conscious mind as a haunting figure even after they reach the convent. But not until she kneels between her mother and a nun and the "Tantum Ergo" has begun, do "her ugly thoughts stop and she begins to

72 O'Connor, op. cit., p. 245.
realize that she is in the presence of God."73

Through the intruding strangers the child comes to recognize an omnipotent God. Only through their light-hearted pretense for the serious matters of life, does she obtain her first startling glimpse of reality and the significance of evil. Then her prayers become sincere. And again the image of the freak who does not hate God for his condition interrupts, and the child can pray in earnest. She then becomes like the blind man whom Jesus touched and restored to sight.

"GOOD COUNTRY PEOPLE"

"Good Country People" relates the story of Mrs. Hopewell, a divorcée and her handicapped daughter Joy, "a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg."74 Joy is thirty-two and has a doctor's degree in philosophy, but is still considered a child by her mother, Mrs. Hopewell. Her ultimate creative act, born out of self-hatred, is the renaming of herself Hulga, to fit the personality her wooden leg has imposed on her.

Joy is an atheist, a believer in nothing, and her mother is one of those cliché—spouting, self-sufficient, "good" women so often encountered in Miss O'Connor's fiction. A tenant family, Mr. and Mrs. Freeman are hired

73 Ibid., p. 248.
hands on Mrs. Hopewell's farm.

Family life proceeds routinely. Mrs Freeman chatters endlessly about her daughters, Glynese and Carramae, whom Joy calls Glycerin and Caramel. Carramae, only fifteen, is pregnant, and her mother always reports to Mrs. Hopewell on how many times she vomits each day. Mrs. Hopewell always mouths platitudes. "That is life,"75 is one of her favorites. Joy is accustomed to these daily mundane conversations of her mother and Mrs. Freeman, in which she does not participate.

Joy is a disappointment to her mother who tries unsuccessfully to utilize her services by having her walk over the fields with her. If Joy looks sour and repugnant, her mother tells her she does not want her to come along, if she cannot come pleasantly. Joy always tells her, "If you want me, here I am--LIKE I AM!"76 Even though her daughter is highly-educated, Mrs. Hopewell knows she doesn't "have a grain of sense."77

The wooden leg Joy has is the result of a hunting accident which occurred when she was ten. It has warped her personality extensively; causing her to have an abnormal fascination for her leg that she dares not let anyone touch.

Such is the life of Joy, her mother, and Mrs. Freeman until Manley Pointer the Bible salesman who is a fake, arrives on the scene. Mrs. Hopewell does not want any of his Bibles,

75Ibid., p. 273. 76Ibid., p. 274. 77Ibid., p. 276.
but she cannot be rude to anyone, so she invites him to supper.

When Mr. Pointer leaves, he stops by the road where Joy is standing and engages her in conversation, while Mrs. Hopewell watches in amazement, out of hearing distance. He seems strangely attracted to Joy and persuades her to meet him at the gate the next day at ten. That night Joy dreams of seducing the Bible salesman and exposing each of his Christian virtues.

The next morning she is at the gate promptly but suspects he has tricked her when he is not there. Then, suddenly she sees him and his black valise. When she inquires why he has brought along his Bibles, he smilingly says, "You can never tell when you'll need the word of God, Hulga."78

They cross the pasture, entering the woods, with Pointer swinging his valise (which appears unusually light) alongside. After they have crossed half the pasture, Pointer becomes quite curious about Hulga's wooden leg, and asks her where it joins on. Hulga does not answer. She seems embarrassed by the question; therefore, he pretends to make amends by exalting her bravery and telling her he imagines God takes care of her. She quickly tells him she does not believe in God--she believes in nothing. Pointer acts astonished.

78Ibid., p. 285.
They travel on into the woods until Pointer pretends tiredness and inquires for a place to rest. Joy suggests the barn, which they enter; and at Pointer's suggestion they mount a ladder into the loft. There he seduces her, "cons" her into taking off her wooden leg, and escapes with it in his valise, telling her that she is not really so smart, that he "had been believing in nothing ever since he was born." 79

The intruder is the Bible salesman who is a phoney, and enters the scene unexpectedly and leaves soon after. His abrupt intrusion and departure redirect the perspective of Joy--Hulga's life. Both the intruder and Joy have perverted themselves, but in the end, the intruder, Manley Pointer, alters their perversion.

Joy desecrates herself by indulging in atheistic doctrine, and exalting her physical deformity. The loss of her leg when she was ten distorts her perspective and instigates the re-routing of her life—which is epitomized in the act of renaming herself and creating a new identity. Sister Kathleen Feeley in *Voice of the Peacock* elaborates on the significance of Joy's renaming of herself.

Philosophically, to name a thing is to encompass it, to know it, to control it. To bestow a name indicates power, and to rename shows—biblically—the special call of God. Abram became Abraham to begin the dynasty of God's chosen people; Jacob became Israel to form the Israelite nation; Simon became Peter to head the Church of Christ.

79 Ibid., p. 291.
God summoned his prophets; Hulga summoned herself to a new life. Her renaming is a comic perversion of God’s practice, a self-call to a life of sterile intellectualism.80

The Bible salesman’s perversion is his manipulation of the word of God for materialistic gains. For him the scriptures are dead words which he deceitfully, but successfully, employs on a guileless, secular world.

His effect on Hulga who viewed Christianity with a hypocritical eye, was profound. Earlier he had declaimed pompously, "He who losest his life shall find it."81 In the barn loft scene at the close of the story, there is an apparent rephrasing of this Bible verse when Hulga agrees for Pointer to see her artificial leg. "It was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life, finding it again, miraculously, in his."82 Hulga, in a sense, loses her life, when she loses her wooden leg, the impetus for the creation of her new identity. Through the deceptive Bible salesman, Hulga loses her false identity and the possibility emerges that she will encounter life on more realistic terms.

"GREENLEAF"

"Greenleaf" is a narrative of two families—the Mays, who represent the "Old South" with all its cultural

80 Sister Kathleen Feeley, Voice of the Peacock (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 25
81 O’Connor, op. cit., p. 280. 82 Ibid., p. 289.
traditions and the Greenleafs, examples of the rising affluence of the "New South" which will eventually displace the "Old." The story unfolds with Mrs. May, one of the central figures, (the bull is the other main character) reflecting on her past fifteen years of managing her farm with only the aid of the shiftless, ignorant Greenleafs. She plans for the future of her farm after her death.

Mrs. May is aware that her two sons, Wesley and Scofield, have no interest in the place. Wesley is an intellectual who hates his teaching job at the university and hates the morons who attend there. Wesley likes nothing.

He hated the country and he hated the life he lived; he hated living with his mother and his idiot brother and he hated hearing about the damn dairy and the damn help and the damn broken machinery. Scofield is also a disappointment to his mother. He is a salesman of Negro insurance, a profession Mrs. May regards as indecent, and a hindrance to any young man seeking a nice girl to marry.

Mrs. May is jealous of the Greenleafs and their sons, O.T., and E.T., who have risen in prosperity and will soon become "Society," while Scofield and Wesley will remain stationary. Then when she is dead from over-work, the Greenleafs will be "healthy and thriving . . . just ready to begin draining Scofield and Wesley." The irresponsible

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84Ibid.  85Ibid., p. 318.  86Ibid., p. 319.
Greenleaf's are "thorns in her side" in other respects too. A scrub bull belonging to O.T. and E.T. has invaded her property and poses a threat to her pure-bred herd. She warns Mr. Greenleaf that if the bull is not removed from her farm, she will have it killed. She even leaves a message with O.T. and E.T.'s Negro hired hand that she wants them to get the bull off her property that same day. The Negro advises her that O.T. and E.T. will expect her to kill the bull. She angrily drives to the barn the next morning and orders Mr. Greenleaf to find the bull and shoot him.

Mr. Greenleaf takes along a shotgun and Mrs. May drives the car to the center of the pasture, into "a position which precludes any escape." She sits on the front bumper of the car, in the hot sun, forgetting Mr. Greenleaf's warning that the bull "don't like cars and trucks." The sun makes her feel strangely sleepy and she finds herself daydreaming--reviewing time in terms of past and future. Her reflections give her deep satisfaction as she believes "Before any kind of judgment seat... she would be able to say... "I've worked, I have not wallowed." She dozes, awakens, and realizes that Mr. Greenleaf has been gone for more than ten minutes. She reaches inside

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87 Feeley, *Voice of the Peacock*, op. cit., p. 98.
88 O'Connor, op. cit., p. 322. 89 Ibid.
the car, honks the horn, and sits back down on the bumper, impatiently waiting for Mr. Greenleaf's return. A few moments lapse, and she sees "a black heavy shadow," the bull, emerge from a line of trees. She yells for Mr. Greenleaf in an attempt to direct him towards the animal. But before Mr. Greenleaf arrives, the bull charges and gores Mrs. May to death.

The officious bull disrupts the life of Mrs. May in more than one respect. Its intruding presence on her farm intimidates her with the fear it will contaminate her herd, thus spoiling the farm she has strived so hard to maintain. It is also the agent of her violent death.

On a higher level, the bull symbolizes Christ, when he makes his appearance known to the competent and practical Mrs. May. He first emerges as a god in the "east ... his head raised--like some patient god come down to woo her." Later when the shades are slit, the bull "steps backward and lowers his head as if to show the wreath across his horns." The images are Christian and represent Christ at the hour of his crucifixion.

The bull's appalling impact on Mrs. May is symbolic of her inherent Christian conflict. She has deliberately ignored a religious heritage, and has justified a salvation attained through good works, rather than grace. "She was a good Christian woman with a large respect for religion,

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90 Ibid., p. 333. 91 Ibid., p. 311. 92 Ibid.
though, she did not, of course, believe any of it was true."\(^{93}\)

The bull also represents the indignities Mrs. May has suffered in life. Her death on the horns of the bull prepares her for the acceptance of these injustices as "a part of the scheme God has prepared for man and the inheritance of fallen men."\(^{94}\) This epiphany is experienced at the moment of her death, when she recognizes the inevitable destruction wrought by a life in which the secular world takes priority over the spiritual.

"THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST"

"The Lame Shall Enter First" explores the impact of a club-footed delinquent, Rufus Johnson, on the lives of Sheppard, a city recreational director, and his young son Norton. Sheppard, a self-proclaimed saviour of delinquents, allows Rufus to come and live with his son and him. Sheppard is obsessed with the idea that he can rehabilitate Rufus who had been placed in a reformatory for various acts of vandalism.

Sheppard had had weekly counselling sessions with Rufus prior to arranging for him to live in his home. He had discovered that Rufus's intelligence tests had shown that his I.Q. was superior (140). He had realized the boy

\(^{93}\)Ibid., p. 316.

had potential to become anything he wanted and Sheppard was eager to help him define and attain his goals—to put his talents to better use. In these weekly sessions, Sheppard had talked randomly with Rufus, on subjects ranging from psychology to astronomy. "He wanted to give the boy something to reach for besides his neighbor's goods."95

Sheppard had neglected his own son Norton, because "Norton was average or below and had had every advantage."96 But Rufus's father had died before he was born, and his mother was in the state penitentiary. He had been raised without water or electricity and his grandfather had beaten him every day.97 Besides, Rufus was club-footed; his acts of vandalism were merely a result of trying to compensate for his deformity. Sheppard was sure that with the proper home environment, and a corrective shoe, Rufus could become a productive citizen.

Norton, however, had suffered a greater deprivation than Rufus. The child had lived a miserable, lonely life since the death of his mother, a year before. Sheppard, instead of trying to help his own child adjust to the loss of his mother, had spent his time counselling Rufus who had shown no gratitude for his concern.

96Ibid., p. 449.
97Ibid., p. 447.
Norton had suffered more deprivation when Rufus came to live with them. On his first visit, Rufus had frightened the child, forcing him to serve him sandwiches and milk. He had ralked repulsively about Sheppard, telling Norton that "He ain't right." Rufus had even desecrated Norton's mother's room by entering and plundering through the dead woman's clothes.

Sheppard had ignored Rufus's belligerent acts when Norton had informed him. Instead, he had asked Norton (whom Sheppard thinks is selfish) to welcome Rufus and share with him. Sheppard had professed not to care what Rufus had said about him. He had told Rufus and Norton,

I'd simply be selfish if I let what Rufus thinks of me interfere with what I can do for Rufus. If I can help a person, all I want is to do it. I'm above and beyond simple pettiness.99

However, Rufus despised Sheppard and had seen through his false sense of duty. When Sheppard had left, Rufus had remarked to Norton. "God, kid ... how do you stand it? ... He thinks he's Jesus Christ!"100

Rufus's statement proves ultimately to be true. Sheppard does try to "play" God. He utilizes every means available to reform Rufus. He buys him a telescope and then a microscope, both of which Rufus "toys" with for only a short time, before becoming bored.

Sheppard had bought the telescope for the purpose of

instilling in Rufus the idea that he could become anything he desired—even an astronaut. The telescope was to be the instrument by which Rufus would broaden his horizons. However Rufus displays only belligerent unconcern, and says that he is not going to the moon and get there alive, but that when he dies he is going to hell.101

Sheppard does not believe in heaven or hell. He only believes in himself. He is his own saviour, and a reasonable and practical one, too. Rufus claims "the Bible has give the evidence . . . for the existence of hell . . . and if you die and go there you burn forever.102 Rufus's remarks interest Norton who had often wondered where his mother was since her death. He pleads with Rufus to tell him. Sheppard tells Norton that his mother no longer exists. "She is not anywhere. She just isn't."103 Rufus is outraged at Sheppard's atheism and tells the child that if his mother believed in Jesus, she was in heaven and he could only join her by dying. Norton tells Rufus his mother did believe in Jesus, but he wonders if he dies, will he go to heaven or burn in hell. Rufus tells him, "Right now you'd go where she is . . . but if you live long enough, you'll go to hell."104

Norton, alienated from his father, turns to Rufus. He longs to join his mother, and even helps Rufus steal a Bible. Rufus's religious "hang-ups" confound Sheppard,

101Ibid., p. 461.  
102Ibid.  
103Ibid.  
104Ibid.
and he is upset when he returns home one evening to find Rufus and Norton engrossed in the stolen Bible. Sheppard glares at Norton, only to find that "the child's face was bright and there was an excited sheen in his eyes."\textsuperscript{105}

Rufus and Sheppard argue about the Bible. Sheppard claims that the Bible is "for cowards, people who are afraid to stand on their own feet and figure things out for themselves."\textsuperscript{106} He tells Rufus that he is far too intelligent to believe in the "rubbish" the Bible contains. His remarks infuriate Rufus who rips a page from the Bible and eats the page to prove his belief. Norton repeats the act, and tells his father, "I've eaten it like Ezekiel and I don't want none of your food after it nor no more ever."\textsuperscript{107}

Prior to interesting Norton in the Bible, Rufus had been accused of vandalizing several houses in the neighborhood. Sheppard had staunchly defended him on all these occasions, but one, when he had had doubts concerning Rufus's innocence. However, he had fears about confronting Rufus with his doubts. He did not want to face the fact that he had failed.

Gradually, Sheppard's interest in Rufus begins to wane. Rufus had refused the orthopedic shoe. He had been ungrateful for the help Sheppard offered. He had

\textsuperscript{105} O'Conner, "The Lame Shall Enter First," \textit{op. cit.}, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 477.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibid.}. 


instilled Norton with false biblical prophecy. Sheppard grows to hate Rufus.

Sheppard's hatred of Rufus reaches its climax when Rufus deliberately gets caught in an act of vandalism and has the police bring him to Sheppard. He tells the police and Sheppard that he deliberately got caught "to show up that big tin Jesus." (Sheppard) Sheppard feels sickened when he realizes his mistake in trying to rehabilitate Rufus.

For the first time, he is aware of the magnitude of his negligence of Norton. He rushes toward the attic where the telescope is, hoping to find Norton there and make up "everything to him." But as he reaches the top of the attic stairs, his dreams shatter and he reels back like a man on the edge of a pit. He is too late: Norton has hanged himself in assurance that he will be re-united with his dead mother.

As an intruder, Rufus Johnson is welcomed into the scene he re-orders, in order that Sheppard may reform him. Ironically, he reforms Sheppard, by gradually awakening him to the realities of life. Through Rufus's intrusion, Sheppard comes to realize his negligence of Norton, which led to the child's suicide. Rufus makes Sheppard aware of the fact that he cannot change the world—that only God can do that. He forces Sheppard to see

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108 Ibid., p. 480. 109 Ibid., p. 482. 110 Ibid.
the destructive end one meets when he falsely pursues the world of reason and intellect.

Sheppard is lame, as well as Rufus. Rufus's lameness is physical and spiritual; Sheppard's is primarily spiritual. He is blind to everything except his one egotistical desire—to rehabilitate Rufus. In the process of attempting this task, he neglects his own deprived child and thus becomes responsible for Norton's death. But the child's death is not the loss it may seem. O'Connor leads the reader to believe that the child, through Rufus's influence, attains his goal—a spiritual reunion with his dead mother; and that Sheppard experiences a sharp recognition of his own limitations.

Rufus's depravity is essentially an outcome of his unflinching view of reality. He refuses a halfway stand. He sees life in terms similar to The Misfit. One either believes in Christ and faithfully serves Him, or else gives himself to Satan, and diabolically pursues a life of evil. To Rufus, a club-foot has nothing to do with his criminal acts. He proves this fact by refusing to wear the orthopedic shoe, which Sheppard, firmly but falsely, believed would dissolve his diabolism. Rufus believes he is caught in Satan's power, but if he ever manages to repent, he will become a preacher. "It's no sense in doing it halfway," he affirms.


111O'Connor, op. cit., p. 476.
The salvation of Rufus is beyond the power of Sheppard.

Christ the Lamb, Christ the Tiger, Christ the Lord. In Him alone is salvation to be found. To contradict Him, is, finally, to contradict ourselves. And to live without Him is intolerable: it is Hell.

Sheppard discovers the truth of salvation, not through works or self, but through Christ, when he belatedly finds his son hanging . . . "just below the beam from which he had launched his flight into space."

"REVELATION"

Practically the entire story, "Revelation", takes place within the narrow confines of a doctor's waiting room where Mrs. Turpin has brought her husband Claud who has an ulcerous leg. Mrs. Turpin, another of O'Connor's "good" women, is annoyed because only one vacant seat remains—which she pushes Claud into because he is not supposed to stand.

In one comprehensive glance, Mrs. Turpin "sums up" the situation. She absorbs all of the repulsive details of the patients in the room, as she remains standing, waiting for a chair. Only one other patient (besides Claud and

\[112^2\]Drake, Flannery O'Connor A Critical Essay, op. cit., p. 36.
\[113^2\]O'Connor, op. cit., p. 482.
\[114^2\]O'Connor, "Revelation", op. cit., p. 489.
herself) meets with her approval—a well-dressed, genteel lady. The others she quickly categorizes as white-trash because of their dress and actions.

It had always been a habit of Mrs. Turpin to classify people according to first impressions based on their apparel and their manners. The waiting room was a perfect place for her to put her unique talents of judgement to work. Her obsession with studying and classifying people would often occupy her thoughts at night. She would always consider the question that if God had given her a choice between being a Negro, or white-trash, that she would pray for him to wait until something else was available; And if God absolutely refused to wait, then she would say,"All Right, make me a nigger then—but that don't mean a trashy one."115

Classes of people always interested Mrs. Turpin because she wanted to make certain her position in society. According to her calculations, she and Claud were in relatively respectable positions. They stood slightly below the extremely wealthy who had "much bigger houses and much more land."116 But, in many respects, these higher class people were not as deserving of their positions as she and Claud would have been.

Pressed for conversation, Mrs. Turpin finds only

115 Ibid., p. 491. 116 Ibid.
one person, the well-dressed lady that had immediately met with her approval. She directs her conversation to her, but the white-trash keep interrupting Mrs. Turpin and her "friend's" chatter. Mrs. Turpin fakes politeness with these white-trash, because she considers it below her dignity to be rude to anybody.

One other patient in the room affects Mrs. Turpin's complacency. She is the daughter of Mrs. Turpin's "equal" and sits reading a book entitled **Human Development**. From time to time, she raises her head and directs a scowl at Mrs. Turpin. The girl's grimace confuses Mrs. Turpin but at the same time evokes pity when she notices the girl's ugly acne-scarred face.

The white-trash continue to disrupt the rambling conversation of Mrs. Turpin and the "nice lady". The talk ranges from the clock on the doctor's wall, through cotton, "niggers", and hogs. All the while the ugly girl's eyes are glued on Mrs. Turpin as if she had some special reason for hating her.

The girl's annoyance seems to grow as the conversation continues—especially when Mrs. Turpin and her mother keep discussing Negroes. The white-trash lady believes the "niggers" should all be shipped back to Africa where they belong. But Mrs. Turpin, believing herself more knowledgeable about these matters, dismisses her stupidity by remarking that "it wasn't so many of them then."\(^{117}\)

\(^{117}\)Ibid.
Claud makes a joke about "white-faced niggers,"\(^{118}\) and everyone laughs except the ugly girl and the white-trash.

As the laughter dies down, the strains of a religious hymn issue from the radio in the waiting room, and Mrs. Turpin's mood sobers. As she listens, her spirits rise in accord with the song. She begins to feel grateful to God because he has made her such a decent, understanding person. In buoyant spirits, she mentally praises Jesus for making her as she is and giving her a little of everything.

Her praise of God and rejoicing is short-lived, however, when her attention is once more drawn to a filthy white-trashy woman and her dirty little grandson. She begins to thing about their laziness, filth, and stupidity—all of which disgust her. The ugly girl who had glared at Mrs. Turpin from the first, fixes her eyes on her like "two drills . . . This time there was no mistaking there was something urgent behind them."\(^{119}\) Mrs. Turpin feels threatened and decides to be friendly with the girl by engaging her in conversation. However, the girl does not answer any of the questions directed at her. Instead her mother makes apologies for her rudeness, explaining to Mrs. Turpin that Mary Grace goes

\(^{118}\) Ibid.
\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 497.
to college and studies too much, and she should have more outside interests than just books or reading.

The discussion rambles on, eventually touching the topic of personality. Mary Grace's mother states that a poor disposition is the worst trait with which an individual can be afflicted. Mrs. Turpin is elated. She knows that the one thing she has been blessed with is a wonderful disposition. Mary Grace's mother elaborates on the limitations of being unappreciative, bitter, and critical. She is speaking of her own daughter and Mary Grace is aware that she is really the topic of the conversation. Mrs. Turpin condescendingly offers the suggestion that "it never hurt anyone to smile." 120

She then experiences the same feeling of elation she had felt when she heard the religious song. Except this time the desire to shout her goodness overwhelms her and she begins a long exclamation of her righteousness.

If it's one thing I am . . . it's grateful. When I think of all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is. It could have been different! . . . Oh, thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!' 121

Mary Grace becomes outraged at this insult and hurls her book at Mrs. Turpin's head and begins to throttle her.

120 O'Connor, "Revelation", op. cit., p. 499.
121 Ibid.
The nurse and doctor rush in to restrain the girl with an injection, but not before she summons the strength to shout at Mrs. Turpin. "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog."\(^{122}\)

Mrs. Turpin's mind stays focused on Mary Grace's remark. She cannot understand why the girl has flung this insult at her instead of at the white-trash, to whom it applied. Mary Grace's offensive attack continues to haunt Mrs. Turpin after she arrives home. She tries to sleep, but the image of a hideous wart hog works its way into her mind and remains.

When Claud leaves to get the Negro hired hands, Mrs. Turpin heads for the pig parlor and violently starts hosing down the hogs. She is angry at God for allowing the injustice she has suffered. Filled with wrath, she demands to know why she is the object of such an outrageous assault.

Why me? It's no trash around here, black or white that I haven't given to, And break my back to the bone everyday working. And do for the church . . . If you like trash better, go get yourself some trash then . . . Call me a wart hog from hell. Put that bottom rail on top. There'll still be a top and a bottom! . . . Who do you think you are?\(^{123}\)

As her rage stills, Mrs. Turpin envisions a bridge leading from a burning earth towards heaven, filled with multitudes of people. She sees white-trash, Negroes, freaks and lunatics leading the procession. And following closely

\(^{122}\)Ibid., p. 500. \(^{123}\)Ibid., p. 507.
behind are people like Claud and herself; the respectable, common sense and well-mannered ones. "Yet, she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away."\textsuperscript{124} Mrs. Turpin tightens her hold on the rail of the hog pen, unable to move. At last, in her moment of awakening, she treads cautiously towards home.

Mary Grace, the silent intellectual, is the intruding stranger on the self-righteous Mrs. Turpin who thrives on judging others. Mary Grace sees through Mrs. Turpin's hypocritical goodness and condescension. Her repulsion of Mrs. Turpin flourishes until it reaches its heights in the book-throwing incident.

Mary Grace plays the role of prophet. She is the instrument by which Mrs. Turpin's false virtues are revealed. The act of violence Mary Grace perpetrates on Mrs. Turpin is the shock necessary to withdraw from her the sin of pride. Only through the impact from the hurled book—which literally knocks some sense into Mrs. Turpin's head, can she realize the full meaning of the biblical scripture.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (Matthew 7: 1-2)

Mrs. Turpin has failed to cast out the mote in her own eye, but has sought to find it in her brother's. She is judged

\textsuperscript{124}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 508.
righteously for the judgment she has passed on others. But through her "revelation," she recognizes that only God has the right to judge.
CHAPTER III

THE INTRUDING STRANGER AS TRANSCENDENT

In "The River," "The Enduring Chill," and "Parker's Back," the intruding stranger appears in transcendent form. The intruder, in theological terms, exists apart from the material universe, and often takes the shape of a divine spirit that over-rules the conscious mind, and subjects it to a re-ordering process.

"THE RIVER"

"The River" is a story about young Harry Ashfield, a child, who despite his youth, is aware of the emptiness in his life. To Harry, life is a monotonous routine of "scrounging" for any food within reach of his small frame while his parents are recovering from hangovers. All the while, he has a deep realization that life is not the big joke his parents think it is, and that his parents have no concern for his welfare.

Harry's relationship with his parents is made clear in the opening scene when Mrs. Connin, his babysitter, drops by to pick up the boy. The child stands sad and lifeless in the middle of the dark living room. The opening lines of the story reveal Harry's plight. His father's unconcern is apparent in the manner in which he presents the boy to his babysitter.
The child stood glum and limp in the middle of the dark living room while his father pulled him into a plaid coat. His right arm was hung in the sleeve but the father buttoned the coat anyway and pushed him forward toward a pale spotted hand that stuck through the half-open door.\[^{125}\]

The haphazard arrangement of the child suggests his deplorable state. However, his obvious disarray does not escape Mrs. Connin's attention, and she is quick to assert that "He ain't fixed right," to which Harry's father nonchalantly mutters, "Well then for Christ's sake fix him."\[^{126}\]

The irony of his remark becomes evident later when Harry, through the influence of Mrs. Connin, a backwoods fundamentalist, is introduced to Christ which he had previously thought was a word associated with "oh" or "damn" or "God", or maybe somebody who cheated them [his parents] out of something sometime.\[^{127}\]

Later, at the end of the story, Harry does "fix" himself for Christ when he baptizes himself and drowns in the process, because he wanted "to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river."\[^{128}\]

Prior to his baptismal death, young Harry had experienced a life of loneliness and despair wrought by parental neglect. But when Mrs. Connin takes him to the baptismal and healing service performed by the Reverend Bevel Summers, Harry is impressed by the preacher, who promises him that if he is washed in the river of suffering

\[^{126}\]\textit{Ibid.}
\[^{127}\]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 127.
\[^{128}\]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 173.
he won't be the same, he'll count.\textsuperscript{129}

In an attempt to atone for the emptiness and lack of love in his life, Harry seeks a new identity through the act of renaming himself Bevel, in honor of the preacher. Though baptized by the preacher, Harry senses he must travel further to attain the riches offered those who discover God's Kingdom. His insatiable desire for the rewards of Christ—acceptance instead of rejection—lead him to his death in the river. At first the river rejects him as his parents did, but then accepts him as he becomes "overcome with surprise . . . and knew that he was getting somewhere, [and] all his fury and fear left him."\textsuperscript{130}

The intruder, death, is transcendent, but is sought by the child; death is the end of his search for value and a meaningful existence. It leads him to his goal, Christ, who will provide an eternal, significant experience.

Harry seeks a spiritual, inner release from human suffering. His pain is internal, not external. Moral deprivation is his illness, and his death evokes the thrice repeated Biblical verses from Matthew, Mark, and Luke when Jesus spoke to his disciples saying,

Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. (Matthew 19: 13-15)

\textsuperscript{129}Ibid., p. 168. \textsuperscript{130}Ibid., p. 174.
Clearly, Harry receives God's Kingdom as a little child and will enter into a paradise that the earthly atheist, Mr. Paradise, who scorned and rejected Christ, tried to rescue him from. Death, the intruding stranger, is a kind and helpful friend who will bring an end to the misery and suffering of one of God's little children.

"THE ENDURING CHILL"

As death is the intruding stranger in "The River", its counterpart, life, is the intruder in "The Enduring Chill." The story centers on Asbury Fox, a frustrated young artist, who returns from New York to his southern home on the outskirts of a small Georgia town, Timberboro. Asbury's return is prompted by the conviction that he is dying of some rare, incurable disease, and that his mother's shock accompanying this discovery will awaken her to the realities of life and "assist her in the process of growing up."\(^{131}\)

Asbury is sullen and morose, but the thought of his impending death leaves him with a deep satisfaction. His death will mean a victory over the despair and futility in his life. It will serve as a deserved punishment to his

\(^{131}\) O'Connor, "The Enduring Chill", op. cit., p. 357.
mother who stifled his desire for imagination and creative temperament. "Death was coming to him legitimately, as a justification, as a gift from life."\textsuperscript{132} Death will be his crowning achievement, his one glorious, significant experience life has not offered.

Asbury looks upon himself as a martyr and delights in the self-pity he supposes his death will evoke. Only bitterness, and a sense of crushing defeat will remain as constant companions until death can claim him. Until this expected event, Asbury can merely choose to ignore the family (his mother and sister) whom he considers stupid and uncultured.

Asbury's mother, however, is aware he is ill, and she repeatedly insists on consulting Dr. Block, the family physician. Asbury is adamant in refusing medical attention from Dr. Block whom he feels is incompetent. He always dismisses her request by stressing the magnitude of his illness. "What's wrong with me is way beyond Block."\textsuperscript{133} He wants to lead his mother to believe that if he had thought medical care would correct his condition, he would have sought it in New York at the hands of professionals.

While in New York, at the onset of his disease, Asbury had written a letter filling two notebooks—intended to be read after his death. Asbury is certain the

\textsuperscript{132}Ibid., p. 370. \textsuperscript{133}Ibid., p. 359.
significance of the letter and its impact on Mrs. Fox will be slow, but he hopes that it will eventually reveal the crime she has committed against him; and that he has forgiven her for her sin. His mother's crime is the smothering of his artistic desire, which he explains in his letter.

I came here to escape the slave's atmosphere of home . . . to find freedom, to liberate my imagination, to take it like a hawk from its cage and set it 'whirling off into the widening gyre' (Yeats) and what did I find? It was incapable of flight. It was some bird you had domesticated, sitting huffy in its pen, refusing to come out . . . I have no imagination. I have no talent. I can't create. I have nothing but the desire for these things. Why didn't you kill that too? Woman, why did you pinion me? 134

Asbury secretly hopes that his deep sense of suffering and loss will penetrate and leave its indelible mark on his mother. He prays the letter will, in time, change her attitude and make her see him as the sensitive, struggling artist he tried in vain to be.

However, Mrs. Fox is a practical woman, and discharges Asbury's persistent reiteration that he is dying. When he asks her to send for a Jesuit Priest, she reminds him that he is not a Catholic. Determined to force her to send for the Jesuit anyway, he insists he is dying and that she must not refuse him this last request. "You are NOT dying," she says matter of factly . . . "Nowadays doctors don't let young people die" 135. . . Asbury again repeats

134 Ibid., p. 364. 135 Ibid., p. 372.
his conviction he is dying, trying to make the words absorb and shatter his mother's practicality and realism. But Mrs. Fox is immovable. She angrily informs Asbury that she will not let him die. "Do you think for one minute . . . that I intend to sit here and let you die?" she says. He sees the harshness in her eyes and for the first time he is struck with doubt and feels his convictions shrink slightly.

Despite his refusal to see Dr. Block, Mrs. Fox has him visit Asbury. Dr. Block takes several blood samples and with each visit, he becomes grimmer. Asbury thinks Dr. Block's seriousness verifies his conviction that death is imminent.

He seeks one meaningful experience before death. The Jesuit Priest, whom he had falsely believed would be an intellectual with whom he might communicate, fails him. A communion with the Negroes before his death will be significant, he decides; but this plan fails also. Finally Asbury despairs when he realizes "there would be no significant experience before he died." But the greatest despair he experiences is the final arrival of Dr. Block, who enters cheerfully, and tells Asbury he has undulant fever, which will not kill him and is "the same as Bang's in a cow."  

Life is the intruding stranger on Asbury, whose futile attempts to create have left him frustrated. Unwilling to

\[136\text{Tbid.} \quad 137\text{Tbid., p. 380} \quad 138\text{Tbid., p. 381}\]
accept his human failings, he welcomes death as a means of escape from this reality. To hasten his end by suicide would have deprived him of the victory he expects to achieve through "his enduring chill" which will supposedly culminate in death. He envisions his triumphant departure as one caused by Art, "the god he had faithfully served and failed." Death will compensate for his failure in life. In death he will achieve heroic stature.

But life intrudes in mocking derision when Asbury discovers that the death he seeks will elude him. The "enduring chill" he glorifies in is undulant fever, received from drinking unpasteurized milk at the barn while trying to achieve a mystic communion with the Negroes, primarily to spite his mother.

At the story's end, he views his intellectual pride as only an illusion and sees it being stripped away. "The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of the new." Asbury sees reality with a new-found clarity. The whirlwind tears "the last film of illusion . . . from his eyes," and he faces not death, but life, without the protection of his age or of its secularism, both of which

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139 O'Connor, op. cit., p. 373.
140 Ibid., p. 382.
141 Ibid.
obscure man's oneness with God. Contrary to his desire, Asbury will not experience a physical death, but a spiritual one to make him worthy of rebirth in grace.

"PARKER'S BACK"

In another story, "Parker's Back", the intruding stranger is also transcendent. However, in this particular case, the intruder is neither life, nor death, but Christ, or the religious calling of O.E. parker by Christ. "Parker's Back" is religiously orientated, a fact verified by the names of the main characters.

O.E.'s true name is Obadiah Elihue. Both names derive their source from the Bible. Obadiah is the name given to several Biblical characters, the most important of whom is the prophet Obadiah, whose book has as its theme the destruction of Edom. The name Elihue comes from the book of Job. Elihue was one of Job's friends, who along with Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz, engaged in philosophical debate over the nature and cause of Job's affliction.

O.E.'s wife, Sarah Ruth, also has a Biblical name. In the Bible, Sarah was the name given to Abraham's wife, who was the mother of Isaac. Ruth was the name given to daughter-in-law of Naomi, wife of Boaz, and great-grandmother

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143 The Book of Job.
of David. Although the names are important as evidence of the biblical concern of the story, "Parker's Back," "is not so much concerned with providing exact biblical parallels as it is with the dramatization of spiritual truth."\(^{144}\)

In the story, O.E. Parker is not a religious man—at least not at first. He curses vehemently, has been promiscuous with numerous women, and has led a life of worldly concern. He is also ashamed of his true name, which he has never revealed to anyone (it had appeared on his baptismal record and in the navy files) until he meets Sarah Ruth.

Ironically, Sarah Ruth is homely and fanatically religious. She is pregnant. O.E. cannot understand his motives for marrying her. Furthermore, he cannot understand why he stays with her.

O.E. has an obsession with tattoos, acquired when he was fourteen and saw a man in a fair covered with tattoos. The man who seemed completely clothed in "a single intricate design of brilliant color", \(^{145}\) impressed O.E. with wonder, and the mystery of life, something he had never contemplated before. From then on, O.E. felt compelled to accumulate tattoos. At the time he married Sarah Ruth, who found his tattoos repulsive, O.E. had amassed a collection of tattoos that enveloped his entire body—except his back.

\(^{144}\)Driskell and Brittain, The Eternal Crossroads, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 512.

\(^{145}\)O’Connor, "Parker's Back", \textit{op. cit.}, p. 512.
He would be satisfied with each new tattoo for only a short time, and then would feel a growing dissatisfaction. "The effect was not of one intricate arabesque of colors but of something haphazard and botched." Then he would feel an irresistible impulse to have a new tattoo. Realizing only one place remains, his back, Parker develops a plan for having a special tattoo placed there. The tattoo would have to be one that Sarah Ruth would be unable to resist. It would have to have a religious subject.

But Parker becomes bewildered in trying to decide on the appropriate religious symbol. His obsession grows steadily on the kind of tattoo. His frustration mounts until one day, while baling hay for an old woman he works for, he runs her tractor into a tree and is flung from the machine. His shoes are pulled from his feet and he sees them burning some distance away. At the moment of his impact, he finds himself shouting "GOD ABOVE!" Parker considers his words a revelation. He would have to have a picture of God tattooed on his back. Sarah Ruth would never be able to resist God.

Parker rushes to his truck, leaving the tractor and shoes burning and drives fifty miles into the city to visit a tattoo artist he had patronized before. He asks the artist for his book on religious tattoos, and finally chooses one of

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146Ibid., p. 514. 147Ibid., p. 520.
a "flat stern Byzantine Christ with all demanding eyes." When the tattoo artist finishes the picture, Parker is reluctant to look at it. When he does view it, at the insistence of the artist, he feels the eyes penetrating him.

He leaves the tattoo shop, buys a pint of whiskey, drinks it, and enters a pool hall he frequented on previous visits to the city. He is immediately recognized there by one of his cronies who slaps him on the back. Parker tells his friend to leave him alone; he has a fresh tattoo on the back. The friend tells the other men in the pool hall that Parker has another tattoo, and they pull his shirt off to see. When the men see the picture of Christ, they immediately think "O.E.'s got religion and is witnessing for Jesus . . ." Parker, offended by their remarks, gets into a brawl and finds himself ejected from the premises. Parker then begins to examine his spirit. He realizes the eyes of the Christ on his back are eyes that must be obeyed.

He returns home to Sarah Ruth as a new man. But Sarah Ruth refuses to let him in until he tells her Obadiah Elihue is seeking admittance. When she sees the tattoo he had thought would please her, she is furious. She does not recognize the picture until O.E. tells her the tattoo is of God. Sarah becomes furious, telling Parker that no man has seen

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148 Ibid., p. 522. 149 Ibid., p. 526.
God's face—he is a spirit. Thinking his tattoo is the ultimate in idolatry, she beats him viciously with a broom until welts form on the tattooed Christ's face. O.E. flees from her attack, and is found at the end of the story leaning against a pecan tree, "crying like a baby."150

The intrusion in "Parker's Back" is Christ incarnated in the tattoo of Him. That Parker avoids Christ is apparent in his refusal to use his rightful biblical name, Obadiah Elihue. His flight from Christ takes the external form of Parker's adorning himself with tattoos, none of which satisfy him until he bedecks his back with the picture of the Byzantine.

Christ intrudes in Parker's life to call him to prophecy. Parker's role as prophet is linked with the biblical roles of Obadiah, Jonah, Elihue, and Job. As Obadiah had heard a rumor from the Lord to prophecy against the heathen, so does Parker when he shouts "GOD ABOVE!", and later testifies against the disbelievers in the pool hall who make a mockery of his tattooed Christ. He rises against them in battle, and when he is thrust from the haven of the heathens—the pool hall—a calm descends as it did when Jonah was cast from the ship for refusing to obey God.151

150 Ibid., p. 530.

151 Driskell and Brittain, The Eternal Crossroads, op. cit., p. 118.
Parker is likened unto Elihue who discoursed with Job during his period of great affliction. Elihue reasons with Job, explaining that God does not have to give an account of His ways because of His greatness which surpasses man. He tells Job that God calls men to repentance by visions, afflictions, and by His ministry. Elihue accuses Job for charging God with injustice, when God cannot be unjust. He reproves Job stressing how man must humble himself before his Maker. Elihue asserts the importance of exalting God. "Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold. Every man may see it; man may behold it afar off." (Job 37: 24-25)

Parker's initial refusal to prophecy brings many afflictions. He is tormented in his search for spiritual comfort. The amassed tattoos are external symbols of the inner spiritual conflict. Physically, he suffers loss of weight becomes nervous and irritable, and fears the compulsive collection of tattoos indicate he is going insane. Not until he has the face of Christ on his back and feels the eyes always on him, demanding obedience, does he relinquish himself to God. The fact that the tattooed Christ is a permanent fixture shows that Obadiah Elihue has experienced a rebirth, an acceptance of his role as prophet, and the Christ on his back will be a witness of the magnitude of God.
CHAPTER IV
THE INTRUDING STRANGER AS OBSCURE

When the form of the intruding stranger cannot be ascertained, but there is evidence of an intruder, or several intruders, the intruding stranger is classified as obscure. Two of Flannery O'Connor's short stories deal with this form of the intruding stranger. They are "The Turkey," and "Judgment Day."

"THE TURKEY"

In an early story by Flannery O'Connor, "The Capture", originally entitled "The Turkey", the young protagonist Ruller, age eleven, chases a large wounded turkey for hours through thick brushes, in a heavily wooded section. Ruller, in some mysterious way, has come to view the turkey with spiritual significance. The turkey represents affinity with his Creator. His harried pursuance of the turkey which continues to elude him and is only captured after much physical suffering and frustration is symbolic of Ruller's perplexity concerning the secular and spiritual world.

The intruder in a literal sense is the turkey itself, but in a more profound sense, the intruder is Christ and the
conflict arising from Ruller's uncertainty whether to be like Hane, his bad older brother who "played pool and smoked cigarettes and sneaked in at twelve-thirty,"\textsuperscript{152} or like Christ. Ruller realizes Hane is wild and mean, and in his frustrated attempts to make the capture which he thinks will raise him in stature, his feelings alternate between despair and elation during the chase. When the turkey's capture seems apparent, Ruller thinks of the added dimension he will achieve.

He guesses his father will think it is something when he comes home with the turkey slung over his shoulder. He imagines the reaction of the family when he brings in his prey. He sees them jumping and yelling "Good Lord look at Ruller! Ruller! Where did you get that wild turkey?"\textsuperscript{153} And his father will say, "Man! That's a bird if I ever saw one!"\textsuperscript{154}

When the turkey eludes him and at times seems entirely beyond his grasp, Ruller, in frustration, believes his inability to capture the turkey is symbolic of his failure in life and that he is going to "turn out" like Hane except at an earlier age than when Hane had begun his evil ways. During these moments, Ruller turns to blasphemy. He curses

\textsuperscript{152}O'Connor, "The Turkey", p. 47.

\textsuperscript{153}\textit{Tbid.}, p. 45.  \textsuperscript{154}\textit{Tbid.}
violently and rolls on the ground laughing hysterically, thinking how his mother would admonish him for his outrageous profanity.

Just when he gives up all hope of capturing the turkey, and decides he is truly bad, he sees it in just the right position for capture. He thinks God has put it in his path to save him after all.

Walking proudly through the crowded streets of Tilford (where nearly all of Mulrose County's eight thousand inhabitants gathered on Saturday) with the turkey slung over his shoulder, Ruller becomes convinced of his righteousness and is over-whelmed with the desire to pay God for the capture of this prize turkey. He has one hoarded dime, and he prays God will send a beggar to him, so he can return his gratitude. Immediately his prayer is answered in the person of Hetty Gilman, an old woman who had been begging for twenty years. Ruller strides forward confidently and thrusts the dime in Hetty's hand. He marches on confident that he is important to God.

He is almost home, when three boys who had shown an unusual interest in the turkey, calmly walk up, take it from him and stroll leisurely away in the opposite direction. Ruller, dumbfounded, races toward home feeling sure that something terrible is pursuing him.

It is difficult to define the intruding stranger in
"The Turkey", although there is sufficient evidence that one exists. The intruding stranger could come in the form of a person or persons—the boys who take Ruller's captured prize from him. The intruder could be transcendent. The capture of the turkey seems to symbolize Ruller's confrontation with the Divine. During his pursuance of the bird, his mind associates the capture of it with communion with God.

Whichever form the intruder takes, Ruller is affected. He has an inclination to group reality via his restricted view of life. By capturing and losing his prize (the turkey), Ruller, in bewilderment, becomes aware that "God works through reality according to his own designs, not man's."155 The intrusion of God or the concept of God affects Ruller's apprehension of reality.

"JUDGMENT DAY"

"Judgment Day" focuses on an old man, Tanner, displaced from his native Georgia soil to the confines of his tactlessly charitable daughter's New York apartment. Tanner's exile to the hostile city is brought about when he is forced to live on a Negro doctor's property and operate his still or leave for the city. Unaware of the despair of city life, he chooses the latter.

As the story unfolds, Tanner is planning his escape from the crowded city he has grown to hate. His one desire is to return to his homeland—dead or alive. Fearing that his daughter will not fulfill her promise to ship his body back to Georgia upon his death, he decides to take the necessary precautions and find his way home alone. He scribbles a note with the instructions that if he is found dead, his body is to be shipped to Corinth, Georgia and delivered to his Negro friend, Coleman Parrum. He pins the note in his pocket.

The means for escape come one snowy morning when his daughter leaves him in the apartment while she goes grocery shopping. Tanner waits until she leaves and ponderously begins his descent of the four flights of steps he hopes will lead him to freedom.

His hopes diminish, though, when he stumbles forward and collapses in the middle of the flight of stairs. Lying there, he envisions his homecoming. He sees himself in a box being lifted from a train onto a wagon. Coleman and Hooten are present and Coleman suspects a trick. The two open the box with a crow-bar and Tanner pulls himself up saying "Judgment Day! Judgment Day!"156 Tanner's vision ends as consciousness returns and he murmurs Coleman's name.

A Negro actor who had assaulted Tanner on a previous occasion is bending over him. He mistakenly takes the appellation Coleman to mean coal man, and a verbal racial assault on him. Tanner recognizes the actor who mockingly tells him, "Ain't no judgment day, old man. Cept this. Maybe this here judgment day for you." 

When his daughter returns home from the store she finds Tanner forced between the spokes of the bannister where the Negro actor has thrust him. She is unable to release him and seeks the aid of the police who saw him loose, only to discover he has been dead nearly an hour. The daughter buries him in New York, but is unable to sleep at night because she knew the old man wanted to return home. Eventually she has his body exhumed and shipped to Georgia, in fulfillment of his last desire.

A number of intruding strangers leave their influence on Tanner. One is the Negro doctor for whom Old Tanner refuses to work. His sense of pride and dignity prevent him from working for colored folks. His refusal to work for the Negro on whose property he lives forces him to move in with his daughter and her yankee son-in-law in New York. They, too, intrude on old Tanner's way of life. The daughter looks upon him as an object of duty to which she is...

157 Ibid.
bound. The city they live in intrudes. Tanner had he had
the choice again would never have come. The crowds, the
confinement, the strange social customs bring on loneliness
and despair.

And finally, the Negro actor intrudes. Contrary to
Tanner's notions, he is not like southern Negroes, but is an
ill-tempered, anti-social being, who misinterprets Tanner's
attempts to be friendly. But perhaps the real intruding
stranger is death. Tanner's desire to return to his spiritual
homeland from which he has been exiled, can only be achieved
by death. The true intruding stranger, death, through which
a new spiritual world is attained, and the misery of the
secular world vanishes, is Tanner's comrade. Death helps
him reach his goal—a return to his native soil.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Much of Flannery O'Connor's fiction deals with a desacrilized universe of modern secularity where man, alienated from God, confronts many obstacles. Only through a revelation do her characters experience a realization of their human limitations. This epiphany arrives near the end of her stories and involve characters who have sought to justify themselves to God through good works. Their failure to view reality except through their own distorted concepts lead many of them to experience a supernatural manifestation.

This epiphany is the one element in her stories that shock her characters into an awareness of the superiority of God over man. Violence is the means she utilizes to "jar" her characters' view of reality and make them ready to accept the grace, Christ—not man—can offer.

The rationalists and self-righteous of her fiction who believe they can manage without His assistance, are the rejecters and ignorers of God's power and saving grace. Yet they cannot flee. And to Flannery O'Connor her characters' confrontation with Him "Who terrifies before He
can bless is the story she constantly retells."158

The intruding strangers in her works serve the purpose of readying her characters for the acceptance of redemption through God's saving grace.

They "come to call the wicked to repentance—and none more so than the modern intellectuals who have no use for Christianity, the Church, or its traditional doctrines."159

The epigraph for A Good Man is Hard to Find serves the purpose of alerting her readers to the Christian emphasis O'Connor places in her works.

The Dragon is by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is necessary to pass by the Dragon.160

Perhaps the Dragon is Satan incorporated in the intruding stranger in her fiction. And the Father of Souls is God. In order for her characters to become aware of Him, they must pass by her intruding strangers.

159Ibid., p. 15.
160Feeley, op. cit., pp. 32-33.


THE INTRUDING STRANGER
IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S FICTION

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Flannery O'Connor's fiction is prolific in an element defined here as the intruding stranger. Since the publication of her first work "The Geranium" in 1947, later revised and published posthumously under the title "Judgment Day", this motif appears in one form or another throughout nearly all of her thirty-one short stories and two novels. Since the intruding stranger is more easily identified and plays a larger role in some of her short stories than in others, this thesis deals primarily with those short stories where the intruding stranger makes the strongest appearance. Furthermore, a study which undertakes to classify all of her art from this perspective would be a tremendous task that would transcend the scope of this thesis. In view of these facts, this thesis concerns itself only with those short stories where the intruding stranger is most
easily recognized and can be identified mainly by one of three forms.

Most often the intruding stranger appears as a person who is either a conscious, or unconscious worker of change. However, in three of the stories, the intruding stranger is an idea or concept such as life, death, or religion, and is classified as transcendent. In two of the stories, the intruder cannot be identified easily, because there exist more than one intruder, or different degrees of intrusion. When this occurs, the intruding stranger is categorized as obscure. Not only does this study deal with identifying the form of the intruding stranger, it also defines the role of the intruder and the intruder's impact on Flannery O'Connor's main characters.

Those stories in which the intruding stranger appears as a person or persons are "A Stroke of Good Fortune," "A Good Man is Hard to Find," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "A Circle in the Fire," "The Displaced Person," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "Good Country People," "The Lame Shall Enter First," "Revelation," and "Greenleaf." In "Greenleaf," the intruder is definitely a bull; nevertheless, this story was classified in the category of the intruding stranger as a person, because the bull is neither transcendent, nor obscure. Although the bull is not human, it more closely resembles a human in characteristics, and falls most suitably into this category. With the exception of the unborn fetus (the sex of whom is yet to be determined) in "A Stroke of
Good Fortune," the intruding stranger appears as a male or males in all the stories except "A Temple of the Holy Ghost;" and "Revelation."

The intruding stranger appears as transcendent in "The River," where the intruder is death, and in "The Enduring Chill," where it is life. In "Parker's Back," the intruder is Christ incarnated in Parker's tattoo of Him which forces Parker to experience a re-birth whereby he must obey God and be a testimony to His saving grace.

In "The Turkey" and "Judgment Day", the intruding stranger is obscure. In these short stories there is valid evidence of an intruder; however, who or what the intruder is--is uncertain. In fact, in these stories, there exist more than one intruder, and just which one of the intruding strangers creates the greatest impact on Flannery O'Connor's main characters is sometimes quite difficult to ascertain.

Since Flannery O'Connor was a firm believer in the Bible and accepted the idea of an omnipotent God to whom man found himself accountable, her fiction also abounds in biblical allusions and confrontations with the Allmighty. Since she was also skeptical of intellectuals, atheists, and self-righteous hypocrites who sought to mold their own twisted perceptions of truth, her fiction forces these characters into an encounter with Christ or the spiritual world through the auspices of the intruding stranger. The intruder acts as a catalyst where-by her characters experience
an epiphany which re-orders their existence.

The intruding stranger, then, serves a unique purpose in her works. The intruder, most often, assumes the role of prophet or messenger sent from God to call the unrighteous to repentance. Ultimately, the intruding stranger is the chosen of God. "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." (Matthew 20:16)

These few are her intruding strangers. Among them, looming in the background, is one gigantic figure—the Great Intruding Stranger Himself—Jesus Christ. He is the archetype for the intruding stranger in Flannery O'Connor's fiction.

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