

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Ironizing Nihilism in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and
The Violent Bear It Away

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This thesis entitled "Ironizing Nihilism in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*" by Dhana Bahadur Shahi has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This research on the two novels, *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960) examines how O'Connor ironically exposes the twentieth-century nihilistic attitude in the face of growing materialism. The heroes of the two novels reject the principles of Christianity in the earlier parts of the novel, but they finally end up embracing faith in God. The heroes in the novels who rebel against the dogmatic notions of religion in the earlier part of novels finally realize and surrender to the religion. O'Connor ironizes the twentieth-century nihilism and posits belief in God.

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Life and Works of Flannery O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor is considered one of America's greatest fiction writers and one of the strongest apologists for Roman Catholicism in the twentieth century. Born of the marriage of two of Georgia's oldest Catholic families, O'Connor was a devout believer whose small but impressive body of fiction presents the soul's struggle with what she called the "stinking mad shadow of Jesus" (qtd. in Baumbach 89)

Born in Savannah on March 25, 1925, Mary Flannery O'Connor began her education in the city's parochial schools. After the family's move to Milledgeville in 1938, she continued her schooling at the Peabody Laboratory School associated with Georgia State College for Women (GSCW), now Georgia College and State University. When she was fifteen, O'Connor, an only child, lost her father to systemic lupus erythematosus, the disease that would eventually take her own life at age thirty-nine. Devastated by the loss of this close relationship, O'Connor elected to remain in Milledgeville and attend GSCW as a day student in an accelerated three-year program.

An avid reader and artist, she served as editor of the *Corinthian*, GSCW's college literary magazine, and as unofficial campus cartoonist. O'Connor provided cartoons for nearly every issue of the campus newspaper, for the college yearbook, and for the *Corinthian*, as well as for the walls of the student lounge. Most significant, she contributed fiction, essays, and occasional poems to the *Corinthian*, demonstrating early on

her penchant for satire and comedy. A social science major with a number of courses in English, O'Connor is remembered by her classmates as obviously gifted but extremely shy. Her closest friends recall her sly humor, her disdain for mediocrity, and her often merciless attacks on affectation and triviality.

In 1945 O'Connor received a scholarship in journalism from the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa). In her first term, she decided that journalism was not her *métier* and sought out Paul Engle, head of the now world-famous Writers' Workshop, to ask if she might enter the master's program in creative writing.

Engle agreed, and O'Connor is now numbered among the many fine American writers who are graduates of the Iowa program. While there she got to know several important writers and critics who lectured or taught in the program, among them Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, Austin Warren, and Andrew Lytle. Lytle, for many years editor of the *Sewanee Review*, was one of the earliest admirers of O'Connor's fiction. He later published several of her stories in the *Sewanee Review*, as well as critical essays on her work. Engle years after declared that O'Connor was so intensely shy and possessed such a nasal southern drawl that he himself read her stories aloud to workshop classes. He also asserted that O'Connor was one of the most gifted writers he had ever taught. Engle was the first to read and comment on the initial drafts of what would become *Wise Blood*, her first novel, published in 1952 (qtd. in Getz 23).

O'Connor's master's thesis was a collection of short stories entitled *The Geranium*, the title work having already become her first published story (*Accent*, 1946). Most stories in this collection, however, are the work of an apprentice in search of her own territory and voice; they suggest only faintly the sharp wit, finely honed style, and spiritual scope of O'Connor's mature work. "The Turkey" most genuinely represents the significant connection between language and belief that came to pervade O'Connor's work. This story also reveals her ear for southern dialect and marks one of her first attempts at the literary irony for which she later became famous.

Following the completion of her M.F.A. in 1947, O'Connor won the Rinehart-Iowa Fiction Award for a first novel (for her submission of a portion of *Wise Blood*) and was accepted at Yaddo, an artists' retreat in Saratoga Springs, New York. There she continued to work on the novel and became friend with the poet Robert Lowell. In 1949, after several months at Yaddo and some time in New York City and Milledgeville, O'Connor moved into the garage apartment of Sally and Robert Fitzgerald in Ridgefield, Connecticut, where she boarded for nearly two years. In the Fitzgeralds, O'Connor found devout Catholics who provided her with the balance of solitude and communion necessary to her creativity and her intellectual and spiritual life.

This stabilizing and productive time was interrupted in 1950, however, when O'Connor was stricken with lupus, the incurable, autoimmune disease that was then treated only by the use of steroid drugs.

O'Connor survived the first life-threatening attack, but she was forced to return to Milledgeville permanently. Remaining in this historic central Georgia town for the rest of her life, from 1951 until 1964, O'Connor lived quietly at Andalusia, the family farm just outside town. In spite of the debilitating effects of the drugs used for treating lupus, O'Connor managed to devote a good part of every day to writing, and she even took a surprising number of trips to lecture and read from her works.

A prolific and devoted correspondent, O'Connor stayed in touch with the literary world through letters to the Fitzgerald, Robert Lowell, Caroline Gordon, and others. It was, in fact, through letters that O'Connor came to know Gordon, who offered invaluable suggestions about her writing, especially about *Wise Blood*. O'Connor also took time to respond to letters from younger writers, to review works of theology for the *Georgia Bulletin* (a publication of the diocese of Atlanta), to tend her growing number of peacocks, and to receive visitors seeking advice on matters both literary and spiritual. During this time, O'Connor won numerous awards, among them grants from the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the Ford Foundation, a fellowship from the *Kenyon Review*, and several O. Henry awards.

An early 1964 surgery for a fibroid tumor reactivated O'Connor's lupus, which had been in remission, and her health worsened during the following months. On August 3, 1964, after several days in a coma, she died in the Baldwin County Hospital. She is buried beside her father in Memory Hill Cemetery in Milledgeville. At the time of her death, the

Atlanta Journal observed that O'Connor's "deep spirituality qualified her to speak with a forcefulness not often matched in American literature." In 1972 the posthumous collection *The Complete Stories* received the National Book Award, usually given to a living writer. The judges deemed O'Connor's work so deserving that an exception was made to honor her lifetime achievement. In 1979 *The Habit of Being: Letters*, edited by Sally Fitzgerald, was published to rave reviews. These letters reveal a great deal about O'Connor's life in Milledgeville, her writing habits, and most important, her profound religious convictions. For the first time readers were able to see—beyond the shocking stories—the warm and witty personality and the incisive intellect of the writer. The collection of letters received a number of awards, and *Christian Century* magazine named *The Habit of Being* one of the twelve most influential religious books of the decade.

O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), received mixed reviews. Even some of the strongest commentators on southern literature seemed to be at a loss to describe this dark novel. While working on the novel in the early years, O'Connor had defied an insistent and authoritative editor at Rinehart by stating that *Wise Blood* was not "a conventional novel," so confident was she in her intent. Scholars who have spent time in the O'Connor Collection in the Georgia College and State University library know that even O'Connor's juvenilia anticipate the relentlessly stark vision that became the mature writer's trademark. The closest literary "kin" of *Wise Blood* in American letters arguably is Nathanael West's *Miss*

Lonelyhearts; both novels are filled with black humor and written in a sharply honed style. A novel of spiritual quest, *Wise Blood* presents the male "pilgrim," Hazel Motes, as inhabiting a sterile and ugly modern landscape derivative of T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*.

The publication of her first short-story collection, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), made O'Connor's Christian vision and darkly comic intent somewhat clearer to readers and allowed them to more easily grasp the intent of her second and last novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), which is often taken as a sequel to *Wise Blood*. A second collection of stories, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, published posthumously in 1965, contains some of O'Connor's most popular short fiction, including the title story and "Revelation."

The body of O'Connor's work resists conventional description. Although many of her narratives begin in the familiar quotidian world—on a family vacation or in a doctor's waiting room, for example—they are not, finally, realistic and certainly not in the sense of the southern realism of William Faulkner or Erskine Caldwell. Furthermore, although O'Connor's work was written during a time of great social change in the South, those changes—and the relationships among blacks and whites—were not at the center of her fiction. O'Connor made frequent use of violence and shock tactics. She argued that she wrote for an audience who, for all its Sunday piety, did not share her belief in the fall of humanity and its need for redemption. "To the hard of hearing," she explained, "[Christian writers] shout, and for the . . . almost-blind [they] draw large and startling

figures"—a statement that has become a succinct and popular explanation of O'Connor's conscious intent as a writer (qtd. in Bauerschmidt 165).

O'Connor had read Faulkner and Caldwell, as well as Eudora Welty, Caroline Gordon, and Katherine Anne Porter, among southern writers. Faulkner and Porter were strong influences, as were Nathaniel Hawthorne, Joseph Conrad, and the French writers Georges Bernanos and François Mauriac. These last four reinforced O'Connor's emphasis on original sin, guilt, and alienation, especially as she focused on the twentieth-century tendency to find in technology and in the idea of "progress" the panacea to life's ills. Although O'Connor knew that she—like her early model T. S. Eliot—was in the minority in her disdain for the increasing secularism of her time, she refused to back down.

Flannery O'Connor was a painstaking and disciplined writer, devoting each morning to her work and making great demands of herself even in her last years as she struggled with lupus. She possessed a keen ear for southern dialect and a fine sense of irony and comic timing; with the combination of these skills, she produced some of the finest comedy in American literature. Like the comedy of Dante, O'Connor's dark humor consciously intends to underscore boldly our common human sinfulness and need for divine grace. Even her characters' names (Tom T. Shiflet, Mary Grace, Joy/Hulga Hopewell, and Mrs. Cope) are often ironic clues to their spiritual deficiencies. O'Connor's recurrent characters, from Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood* to O. E. Parker of "Parker's Back," are spiritually lean and hungry figures who reject mere lip service to Christianity and the

bland certainty of rationalism in their pursuit of salvation. These same characters usually deprived economically, emotionally, or both, inhabit a world in which, in O'Connor's words, "the good is under construction" (qtd. in Hendin 256).

O'Connor was a Roman Catholic in the Bible Belt South; her fiction, though, is largely concerned with fundamentalist Protestants, many of whom she admired for the integrity of their search for Truth. The publication of her essays and lectures, *Mystery and Manners* (1969), and the publication ten years later of *The Habit of Being* confirmed the strong connection between O'Connor's fictional treatment of the search for God and the quest for the holy in her own life. Indeed, her life and work were of a piece. She attained in her brief life what Sally Fitzgerald called (after St. Thomas Aquinas) "the habit of being," which Fitzgerald describes as "an excellence not only of action but of interior disposition and activity" that struggled to reflect the goodness and love of God (161).

When O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away* first appeared in print, there was an initial rush to oversimplify, given the provenance of the writer, and the southern aspects of her characters. Commentators tended, in the light of their own prejudices and preconceptions, to see her as another chronicler of Southern grotesqueries. They disliked it for what they saw as mockery of themselves and of Protestantism, and in her own locale it was regarded as a shockingly immoral book.

Viewing the novel *Wise Blood* as imbued with the theme of God's redemptive act of mankind in the depraved world, Jonathan Baumbach writes, "*Wise Blood* explores the world of corrosion and decay invested with evil, apparently god-forsaken, but finally redeemed by God through men's renunciation and extreme penance" (87).

Frederic Asal in a more secular reading, writes, at the end of the novel, "as Enoch, the protagonist's parallel plunges downward into bestiality, the protagonist, Hazel Motes rises upward into a desperate spirituality" (24). Similarly, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury take the novel as the reflection of moral pain and rising alienation as they write, "*Wise Blood* offered a dismayed, disturbing moral vision" (375).

Some reviewers and critics have charged O'Connor with sociological, psychological and religious provincialism. According to Eggenschwiler, "these critics neglect the humanism which was central to Miss O'Connor's background, and accordingly is essential for an understanding of her writings" (14). All of the O'Connor's fiction is concerned with the historical and religious division of society and man, the loss of physical and spiritual place. In her novels, man is one of the major complexities of the world. Thomas M. Carlson observes: "It can be seen that the enveloping action in all her fiction follows the archetypal pattern of traditional myth, the fall of the Divine man into the rational world and his subsequent struggle with the conflicting multiplicities of the world" (44).

In *Wise Blood*, the characters suffer from every kind of alienation as they emphasize only on material and finite aspect of the reality.

Comparing the hero, Hazel Motel to Saint Anthony, Lewis A. Lawson writes: "Both are possessed with an overpowering sense of the importance of religious belief . . . And both use self-abasement to express their realization of the gulf which separates the human from the spiritual" (39).

There has been a tendency to describe O'Connor as a religious fanatic and an ideal writer who looks upon heaven rather than earth as a site where human well-being is to be achieved. But she believes in the metaphysical conception of man as a synthesis of the finite and infinite. And she sees the holistic development of man in this synthesis. In this regard, reading the novel, *Wise Blood* from a revised understanding of the relationship between eschatological and socio-historical frames of references, Susan Edmunds writes:

Wise Blood sets up an analogical or "mirroring" relationship between contemporary history and Christ's second coming in order to measure communities of the present day by divine standards. This analogical relationship is dynamic and open-minded, allowing humans the freedom to participate actively in the fulfillment of God's historical vision. (par. 5)

The violent Bear it Away (1960), a sequel to O'Connor's *Wise Blood* has drawn the attention of many critics. The novel is enriched in meaning by several critical interpretations ranging from religious to modern critical approaches. Stuart L. Burns viewed the theme of the novel as:

The structural pattern of *The Violent Bear It Away* enlarges upon the concept of the Journey to the 'father of souls' and the theme of the novel is concerned with the question of whether this journey toward self realization and religious fulfillment is successful or not: whether in other words the protagonist Tarwater passes the dragon or faces into its Jaws. (319).

Talking about the protagonist of the novel, Robert Fitzgerald who is O'Connor's nearest friend says, "There are few better representation of the devil in fiction than Tarwater's friend and overhead and finally embodied in *The Violent Bear It Away*" (52). Leonard Unger suggests: "The effects of the novel's events on young Tarwater is to extirpate the rational self instead; to burn away all reason and leave him entirely violent and mad . . . Tarwater is an allegory of the church" (347).

Clair Katz compares O'Connor's psychic determinism is more profound than Freud's in he novel *The Violent Bear IT Away*. He further argues, "O'Connor dramatizers a psychic determinism more profound even than Freud's and constructs a literary form that allows no escape from the infantile determinations of personality" (63).

Miles Orvell begins his treatment of O'Connor's writing by usefully placing it within the American tradition of satiric romance. Like Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Poe, O'Connor creates a fiction of surfaces, which concomitantly reflect the aspect of "psyche's traumatic investigation reality" (542).

So, the present research studies the novels, *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear it Away* to expose the nihilistic attitude of the modern period. It examines how O'Connor ironizes the nihilistic attitudes in the modern man. The first chapter is an introduction to the work. The second chapter makes the study of nihilism and irony. The third chapter analyzes the text to prove the hypothesis – by presenting the heroes who rebel against the dogmatic notions of religion in the earlier parts of novels and finally surrender to the religion, O'Connor ironizes on the twentieth century nihilism and posits belief in God.

Nihilism: A Theoretical Discussion

Nihilism refers to a philosophy of skepticism that originated in 19th century Russia during the early years of reign of Alexander II. The term is an old one, applied to certain heretics in The Middle Ages. In Russian literature nihilism was probably first used by Nadezhdin in his article. In the *Encyclopedia Britannica* writes that Nadezhdin, as did V. Bervi later equated nihilism with skepticism. M.N. Katkov, a well-known conservative journalist mainly responsible for interpreting nihilism as synonymous with revolution, presented nihilism as "constituting a social menace by its negative at all moral principles" (706).

"Nihilism" comes from the Latin "nihil," as nothing, which means not anything, that which does not exist; it appears in the meaning to bring to nothing, to destroy completely. Early in the nineteenth century, Fredrich Jacobi used the word to negatively characterize transcendental idealism. Ivan Turgenev popularized the term by using 'nihilism' in his novel to describe the crude scientism espoused by his character Bazarov who preaches a creed of total negation. In Russia, nihilism becomes identified with a loosely organized revolutionary movement that rejected the authority of the state, church, and family. Mikhael Bakumin identified himself with nihilism: "Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which

destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of all life – the passion for is also a creative passion! (72). The movement advocated a social arrangement based on rationalism and materialism as the sole source of knowledge and individual freedom as the highest goal.

Nihilism is closely linked with disbelief, doubt and negation of existence at any moral principles. Generally, nihilism seems more revolutionary regarding the matters of religious beliefs. The philosophy of nihilism becomes the counterpart of the conservative ideology. The nihilists are regarded as disheveled and unruly who rebel against tradition and social order. The philosophy of nihilism then began to be associated erroneously with the regicide of Alexander II and the political terror that was employed by those active at the time in clandestine organization against absolutism.

Nihilism is a belief that all political and religious organizations are bad, as a system of thought which says that there are no principles as belief upon God and upon holy book vanishes. The nihilist is the person who glorifies the philosophy of nihilism and practices the negation of the beliefs upon any pre-established religious and social conservative organizations. This system of thought emerges with the seeking of meaninglessness and falsity upon any beliefs of pre-established truths.

If to the conservative elements the nihilists were the curse of the time, to the liberals such as N. G. Chezyshevsky they represented a mere transitory factor in the development of national thought, a stage in the

struggle for individual freedom, a true spirit of the rebellious young generation. Nihilism struggles against the artificiality and opens the choices to the individual freedom.

Fundamentally, nihilism is the rejection of the established social order and negation of all forms of aestheticism. *Encyclopedia Britannica* further defines that

. . . nihilism represented a philosophy of negation of all forms of aestheticism; it advocated utilitarianism and scientific rationalism. The social sciences and classical philosophical systems were rejected entirely. Nihilism represented a crude form of positivism and materialism, a revolt against the established social order; it negated all authority exercised by the state, by the church, as by the family. (707)

Nihilism based its belief on nothing but scientific truth; science became the cure-all for social problems. All evils, nihilists believed, derived from a single source—ignorance—which science alone would overcome.

Since the nihilism is derived from the study of science and is developed by the people like Darwin and Spencer; nihilism denies the duality of man as a combination of body and soul. Nihilists questioned the doctrine of divine right. They came in to similar conflict with secular authorities. Since they scorned all social bounds and family authority, the conflict between fathers and sons because equally immanent as is Turgenev's novel.

Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence. A nihilist believes in nothing, has no loyalties, and no purpose other than an impulse to destroy. The earliest philosophical positions associated with what could be characterized as a nihilistic outlook are those of the skeptics; skeptics deny the possibility of certain and could penance traditional truths as unjustifiable opinions. Extreme skepticism is linked to epistemological nihilism which denies the possibility of knowledge and truth: this form of nihilism is coherently identified with fast modern anti-foundational nihilism which is associated with politics in several ways. In this regard, Jim Leffel writes:

Political nihilism, as noted, is associated with the belief that the destruction of all existing political, social, and religious order is prerequisite for any future improvement. Ethical nihilism or moral nihilism rejects the possibility of absolute values, and values addressing such are the product of nothing more than social and emotive pressures. Existential nihilism is the notion that life has no intrinsic meaning or value, and it is, no doubt, the most commonly used- and understood sense of the word to day. (5)

By rejecting man's spiritual essence in favor of a solely materialistic one, nihilists denounced God and religious authority as antithetical to freedom. The movement eventually deteriorated into an ethos of

subversion, destruction, and overly Nihilism attacks a systematic philosophy, denies absolutes, and rejects the abstract concepts of any kind. For nihilists, achieving individual freedom is the only law; and the state, which necessarily imperils freedom, must be destroyed. The philosophers who claim to be nihilists, nihilism is most often associated with Friedrich Nietzsche who argued that its corrosive effects would eventually destroy all moral, religious, and metaphysical convictions and precipitate the greater crisis in human history. Richard Tar has comments Friedrich Nietzsche as the prophet of the postmodernism and pioneer of nihilism in western culture: "By all accounts the central prophet of the postmodern mind was Friedrich Nietzsche, with the radical perspectives, his sovereign critical sensibility, and his powerful, poignantly ambivalent anticipation of the emerging nihilism in western culture" (375).

Obliviously Friedrich Nietzsche is most often associated with nihilism. For Nietzsche there is no objective order or structure in the world except what we give it. The nihilist discovers that all values are baseless and that reason is impotent. For Nietzsche "every belief, every considering something-true is necessarily false because there is simply no true world. Further more, nihilism requires a radical repudiation of all imposed values and meaning. "Nihilism . . . not only the belief that everything deserves to perish: but one actually puts one's shoulder to the plough: one destroys" (Nietzsche 35).

The caustic strength of nihilism is absolute, Nietzsche argues, and under its withering scrutiny. Nihilism exposes all cherished beliefs and

sacrosanct truths as symptoms of defective western myths. The collapse of meaning relevance and purpose becomes the most destructive force in history, constituting a total assault on reality and nothing less than the greatest crisis of humanity. The advent of nihilism has been moving as towards a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade since Nietzsche's compelling critique, nihilistic themes i.e., epistemological failure, value destruction, and cosmic purposelessness have preoccupied artists, social critics, and philosophers. Nietzsche's analysis is accurate and confirms that patterns of nihilism were indeed a conspicuous feature of collapsing civilization.

Nihilism literally has only one truth to declare, namely, that ultimately nothingness prevails and the world is meaningless. From the nihilist's perspective, one can conclude that life is completely amoral and that motivates such monstrosities as the Nazi reign of terror. With the nihilism the cold, in human world wins with nothingness, incoherence, and absurdity. Nietzsche's assessment of modernity is ambivalent. On the one hand, he describes it as the age of the last man, the age of shifting mediocrity where the values of the next have become university's triumphant; on the other, he describes it as a promising dawn, a re-awakening of humanity's full potentialities. He characterizes this new beginning as the liberation of the creative human will, which suggests that the power of creation had hitherto rested outside the human sphere, or at least that we had believed this to be the case, which for Nietzsche amounts to the same thing. Nietzsche's narrative of the history of morality can be

read as the slow but progressive unfolding of the self-consciousness of the human will. Byron Wilson views upon the Nietzsche's idea upon history as:

The history of morality for Nietzsche is the history of nihilism, the story of creation must also be told against this latter . . . although Nietzsche himself speaks of nihilism as a merely 'pathological transitional stage' in human history, to see the phenomenon of nihilism in this manner is to misconstrue its significance for Nietzsche's own thinking on the concept of creation and its function in human willing . . . Nietzsche himself of his most challenging understands it is solely the product of the evaluative will to power of the 'complete nihilist; so that in dispensing fully with nihilism one would also be eliminating the possibility for the creative human will to reach full maturity. (357)

The problem of nihilism occupied Nietzsche throughout his career and might arguably be called his central philosophical concern. Nietzsche defines a type of nihilism in *Will to Power* as "the radical repudiation of value and desirability" (3). He adds that nihilism, this understood, is rooted in the Christian moral interpretation of the world. Thus he approaches the phenomenon as an 'evolutionary' process, for Nietzsche, recounting the history of morality is equivalent to showing how one kind of nihilism is replaced by another.

One of the types of the nihilism is existential Nihilism. While nihilism is often discussed in terms of extreme skepticism and relativism, for most of the 20th century it has been associated with the belief that life is meaningless. Existential nihilism begins with the notion that the world is without meaning or purpose. Existence itself – all action, suffering and feeling – is ultimately senseless and empty.

Alan Pratt points out existential nihilism as "in one form or another, has been a part of the western intellectual tradition from the beginning" (15). The skeptic Empedocles observes 'the life of morals is so mean a thing as to be virtually un-life and embodies the same kind of extreme pessimism associated with existential nihilism. The 20th century is the atheistic existentialist movement which is responsible for the currency of existential nihilism. For the existentialist, nothingness is the source of not only absolute freedom but also existential horror and emotional anguish. Nothingness reveals each individual as an isolated being 'thrown' into an alien and unresponsive universe, barred forever from knowing why yet required inventing meaning. From the enlightened perspective of the absurd, Camus observes Sisyphus' plight condemned to eternal, useless struggle, was a superb metaphor for human existence. Pratt observes Camus in nihilism as he says:

Camus was convinced that nihilism was the most vexing problem of the twentieth century. Although he argues passionately that individuals could endure its corrosive

effects, his most famous works betray the extraordinary difficulty he faced building a convincing case. (16)

Camus views at length how metaphysical collapse often ends in total negation and the victory of nihilism, characterized by profound hatred, pathological destruction, and incalculable violence and death.

By the late 20th century, 'nihilism' had assumed two different casts, a 'nihilist' is used to characterize the postmodern man, a dehumanized conformist, alienated, indifferent, and baffled, directing psychological energy into hedonistic narcissism or into a deep resentments that often explodes in violence, the perspective is derived from the existentialists' the reflections on nihilism stripped of any hopeful expectations, leaving only the experience of sickness, decay, and disintegration. In contrast to the efforts to overcome nihilism noted above is the uniquely postmodern response associated with the current anti-foundationalists notion. The philosophical, ethical and intellectual crisis of nihilism that has moved towards modern philosophical mode has given way to mild annoyance or, more interestingly on upbeat acceptance of meaninglessness. Ashley comments: "Postmodern anti-foundationalists, paradoxically grounded in relativism, dismiss knowledge as relational and 'truth' as transitory, genuine only until something more palatable reflexes it" (23). In contrast to Nietzsche's pears and the angst of the existentialists, nihilism becomes far the anti-foundationalists just another aspect of the contemporary milieu. The history of morality, the pre-modern type is the transcendental nihilism. All efforts to posit a beyond, a supra-sensory realm opposed to

'this world,' a result in transcendental nihilism of absolute values or 'absolute spheres'. In his summary of western morality, Nietzsche argues that the move to the transcendent is the first step in 'the history of an error'. Transcendental nihilism operates by moving life's center of gravity out of life itself; this is its most general characteristic, which is why Nietzsche can conflate its metaphysical and religious manifestations. Byron comments the transcendental nihilism in the realm of "the metaphysical: economy of all forms of transcendental nihilism human are therefore in the strictest sense mere creatures whose place in the universe is pre-determined and subordinate. Human are predicates of a supra-sensory subject.

Nietzsche describes the modern world as the forum in which various responses to the death of God clash. The first response he calls passive nihilism. The passive nihilist has discovered that all value originates not from a divine or quasi-divine source, but from the particular perspective of the valuator. On the other hand, Nietzsche points to the nihilists' attempts to replace then fallen gods. This is called 'reactive nihilism.' Like passive nihilism, it represents a 'decline and recession of the power of the spirit. Nietzsche's analysis of reactive nihilism reveals an ambiguity in his thought. We have seen that transcendental nihilism, by arrogating to itself the paradigmatic act of creation, denied to humans the ability to self-create. All human activity, on this scheme, involves nothing more than the discovery and re-enactment of divine design. Byron sums up Nihilism as complete nihilism:'

We need eventually to look at the final form of nihilism, 'complete nihilism' . . . in order to clarify the ambiguity which has arisen here, and thereby reveals his deepest thoughts on the problem of the creative will, we must first look more carefully at Nietzsche's discussion of 'humanity.'

(30)

Before Nietzsche, there was also the concept of Nihilism. A nihilist was the person who makes such a passionate ado about precisely nothing. The nihilist is no more animated by 'the tragic sense of life.' than he is elevated by a tragic sense of human. John C. Carthy views that

to explain nihilism's strange dependence upon modern philosophy by charting something of the history of their relations. The graver man of his argument is that Nietzsche, wrongly identified by vulgar opinion as the arch-priest of nihilism, was mistaken when he took nihilism to be the consequence of the death of God. (140)

Nihilism before Nietzsche may be said to consist of different parts. The first proposes that the remote origins of nihilism lay with Descartes and in particular with the Cartesian doctrine of will. Secondly, Fichte's debt to Descartes in radicalizing the self-positing is ego of the 'Cartesian Cogito.' The third part of Nihilism before Nietzsche offers an intriguing survey of the nihilistic repercussions of German idealism in the literature of German Romanticism and in the literary politics of Russia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The author of nihilism before

Nietzsche, therefore, pays little heed to Nietzsche's abiding concern with what he calls 'the problem of truth.'

It has been a long time since Nietzsche explored nihilism and its implications for civilization. As Nietzsche predicted, nihilism's impact on the culture and values of the 20th century has been pervasive, its apocalyptic tenor spewing a mood of gloom and a good deal of anxiety, anger and terror. Interestingly, Nietzsche, himself, a radical skeptic preoccupied with language, knowledge, and truth, anticipated many of the themes of post modernity. On the whole, nihilism refers to denote the doctrine that moral norms or standards cannot be justified by rational argument. And it is widely used to denote a mood of despair over the emptiness or triviality of human existence.

The representation of the revolutionary philosophy of the nihilism in the fiction writing became the main interest of the 19th century writing. It was I. S. Turgenev in his celebrated novel *Father and Sons* (1862), who popularized the term through the figure of Bazarov, the nihilist. Eventually the nihilists of the 1860s as 70s came of to be regarded as disheveled, untidy, ragged men who rebelled against tradition and social order.

One of the liberal persons Chernyshevsky represented a mere transitory factor in the development of national thought. He presents the stage for the individual freedom that becomes the true spirit of the rebellious young generation. In his novel *What is to Be Done* (1863), Chernyshevsky endeavored to detect positive aspects in the nihilist philosophy comments in his memories, prince Peter Kropotkin, the leading

Russian anarchist, defined nihilism as the symbol of struggle against all forms of tyranny, hypocrisy, and artificiality, and for individual freedom.

The origin of the nihilism in fiction is much more rebellious. The nihilism leads the young generation because it opens the choices to the individual freedom. Nihilism struggles against artificiality and beliefs in the thing that comes beforehand. The thinking of nihilist was profoundly influenced by such men as Ludwig Feuerbach, Charles Darwin, Henry Buckle, and Herbert Spencer. Since nihilists denied the duality of spiritual and material substance, they came into violent conflict with ecclesiastical authorities.

The nihilist characters scorned all social bounds and family authorities. In the same way, Turgenev's novel presents the conflict between father and sons that are equally immanent. A comparison between Turgenev's hero, Bazarov, and the hero of Leonid Andreyev's drama is pointed out in encyclopedia as it "reveals the deterioration of nihilist philosophy, which changed from a faith in science into a justification of terror and destruction as a means to attain the set goals" (*The Encyclopedia Britannica* 707).

Nihilism is a loss of faith. Loss of faith is characterized in the fiction from the nihilistic perspectives. Robert Detweiles comments:

Nihilism seems to have consisted of three steps: first, an awareness by writers and critics of the decline of traditional Christian values and often an accompanying disavowal of them; second, a sense of loss precipitated by the failure to

find adequate substitutes for those values; third, a re-evaluation of those values from a stand point of disillusion, resulting in a new recognition of the Christian heritage but without the vitalizing ingredient of personal commitment. (7)

Decline of Protestantism and the concurrent size of secularism have determined the characters of most American fiction. The optimism of the secular spirit did not last long, and American novelists were especially quick to note the loss at spiritual orientation. The first and natural reaction of the novelist caught in the senselessness and disorientation of modern existence has been, if he is honest, to depict it. Such fictions provide the despoliation of a soul that infected western society as a whole, shocked the naively believing Americans in particular, and for a time inspired a frenetic cult of its own. The preoccupation with the inner functions of literature resulted in self-important triteness or demanded the corroboration of external experience, and freedom from belief turned not only into societal disorientation but into the individuals' alienation from himself.

As nihilism has greatly been ironized in various fictional works, the concept of irony deserves some discussion for the interpretation of the texts in this research work.

Irony is, for Rarty, "a healthy skepticism of one's own language game, a preparedness to adjust ones' lexicon, refigure one's vocabulary and desist from positing any truth or representation outside language" (qtd. In Rarty 80). The shortest definition of irony—and the best in that it embraces

the majority of common cases – is Samuel Johnsons : "A mode of speech of which the meaning is contrary to the words "(qtd. in Enright 5) .

Expression of ones meaning by language of opposite or different tendency, esp. simulated adoption of another point of view or laudatory tone for purpose of ridicule; ill- timed or perverse arrival of event or circumstance in itself desirable as if in mockery of the fitness of things; use of language that has an inner meaning for a privileged audience and out meaning for the persons addressed or concerned. Etymologically the word irony is derived from the Greek eiron was a dissembler, in Greek comedy, who characteristically spoke in understatement and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he was. The Greek term eironeia for irony has been used in Plato's' Republic at first to show the irony in Socratic dialogue. Similarly, Latin term ironia is used to elaborate the rhetoric of irony by Cicero. Irony is the result of the deliberate pretension of the eiron or an ironist in Greek. It is generally defined as the discrepant gap between what is said and what actually is meant. The term 'irony is used to identify various literary devices and modes of organization

Socratic irony takes its name from the fact that, as he is represented in Plato's dialogue's, the philosopher, Socrates usually dissembles by assuming a pose of ignorance, an eagerness to be taught and the modest readiness to entertain opinions proposed by others; although these, upon his continued questioning always turn out to be ill – trounded or to lead to absurd consequences.

Dramatic irony involves a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant and of which a character is ignorant; in that situation, the character unknowingly acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual situation or expects the opposite of what we know that the fate holds in store or says something that anticipates the actual outcome but not at all in the way that the character intends. The dramatic irony becomes tragic irony when the character gets fears of evil or incoming danger and he tries to avoid it but it leads him towards his own fall or destruction.

Verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. The ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation but with indications in the overall speech situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite attitude or evaluation. In the case of verbal irony the speaker who gives some clues that makes the sharp ironic undercutting of the ostensible meaning.

A game for two players the ironist, in his (her) role of naïf proffer a text but in such a way or in such a context will simulate the reader to reject its expressed literal meaning in favour of an unexpected "transliteral" meaning of contrasting import [...] that of depreciating oneself, which is the countersinking ontaglio method. (Muecke 55-56)

The quote points out that the verbal irony depends on authors ironic intension which is shared with the reader. Sarcasm is derived from the Greak verb "Sarkazein"-means to tear flesh. It is the exaggerated inflection of the speaker's voice. Sarcasm is sometimes used for all form of irony but it is for more useful to restrict it only to the crude and taunting use of apparant praise for depraize.

Cosmic irony is also known as the irony of fate is attributed to literary works in which deity or fate is represented as though deliberately manipulating events so as to lead the protagonist to false hopes only to frustrate and mock them. In cosmic irony human beings are like puppets in the hands of supernatural powers.

Romantic irony is a term introduced by Friedrich Schlegel and other German writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to designate a mode of dramatic or narrative writing in which the author builds up the illusion of representing reality only to shatter it by reading that the author as artist is the creator and arbitrary manipulator of the characters and their actions

The word as chaotic, unpredictable, and inexhaustibly fertile, and the artist, in the face of it, as obliged to recognize the limitations of his own consciousness; his perceptions of the infinite are inevitably partial and thus in some degree false yet he must rightly value them [...] and who then articulates this experience in a from that simultaneously creates and decreates itself. (qtd. in Enright 12-13)

This quote of irony further underscores the point that the romantic irony has established literature as the expression of human consciousness about his/her ironical relation with nature, that has dialectical tension.

A number of writers associated with the New Criticism used "irony" although in a really extended sense, as a general criterion of literary value. In New Criticism the notion of irony is also highlighted – I.A Richards, Kenneth Burke, Critics literature is the representation of these facts of paradoxes, that shows how human beings maintain proper balance over such contradictions.

Some literary works exhibit structural irony which introduces a structural feature that serves to sustain a duplex meaning and evaluation throughout the work. One common literary device of this sort is the invention of a naïve hero, or else a naïve narrator or spokesman, whose invincible simplicity or obtuseness leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader—who penetrates to and shares, the implied point of view of authorial presence behind the naïve person just as persistently is called on to alter and correct.

Wayne C Booth identifies stable irony, in *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), that in which the speaker or author makes available to the reader an assertion or implied serves as a for, ground for ironically qualifying or subverting the surface meaning. Stable irony is intended, covert, fixed and finite in application. The irony whose ironic intention of the speaker is shared with the reader by some patent clues that offered in the established situations by the writer is called Stable irony unstable irony on the other

hand, offers no fixed stand point which is not itself undercut by further ironies. Unstable irony is a mode of reflecting the paradoxes and incongruities implicit in the structure of universe and in our existence. Irony opens the forum of multiple interpretations. It can't be defined appropriately. Thus the traditional definition of irony is saying one thing and giving to understand the opposite.

Irony is, on such an account, explained according to context. There is a clear recognition of context and a distinct separation between sentence meaning the usual use of an expression in a shared context and the speaker's ironic meaning which establishes an exclusive context critical of the assumption of the first context. Irony would then be a way of speaking which depends upon ordinary meaning might be relocated in another context which establishes the ironic meaning

Ironizing Nihilism in *Wise Blood*

The two novels *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away* by Flannery O'Connor ironically expose the nihilistic attitude of modern man in the twentieth-century America. O'Connor exploits the ironic mode of storytelling to reveal the growing loss of faith in man who values materialistic gains more than the spiritual values. O'Connor, while ironizing nihilism to convey religious message, has used irony as a vehicle to posit man's belief in religion. The heroes of both the novels reject the existence of God and struggle for their own selves but finally accept the notion of God. Thus, by presenting the heroes who rebel against the dogmatic notions of religion in the earlier parts of the novels and finally realize and surrender to the religion, O'Connor ironizes on the twentieth-century nihilism and posits belief in God.

The religious beliefs are spiritual in nature and abstract in principle. The belief that anyone keeps and does not keep is based upon the individual nature. To some extent, the social environment and familial upbringing shape the ideology of religious dogmas. The religious nature of belief depends upon the effect of religion that is imposed on anyone's life. A religious person takes the division of holiness and impurity.

On the other hand, nihilism is a belief of negation about keeping the existence of holiness and the ultimate power of god. The relation with God brings the thinking of a man towards the purity and impurity. An initial belief of Christianity is the belief of baptism. A newly-born child is led towards the Christianity through the Christian type of upbringing. If anyone rejects the practices, he becomes a nihilist theoretically. O'Connor presents the dramatization of the abstract spiritual principles and creates a world of opposites in conflict to ironize nihilism. When a nihilist character escapes from the religious and spiritual practices superficially and adopts the activities for the sake of his own objective, the situation becomes more ironic.

The very title of the first novel *Wise Blood* carries a note of irony. O'Connor ironizes the modern man who claims to be wise and learned. Here, O'Connor's point is that the modern man, in fact, has lost all his ancient wisdom because he is becoming more and more secular and materialistic. The major characters, Hazel Motes and Enoch Emery, who claim to have possessed "wise blood" involve themselves in material comforts, random sexual encounters and anti-religious campaign like preaching against Christ throughout the novels (30). None of these men posses 'Wise Blood' as O'Connor states though Hazel Motes shows some hope of embracing faith because he immolates himself at the end of the novel.

In the protagonist of her novel, *Wise Blood*, Hazel Motes, we find a figure that is grotesque in the strict sense of the term: a fantastic

combination of nihilistic atheism and evangelical fervor in a single figure. On nearly every page of the book, human figures are well on their way to being absorbed into grotesque beings and the lower orders of animals. While people are frequently depicted as aggressive or gaudy birds in *Wise Blood*, they are often more disgusting or bizarre creatures. One of the major characters, Hazel Motes is the most eccentric and grotesque characters in the novel. In the novel's opening paragraph, as Hazel Motes, the protagonist hereafter referred to as just Haze is sitting at a forward angle on the train seat, "looking one minute at the window as if he might want jump out of it" (3). This abnormal behavior shows his animalistic nature. The predatory Haze, though he will hunt and kill his prey with his broken-down "rat-colored car" rather than his sharp beak, has "a nose like a shrike's bill," and pushes his way through the crowd "with his elbows spreading out like sharp wings" (35). Hazel can always be seen in motion in the novel. By presenting Haze in a frenetic but futile motion, O'Connor links him to animal. As the novel begins, he has just come back "from half way around the world" (11), where the army had sent him to some unnamed war. After returning from the war, he visits his old deserted home place. He is now one of O'Connor's displaced people— a restless wanderer in search of a place to be as his relatives are all dead and neighbors displaced because of the war. He is seen moving in a small, closed system that is itself being carried along within a larger moving system. But Haze seems completely oblivious to the absurdity of his restless movements on the train, for example: As he lurches up and down

the aisles, he is pushed by the porter and the steward; next he is humiliated in the packed dining car as the steward prevents Haze from going inside. O'Connor writes, "The man stopped him and said 'Only Two,' and pushed him to the doorway" (6). Again, as Haze returns to his berth, he is blocked by Mrs. Hitchcock, and when "she tried to get past him he tried to let her pass but they were both moving the same way each time" (8). Ironically, his incessant movements within the train are meaningless.

Haze once went with his father to the city where he forced Haze to go into a tent where "two monkeys" danced (31); and in another tent; "a dried-up man with a horn voice was barking" (32) after Haze buys the car, he travels to different places. Once he goes past blocks of white houses, each sitting with an "ugly dog face" on a square of grass (38), and a little further Haze sees the head of "a string of pigs" appearing snout-up [. . .] " (38). He travels to different places. Once he goes past blocks a square of grass (38), and a little further Haze sees the head of "a string of pigs" appearing snout-up [. . .]" (38).

Haze's strange activities are in perfect parallel with his rusty old car. This is a stinging satire on growing materialistic world. The emblem of Haze's absurd motion is of course his battered car, Essex, his symbolic home, pulpit and coffin. He uses the rusty old car as his home as well, and the irony is that he dies at the hands of police in the car. He can never escape this enclosed place as long as his body is not cremated. Despite his claim that "I don't have to run away from anything because I don't believe in anything" (39), he spends most of his time driving around in the car,

which "lurches forward about six inches and then back about four" (79), mimicking Haze's unsteady movements on the train. Ironically, he brags to anyone he meets about his car, although several mechanics warn that his good-for-nothing car will soon stop for good.

Haze's futile motions, be it on the train, in the car or even on a ship is analogous to the futile motions of caged animals. While testing his new car out in the country, Haze becomes infuriated when he is blocked by a slow-moving truck carrying a crate "stuffed so full of wet barred-rock chickens that the ones facing him had their heads outside the bars" (38). Here, O'Connor makes the point that imprisonment is possible even when one is moving. For, as it can be seen, humans have been described as birds throughout the novel. Soon Haze finds himself stopped in the middle of the road, reading a sign that says "Jesus Saves" (39). But Haze is not yet ready for this message, so he heads back towards Taulkinham in search of Enoch, his parallel, having been reminded of the zoo by the crate of chickens. Haze once encounters caged animals when his car breaks down on his outing with Sabbath Lily Hawks, a girl of thirteen years, who gets attracted to him. He walks to a gas station and sees a cage there labeled with a sign reading "Two Deadly Enemies. Have a Look Free" (64).

O'Connor writes:

There was a black bear about four feet long and very thin, resting on the floor of the cage; his back was spotted with bird lime that had been shot down on him by a small chicken hawk that was sitting on a perch in the upper part of the same

compartment. Most of the Hawk's tail was gone; the bear had only one eye. (64)

Here symbolically, the two deadly enemies are, alternately, Haze and Sabbath or Haze and Asa Hawks. Haze, who is thin and wears a black hat, is the bear; the cage is his car. O'Connor will soon explicitly describe Haze's car as a kind of cage like the bear's for Haze dreams that he is trapped in his car while people file past and gawk at him, some showing "considerable reverence, like the boy from the zoo" (82), others laughing. Sabbath Lily Hawks in the first alternative is the small chicken hawk; she shares its name and had hidden in the back seat of Haze's car in her effort to prey on him sexually. After meeting Haze, she gets attracted towards him sexually as well. In another alternative reading, Asa Hawks is Haze's "deadly enemy", because he, unlike Haze, is insincere in his religious stance. Asa Hawks, who is described as "a mandrill" (19) at one point because of the stripped scars on his face, is ironically named in that he is spiritually blind, fake preacher whose physical vision is acute. When O'Connor writes that "most of the Hawk's tail was gone," She alludes in a pun on "tale" (64) to Haze's having gotten away in the previous chapter – with one of Asa's two newspaper clippings – the one about his plan to blind himself at a revival ceremony. Hawks keeps two newspaper clippings - the first saying, "Evangelist promises to blind self," and the second, "Evangelist's nerve fails" (58-59). Though Hawks tries to blind himself for religious reason, he can not do so because of his failure of nerve. Haze does not know about the other clipping which describes Asa's

failure of nerve; yet, because he has plucked half of the Hawks' tale and he will soon pluck the other when he discovers Asa can see. Haze is symbolically the one-eyed bear that is half way towards the victory over Hawks of blinding himself. Eventually, Haze fulfills Hawks' forsaken intention – he burns out his own eyes. This is the greatest irony on the modern secular man.

O'Connor further ironizes modern man by linking Haze to animal – this is through his enchantment with confined and lonely places.

Throughout the novel, he can be seen in these places, or he cannot resist his temptation for such places. After getting off the train in Taulkinham, Haze searches for a lonely place so that he can escape from the hustle and bustle of the city as O'Connor writes, "He walked up and down the crowded waiting room two or three times, but he did not want to sit on the benches there. He wanted 'a private place' to go to" (14). There is a reference of the "toilet stall" in the train station which is an example of another enclosed place in the novel (15). Haze, then, heads towards the prostitute, Leora Watt's place, upon seeing her address in the toilet stall. Her secret "private chamber" attracts Haze rather than his sexual desire (16). Here, O'Connor links her to animal by placing her in "a cage-like white iron bed" cutting her toenails with a large pair of scissors (16). And the prostitute asks Haze, "You huntin something?" (16). This shows animalistic nature of Haze. Haze then buys a second-hand car which has a color of a rat; he uses it as his home, which becomes like his cage. In addition to this, Haze often dreams of being shut in enclosed and confined

places like coffin and casket. While he was traveling on the train "he thought where he was lying was like a coffin in his half-sleep" (9). Again, "he saw his mother in his sleep, terrible, like "a huge bat', dart from the closing, fly out of there [. . .]" (13). Later while sleeping in the Essex he dreams that "he was not dead but only buried [. . .] and waiting on nothing" (94). In this dream he becomes – like the despised mummy – a man on display whom people can see but not touch. The cage which Haze subconsciously fears becomes finally the tunnel – in Mrs. Flood's perception – into which he disappears. Haze has chosen isolation and dies defiantly alone.

O'Connor depicts man's sexuality as the essence of his animality. By this she attacks the modern man who lacks spiritual and meditative aspect. As Haze examines the walls of the toilet stall in the train station where he searches for a private place, for instance, he sees a phallic drawing "that looked like a snake" (14). Another similar sexual association is the image of the coffin-like box containing naked woman Haze has seen when he was a boy at the carnival. The carnival woman, who had first looked like "a skinned animal" to Haze, had set off the unfortunate linking in the boy's mind of sexuality and death, a fusion encouraged by his father's crude remark that "Had one of themther built into ever' casket [. . .] be a heap ready to go sooner" (32). Besides his similarities to birds, bears, and jungle cats, Haze too is linked with apes because of his animalistic sexual instinct. As he had prepared to make sexual approach towards Mrs. Watts, Haze's heart "began to grip him like a little ape clutching the bars of its

cage" (31). His advance towards Sabbath Lily Hawks is animal-like as she describes Haze as "King of the Beasts" (87). This shows how modern man has lost spiritual values and degenerated into savagery, which is an irony on the modern secular practices.

Although other characters including Enoch Emery care very much for "creature comforts, "Haze places his trust only on two things: his rusty old car, and Leora Watts, both of them the emblem of material comfort and pleasure. But when he is humiliated by the prostitute at his last visit, and the policemen destroy his car, Haze himself soon comes to the dead end of discovering that his world is his prison. Earlier, he had boasted saying, " nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (58) and "I don't need Jesus," Haze said, "What do I need with Jesus? I got Leora Watts" (28). And only at this moment he seems to gain some insight as O'Connor describes Haze mediating when his car is destroyed:

Haze stood for a few minutes, looking over at the scene. His face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing and on beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space. His knees bent under him and he sat down on the edge of the embankment with his feet hanging over. (107)

The embankment, like the door opening onto empty space represents the limits of man's power: the point past which reason fails him. Haze's car, the symbol of rational design, cannot take him where he wants to go. Rather it becomes the prison house in which he places himself

inescapably. As Hawks had said to Haze the first time they met, "You can't run away from Jesus" (26). The dramatic irony is that he now cannot ignore the religious values. By the time the policeman asks Haze "Was you going any Where?" Haze has finally learned correct answer 'No" (108). Yet while Enoch's gaze had stopped at the skyline of Taulkinham, Haze now penetrates deeper, into the heaven, the dimension of spiritual freedom.

When Haze finally blinds himself after witnessing rampant evil and moral degeneration, he brings further isolation and confinement to himself. Despite his conscious efforts, terrifying images of isolation pervade his subconscious mind. He limits himself and his movement by putting rocks in his shoes; wrapping barbed wire around his chest, symbolically fencing in the animal of his flesh; living in the ultimate prison of blindness. This is on the physical level. But O'Connor's point is that there is some hope for spiritual salvation when one is ready to make sacrifice by torturing themselves. As long as he lives, he lives a life similar to that of animal. Only his death at the hands of policemen, the keepers of the human zoo liberates him from the imprisonment. Thus, O'Connor exposes spiritual degeneration in Haze.

The reason why O'Connor uses images of animals and birds is that she wants to criticize the people who enjoy secular practices through her characters. In order to show how humans are no more than animals without the uplifting influence of a spiritual winged figure: the Holy Ghost, she uses grotesque characters and animal references. On one of his

random drives, Haze, who despite himself is more aware than the other characters of the spiritual dimension, notices a "blinding white cloud", which "had turned into a bird with long thin wings and was disappearing in the opposite direction" (65). The Holy Ghost is symbolized by the cloud-bird image as O'Connor describes the cloud earlier in the traditional anthropomorphic image of God, as "a white one with curls and a beard" (60).

In this way, O'Connor exposes spiritual degeneration in human beings in the mid-twentieth century of America through the projection of animalistic nature upon the characters in the novel, *Wise Blood*. However, O'Connor also leaves some hope that one can come out of the imprisonment of evil, material comforts, excessive human self-dependency, and pride and vanity, if they pursue spiritual values. And they can only experience growth in all areas of human life. Haze's final realization of this and his act of self-sacrifice by blinding and torturing himself lead to an expansion and spiritual freedom, for even the literal-minded Mrs. Flood can sense that her blind companion contains "the whole black world in his head bigger enough to include the sky and planets and whatever was or had been or would be" (113). Not Enoch, last seen in gorilla suit, staring over the valley at the uneven skyline of the city" (102), not the false prophet knocked down by implacable Haze, not Hawks or Onnie Jay, not Sabbath who ends up in a detention house, but Hazel Motes retains some possibility salvation as he realizes his mistake. In this way, O'Connor highlights the importance of religion first by

satirizing secular practices and finally placing her major character on the path to religion.

Ironizing Nihilism in *The Violent Bear It Away*

The title of the novel *The Violent Bear It Away* is taken from the *Holy Bible*. The Biblical line "from the days of John Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" suggests that even the world of god is not safe from the violent activities. As the denting of the nature, the violence is accepted everywhere, and any type. The power of violence to effect spiritual awakening and the impact that a conversion of this kind has upon Christian salvation are themes in the novel.

The novel opens with the death of old Tarwater, a prophet and patriarch. The young Tarwater is busy in making his decent burial. The Great-nephew, Francis Marion Tarwater is stolen by the old Tarwater when he was only the age of four. The novel presents the conflict between the ideology of religious matters, beliefs and practices. Young Tarwater represents the religion of Christianity and the nephew Rayber represents the changes in beliefs. Rayber, a school teacher, represents the view of the social scientist, believing that human behavior is shaped by forces of environment and psychology that an aware human being is capable of changing and controlling. "His great-uncle had gone to live with the school teacher and as soon as he had got there, he had baptized Tarwater,

practically under the school teacher's nose and the school teacher had made a blasphemous joke of it. But the old man could never tell this straight through" (163).

Young Tarwater, a teenager raised in rural isolation, is an extension of old Tarwater:

The old man, who said he was a prophet, had raised the baby to expect the Lord's call himself and to be prepared for the day he would hear it. He had schooled him in the evils that befall prophets; in these that come from the world, which are trifling, and those that come from the world which are trifling, and . . . He had learned by fire. (126)

Young Tarwater is trenchant in his rejection of the urbane world and struggles internally with the facts of redemption as he has been taught to understand them by his great uncle. The old Tarwater had several attempts to kidnap the young boy for his religious purpose. The attempt to make him according to his choice of baptizing and upbringing,

. . . several trips into town to try to kidnap him so that he could baptize him, but each time he had come back unsuccessful. The school teacher was on his guard and the old man was too fat and stiff now to make an agile kidnapper."

(128)

The novel focuses principally on young Tarwater's conflict with Rayber. These two characters represent the contrast between a sacred and a secular world views. In one world spiritual salvation is possible, but

freedom and individuality bend to God's will. In the other self actualization is possible, but the life of the spirit has last significance. The conflict makes a way to examine human condition in a modern, Godless world.

From childhood, young Tarwater has been taught that it is his place to carry on in his great-uncle's footsteps and baptize Raber's retarded son, since old Tarwater had been unable to do so,

He followed his uncle's custom of never taking off his coat except in bed. He had always followed his uncle's customs up to this date but; if I want to move that face before I busy him, it wouldn't be a soul to hinder me, he thought, he thought; no voice will be uplifted. (130)

The death of Mason Tarwater leaves the young Tarwater alone to work in the open choices of his burial. Old Tarwater used to consider himself a prophet and live in a southern backwoods farm called Powderhead. The keeping of a young boy far from him for the sake of the individual choice becomes selfishness. The old Tarwater wants the baby to learn about the Christianity. Though the old Tarwater fails to baptize the nephew Rayber, he steals Francis Tarwater another grand nephew. Rayber, the school teacher represents the change, modernity and revolt against the conservative Christian ideology. Rayber, a typical nihilist does not cope with the Christianity. But on the other hand Francis is pre-destined to be in conflict with Rayber.

Old Tarwater believes that his destiny is to baptize his other great-nephew, Bishop, and that this destiny will become Francis's if he fails. He wants the young Tarwater to be a prophet. He says: "You will learn what a trifle is on the day those crosses are gathered! Burying the death Right may be the only honor you ever do yourself. I brought you act here to raise you a Christian and more than a Christian, a prophet" (132).

The impression of the prophet is immensely deep rooted in the heart and mind. He claims to have learned this from God, in an event in which Mason's eyes were 'burned clean', and his mission as a prophet was revealed moron's only request to the younger Tarwater was to be buried when he died and to have a cross mark his grave. The old Tarwater was much conscious about his death so he makes good plan of his burial and instructs his nephew about the procedure: "Listen if it ain't feasible to use the box when the time comes, if you can't lift it or whatever, just get me in the hole but I want it deep. I want it ten foot, not just eight, ten. You can roll me to it if nothing else" (131).

Tarwater leaves his dead great-uncle in a burning house and moves to meet his uncle Rayber, a school teacher of secular ideology. Raber is the father of Bishop, the baby Tarwater is destined to baptize:

He did not believe that he himself was farmed in the image and likeness of God. But that Bishop was he had no doubt.

The little boy was part of a simple equation that required he further solution, except at the moments when with little or no

warning he would feel himself overwhelmed by the
horrifying love. (192)

He too was kidnapped by Mason, but escaped when he was the same age as Tarwater. He is staunch antireligious, and refuses to have his son, who is mentally retarded, baptized. The school teacher had stopped him from baptizing Bishop. "He had made, since he learned of that child's existence, several trips into town to try to kidnap him so that he could baptize him, but each time he had come back unsuccessful. The school teacher was on his guard" (128).

And, old Tarwater talks about the mission of God at the believes on him: "It by the time I die', he had said to Tarwater, "I haven't his baptized, it be up to you, it'll be the first mission the Lord sends you" (128).

When Tarwater arrives, Rayber is pleased to see him, hoping that the boy has finally rejected his religious upbringing. Tarwater believes as if he has finally escaped his destiny, but is horrified when he sees Bishop, feeling again that he is trapped into the life of a prophet. The human spirit is marked with lopsidedly spiritual. There is one type of modern man who recognizes spirit in himself but who fails to recognize a being outside himself whom he can adore as creator and Lord, consequently he has become his own ultimate concern. And there is another type of modern man who recognizes a divine being not himself, but who does not believe that this being can be known analogically or defined dogmatically or received sacramentally. Spirit and matter are separated for him. Man

wanders about, caught in a more of guilt he can't identify, trying to read a god he can't approach, a god powerless to approach him.

In this context, it is only the violent that are able to bear the kingdom of heaven away. The modern world demands that its citizen accept some construct or product as a substitute for an encounter with the real. Rayber, the school teacher represents the secular state of the spiritualism Rayber denounces the baptism and discards the process of regeneration: "Baptism is only an empty act," the school teacher said. "If there's any way to be born again, it's a way that you accomplish your self, an understanding about yourself that you reach after a long time, perhaps a longtime" (237-38). However, later on Rayber lets the boy to be baptized and ironically presents glass water across the table with the tone of irony:

What you want to do is meaning less, so the easiest solution would be simply to do it. Right here now, with this glass of your mind. As far as I'm concerned, you may baptize him at once. He pushed his own glass of water across the table.

His look was patient and ironical. (238)

Rayber decides to give upon his nephew and leave him to his destiny. Tarwater takes Bishop out in a boat to go fishing. When they get to the middle of the lake, Tarwater drowns his cousin and, as he's holding the boy underwater, recites the words of baptism over the body at the struggling Bishop:

He was started to see the boy put his hand on Bishop's neck just under his hat, open the door and guild him out of it. It

occurred to him that what he meant by doing something was to make a slave of the child. Bishop would be at his command like a faithful dog. Instead of avoiding him, he planned to control him, to show who was master. (239)

Tarwater believes that he has at last removed himself from the reach of God, that he will no longer struggle with the call that the leaves, setting out for home, where to his own thinking removed himself from the reach of God's calling by drawing the boy he was supposed to baptize. He begins to feel hungry, and his hunger rapidly takes on spiritual dimensions. He tries to eat but gets sick, and he begins to realize that his hunger is something more than a natural one. Rayber seems to want his nephew through a situated course of therapy. One proposes scripture as the proper medium through which the young Tarwater can come to self-knowledge, whereas the other proposes that he came to understand himself through the lens of analysis. Rayber sees the cure of Tarwater, the old man is clear to establish the centrality at the sacrament of baptism to Tarwater's future life.

Rayber still seems terrified at the possibility that young Tarwater might be suffering from the same sick. Faith that he had when he was a boy, but Rayber is also somewhat exultant that he might have the chance to save him from such misplaced faith. He lays out his principles for Tarwater in a brief space, "The great dignity to say: I am born once and no more. What I can see and do for myself and my fellow man in this life is all at my portion and I'm content with it. It's enough to be a man" (172).

Tarwater is eager to imagine himself as a Biblical prophet; he wants the glory of an Old Testament task. He is given as his first task, after old Tarwater dies, the baptism of his idiot cousin, Bishop, if Tarwater would have been so resistant to God's call to be a prophet he would have been given a more dignified task, or even left the task at all. But the old man insists that his great-nephew's first task is nothing as grand as what young Tarwater would imagine. The old man, who said he was a prophet, had raised the boy to expect the Lord's call himself and to be prepared for the day he would hear it.

Having learned much from his own mistakes, he was in a position to instruct Tarwater when the boy chose to listen - in the hard facts of serving the hard. The novel is finally about the story of young Tarwater's path to God, it is in the day-to-day living of Rayber that we are allowed to see the life lived in resistance to grace, and the final image of Rayber seems to be one in which the activity of grace is completely absent. As we see in Rayber's final scene with the boy, although he sets out wanting to save Tarwater from the terrible future of being a backwoods prophet, he ultimately comes to realize that what he really did for the boy is not love but a deep hatred: "Gradually it became distinct and still, gaunt and cross-shaped. He observed, deep in its eyes, a look at starvation. I wasn't going to baptize him, he said flinging the silent words at the silent face. I'd drawn him first" (221).

As Tarwater sits beside the sleeping driver and remembers the murder at Bishop, he utters the words of baptism: they function as the

renunciation of the devil that is part comprise the baptismal rite: "suddenly in a high raw voice the defeated bay cried out the wards of baptism, shuddered, and opened his eyes. He heard the sibilant oaths of his friend fading away on the darkness" (216).

The destiny and religion dominates over the secular. The novel presents the religious imagery and themes, ranging from the power of passion to the dominance of destiny. Tarwater's destiny of being a baptizer of the Bishop cannot be evaded. Whether or whatever the negation of the circumstances are drawn, his fate ultimately leads him to it. On the other hand, the secular protagonist and nihilist anti-hero Rayber also losses his effort and lets the boy to be baptized: "The school teacher spoke slowly, picking his words as if he were looking far the steadiest stomas to step is on across a rushing stream.

Until you get rid of this compulsion to baptize Bishop, you'll never make any progress toward being a normal person. I said in the boat you were going to be a . . . I shouldn't have said that I want you to make the choice . . . what you do is up to you. (237)

O'Connor illustrates this well, demonstrating the power of Tarwater's destiny as it dominates every obstacle in its way; the drowning of Bishop is transformed to a Baptism, Tarwater's rape turns to revelation, and the secular Rayber fails in every way.

The importance of passion is linked with the power of religion. The belief of negation of the religion becomes ironic with in the context of the

novel, however, it assumes a crucially concrete wearing in the character of Rayber. When Tarwater shows upon the front porch of his uncle, after lighting the fire at Powerhead, Rayber is both deaf and blind, neither wearing is paid. He is able to make himself deaf and blind whenever he wants. For the modern man, deafness and blindness are clearly problems to be solved by means of human ingenuity. All of O'Connor's wisdom is rooted in the moment when an individual encounters grace and responds to it in one of two ways either yielding to its call and seeking to obtain the kingdom of heaven through the violence of a struggle with the fallen nature so as to hold fast to the transformative power that is the Holy word, or the needlessness of the deaf man, who fails to know the truth when he meets it.

Tarwater is filled with passion, which he suppresses. Tarwater succeeds and is redeemed, and Rayber is ultimately destroyed. When Bishop is killed, he realizes that he has no love for his son; and Rayber collapses. The idea that everything that destroys also creates is evident as well. Nearly every symbol and character of the novel pulls Tarwater away from his destiny but also pushes him back. Rayber nearly succeeds in secularizing Tarwater, but he ultimately brings the boy back to power head. The drowning of Bishop, the ultimate secular act, nearly destroys Tarwater's destiny, but the simultaneous baptism redeems it. Fire both destroys Powerhead and burns Tarwater's eyes clean. Water drowns and baptizes. Every thing that destroys redeems. If the destiny is prone to religion, there is no chance of secularism. Whatever the will leads, but the

destiny does not evade the circumstances and pushes back to the fate. The condition becomes more ironic to the nihilism.

Conclusion

O'Connor's two novels *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away* are an irony on the twentieth-century nihilistic attitude. The novels ironically expose the spiritual decline in the human beings in the modern period in America. The major characters in the novels appear grotesque and do eccentric activities like preaching against Christianity and Jesus Christ, making money out of preaching and torturing others and themselves. They act on an impulse. They have no idea what they are going to do and where they are going. This projection is the greatest irony on human beings.

In *Wise Blood* one of the major characters, Hazel Motes, rejects God, and starts a crusade against Jesus. He preaches his self-professed new "church without Christ" though he eventually realizes his grave mistake that brings him a lot of suffering and alienation in his life. O'Connor's point is that modern man is becoming like an animal. O'Connor makes a perfect fusion of animal imagery and images of confinement and isolation in the novel, which substantiates the idea that human beings lack spiritual aspect. Haze cannot resist his love for such places, though he moved half way round the world while in the army. He always dreams of being shut into the coffin-box. His old, rusty car is like his cage as he uses it as his permanent home. No spiritual thought can

come to him as long as he sticks to it. Moreover, he is always in search of private and lonely places throughout the novel. The other references of toilet stall, zoo cages, museum cases, casket coffin box etc are the other examples of enclosed places with animal associations.

He moves from place to place saying blasphemous things about God in a strange way. His motion in the novel is animal-like. What he does throughout the novel is move round where they live like the animals in zoo cages. Haze's movement inside the train, car, prostitute's room etc is similar to that of the animals.

Hazel's transformation at the end of the novel, however, reflects his surrendering his self to God. With Hazel O'Connor leaves the hope for human salvation because he puts himself into extreme form of self mortification and torture. Though Haze physically isolates himself from the physical world, he possesses the possibility of spiritual dimension. Although he blinds himself, he becomes better able to see than before, because earlier he was more preoccupied with physical things. Now, he is left with only inner eyes to see and meditate. So, he can really focus on meditation for human salvation. And his ultimate death unites him to God. Thus, O'Connor makes the point that if one is ready to sacrifice oneself, they can rise above the animality and live maintaining humanity.

The central character of *The Violent Bear it Away's* is Francis Marion Tarwater, a boy who, like Hazel Motes, is attempting to escape a calling. Tarwater in his efforts to escape what seems to be a divine call like Hazel, at last must give in to God's imperative. He strictly refuses to

baptize Rayber's retarded son, Bishop. He even rejects his great-uncle Old Tarwater to give a proper Christian burial. But ironically he is drawn towards his uncle, Rayber's house where he ends up drowning Bishop at the same time chanting words required for the baptism. Thus, he fulfills Old Tarwater's last wish. At the end of the novel he is setting out to return to the city in his new role as a prophet. What both Hazel and Tarwater have experienced is the lacerating effect of God's grace, a grace which, O'Connor implies, is far removed from its syrupy portrayal in popular hymns. Instead, it seems to have more in common with the terrifying experiences of *Old Testament* prophets, for whom it is manifested as God's relentless insistence on bestowing mercy as he chooses.

At the heart of the novel is the acceptance or rejection of a divine call to prophecy; this background is essential for understanding young Tarwater's struggle. O'Connor's religious imagination creates symbols and scenes that make the conflict between the words and example of Great-uncle Mason Tarwater and Uncle Rayber's antiseptic way of life real to the young boy, who must choose between them.

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