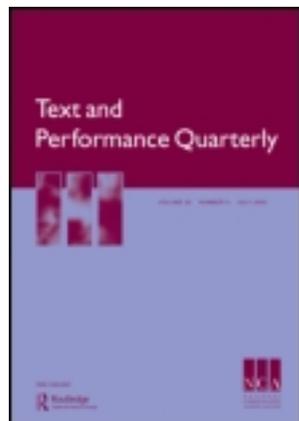


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Sermon on the Hood of an Essex: Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*

Glenn Settle

Flannery O'Connor's readers have not discussed the centrality of the Wise Blood sermon. The novel includes five dialogue sermons that may be considered as a five-part discourse, from exordium through conclusion. Full of fits and starts like Hazel's car, the sermon is integral to the novel, even central to its action, particularly that related to Hazel's character growth. In sermon delivery Hazel rhetorically tries out numerous belief systems. The sermon occasion thus becomes a learning experience for him. The interruption/completion of the sermon, via ghostly doubles, leads to Hazel's apparent epiphany. **Keywords:** heteroglossia, Flannery O'Connor, sermon, *Wise Blood*, Bakhtin

"Unholy Sonnet"

He loads his weapons, but the Lord God sees him.
.....
Watching as he listens first to one voice,
A melody, then the other, like a latch
That slips and catches, slips, until it clicks.

(Jarman)

FLANNERY O'Connor's *Wise Blood* is the story of a young man, Hazel Motes, who returns home from the army to Eastrod, Tennessee. Hazel moves from there to Taulkinham, where he sets himself up as counterpoint to an ostensibly blind street preacher, Asa Hawks, and founds "The Church Without Christ." Hazel vehemently proclaims his church's doctrines until, in an ironic *Bildungsroman*, he comes to his senses and blinds himself, then inflicts his own early death.

Since the publication of *Wise Blood* in 1952, a growing and helpful body of criticism has developed on O'Connor's difficult novel. Yet despite the wealth of such criticism, readers have failed to emphasize the importance of the novel's sermon—or, rather, sermons. *Wise Blood* contains, in all, five dialogue sermons preached, primarily, by its main character, Hazel, in Chapters 3, 6, 8, 9, and 10. Hazel preaches his first sermon outside an auditorium as he confronts Asa when the fake blind preacher is handing out gospel tracts. Hazel preaches sermons two and three outside or near movie theatres. Sermons four and five, also delivered near "picture shows," are tag-team efforts. In sermon four the huckster Hoover Shoats finishes Hazel's discourse when Hazel begins to flag. Sermon five is delivered by a trinity of preachers: Hazel, Hoover, and Solace Layfield, a false "True Prophet" whom Hoover has commandeered to urge a pay-as-you-join version of Hazel's church.

The sermons O'Connor presents in the novel are performance-in-text occasions

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that, like "real life" sermons, contain corpus, rhetors, delivery, and audience—in this case, two audiences. One of these listens to Hazel, Hoover, and the True Prophet preach on the streets of Taulkinham. The other, that outer audience comprised of the novel's readers, gazes with interest both upon that inner audience and upon O'Connor's rhetors—characters whose colorful religious acting makes them interesting in their own right and whose interrelationship with sermon text makes them candidates for close analysis. This essay argues that while we may view (or listen to) the sermons separately, textual considerations recommend our listening to them as a single, developing dialogue sermon central to the novel's action, particularly that related to Hazel's character growth.

Prominence of the *Wise Blood* Sermon

To date, scholars have underscored neither the centrality of the sermon nor its relationship to the novel's rhetors. Ted R. Spivey hints that Hazel "create[s] his own personal religion, which he discovers for himself through his 'prophetic' preaching in the streets of Taulkinham [. . .]" (110). Margaret Earley Whitt refers to Hazel's personal religion and church, in behalf of which Hazel "becomes its [self-proclaimed] preacher" (29). But Whitt focuses not on the sermon as such but on certain numerological aspects of Hazel's preaching.¹ Laura B. Kennelly, who finds Edwin Black's three features of "exhortative discourse" relevant to *Wise Blood*, comes closest to emphasizing the importance of the novel's sermon. As detailed by Kennelly, Black's "exhortative discourse" features "an intense conviction and 'alien' view," the "use of emotion to inspire belief," and "a clear, easily understood literary style that uses the copula and concrete description" (153). Kennelly highlights the copula aspect in relation to the *Wise Blood* sermon: "In his orations [. . .] Hazel describes reality as he sees it rather than as he thinks it ought to be. [. . .] Haze, true to Black's analysis of an exhortative speaker, never says people should believe in the new jesus or that they should be clean. Instead [. . .] he says they *are* clean or that the time of the new jesus *is* here [. . .]" (161–62, italics in original). Kennelly's analysis underscores the exhortative nature of Hazel's delivery, but here again the treatment of the sermon is somewhat incidental.

I maintain that the *Wise Blood* sermon is central to the novel's action. By "sermon" I refer to the religious discourse of ministers in a public setting—to Hazel's audience-focused exhortation, so full of strong advice and impassioned directive, and to the religious discourse of two other ministers, Hoover Shoats and the True Prophet, Solace Layfield. Taken together, such discourse forms a significant part of the novel's action, and itself embodies ongoing action. During the preaching event Hazel Motes opens up verbally, existentially formulating his concepts and philosophies. With the help of Hoover and the True Prophet, Hazel delivers a sermon that both relates to and adds definition to the novel's heteroglossia. Further, the sermon occasion becomes a learning experience for Hazel. In the dialogue sermon Hazel's alter ego expresses itself, enabling the protagonist to work through the tensions among numerous double voices he has heard and harbored.

O'Connor does not construct sermon tangentially to the action of the story, as might be said, for instance, of T. S. Eliot's discrete use of Thomas a Becket's sermon in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Neither is the sermon in *Wise Blood* preached by a minor

character introduced only to further a story's action, as in *Moby-Dick* or *The Sound and the Fury*. Both Melville's Father Mapple and Faulkner's Reverend Shegog appear in those novels only long enough to expound their sermons and disappear. O'Connor's *Wise Blood* sermon is more integral.

Hazel's five-part sermon lies at the heart of the relatively short comic novel and is framed by other sermons. As prelude to the sermon stands Hazel's recollection in the book's opening chapter of his grandfather declaiming atop a Ford, and as postlude stands Solace Layfield's three-sentence mini-exhortation in Chapter 10. Further, in the novel Hazel preaches numerous sermons we don't specifically overhear. After his second discourse we read, "That night he preached in front of three other picture shows before he went to Mrs. Watts" (106), a whore he encountered upon his arrival in Taulkinham. On the night he delivers the fourth part of his overheard sermon, "He preached [additionally] outside of four different picture shows" (147). Though Hazel tells a cab driver early on, "I ain't any preacher" (31) and though Hazel's early call "to be a preacher of the [Christian] gospel" (23) is supplanted by his conviction to be a preacher of a different gospel, Hazel cannot shake preaching.

Yet Hazel is hardly a verbal person. In interchanges with other prominent characters in the novel—Hoover Shoats, Asa Hawks' daughter Sabbath, or Hazel's landlady Mrs. Flood—Hazel gets badly bested in verbal interchange, at least in terms of the number of words expressed. Even when it comes his turn in conversation, Hazel often demurs, acting as if he has not heard a particular question or going about some other business instead of responding verbally. His face is "like one of those closet doors in gangster pictures where someone is tied to a chair behind it with a towel in his mouth" (86). It is only in the sermon that Hazel expresses himself fully. In fact, what may be Hazel's longest uninterrupted speech in the novel apart from the sermon is a two-sentence retort to Sabbath that sounds like an abstract of Hazel's sermon: "I believe in a new kind of jesus, one that can't waste his blood redeeming people with it, because he's all man and ain't got any God in him. My church is the Church Without Christ!" (121). Outside his sermon delivery Hazel Motes is a closed-off room, his eyes "two clean bullet holes" (98) with nothing behind them. Within the sermon we hear expressions of an extremely lively mind, one which turns out to be, like Hazel's face, "a gun no one knows is loaded" (68).

The five sermon parts constitute the major vehicle of spoken expression for Hazel. His third sermon part runs to some two dozen sentences that are uninterrupted by another's speech, and the fifth and final sermon part contains Hazel's longest sentence in the novel, atypical of Hazel's everyday speech both in syntax and semantics: "If there was any Fall, look there, if there was any Redemption, look there, and if you expect any Judgment, look there, because they all three will have to be in your time and your body and where in your time and your body can they be?" (166). Apart from the sermon, Hazel seems verbally trapped. In the giving of it he escapes, opens up, like a stutterer suddenly freed when delivering lines onstage.

Structure of the Sermon

As I have suggested, the five overheard sermons may be listened to as one long, developing sermon, the focus of which becomes delineated as the novel progresses.

Hazel's first exhortation, preached atop some steps leading out of a temple-like auditorium in Taulkinham, constitutes the exordium to the larger sermon. This initiatory discourse comes in response to Hazel's first standoff with Asa Hawks, who has arrived to distribute gospel tracts to people coming out of an auditorium and who is to become a foil for Hazel's character growth. Preparatory to Hazel's struggling to ascend the auditorium steps to escape the hawking Asa, the charlatan blind preacher shouts at Haze, "Repent! Go to the head of the stairs and renounce your sins and distribute these tracts to the people!" (53). Haze's exordium, preached to what the older minister, Hawks, has referred to as his "congregation," shows in some respects the marks of a beleaguered minister candidate's initial sermon—indirect, tentative, and almost incidental. As such, the beginning of Hazel's exordium encompasses an interchange with Asa, a conversation with a cigar-lighting fat man, and a warning to an old woman: "You better get on the other side, lady [. . .]. There's a fool down there giving out tracts" (55).

With his back to the auditorium wall, the heart of Haze's exordium opens with what is meant to be an exasperated curse, but as transition into the body of Haze's delivery, it comes off as a ritualistic call to celebrants: "Sweet Jesus Christ Crucified." This phrase is preceded by an uttered "Jesus" and Haze's declaiming "My Jesus" three times. Then, attempting to engage interest as his exordium builds, Hazel shouts to people streaming by, "I want to tell you people something." Hazel proceeds to encapsulate for them what is to become his larger sermon topic: "Maybe you think you're not clean because you don't believe. Well you are clean, let me tell you that. [. . . And] if you think it's because of Jesus Christ Crucified you're wrong" (55).

The exordium functions as the place in which Haze, as preaching initiate, announces his call: "Listen here, I'm a preacher myself and I preach the truth." Such annunciation refutes Haze's earlier denials of that call to a cab driver and to Mrs. Watts. Next, as initiate, Haze informs his celebrants of his credibility: "Don't I know what exists and what don't? [. . .] Don't I have eyes in my head? Am I a blind man?" In his exordium, Hazel also announces the goal of his preaching program: "I'm going to preach a new church—the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified. [. . .] It's not started yet but it's going to be" (55). The initiatory discourse concludes with a personal, rapport-establishing reference: "I don't need Jesus [. . .]. What do I need with Jesus? I got Leora Watts" (56).

Following his exordium, evangelist Haze continues to preach from a conspicuous, public, and raised position, as if elevating the significance of his words. The elevated place Haze chooses for sermon segments two through five is the hood of an Essex, a jalopy that functions for Haze as transportation, home, and movable pulpit. Like the exordium preceding them, the four remaining sermon sections are dialogic. In his second sermon section, Haze interacts with three boys coming out of a movie theatre and then with three "portly women" escorted to the theatre by a "little thin man."

In his exordium Haze sought to establish rapport, to assure his audience of his integrity, and to pacify them ("[Y]ou are clean"). Now, in his second discourse, Haze both challenges and clarifies. Haze repeatedly asks the boys, "Where has the blood you think you been redeemed by touched you?" (104). When they don't respond, Haze demands twice, like an insistent catechist, "What church you belong to?"

When one of them titters, "Church of Christ," Haze responds, "Church of Christ! [. . .] Well, I preach the Church Without Christ. I'm member and preacher to that church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way" (105).

Through dialogue with the three boys, Haze settles on a shortened, workable name for his church, calling it "the Church Without Christ," a title he uses thereafter in his other discourse sections. (In his exordium Haze has referred to his "new church" generically as "the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified." In sermon part four, Hoover, alias Holy, euphemistically amends the established name to "the Church of Christ Without Christ," then to "the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ.") In his second discourse, Haze announces his goal in specific, yet still introductory, planning-stage terms: "Listen, you people, I'm going to take the truth with me wherever I go [. . .]. I'm going to preach it to whoever'll listen at whatever place. I'm going to preach [. . .]" (105). The kernel of Hazel's second segment becomes a litany. After he renounces belief in a Fall, Redemption, and Judgment, "[H]e began over and said the same thing again," then says it shortly thereafter for "a third time" (105).

The third sermon section, the sermon's center, is the longest, most fully developed of Hazel's five exhortations, preached, like all Hazel's sermon segments except the exordium, from "up on the nose of" a rat-colored Essex near a movie theatre. In section three, Haze reiterates his message for the first time in unrestricted present tense terms. "I preach the Church Without Christ," he says, not "I am going to preach," as he has earlier said. Haze also adds a sermon motif at this point, peace apart from reconciliation: "There's no peace for the redeemed," he shouted, 'and I preach peace, I preach the Church Without Christ, the church peaceful and satisfied! [. . .] Look at me! [. . .] and you look at a peaceful man! Peaceful because my blood has set me free' (140-41).

Like the other parts of his exhortation, Haze's central discourse is specifically auditor-focused, but the challenge Haze introduced in his second section now becomes attack. "Leave!" Hazel shouts to two or three people who begun walking off. "Go ahead and leave! The truth don't matter to you" (140). The intensity of Haze's directive continues in the highly emotive balance of Haze's third sermon section. To emphasize Hazel's conviction and intensity, O'Connor uses seven exclamation points to punctuate close to half of the remaining sentences in the body of her street preacher's exhortation.

The declamatory third section focuses on a call for a new religious symbol:

"What you need is something to take the place of Jesus, something that would speak plain. The Church Without Christ don't have a Jesus but it needs one! It needs a new jesus! It needs one that's all man, without blood to waste, and it needs one that don't look like any other man so you'll look at him. Give me such a jesus, you people. Give me such a new jesus and you'll see how far the Church Without Christ can go! [. . .] Show me where this new jesus is [. . .] and I'll set him up in the Church Without Christ and then you'll see the truth. [. . .] Give me this new jesus, somebody, so we'll all be saved by the sight of him! [. . .] Take counsel from your blood and come into the Church Without Christ and maybe somebody will bring us a new jesus and we'll be saved by the sight of him!" (140-41)

Hazel holds out reward in his central exhortation. By joining his church, one may

become "peaceful and satisfied." Such promised "peace," however, is conditional, for to be "saved," "so we'll all be saved," Hazel's auditors must bring him "a new Jesus." With the awe of a star-struck Magus, Enoch Emery, Hazel's comic double, listens to Hazel's prophetic cries for a new savior figure and then sets out to literally acquire one. This motive, accounting for extended action in the novel from this point on, underscores the fallaciousness of Hazel's preaching: Enoch brings Hazel exactly what he asked for but not what he wanted.

Hazel begins the fourth sermon segment, like the other parts, by addressing passersby on the Taulkinham streets, but Haze's contribution to the fourth sermon section is fragmentary, his delivery interrupted by Hoover Shoats, alias Onnie Jay Holy, who has seen in Haze's preaching an opportunity to make a buck. Even so, Hazel seems to be winding down in his fourth discourse section, having evidently exhausted his major topic in segment three. "Do you people care anything about the truth?" he asks his congregation totaling "two men and a woman with a cat-faced baby" (148). Hazel then expresses a central tenet of his fledgling church: "The only way to the truth is through blasphemy [. . .]." Evidently, the trio with the baby are not impressed, for just after Haze asks, "'Are you going to pay attention to what I've been saying or are you just going to walk off like everybody else?" the people do in fact begin to leave, until retrieved by Onnie Jay Holy.

Onnie Jay (Hoover Shoats) soon gathers a fairly large crowd, something Haze has been incapable of doing. Hoover narrates his own religious conversion, testifying how his life has been improved since meeting "the Prophet," Haze. Then, Hoover announces that he wants his onlookers to join Hazel's church, a church where "[y]ou don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it, it ain't true, and that's all there is to it. No jokers in the deck, friends" (152). Hazel breaks into Hoover's monologue only long enough to express again his sermon motif: "Blasphemy is the way to the truth [. . .] and there's no other way whether you understand it or not!" (152).

Hoover's discourse represents the ultimate in blasphemy, his trumped-up narrative sermon preached only to entertain and milk a crowd. Yet, though it is ostensibly stymied, Hazel's fourth sermon part is in fact dialectically completed, not cut short, by Hoover's sermon. As I shall discuss, the verbal interplay between the two street preachers is not so much antithetical as it is rhetorically complementary. Further, such verbal interplay contributes to the multiple languages of the novel, to the novel's "heteroglossia."

Hazel seems to have caught his breath for his concentrated fifth and final exhortation, delivered from the hood of his Essex outside the Odeon Theatre. "Let me tell you what I and this church stand for!" he shouts. Hazel and his church ultimately "stand for" the doctrine "that there's no truth," that reality lies entirely within one's consciousness: "Nothing outside you can give you any place [. . .]" (165). In urging his point, Hazel drums heavily on the motif of truth: "Stop one minute to listen to the truth. [. . .] I preach there are all kinds of truth, your truth and somebody else's, but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's no truth [. . .]. No truth behind all truths is what I and this church preach!" (165). Hazel's "truth" amounts to a climactic denial of heaven and hell, redemption and judgment. In this, the conclusion to the five-part sermon, Hazel also denies the

existence of conscience, a "trick" that is "no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you" (166).

As in his penultimate sermon part, Hazel finds the fifth section of his exhortation interrupted by Hoover Shoats, who, unable to solicit Haze's participation in his sidewalk scheme in section four, now brings with him Solace Layfield, "the True Prophet," idealized shadow of Hazel and his "truth" conception. (In exhortation four Hoover referred to Hazel only as "the prophet" or "this prophet," not as "the True Prophet.") Initially, Hazel does not notice the approach of Hoover and the True Prophet, a Hazel Motes look-alike in "a glare-blue suit and white hat." Unlike his tentative preaching in the exordium, in the conclusion of his exhortation Hazel now "preach[es] with such concentration" that he is oblivious to things around him. Upon finally observing the True Prophet, however, Hazel stops preaching, climbs down from his Essex, and stares at his preaching double.

Hazel soon decides he must hunt down and destroy the True Prophet because, like Holy Hoover, the True Prophet, despite his title, simply "ain't true." Hazel does in fact run over and kill Layfield, the True Prophet, to whom it has never occurred that preaching on a street corner "might be a dangerous job" (201). The sermon interruption by Hoover and the True Prophet thus provides motivation for the climactic action in *Wise Blood*, action which includes, eventually, the murder of Layfield, the destruction of Hazel's Essex, and Hazel's self-blinding and death. (This action, related in Chapters 13 and 14, is "eventual" because Chapters 11 and 12, following the conclusion of the sermon in Chapter 10, focus not on Hazel but on Enoch.)

The five sermon parts comprise, then, one developing dialogue sermon. From exordium through conclusion, the exhortation builds for Hazel during the act of expression itself. The sermon starts slowly, introducing us to a faith-initiate and tentative preacher, but the sermon crescendoes. After working to establish rapport and to clarify his focus and goals in the first two sections, Hazel promises and strongly exhorts his auditors in his pivotal third section, the body of the sermon. Subsequently, upon the introduction of Hoover Shoats in section four, the *Wise Blood* sermon takes off in a direction unforeseen by O'Connor's street preacher. Hoover's appearance stuns Haze, but he gathers his second wind and goes on to preach his fifth and final exhortation with obvious "concentration" until the sermon is finally completed by Hoover and a third lay preacher, the True Prophet Solace. As Hazel's sermon is concluded, so is the wider action of the novel. His Taulkinham preaching complete, Hazel takes specific action that, motivated by the interruption of his preaching, eventuates in his movement toward epiphany—an occasion (or occasions) momentary and almost incidental where Haze apparently glimpses unveiled transcendent truth.²

Philosophical Focuses of the Sermon

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, M. M. Bakhtin suggests that comic novels feature "heteroglossia," partially described as a novel's "multiplicity of 'language' and verbal-ideological belief systems—generic, professional, class-and-interest-group [. . .]" (311). In "The Rhetoric of Heteroglossia in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*," Mary Frances HopKins highlights such various language systems in

O'Connor's novel, finding instances of heteroglossia in the novel's "stretches of rural southern dialect, dialogue of characters, and narrator's [variegated] discourse" (204). What has not been emphasized is that the novel's primary "verbal-ideological belief systems," those numerous and often competing voices that help give *Wise Blood* its range and depth of heteroglossia, are expressed centrally in the novel's sermon.

One such "belief system" is theological liberalism. In his exordium, Hazel denies original sin: "I want to tell you people something. Maybe you think you're not clean because you don't believe. Well you are clean, let me tell you that. Every one of you people are clean" (55). Haze's second sermon part features a concomitant denial of redemption and judgment: "I'm going to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two" (105).³

In his second exhortation, Hazel identifies his church as anti-miraculous: "I'm member and preacher to that church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way" (105). In his third exhortation, Haze preaches against the divinity of Jesus: "[I]f it was three crosses there and Him hung on the middle one, that one wouldn't mean no more to you and me than the other two" (140). According to early Christian councils Jesus was "truly God and truly man," but Haze shouts that his church needs a "new jesus," "one that's all man, without [expiatory] blood to waste" (140). In his fifth exhortation, Haze denies the reality of hell: "You needn't to search for any hole in the ground to look through into somewhere else" (166). And in the climactic fifth section, Haze replaces a transcendent God with one confined to the workings of individual consciousness: "In yourself right now is all the place you've got. If there was any Fall, look there, if there was any Redemption, look there, and if you expect any Judgment, look there, because they all three will have to be in your time and your body [. . .]" (166).

Following the sermon, Enoch Emery brings Hazel his called-for "new jesus," a shrivelled mummy Enoch has stolen from a museum case. But Haze dashes the totem against a wall, the action possibly symbolizing Haze's destruction of another "verbal-ideological belief system"—a crude kind of empiricism. As theological empiricist, Haze desires to see and touch that in which he believes. In a parody of the Johannine conception of the Christ "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" (1 John 1:1), Haze, on his way to Taulkinham, envisions himself living "with his two eyes open, and his hands always handling the familiar thing" (22). During his exordium, Haze shouts, "Don't I have eyes in my head? Am I a blind man?" In the third sermon section, Haze demands a "new jesus" "that don't look like any other man so you'll look at him" (140–41).

Voicing logical or empirical positivism, Haze, in sermon section three, calls for factual confirmation through the verification of sight: "Show me where this new jesus is [. . .] and then you'll see the truth. [. . .] Give me this new jesus, somebody, so we'll all be saved by the sight of him!" (141, emphasis added). "What you see is the truth," Haze tells Sabbath. It is "not right," he explains to a service station attendant as he plans to leave Taulkinham, "to believe anything you couldn't see or hold in your hands or test with your teeth" (206). In sermon section five Haze cries, "Where in your time and your body has Jesus redeemed you? [. . .] Show me

where because I don't see the place' ” (166). If Sartre's Nausea is what William R. Allen calls the "literary epitome of existential loathing of the physical" (259), O'Connor's novel is not far behind. In the centre of the sermon Hazel cries out repeatedly for a "new Jesus" to represent his Church Without Christ, but when Enoch brings such an emblematic figure, Haze destroys it. Then, at the end of the sermon, Haze runs over and kills the True Prophet, Solace.⁴

Another "verbal-ideological belief system" Haze voices is existentialism. In probable reference to Sartre, O'Connor herself once referred to *Wise Blood* as her "Opus Nauseous" (Habit 24, 27). *Wise Blood* characters are cut off from others, trapped in an epistemologically uncertain present without past or future, a no-exit kind of world. Sleeping in an upper berth on a train in the opening chapter of the novel, Haze pictures himself in a coffin. "I'm sick!" he shouts at the porter, "I can't be closed up in this thing. Get me out!" (27). Haze expresses his existentialist feelings in the conclusion of the sermon: "Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it" (165). Where the existential hero Haze has "come from" and where he thought he was "going to" is Eastrod, Tennessee, but there his family members have all died and the town itself has perished.⁵ "Where is there a place for you to be? No place," summarizes Haze in the sermon finale. "Nothing outside you can give you any place. [. . .] In yourself right now is all the place you've got" (165–66). Existential solipsism seems to be Haze's lot.

Several motifs in the sermon underscore a related "verbal-ideological belief system," nihilism and Nietzsche's concept of the amoral superman. Nietzsche proclaims, "[T]here is no Devil and no Hell. Your soul will be dead even before your body [. . .]" (*Thus* 48), and Haze shouts "[Y]ou needn't to search for any hole in the ground to look through into somewhere else" (165–66). For Nietzsche the soul is only a "word," just as Haze has told Asa Hawks that "fornication" and "blasphemy" also "ain't nothing but words." In his exordium Haze proclaims, "You people are clean," and in the conclusion of the sermon Haze tells his congregation that "conscience," the voice of the soul, is but a "trick." One reader finds the ideological ties between Hazel and Nietzsche so apparent as to call Hazel "Nietzsche as a Country Boy" (Montgomery 397). Nietzsche proclaims in his oft-quoted phrase that "God is dead" (*Thus* 41). "The father' in God has been thoroughly refuted," suggests Nietzsche, "ditto, 'the judge,' 'the rewarder'" (*Beyond* 66). In his Nietzsche-echoing voice in the concluding sermon section, Hazel cries out that "Redemption" and "Judgment" have to be summarily restricted to one's private consciousness, "in your time and your body," apart from any transcendent complication. In the emphatic "there's no truth" sermon conclusion, Hazel voices the word "truth" seven times in only three sentences, emphasizing rhetorically, in ritualistic sing-song, the denial of things, including truth itself.⁶ Prior to his truth—all truth—no truth chant, Haze exhorts, in the opening of section four, "The only way to the truth is through blasphemy [. . .]" (149), and later in the same section, he reiterates this idea, proclaiming that "[b]lasphemy is the way to the truth [. . .] and there's no other way whether you understand it or not!" But earlier, in conversation with Sabbath, Hazel denied any substance in "blasphemy." Thus, the penultimate part of the sermon frames the nihilistic irony and tension: Truth itself, which is "no truth," is dependent upon "blasphemy," which is just "a word."

In "The Cage of Matter: The World as Zoo in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*," Allen points to another "socio-ideological belief system" voiced in the sermon, that of evolutionary progress. O'Connor's interest in Teilhard de Chardin's conception of the Omega Point as physical and spiritual evolutionary goal is well-known. Yet, as Allen suggests, "[W]hen man, mimicking Satan, revolts against God, the only way he can go is down—into a lower order of being" (259). Hoover Shoats, whose name suggests a recently weaned pig, symbolizes the worst of Talkin' Ham's de-evolved citizenry. Shoats is part of what Bacon calls a "'salesman's world'" where "faith itself becomes a commodity" (40). Like Asa Hawks, Hoover Shoats preaches for money, interrupting Hazel's exhortation to advertise, "I want ever' one of you people to join the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ. It'll cost you each a dollar but what is a dollar? A few dimes! Not too much to pay [. . .]" (153). Haze counters, "It don't cost you any money to know the truth! You can't know it for money!" (154). To which, Onnie Jay Holy responds, "'You hear what the Prophet says, friends. A dollar is not too much to pay. No amount of money is too much to learn the truth!'" (154). Despite their differing motives for preaching, Hazel and Hoover both preach progress. In his exordium Hazel envisions a "new church," one "'not started yet but it's going to be.'" "The Church,'" he cries in section three, "'needs a new Jesus!'" Haze's repeated cries for a "new Jesus"—the phrase "new Jesus" is articulated five times in that exhortation alone—underscore rhetorically the heartfelt urgency of Haze's call for progress. Though in contrapuntal fashion, Hoover too sounds the theme of progress, declaring that "'[t]his church is up-to-date! When you're in this church you can know that there's nothing or nobody ahead of you [. . .]" (153). According to Allen, though Hazel "had insisted on going forward," upon his eventual self-recognition "he understands he must go backward, into memories of his religious childhood [. . .] to the transcendent moment in human history, Christ's birth in Bethlehem" (269).

Materialism, symbolized in the Essex from which Haze preaches, represents another "belief system" of the sermon. Like some dominant piece of liturgical furniture, the Essex functions as podium for each of Haze's exhortations except his first. Hazel finds in his car—his transportation and chancel-home—a material faith substitute. "'Nobody with a good car needs to be justified'" (113), murmurs Hazel to Asa Hawk's daughter Sabbath. "This is a good car,'" Haze tells a mechanic. "I knew when I first saw it that it was the car for me, and since I've had it, I've had a place to be that I can always get away in'" (115). For Spivey, Hazel's car is "an actual means of fleeing all theologes and sacraments" (116). Hazel's Essex, hearse-like with its "dust-color[ed]" interior, its missing back seat, and its "dark green fringed window shades on the two side-back windows" (69), is his essence.⁷ Though Hazel is always moving in the novel, either by train, taxi, or car, he gets nowhere, just as his movements among various belief systems likewise take him nowhere. Kessler describes O'Connor's characters' searches as "*[m]oving in place*" quests (32, italics in original).⁸ According to Bacon, "The destruction of the product with which he has identified himself forces Hazel to consider the possibility of some reality other than the material" (35). The Essex, destroyed by a policeman in Chapter 13, in fact "cost[s] Hazel his unbelief" (Baumgaertner 124). When Hazel asks the son of a used car dealer, "How much is it?" the boy responds with double entendre: "'Jesus on the cross [. . .] Christ nailed'" (70). In what numerous readers see as the

pivotal scene in the novel, the destruction of the Essex, Hazel loses not only his car, but also his preaching station.

Significantly, Hazel Motes delivers his religious discourse not in a conventionally sacred and transcendent space but from a profane and earthly one. Hazel's is not a sermon on a mount/plain, nor even one voiced in a glass cathedral, but one proclaimed from an Essex hood. Standing atop a dilapidated junker on Taulkinham's wasteland streets, Hazel has professed belief in numerous value systems, but the backdrop of his preaching undercuts his message. Spivey suggests that Nietzsche is "religious compared with Haze. [. . .] Actually, Haze's theology most resembles that found in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where a non-metaphysical pseudo-religion has as its chief symbol the automobile" (117). The profane "chief symbol" of Hazel's sermon, the run-down Essex, underscores the profanity of Hazel's faith.

Self-Referential Rhetoric in the Sermon

Earlier, I noted that the performance of Hazel's final two sermon parts is interrupted—"hijacked" may be a better word—by Hoover Shoats. The respective discourses of the two preachers, however, do not form statement and counterstatement so much as they form an ongoing expression of like-minded doctrine. As "Hoover Shoats" phonetically imitates "Hazel Moats" and as the True Prophet's physiognomy, dress, and car mirror Hazel's, so the doctrinaire value systems of Hoover and the True Prophet echo those of O'Connor's protagonist.⁹ Both Hazel and Hoover envision theirs to be a progressive church: Hazel's is a "new church," and Hoover's is "up-to-date." Further, both preachers declare the supremacy of their egos. Hazel cries in his exordium, "'Don't I know what exists and what don't? [. . .] Don't I have eyes in my head?'" (55). In the conclusion of his sermon Hazel shouts, "'Nothing outside can give you any place [. . .]. In yourself right now is all the place you've got'" (165–66). Similarly, Hoover proclaims, in apparent extrapolation of Hazel's gospel, "'You don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it, it ain't true, and that's all there is to it. [. . .] When you're in this church you can know that there's nothing or nobody ahead of you, nobody knows nothing you don't know, all the cards are on the table, friends, and that's a fack!'" (152–53).

Having no doubt heard Hazel deny original sin, Hoover recommends as corollary the doctrine of original virtue: "'Every person that comes onto this earth [. . .] is born sweet and full of love. A little child loves ever'body, friends, and its nature is sweetness [. . .]'" (150). Hoover testifies that Hazel's church and his "new jesus" have helped bring his "sweet nature into the open where ever'body could enjoy it'" (151), and when the True Prophet preaches, he only restates colloquially one of Hazel's central motifs: "'The unredeemed are redeeming themselves and the new jesus is at hand! Watch for this miracle! Help yourself to salvation in the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ!'" (167).

Though the theological apparatus of the hucksters' preaching simulates Hazel's beliefs, the duplicitous language constructs and character doubling undercut for Hazel his voiced value systems. In Bakhtin's terms, "[A]s soon as it became clear [. . .] that the ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected with these languages contradicted each other and in no way

could live in peace and quiet with one another—then the inviolability and predetermined quality of these languages came to an end [. . .]” (296). The contradiction of the language systems becomes clear for Hazel in several ways. Hazel’s sermon language bears no pecuniary motive. Hazel expresses without obsequiousness, though in backwoods dialect, the particular truths he means to hold. As such, Hazel’s religious discourse is sacred. The diction of Hoover and the True Prophet, in contrast, is profane. They only tamper with belief, a matter which for Hazel is one “of life and death” (*Wise Blood* 5). Card-playing metaphors (“cards,” “table,” “jokers,” “deck”) suggest that for Hoover preaching is but a game. Hoover’s diction adds to what Bakhtin would call the “multiplicity of ‘language’ [. . .] systems” of the novel’s sermon, but to Hazel the language of the huckster and his ally disclose marks of the counterfeit, those hypocritically false, anathema.

Hazel declaims and shouts, but Hoover entertains and soothes. As a prophet interested more in truth than in the opinion of his audience, Hazel never uses the colloquial and ingratiating “friends,” as Hoover does. Nor does Hazel warm his listeners’ ears with “gittar” music, as Hoover does. Nor does Hazel use sentimental imagery, a frequent feature of Hoover’s discourse. Hoover refers, for instance, to a “‘little babe [as . . .] a little bundle of helpless sweetness’” and to “‘that little rose of sweetness’” inside his audience’s hearts (153). Calling himself “an artist type,” Hoover tells Hazel, “‘If you want to get anywheres in religion, you got to keep it sweet’” (157).¹⁰

Though the doctrinal stances of the hucksters do not differ markedly from those of Hazel, the language systems and motive for preaching do, and these distinctions sound for Hazel the disharmony of his own languages. Hazel has paid little attention to his image in the train window, to his shadow on Taulkinham’s “electric” streets, or to his reflected equivalent in Enoch Emery; however, the parroting words of the mercenary Hoover and the cartoon-like glare of Hazel’s look-alike, Solace Layfield, begin to clarify for Hazel the absurdity of his message.

Asals refers to O’Connor’s “doubling the double motif, in using Solace Layfield’s duplicity to reflect Haze’s unacknowledged internal split” (28). According to Asals, Hoover’s “deliberately constructed” True Prophet Layfield “reflects Haze’s unconscious attempt to create a *false* self” (27, italics in original). Dressed exactly like Haze and preaching atop the hood of a “high, rat-colored,” assembly-line-equivalent to Haze’s Essex, O’Connor’s “doubling [of] the double in the person of Layfield presents itself to Haze as spectacle. Haze is “so struck with how gaunt and thin he looked in the illusion that he stopped preaching. He had never pictured himself that way before. [. . . H]is attention was fixed on the man on the nose of the car. He slid down from his own car and moved up closer, never taking his eyes from the bleak figure” (167).

One particular remark of O’Connor has been often quoted: “[T]o the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures” (*Mystery* 34). The effect of O’Connor’s “large and startling” fiction has been staggering to some. Kennelly calls *Wise Blood* an “exhortative novel” capable of “producing an imaginative jolt that may cause a change in belief” in the reader (153), and Orvell writes, “For the unprepared reader, the peculiar voice of Hazel Motes produces a sensation like walking into a glass door” (69). Readers generally have linked the “large-and-startling-figures” statement to what O’Connor termed a “nov-

elist with Christian concerns" writing to a culture of "secular belief." Apparently, however, the effect of "walking into a glass door" occurs for the "almost-blind" preacher in O'Connor's novel too. David D. Knauer suggests that "the confounding event of the Incarnation haunts Flannery O'Connor's fiction" in both "spiritual" and "prosaic" ways, in "divine revelation or creative process" (127). The incarnations of the "startling figures" of Hoover and the True Prophet–Hazel's dissociated, dialoguing-with-himself equivalents—effectively "confound" and "jolt" not only the *Wise Blood* reader, but also the novel's chief exhorter, Haze.

The sermon concludes against the backdrop of the Odeon, a movie theater where reflected images abound. There, interactively, exhorter becomes exhorted: Haze as speaker becomes an auditor, a member of an audience listening to and watching a street preacher, himself, or, rather, his alter ego with which he has been "Solac[ing]" himself. In the cinematic showing of character doubles within the action of his preaching, Hazel in Kennelly's terms "realizes that he himself is not true and that he has been mocking what is [. . .]" (156–57). Going back to his room after the sermon, Hazel finds Sabbath Lily Hawks waiting. Before he allows her to seduce him, Haze sits on the bed "as if he were waiting to remember one more thing" (170). Haze evidently "remember[s]" that final "thing" when he next sets out on a preaching mission and has his car-pulpit destroyed.

The sermon thus carries for Haze its own kind of self-referential rhetoric. Having voiced numerous verbal-ideological belief systems in his sermon and having heard and seen his language and belief systems parodied during the final two parts of the sermon, Haze, following the destruction of his preaching station, silences the many competing voices he has sounded. For Bakhtin there are two central features of heteroglossia in comic novels. One of these relates the presence of a "multiplicity of 'language' and verbal-ideological belief systems," a presence I detailed earlier in this essay. Bakhtin's second feature of heteroglossia entails that those "languages and socio-ideological belief systems" are "unmasked and destroyed as something false, hypocritical, greedy, limited, narrowly rationalistic, inadequate to reality" and, therefore, "doomed to death and displacement" (311–12).

Witnessing the curious doubling of his double, Haze comes to see his double, in Bakhtin's terms, as a "false" and "hypocritical" covering "inadequate to reality." Consequently, Haze unmask the face he has donned to cover "wise blood" within. "This man is not true [. . .]" and "This man is a liar [. . .]," Hazel shouts of Hoover in the penultimate sermon section (152–53). In much great literature, the double complements another character, acting as that alter ego for which one searches, much as one part of a body seeks its missing half in Aristophanes' tale in the "Symposium." In contrast, *Wise Blood*, like many other O'Connor stories, seems to recommend "the disastrous failure of reconciliation not only between two characters, but also between opposing sides of the self," the "sundering" rather than the completing "of the protagonist and his double" (Asals 115–16).

Hazel rejects one aspect of his dissociated ego, Hoover, and destroys another, the True Prophet, but since their espoused belief systems imitate his, Haze's denunciation is aimed at himself as much as them. A woman outside the Odeon asks Haze after he has slid down from atop his Essex, "'Him and you [the True Prophet] twins?'" Haze responds, "'If you don't hunt it down and kill it, it'll hunt you down and kill you [. . .]'" (168). The signifier "it" in "hunt it down" harks, ambivalently,

both to Haze's counterpart the True Prophet and to that competing "wild ragged figure" of a voice beckoning Haze, in approach-avoidance, to "come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on the water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown" (22). All Haze has wanted as far back as his induction into the army is to "get rid of it once and for all." The "[m]isery he had was a longng for home; it had nothing to do with Jesus" (24). Yet in killing Solace, Whitt suggests, Haze "symbolically kills his own Church Without Christ" (23).¹¹

Significance of the Sermon

The ideological tension in Hazel's "dialogic imagination" is reflected in the tension among various sermon voices in Taulkinham, a "talkin'" city. Into this sermon "dialogue," however, the people of Taulkinham only minimally enter. When Haze interrogates them, challenges them, commands them, and otherwise tries to engage them, his auditors typically ignore or talk about Hazel instead of to him. " 'A wise guy,' " a man hearing Hazel volunteers in sermon section two. " 'He's a preacher [. . .]. Let's go,' " says a woman in the same section. Hazel meets such complacency, suggests Asals, because he "preaches values that Taulkinham has already adopted" (44). It is first, then, in Hazel's expression of what Bakhtin terms "verbal-ideological belief systems" that the discourse is centrally "dialogic."

The sermon is additionally dialogic because of Hoover's and the True Prophet's contributions. Sermon parts one through three, exhortative and demonstrative in delivery, belong to Hazel. Sermon part four, owned in large part by Hoover, is mainly anecdotal, quiescent, and audience-pleasing. Sermon part five hardly synthesizes such oil and water approaches, but Hazel, Hoover, and Solace all preach in the finale, the latter having the final word. In parts four and five, Hoover's and Solace's materialistic belief systems not only mirror but also extend Hazel's. Further, both in means (card-playing diction, for instance) and in manner (relaxed narration), Hoover's discourse contributes to the sermon's heteroglossia. Solace Layfield's mini-contribution to the spoken discourse clarifies Haze's thesis, just as Hazel's look-alike, incarnate word and person, clarifies for Hazel the tawdriness of his truth/no-truth claims. His fourth wall ruptured, Hazel envisions Solace, the True Prophet, outside the Odeon and there discovers meaning through revealed image. The True Prophet becomes for Hazel "the knowing [voyeuristic, cinematic] eye who sees through the fabricated structures of truth" that Hazel has presented to himself (Denzin 2).

Taken together, the five hybrid sermon parts symbolize de Chardin's dictum, upon which O'Connor based the title of her story 'Everything that Rises Must Converge.' The action of the sermon rises in Hazel's impassioned exhortation then "converges" in Hoover's sycophantic blather and the True Prophet's incarnational finale. Hazel's articulation of various belief systems sets him up to see, but it is the presence and discourse of Hoover and the True Prophet that converge in Hazel's vision. As O'Connor once wrote, "Like the old lady, I don't know so well what I think until I see what I say [. . .]" (*Habit* 5). For O'Connor's street preacher Haze, the True Prophet becomes the true prophet—through him, Hazel sees what before he's only said.

O'Connor's inclusion of the *Wise Blood* sermon sets up a rhetorical tension between two genres, the sermon and the novel. Whereas sermons tend to be thought of as unashamedly didactic, novels, at least in our fairly recent understanding, have been hailed for what Bakhtin has called their "open-endedness." Sermons we take to be monologic and paraphrasable, novels dialogic. Hazel Motes' goal, once he fashions it, is to preach, to enlighten and convert. In delivering his impassioned discourse, Hazel works toward closure. His exhortative religious discourse is self-reflective, integrated into the novel's action, and presented in tandem with the relaxed discourse of Hoover Shoats, and such integration blurs the boundary between the monologic sermon form and the open-ended novel. By so fusing the hieratic sermon genre into her novel, O'Connor increases the tension between comedy and high seriousness, and the result is a profound comic novel. In O'Connor's words, "[T]he maximum amount of seriousness admits the maximum amount of comedy" (*Mystery* 167). The give-and-take sermon highlights the inclusiveness and interconnectedness of *Wise Blood's* action, with the sermon discourse adding a prominent and colorful thread to the overall tapestry of heteroglossia so artistically woven into the novel.

The *Wise Blood* sermon has an overlooked prominence. It is the central religious discourse in O'Connor's comic and religious novel. The paucity of Hazel's verbal communication outside the sermon and the extent of his verbal communication within it highlight this centrality. The five-part sermon reveals a growth in rhetorical development, from exordium through conclusion, and the preaching of the sermon relates causally to the wider action of the novel. Further, the sermon genre carries with it a hieratic rhetoric of its own, a transcendence of meaning that bestows on Hazel's exhortations and declamations a seriousness of purpose. Juxtaposed against Hoover's and the True Prophet's discourse in the context of O'Connor's comic novel, however, Hazel's exhortations and declamations simultaneously display a foolishness of purpose.

By "novelizing" sermon, O'Connor deepens the heteroglossia of her text. In sermon performance, O'Connor's comic protagonist dialogically auditions numerous verbal-ideological belief systems that become revealed to him as false only in the incarnations of his doubles. Though from one perspective such doubles complement Hazel's preaching, from another, in the exposing of their own duplicity, they undercut the stances of the sermon and so destroy them.

Conclusion

"The action and individual act of a character in a novel are essential in order to expose—as well as to test—" a character's "ideological position, his discourse" (Bakhtin 334). In the expounding of his sermon Hazel listens to a cacophony of voices in order to hear, at last, a single voice—a voice, paradoxically, of shut-mouthed silence. Like Job, Hazel at the end of his rhetorical search "lay[s his] hand upon [his] mouth" and "will not answer" further (Job 40:4–5). Having had his rhetorical guns turned upon his professed beliefs in parts four and five of the sermon, Hazel evidently comes to see his rhetorical presentation, in T. S. Eliot's terms, as that of a "bad poet," one who has been "unconscious where he ought [to have been] conscious, and conscious where he ought [to have been] unconscious"

(10)—and so sights his gun upon himself. "He could have been dead," his landlady, Mrs. Flood, thinks after Hazel stops preaching and blinds himself. "He might as well be one of them monks, she thought, he might as well be in a monkery" (218). To Mrs. Flood, Haze Motes has become what his name suggests—a very small speck, a particle—albeit one which becomes, as witnessed by Mrs. Flood in O'Connor's last words in the novel, a curious "pin point of light," a point of light Haze's landlady earlier likened to "the star on Christmas cards."¹²

The *Wise Blood* sermon expresses rhetorically the ongoing search of the central figure in the novel who ultimately discovers himself to be, in O'Connor's words, a "Christian *malgre lui*" (*Wise Blood* 5). Yet, if Hazel Motes matures in the novel, grows up as protagonist in a Christian *Bildungsroman*, his maturation quest, presented "obliquely as a *via negatiua*" (Desmond 55), is problematic because it is allied to his sermon search. Emblematic of Hazel's personal quest, the *Wise Blood* sermon is presented elliptically, broken up by O'Connor's narrator's dry commentary and narrative. Hazel's bits-and-parts sermon is like his Essex's fits-and-starts engine. It has "a tendency to develop a tic by nightfall" and, at a critical juncture at the conclusion of his discourse, will only push Hazel's vehicle "forward about six inches and then back about four" several times in succession.

Hazel's *Wise Blood* sermon is a stunning postmodern performance, participatory and polymorphous, process-oriented and cinematic, indeterminate and oddly slant. Like his Essex engine, so full of noise, it is finally dark and powerless, confined. Hazel's sermon-on-the-hood garners but one disciple, and that, it turns out, was "a mistake" (146). Exhausting in its motionlessness, the novel's five-part sermon is, in some respects, like an absurd play that is interrupted from act to act by intermissions so substantial one tends to forget a play is in progress. Whether Hazel, the street playwright and central actor in this backwoods Tennessee commedia, is aware of his own play's development remains uncertain. After all, he is as much written by it as he is its author. Is the sermon finally Hazel Motes'? Hoover Shoates'? the True Prophet Solace's? Society's? Ironically, the composition of the Taulkinham audience changes almost wholesale from act to act as well, further undercutting any sustained, developed, and intended "play."¹³ Nonetheless, the sermon-play affects Preacher Motes and functions as a central action in O'Connor's novel—an action which leads, ultimately, to pivotal actions of another kind.

O'Connor once said that the South is not "Christ-centered" but "Christ-haunted," and she herself was part of that South, haunted spectrally by ghosts, "fierce" ghosts, as she said, "cast[ing] strange shadows, particularly in our literature" (*Mystery* 45). Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. describes O'Connor as a "participatory author" who "call[s] forth her many voices" and thereby "explores and pressures her [own] essential values and beliefs [along] with [those of] her characters" (141). Tracing "strange shadows" and "calling forth" voices, O'Connor nonetheless hardly allows her *Wise Blood* narrator to become "merely one voice of many in the ongoing dialogue generated by the work" (Brinkmeyer 17) or just "one [more] voice in a shouting match" (Gentry 8). The dialogism of *Wise Blood* is underscored in the novel's moving-in-fits-and-starts sermon preached primarily from the hood of Hazel's moving-in-fits-and-starts Essex. As Bakhtin has said, "Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of *having to choose a language*. [. . .] Consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move in and occupy a position for

itself within it [. . .]" (295, italics in original). Coming to occupy such a position "amidst heteroglossia" poses a central struggle for O'Connor in her fiction. It is also, I have suggested in this essay, Hazel's own conflict. As O'Connor expresses in her "Author's Note to the Second Edition" of *Wise Blood*, "Free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man" (5). Hazel's "many wills" conflict in the novel's polyphonic sermon, where Hazel rhetorically wrestles with a cacophonous litany of voices and doubles as he moves toward what appears to be settled belief. Orthographically, there is slight difference between the nickname "Haze" and the given name "Hazel." However, while "Haze" suggests vagueness, confusion, or obscurity, Hazel, in Hebrew, means "seen by God" or, alternatively, "one who sees God," the source of light (1John 1:5). Presented in the last phrase of O'Connor's novel as a "pin point of light," Hazel Motes evidently has listened—finally—to wise blood within, a "silent melody" (139) he comes to find enchanting.

Notes

¹Whitt notes O'Connor uses the words "Jesus" or "Christ" 133 times in the novel, but "once Motes creates his church and becomes its preacher, he does not use the word Jesus as a cuss word again" (29). O'Connor's "references to specific numbers with Christian associations are most apparent with 'three,' representing the Trinity [. . .]," recommends Whitt. "This number emerges as the most often chosen after Haze has declared his preaching vocation" (30). It is possible there is also numerological significance in the five sermon parts. I find it interesting, for instance, that scholars have observed five discourse sections in the gospel of Matthew.

Numerous readers suggest an epiphany occurs for Hazel after the destruction of his car in Chapter 13. Ragen (Wreck) for instance, likens Hazel's moment of self-revelation beside a highway to that of St. Paul's violent conversion on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1–9). Asals acknowledges that Hazel, after the destruction of his car, "is forced to encounter unprotected that dimension of existence he has so long avoided," but he maintains that Hazel nonetheless "receives no revelation" (53). Gentry describes the "blank, gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space" (209) in front of Hazel beside the roadway as "a void upon which Hazel now must impose meaning himself" (132). Baumbach cites the True Prophet's confession of sin to Hazel as "the turning point in the novel for Hazel," his "first revelation of the horror of his own damned soul" (95). Because of the divergence of views and because I do not view the question of epiphany as central to this essay, I qualify Hazel's epiphany as potential, "apparent." My own view is that Hazel experiences epiphany, but that it is multiform, occasioned by jolts here and there. One such jolt occurs when Hazel first sees the True Prophet, comes down from his Essex-pulpit, and stares at his preaching double. For an interesting discussion of conversion understood as process rather than single event, see Donahoo. For an apt discussion of epiphany in relation to O'Connor's works, see Schloss, Ch. 6.

²Ragen suggests that "O'Connor was consciously an opponent of the party of Hope, the strain in American literature that denies Original Sin and declares Man's innocence." O'Connor "has nothing good to say about Emerson," says Ragen, "and traces [to him] 'the vaporization of religion in America'" (Wreck 88).

³Such acts have led several readers to see *Wise Blood* as Manichean (Eggenschwiler; Asals; Klug; and Magstrale). Others, however, maintain that O'Connor's fiction does not support a Manichean separation of spirit and flesh (T. Carlson; Montgomery; and Ragen, "Grace"). O'Connor herself denied a Manichean conception in her fiction, declaring such fiction, "for the sensibility infected with it," to be "hard if not impossible to write because fiction is so very much an incarnational art" (Mystery 68).

⁴The social distancing and superficiality of Taulkinham are suggested in the play on its name, "talking ham," just as Eastrod, "east-of-the-rod [cross]," symbolizes theological alienation. Giannone points out that "Taulkinham" also can be read as "the 'home of the small cross,' the lesser path that O'Connor's protesting saint follows" (38).

⁵Han explores O'Connor's perspective on the "death of God" and other philosophic-religious "sects" current at the time *Wise Blood* was written.

⁶The Essex, manufactured by the Hudson Motor Company from 1918 to 1932 as that company's lower-priced model, hardly had achieved by 1952, the year in which *Wise Blood* was published, an enviable reputation; however, as Rae suggests, for a short time it found a market among those prepared to pay more than what a Ford would cost to get what they considered "style" (61).

⁷Discussing Hazel Motes' quest in relation to the male escape tradition in American literature, Ragen identifies the Essex as the symbol of Hazel's failed escape (Wreck).

⁸For general treatments of the double, see Guerard and Rosenfield. For a psychoanalytic treatment, see Rank. Rank suggests primitive man first "localized" the "body-soul" double "in his shadow or mirror-image" ("Religion" 13). For discussions of the double related specifically to O'Connor, see Paulson and, in particular, Asals, Ch. 3. For interesting elaborations on the Haze-Enoch parallel, see Gregory and Kahane.

"Shoats' "sweetness" speech may be compared to Abrahams' "tallung sweet" construct.

¹Hazel's simultaneous search for and flight from the "wild, ragged figure" of Jesus is discussed by Drake.

¹²Hazel's self-blinding and personal flagellation trouble not only Mrs. Flood but also readers of *Wise Blood*. Yet while symbolizing Haze's straining to be purged of "nameless unplaced guilt that was in him" (63) and caricaturing a rigid fundamentalism, such acts hardly express Christian orthodoxy. Hazel's actions as means to expiation in light of St. Paul's statement, "[A] man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16), are discussed by Feeley, 61–65. Also see Giannone, 31–40, and Han.

¹³There are connections in the *Wise Blood* sermon to both Brecht and Artaud. The interface of parody, dialogism, and theatre in Hazel's performance sermon, using as backdrop Turner and, perhaps, Marvin Carlson's, "Theatre and Dialogism" could form an interesting study.

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