

## ANALYSIS

“Judgment Day” (1964)

Flannery O’Connor

(1925-1964)

“Her first published story, ‘The Geranium,’ appears again in revised form in the posthumous volume, retitled ‘Judgment Day’... Old Dudley in ‘The Geranium’ is entombed in his daughter’s New York apartment and is afraid to descend from it to gather the broken remains of a cherished geranium fallen to the street; old Tanner in ‘Judgment Day’ does not yield to the same kind of entombment and symbolically rises from it by sheer strength of will and belief that such entombment is terminable.... Regardless of one’s own religious predilections, [a reader] must know the meaning of the sacramental view of life before he can know the meaning of Flannery O’Connor’s fiction. She fuses the transcendent world with the sublunary one, achieving such a convergence of actualities that one is meaningless without the other....

Miss O’Connor’s sacramental view surveys the countryside and illuminates it so that her readers may see the true country in it and above it; the outward features and the natural actions are signs of inward and spiritual grace, as they are in ‘Judgment Day,’ a story which begins in tawdriness and ends in joy.... The Negro doctor Foley...had gained a kind of sovereignty over Tanner in much the same fashion that Tanner had won the upper hand with Coleman.... The daughter insists that Tanner leave Coleman and return home to New York with her. There, in an apartment with his daughter and her insensitive, atheistic truck-driver husband, the old man longs to be back in Corinth... [His daughter] is married and childless, and she considers caring for her father ‘As bad as having a child’....

As a result of his longing for home, he attempts to befriend a Negro tenant, as he had Coleman Parrum. This Negro, however, is cynical, atheistic, and proud; Tanner’s innocent patronizing antagonizes the Negro and sets in motion the events which lead to Tanner’s first stroke. When the old man learns that his daughter intends, against his wishes, to bury him not in Corinth but in New York, he begins planning, in spite of his illness, his return to his true country in the South.

He dies of a second stroke on the first flight of stairs, where he is found by the Negro actor who furiously lodges the old man in the banister rungs because he misinterprets Tanner’s appeal to Coleman as a mocking epithet, coal-man.... As is often true of the city in Flannery O’Connor’s fiction, New York is a place of the damned, a godless hell for the old man, allegorically a purgatory of suffering antecedent to his entry into the eternal true country. Tanner’s thoughts move from those of his imprisonment in the ‘pigeon-hutch of a building,’ to those of Coleman and Corinth, and to those of Judgment Day.... The theme of the story is the certainty of resurrection at Judgment Day for those who kept their promises, did their best, and honored their parents.... When Tanner realizes the imminence of his death just before falling down the stairs, he quotes ‘The Lord is my shepherd.... I shall not want.’ Though the conclusion of this psalm is not supplied, its meaning is so strongly felt that its inclusion is not necessary: ‘And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’

Tanner defends his faith when it is reviled by the Negro actor.... The old man not only expresses an equation between the mystery of man’s identity and the mystery of God’s being, but he is...an illustration of Christ’s pronouncement in the Beatitudes: ‘Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven’... Tanner has followed Christ’s teaching that one should love his neighbor as himself. In an almost Christlike manner, he has assumed the responsibility for Coleman Parrum for thirty years after seeing the Negro, triumphed over by Tanner at their first meeting, as ‘a negative image of himself’... Although Tanner tells his daughter that Coleman is paroled to him, the bond which joins them is more than a legal one—it is moral and spiritual.

The old man's resurrection is anagogically indicated in his dream concerning his death and the shipment of him in his coffin to Corinth.... This dream of a rising from the coffin into the true country of his life, Corinth, Georgia, to be reunited with those he cares for is repeated in Tanner's delirium on the stairs when he thinks the Negro actor is Coleman; its repetition insistently calls for a symbolic interpretation in which real death is followed by the resurrection of the body. Such an interpretation is appropriate, too, for the story's concluding event, in which Tanner's daughter, having buried her father against his wishes in New York, has him exhumed and shipped back to Corinth. The remarkable achievement of 'Judgment Day' is its unmistakable evocation of joy and spiritual triumph out of material that is otherwise pathetic, ugly, and violent; Flannery O'Connor's sacramental view of humanity throughout her fiction focuses upon such transformation.... All of her stories symbolically represent... a spiritual journey of the soul."

Carter W. Martin

*The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor*  
(Vanderbilt 1968) 9, 22-27, 138, 175, 223

"'Judgment Day' bears the same relationship to 'Everything That Rises Must Converge' that 'The Displaced Person' bears to 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find.' In both collections Miss O'Connor apparently amplified shorter, previously published stories for the express purpose of completing a fictional frame and achieving her doctrinal progression. This belief is supported by her novelistic method: revision of stories to function in continuous narrative frames.

In the original story, 'The Geranium,' out of which 'Judgment Day' grew, an old southerner living in New York tastes humility in an encounter with a sophisticated and mildly patronizing Negro, after which he is insulted by a neighbor whose potted geranium he has looked forward to seeing every day.... The revised story generates significant metaphysical meaning from the same basic situation but omits the geranium in favor of developing the character of the transplanted Georgian. Both stories juxtapose old Tanner's reactions to the New York Negro with his intimate friendship with a 'nigger' back home, but the revised version is far richer, far more suggestive, in its ironic use of these materials.

In ["Everything That Rises Must Converge"] Julian's response to his mother's death reveals his vulnerability and dependence; he is poorly prepared for dealing with 'guilt and sorrow' on his own. In the concluding story [in the collection, "Judgment Day,"] old Tanner's death apparently has a similar effect on his 'duty-doing' daughter; she reneges on her promise to have his body returned to Georgia for burial, 'but after she had done it she could not sleep at night.' The last paragraph ends, 'so she had him dug up and shipped the body to Corinth. Now she rests well at night and her good looks have mostly returned.'

Neither Julian nor Tanner's daughter is concerned with spiritual matters; both are concerned with 'practical' matters and with appearances. The central revelations occur to members of the older generation. Julian's mother fully experiences the extent of her displacement; her stroke is very similar to the violent wrenching of personal identity which Mrs. Shortley experiences in 'The Displaced Person'... Similarly, at the climaxes of their experiences both Tanner and Julian's mother experience fantasy reunions with loved ones. 'Tell Caroline to come get me,' the sick woman says, obviously alluding to a Negro servant in better days. Tanner assumes that his Negro friend Coleman will meet the train on which he fancies his body is traveling homeward for burial, and at the high point of his dream he imagines himself greeting Coleman with the news of the resurrection of the body on judgment day.

Tanner attains a spiritual victory while externally suffering humiliation and defeat. Living in New York with his daughter, he regrets his decision to leave Georgia rather than to operate his still for the mixed-blooded Dr. Foley, who had bought the property on which Tanner and Coleman lived. In a sense, Tanner has been displaced by a part-Negro, part-Indian, part-white man whom he resents in a way similar to the Shortleys's resentment of Guizac. The racial issue is brought to the foreground by Foley's observing that the day is coming when 'the white folks IS going to be working for the colored and you might's well to git ahead of the crowd.' Tanner is true to type with his rejoinder that 'the government ain't got around yet to forcing the white folks to work for the colored.'

Tanner, then, with his racial pride, is the author of his own misery in New York; he finally admits to himself that he would have preferred being 'a nigger's white nigger any day' to 'sitting here looking out of this window all day in this no-place.' At the beginning of his relationship with Coleman, Tanner had put the Negro in his place; now, ironically, as he awaits death, he wants Coleman to put him in his place—bury him in Georgian clay. Though he is shocked that a Negro should live next door to his daughter, he had lived for years with Coleman in their jerry-built shack. Anxious to know the Negro next door, whom he assumes to be like Georgia Negroes he has known, Tanner treats the actor as he would other Negroes, sawmill workers and domestics, but he is fascinated by the actor's hornrimmed glasses and by the Negro woman's bronze hair. The Negro rebuffs him from the start; he objects to being called 'preacher' and denies being from the South. In particular, he repudiates all religion, declaring that he does not believe any of 'that crap.' Old Tanner replies, 'And you ain't black...and I ain't white.'

At the end of 'Judgment Day' Tanner attempts to run away to catch a freight for Georgia but falls sick on the stairs, where his coffin-dream and his reunion with Coleman are interrupted by the Negro actor. Just as he imagines that he is leaping from his casket to shout 'Judgment Day!' to Coleman, he mutters Coleman's name, and the actor, offended already at being called 'preacher,' assumes that Tanner is calling a 'coal man.' He denies being a 'coal man' and says 'in a mocking voice,' 'Ain't no judgment day, old man. Cept this. Maybe this here judgment day for you'....

There follows the outrage of Tanner's head being forced between the banister rails, but Miss O'Connor does not dramatize that violence, just as she does not dramatize the rape of Francis Tarwater. Tanner's last words, 'Hep me up, Preacher, I'm on my way home,' make no impression on the appearance-conscious Negro actor, but they are an economical summary of Miss O'Connor's total fictional theme: movement upward and movement homeward, even when the homebound character must first be totally displaced from physical things in order to recognize the nature of his 'true country.' Hazel Motes's dying words, 'I want to go on where I'm going,' are followed by Mrs. Flood's triumphant words, 'I see you've come home!'

Tanner's home is in Corinth, Georgia. Peter is said to have established the church at Corinth [Greece].... Peter...preached at the house of 'one Simon a tanner'... Hence Miss O'Connor links [Peter] with Tanner and with the Christian's rising above national and racial differences to converge in faith with all other Christians.... Tanner's initial attitude toward the Negro Coleman is comparable to Saul's early persecution of the Christians, and his thrice-repeated refusal of Dr. Foley's offer of employment parallels Peter's denial of Christ. Coleman was paroled to Tanner and remained with him for thirty years, the number of years of Christ's preparation for his three-year ministry. Finally, Tanner's death—his hat pulled down over his face and his head and arms thrust through the banister rails—is suggestive of both martyrs' deaths: Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified upside down. Miss O'Connor specifies that Tanner landed upside down when he fell on the stairs and that when his daughter later found him, his 'feet dangled over the stairwell like a man in the stocks'....

Tanner recognizes himself in the Negro Coleman... Early in his relationship with Coleman, Tanner... finds himself carving a pair of spectacles which he gives to the Negro. The spectacles bind the two men together, and Coleman becomes 'a negative image' of Tanner; their convergence is their recognition of their common lot of 'clownishness and captivity.' Such a convergence is impossible with the Negro actor, who judges people wholly on externals and...denies faith and human need out of pride.... That Tanner's dream of resurrection is, ironically, false does not matter, for he is freed from all worldly distinctions... The reader recognizes—uncomfortably, no doubt, if he is dedicated to the liberal 'cause'—that it is the Negro actor who is enchained, held by his sense of identity and isolated from union with other people; he is obliged to deny his faith as he denies human relationships, all for the sake of superficial 'equality.' Tanner opens his eyes at the climax of his vision and is shocked that 'this nigger ain't Coleman'."

Leon V. Driskell & Joan T. Brittain  
*The Eternal Crossroads: The Art of Flannery O'Connor*  
(U Kentucky 1971) 107-10, 143

"Written during her final illness, [this story] reveals a new depth and complexity in her imaginative vision of death.... Unaware of the direction in which the knife in his hands is moving, [Tanner] carves a

pair of spectacles, while the Negro [Coleman] watches 'as if he saw an invisible power working on the wood.' On an impulse, Tanner fastens haywire earpieces on the glasses and hands them to the Negro. Coleman puts them on.... Then he 'looked directly at Tanner and grinned, or grimaced... Tanner...had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot'.... This scene, which is a modern version of the great restoration-of-sight scenes in Scripture, may well represent the artistic vision of Flannery O'Connor. It is a vision which captures reality accurately, penetrates to its core, and probes its spiritual extensions. Through the carved wooden spectacles of her art, she presents man, distorted, partly grinning, partly grimacing; partly the clown, living on the surface of life; and partly the captive, under the sentence of death and judgment.... The aura of mystery in which this scene ends is an essential element of Flannery O'Connor's rendering of reality....

O'Connor deepened every element of 'Judgment Day' to make the entire story of the old man's death symbolic of man's universal longing for 'home'.... Two long flashbacks contrast Tanner's life in Georgia and in New York.... These scenes suggest the barrenness of the present and the richness of the past to authenticate Tanner's desperate determination to return to his homeland. 'Judgment Day' is infused with biblical overtones. Tanner thinks and speaks in scriptural images and idioms... His roots are sunk not only in Georgia but also in the religious heritage...that soil has bequeathed to him. His daughter, 'enlightened,' has cut herself off from this. To his anguished cry, 'Bury me here and burn in hell,' she replies, 'And don't throw hell at me. I don't believe in it. That's a lot of hardshell Baptist hooey.' She offers him TV for 'some inspiration'... By her emphasis on homecoming interlocked with judgment day, the day of final return, Flannery O'Connor lifts the story to the level of a paradigm."

Kathleen Feeley, S.S.N.D.

*Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock*  
(Rutgers 1972; Fordham 1982) 4-5, 106-07

"Just before her death Miss O'Connor revised 'The Geranium' and retitled it 'Judgment Day' (1965). In the revised story her conception of human nature, of good and evil, and of their relation to the grotesque is much deeper and much more complex than in the original. Tanner, the old man in 'Judgment Day,' is an avatar of Old Dudley: he resembles his earlier counterpart in that he too finds himself estranged from his native roots and forced to live in an alien metropolis. But he transcends Dudley's dimensions of character in that he is obsessed with ultimate things, with what his atheistic daughter terms 'morbid stuff, death and hell and judgment.' Here also is a spiritual conflict to reckon with that was largely absent in 'The Geranium.' Even Tanner's dreams mirror these theological preoccupations: in one recurring dream his corpse is being transported home, and as it reaches its destination, his friends hear a scratching noise, and when the coffin lid is pried open, Tanner leaps out, shouting 'Judgment Day, Judgment Day'....

Tanner is leaving New York because he has overheard his daughter telling her husband that she is going to bury the old man in a New York plot after he is dead. Tanner is determined to see that he gets buried in the South. Prior to his departure he has pinned a note in his pocket: 'IF FOUND DEAD SHIP TO COLEMAN PARRUM, CORINTH, GEORGIA.' And when he looks at his daughter, his eyes are 'trained on her like the eyes of an angry corpse.' Thus, by rendering death in various postures of the absurd, Miss O'Connor places Tanner's will in opposition to the climax of the story; and this opposition between intention and reality illuminates a major aspect of the grotesque. Tanner dies before he can begin his journey home, and his daughter discovers him on the landing of the stairs: 'his hat had been pulled down over his face and his head and arms thrust between the spokes of the banisters; his feet dangled over the stairwell like those of a man in stocks.' With his crucifixion etched in the acid of the grotesque, as are the real and ritualistic crucifixions of other O'Connor characters (such as Guizac in 'The Displaced Person,' Haze Motes in *Wise Blood*, and Parker in 'Parker's Back,') Tanner demonstrates clearly the ability of the grotesque to render character in complicated postures which simultaneously evoke the effects of terror and the ludicrous.

Tanner's abortive journey thus creates a minor allegory which records the tragic implications of man's fate in a world deprived of meaning. Miss O'Connor relies upon a religious conception of Nature to explain the accumulations of the grotesque in this world, and God's judgment certainly is involved in the fact that sin, suffering, and infirmity were brought into the world following the Fall. A connection can be established between existential dislocation, which is at the core of the grotesque vision, and spiritual

dissociation: this explains why most of Miss O'Connor's characters can be evaluated by their attitude toward Christianity. All men, Flannery O'Connor realized, must eventually embark on a trip similar to Tanner's. This metaphor of the voyage actually defines a substantial amount of grotesque action in her fiction. These voyages inevitably culminate in suffering, evil, and disorder—with many of those forces which reinforce a grotesque vision. Miss O'Connor, however, goes beyond many writers of what we might term the secular grotesque by invoking religion as a way of confronting the absurd.... She wants to provide a corrective to man's desperate and meaningless condition by emphasizing the theological foundations of nature and grace."

Gilbert H. Muller  
*Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque*  
(U Georgia 1972) 16-18

"All of the changes O'Connor wrought in the character relationships from 'The Geranium' to 'Judgment Day'...increase the isolation of the old man and...provide the dramatic context for his apocalyptic dream of a judgment day that will return him to the warm embrace of the South.... The geranium, bottom up in the alley, has become, in the later story, the man himself.... A spiritual significance emerges from the naturalistic level of a situation and a sense of entelechy [a force directing life] is discovered in the present moment.... The coming together of black and white, when it happens, is a gift and not a contrivance, and...it is based on a shared sense of human limitations or, if you will, poverty.... Tanner dreams of arriving home in a coffin; and the imagined scene, when he is greeted at the railway station by his faithful friend [Coleman] and by a white friend, Hooten, is a remarkable vision of reunion in the end that is at once deeply moving and hilariously funny. For the familiarity, warmth, and comic spontaneity of their relationship are marvelously evoked by the toughly colloquial language....

The deepened hostility of the Negro, together with the blasphemous retort he makes to Tanner, alters his role in the story from that of a merely irritating presence...to the stature of a spiritual antagonist, a veritable anti-Christ.... The final image of the old man is narrated in the author's flatly descriptive tone, deliberately understated in order to heighten, by contrast, the nightmare horror and grotesqueness of his actual fate at the hands of the Negro... O'Connor judges at once the vanity of the daughter and the perseverance of old Tanner: he does, at last, make it South. And more than South: 'Hep me up, Preacher. I'm on my way home!' One cannot neglect the probability that Flannery O'Connor also knew, in her last year, that she too was on her way home.

Placed at the end of her last collection of fiction, 'Judgment Day' stands unequivocally as a conclusion in which everything is concluded. Written in the winter of her own life, it is the only one of her works to be set in the season of winter... It is a kind of last testament of the author—a story whose manner progresses through comedy to horror, to redemption, presenting, finally, a vision of life and death that turns an ironic eye upon the whole scene. It is an irony that is the privilege of the Christian vision, an irony whose expression in her fiction was the imaginative fulfillment of her faith."

Miles Orvell  
*Invisible Parade: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor*  
(Temple U 1972) 181-87

"'Judgment Day' is unique among O'Connor's collected works because it alone is set in the North. Now we view for the first time the conflict between Southern rural and Northern cosmopolitan; in this conflict are summed up many of the social problems that beset our age.... As in ["Everything That Rises Must Converge"], a representative of the older generation, unable to adjust to the changed social patterns of a transformed world, provokes the wrath of an 'emancipated' black and pays for his social obtuseness with his life.... In the South, Tanner, a white man, lived in a shack. It was, furthermore, a squatter's shack, built on another man's property and shared with a black, a 'stinking skin full of bones.' But at least the shack had air around it, and at least one could put his feet on the ground. His poverty had forced Tanner to move to New York City to live with his daughter. In the city, people live in pigeon-hutches, and the air is fit only 'for cats and garbage'.... Tanner finds his daughter's attitude of righteous solicitude unbearable....

There are three major black characters, each representative of a type or class. The first of these—[1] Coleman—reflects, like the lumber gang bossed by Tanner, the typical stereotype of the Southern Negro—

slightly ludicrous, slightly pathetic, easily dominated by the determined white with his 'superior brain power'... Coleman becomes Tanner's friend for life. When Tanner's daughter shames her father for living with a black man, he hotly defends the arrangement.... 'He ain't a bad nigger'... a gross understatement of Tanner's private views. Coleman is Tanner's one and only close friend, the single person he writes from New York, the one he speaks to in his imagination when he recounts his unwholesome experiences in the city, and the one he addresses his corpse to in case he should die on his way home.... Coleman is, in fact, Tanner's twin. When he first laid eyes on Coleman, Tanner 'had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot'....

The two men live together in their shack on terms of closest friendship. The friendship is made possible by the fact that each accepts a mutually agreed upon structure of ground rules: Tanner, as the white, is supposedly the superior. The difference in color between them will never be ignored, though obviously it has long since ceased to matter. Tanner's ability to 'handle niggers' proceeds from a certain set of assumptions as to their inherent character and the appropriate means of dealing with them. As long as they fall into the role chosen for them and submit to the prescribed forms of treatment, all goes well and harmony prevails between the races.

Tanner's first major difficulty in dealing with a Southern black comes with [2] 'Dr.' Foley, who owns the land on which Tanner and Coleman live. Dr. Foley is obviously of a new breed. He is an opportunist who competes with great success in the white middle-class race for 'things.' Most of his profit is derived from his own race, which he exploits as fully as might a white man.... Dr. Foley, in fact, is only part black, the rest being Indian and white. But, to Tanner, his black blood determines his race.... Looking back, he realizes that he should have opted for being a 'nigger's white nigger' rather than take his daughter's offer of living in the noplacement of New York City.

The third type of black is that depicted in [3] the characters of the black actor and his wife, who move into the apartment next to the daughter's. They are unlike anything ever experienced by Tanner, and his failure to recognize this fact leads to his death.... He is now too old to learn new ways of thought and behavior; he is like an animal who relies on some previously learned response pattern... Just as Tanner's... acceptance of responsibility for Coleman is contrasted with his daughter's resentful attitude toward him, his essentially peaceful method of dealing with the black labor gang he had supervised is contrasted with the actor's violent reaction to him....

Admittedly, the black man has much provocation for his action. Yet, in this situation, he is manifestly the intellectual superior, and he evidences none of the compassion nor kindness that Tanner had displayed in like situations when he was the superior mind. Further, it is ironic that the very methods that probably saved Tanner's life in his initial dealings with Coleman lose it for him here. The black man's answer to Tanner's overtures is to slam the old man into the wall, bringing on the stroke from which he never recovers. Later, discovering the old man helpless on the staircase, the actor stuffs his head and limbs through the bannisters and leaves him there to die. The black man, in fact, no longer behaves like a human being. He acts from a single impulse, uncontrolled fury against the whites....

Significant also are Tanner's religious attitudes contrasted with those of his daughter and of the black neighbor. Both the latter are 'emancipated' from provincial religious commitments. The daughter disdains traditional belief... Thus, the 'new' blacks and Tanner's daughter have much in common. Their renunciation of religious belief obviously underlies their lack of humanity. And each, in effect, murders the old man: she, spiritually; he, physically.... The death of Tanner... makes it a day of judgment for the survivors as well as the deceased."

Dorothy Walters  
*Flannery O'Connor*  
(Twayne 1973) 130-34

"[The] *essential* O'Connor is not about race at all, which is why it is so refreshing, coming, as it does, out of such a *racial* culture. If it can be said to be 'about' anything, then it is 'about' prophets and prophecy, 'about' revelation, and 'about' the impact of supernatural grace on human beings who don't have a chance of spiritual growth without it.

An indication that *she* believed in justice for the individual (if only in the corrected portrayal of a character she invented) is shown by her endless reworking of 'The Geranium,' the first story she published (in 1946), when she was twenty-one. She revised the story several times, renamed it at least twice, until, nearly twenty years after she'd originally published it (and significantly, I think, after the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement), it became a different tale. Her two main black characters, a man and a woman, underwent complete metamorphosis.

In the original story, Old Dudley, a senile racist from the South, lives with his daughter in a New York City building that has 'niggers' living in it too. The black characters are described as being passive, self-effacing people. The black woman sits quietly, hands folded, in her apartment; the man, her husband, helps Old Dudley up the stairs when the old man is out of breath, and chats with him kindly, if condescendingly, about guns and hunting. But in the final version of the story, the woman walks around Old Dudley (now called Tanner) as if he's an open bag of garbage, scowls whenever she sees him, and 'didn't look like any kind of woman, black or white, he had ever seen.'

Her husband, whom Old Dudley persists in calling 'Preacher' (under the misguided assumption that to all black men it is a courtesy title), twice knocks the old man down. At the end of the story he stuffs Old Dudley's head, arms, and legs through the banisters of the stairway 'as if in a stockade,' and leaves him to die. The story's final title is 'Judgment Day.' The quality added is rage, and, in this instance, O'Connor waited until she saw it exhibited by black people before she recorded it."

Alice Walker  
"Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor"  
*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1975)  
(Harcourt/Harvest 1984) 53-54

"'Judgment Day' is a parable about an exile's return to his homeland. Imprisoned in his daughter's New York apartment, Tanner wants to return to Corinth, Georgia at any cost, 'dead or alive'; he is willing to pay the price because he knows the tragic shape of his own personal mistake in originally consenting to leave home. His climactic encounter with the black actor, ironically both Judgment Day and Homecoming for him, is the inexorable consequence of the avoided conflict with Dr. Foley, that earlier judgment day that functions symbolically in the story as Tanner's actual sin of dishonesty to self leading to accepted banishment. By contrast Tanner's original sin, the condition of sinfulness that precedes the individual's actual fall, was his patronizing attitude toward blacks arising from his putative victory, thirty years earlier, over Coleman Parrum. After he had impressed Coleman with his 'whittling,' a nervous coverup for a more genuine reaction of fear, Tanner rashly concluded: 'The secret to handling a nigger was to show him his brains didn't have a chance against yours: then he would jump on your back and know he had a good thing there for life.'

This crucial episode, so structurally central to the story, describes a fleeting revelation of human equality that Tanner lacks the spiritual sensibility to recognize. Coleman tries on the pair of spectacles Tanner has whittled from bark, and as he brings Tanner comically into focus, the latter has 'an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot. The vision failed him before he could decipher it.' In response to Tanner's 'What you see through those glasses?' Coleman affirms the experience of equality from his vantage point, 'See a man.' Responding to 'What kind of a man?' Coleman again shows his shrewdness in refusing to yield any more ground than necessary. 'See the man make theseyer glasses,' he says. Only when Tanner blurts offensively, 'Is he white or black?' must Coleman say 'He white!'

Through a series of deft narrative transitions O'Connor moves her story from time present (the 'morning' of Tanner's day of final judgment) through the recent past of 'the morning before' and 'two days' before that (when the crisis of where he would be buried arose) into the past at Corinth the day of his exile (when his daughter and Dr. Foley visited him the same day) and finally into the remote past of his original sin of intolerance, the encounter with Coleman... The narrative works itself back again to the present along the concentric circles of its temporal descent into recognition, through the day of exile into the near present of Tanner's stroke and dream of return and the argument about the place of his burial, then finally into the time present of his Judgment Day itself.

On the deepest level of meaning, Tanner's sin, like everyman's, is the original sin of denial of human brotherhood. His actual sin on the day of racial judgment in Corinth stems from his refusal to accept the historical inevitability of changing times. The crisis that Dr. Foley represents is between classes as well as races—the social cataclysm that Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!* announces as the future of the Jim Bonds of the world. The level of the offense is not fraternal as in Tanner's denial of Coleman, but social and historical. Tanner will accept exile in New York, where he knows he does not belong, rather than work for the part black, part Indian and white Dr. Foley. 'The day is coming,' Dr. Foley reminds Tanner, 'when the white folks IS going to be working for the colored and you might well to git ahead of the crowd.' Tanner's weak response—'That day ain't coming for me'—is devastated by the stinging truth of Foley's retort: 'Done come for you.... Ain't come for the rest of them.' Inasmuch as Dr. Foley's statement is prophetic of the story's conclusion, it reveals Tanner's death as the necessary effect of this day's tragic miscalculation.

The dream is the narrative device that O'Connor uses so successfully in evoking the tone of ultimate victory. Tanner, knowing that he cannot trust his daughter, decides to get himself back home—dead or alive—while the decision is still his to make. Although he has seriously misjudged the nature of his illness, his determination has taken him through remote phrases of planning. His sense of expectation erupts into a dream that is pure wish-fulfillment; in it he arrives home in Corinth in a pine box, alive enough to scare his cronies half to death with the cry, 'Judgment Day! Judgment Day!... Don't you two fools know it's Judgment Day!' On Tanner's last day, with the instructions concerning his destination pinned inside his coat, he totters into the hallway, lurches toward the stairs and lands 'upsidedown in the middle of the flight.' The jolt of the fall becomes in his imagination the unrelieved joy of a coffin sliding off the baggage wagon in Corinth. Confusing the black actor with Coleman, he delivers the insult that hastens his death and the pronouncement of history's verdict. 'Ain't any coal, man, either,' the actor mocks.... 'Ain't no judgment day, old man. Cept this. Maybe this here judgment day for you.'

The day of interracial judgment, and the tragic convergence it implies, is also Tanner's Homecoming. His final plea to his estranged neighbor—'Hep me up, Preacher. I'm on my way home!'—captures the pathos of conflict and resolution, of sin and forgiveness, of time and eternity. Liberated forever from the 'pigeon-hutch of a building' where he atoned for his sins against self and neighbor, Tanner faces joyously the eternal homecoming of his return to Corinth that he is confident he has won.... Tanner's bumptious stupidity and the black actor's swollen rage are the sparks of everyday tragedy; they are problems... recognizably American and unmistakably human... 'Judgment Day'...[is] one of her finest and subtlest tales, masterful in narrative structure and compelling in tone and effect. This 'unmistakable evocation of joy and spiritual triumph'...is a truly distinguished American variation on the archetype of homecoming and perhaps our noblest literary presentation of the significance of resurrection."

John R. May

*The Pruning Word: The Parables of Flannery O'Connor*  
(U Notre Dame 1976) 120-24

"The spiritual depth and complexity of 'Judgment Day' is evident in its mode of narration. As in *The Violent Bear It Away*, the opening scene is (unbeknownst to the reader) only a short remove from the conclusion. What appears, therefore, as a straightforward narrative is actually a series of convoluted flashbacks which account for Tanner's dilemma at the beginning and prepare for his resolution at the end. Thus already in the second paragraph Tanner is recalling what he did the previous day in preparation for his flight homeward. By the fourth paragraph O'Connor has plunged us into the first of five interwoven remembrances. Through them Tanner burrows ever more deeply into his own past, until finally he discerns the root of his misery, confronts the awfulness of his sin, and seizes his one hope for redemption...

The first of these recollections takes Tanner back into the immediate past when, two days earlier, he had learned how desperate his plight is. He had overheard his daughter and son-in-law declaring their intention to bury the old man in the city rather than take his body back to Georgia for its final rest. Their refusal to honor Tanner's desire for burial in his own native soil is more than filial ingratitude; it is a species of spiritual hubris. For the daughter has come to believe, in good secular fashion, that when we die we rot—it matters not where. When Tanner warns that such irreverence will land her in Hell, she hisses her disbelief in any such 'hardshell Baptist hooley.'



The heart of their conflict is thus not only familial but also religious, and the homecoming which old Tanner desires is less geographical than spiritual. But he will not experience it until he first confesses, if only inwardly, his own egregious pride. Tanner moves toward such penitence when, in a second remembrance ensconced within the first, he recalls his mistake in coming to live with his daughter in the first place. He had summoned her back to Corinth, Georgia, to prevent his being humiliated by a black dentist who had bought the property on which he was squatting. There the daughter had found Tanner living in utter squalor with a Negro named Coleman. Although she had tried to shame her father for his disreputable life, he was at first able to resist her with his own splendidly reductive taunts: 'You go on back up there. I wouldn't come with you for no million dollars or no sack of salt.'

Then in a third descent into memory Tanner confesses, albeit still proudly, what prompted him to forsake his own true country for exile in New York. The sudden discovery that Negroes could buy land out from under whites was a shocking blow to Tanner's sense of racial superiority. The insolent black dentist represents, for Tanner, the ultimate reversal of values, the intrusion of Northern principles into Southern society, the placing of the bottom rail on the top. Rather than submit to such ignominy, he has come to reside with his daughter in New York. Could he make the decision over again, however, Tanner would gladly remain in Corinth, even if it meant becoming what he calls 'a nigger's white nigger.'

Far from humbling Tanner's racial presumption, this confession serves to reinforce it, as does his haughty declaration that he resisted the urge to kill the Negro doctor because he knew how to 'handle niggers.' There follows another remembrance (what amounts to a fourth flashback tucked into the third) wherein Tanner tells how he perfected his mastery of black men. It is, in my view, the most arresting episode in all of Flannery O'Connor's fiction, and it shows the workings of grace far more convincingly than reams of discourse on the subject. For what Tanner intends as a demonstration of his racial lordship turns into an unwitting account of that terrible moment of free choice when, against the entire spiritual grain of his being, he denied his fundamental companionship with another wretched creature who happened to be black.

It all began when a drunken Negro had wandered up to the isolated sawmill where Tanner was overseeing the work of six black laborers. Tanner did not fear the hulking Negro with muddy eyes, if only because he had always been able to dominate blacks by keeping before them a visible reminder of his sovereignty, a flashing blade.... When on the second day the loitering Negro had refused to leave, the white boss decided to put matters under control, lest his own tractable blacks be tempted to rebellion. But just as he had prepared to use the menace of the knife, Tanner unaccountably changed his mind. As if in fear that the giant Negro might turn on him in murderous wrath, Tanner had suddenly gone back to his whittling. Not with any deliberate design of his own but by the direction of an 'intruding intelligence,' Tanner found himself fashioning a crude pair of spectacles.

With equal strangeness the Negro had momentarily put aside his own sense of alienation and begun watching Tanner's rough composition 'as if he saw some invisible power working on the wood.' Spurning the presence of these larger spiritual forces, Tanner had sought to taunt the hazy-eyed Negro into a conventional act of clownish submission: 'You can't see so good, can you, boy?... Put these on'... The addled Negro's instinctive reaction was to have crushed the fake glasses and Tanner with them. But in that very instant of rightful rage, there had been something else at work in him which offset the pleasure of thrusting the white man's knife into his innards. The innate sense of self-restraint which stayed the Negro's murderous hand prompted him to a further display of mutual regard which left Tanner even more perplexed. For in a mysterious act of willing self-humiliation, the black man put on the wood and haywire spectacles....

The Negro's minstrelsy may appear to be another instance of that 'Tomming' and 'signifying' by means of which Southern blacks have survived white oppression. Even if such buffoonery is a gesture of submission, I believe it is more a penitential than a racial act of obeisance. What the Negro acted out and what Tanner momentarily glimpsed was a mime of their essential condition: not their racial equality so much as their common imprisonment in the bonds of sin and mortality—as if they mirrored each other's mutual 'clownishness and captivity.' In acknowledging the absurdity of man's plight, the black man opened the way to real fellowship; in denying their comic desperation, Tanner cut himself off from both an

immediate and an ultimate communion. The one saw truly despite his liquored eyes and lensless glasses, while the other blinded himself to ultimate truth.

I find this scene deeply convincing because it dramatizes the operation of grace in an ordinary situation, the mysterious within the commonplace, the supernatural amidst the mundane. The revelation may come here as an invisible intrusion upon the two men from without, but it also arises from the depths of their hearts. There is no need for theological assertion because the scene enacts the movements of a grace which, implicitly at least, seeks to offer itself to men at every moment of their lives and which, would they not spurn it, might bind them together in true companionship.

The larger significance of this life-turning encounter was not wholly lost on Tanner. For while he recalls the incident as an instance of his ability to 'handle niggers,' it establishes exactly the opposite. The Negro's mimicry broke the tension between them and led to a chaffing exchange of witticisms which proved him not to be another anonymous 'nigger' but a human being named Coleman. Even if the deeper meaning of Coleman's confession of their mutual misery remained opaque to Tanner, they became life companions from that moment forward. For the sake of his own threatened pride, Tanner still maintains that Coleman was a lackey who could not resist the white man's domination. But we know how sorely Tanner now misses Coleman, how wistfully he dreams of him. Thus while Coleman may have indeed played the role of the monkey on Tanner's back, one suspects he did so less in abject servility than in sardonic admission of their common captivity.

The series of interwoven flashbacks culminates in Tanner's fifth and final meditation, wherein he recalls his recent clash with the black man living in the adjacent apartment. The previous recollections prepare for this last one, both fictionally and spiritually. Not only is Tanner's mind gradually moving toward the present and readying itself for the fearful future which awaits him, it also links his Northern and Southern encounters with Negroes as mutually revelatory. Having set out originally to justify his mistaken decision to live with his daughter, Tanner comes dimly to recognize how the wrath which falls on him in New York is a kind of punishment for the mercy which he rejected in Georgia years ago. It was, as it were, the original sin which has corrupted the whole of his life.

As if in penance for having abandoned his Negro companion in Georgia, Tanner had tried to befriend the Negro next door, naively thinking him to be a fellow exile wishing to be back in the South. Tanner had greeted him with the familiar term of endearment which Southerners often (and without condescension) used to address black men: 'Preacher.' Stung both by Tanner's easy familiarity and by the spiritual assumptions implicit in it, this secularized Northern Negro spat back a mouthful of invective which reveals how deeply Tanner's greeting had struck home....

It is a mark of Tanner's integrity that he did not forego honesty for friendliness by seeking to soothe the black man's anger. The Negro had repudiated the deepest truth of all, and Tanner was determined to let him know the folly of such a denial: 'The old man felt his heart inside him hard and tough as an oak knot. "And you ain't black," he said. "And I ain't white!" Such truthfulness served further to enrage the black man, who struck Tanner with such violence as to induce in him a stroke.

Given Tanner's racist history, one would expect such a scourging to issue in an irremediable hatred of blacks and perhaps an enduring bitterness toward life itself. Remarkably, however, there is no rancor in Tanner's remembrance of this horrific episode. He reports the incident almost neutrally, and not with the indignation he had earlier felt toward the black dentist, even though he has more cause for vengeance now than then. By linking the beating to his earlier encounters with black men, moreover, Tanner seems implicitly to acknowledge it as a kind of purgation, a terrible penance for failing to decipher the grace Coleman proffered him in pantomime—indeed, for the accumulated arrogance of his life.

In the first speechless days following the stroke-inducing attack, Tanner had made his ultimate peace and was reconciled to the death he knew was soon to come. He had even dreamed of going home alive in a pine coffin and of jumping out to startle his friends at the Corinth train depot with a joke: 'Judgment Day! Judgment Day!... Don't you know it's Judgment Day?' But O'Connor will not let Tanner die amidst such roguish dreams. As the story finally returns to the opening scene, he faces a day of judgment which is not

feigned but real. For he has overheard his daughter and son-in-law planning to bury him in New York rather than heeding his desire to rest in his own soil. It is this shocking discovery, this final betrayal—not the Negro's brutal assault—which moves Tanner to set out desperately for Georgia on his own, 'as confident as if the woods lay at the bottom of the stairs.'

Externally, Tanner's hope is the emptiest illusion. He has no chance of making it back to Georgia alone, and the frustration of his last earthly desire would seem to deny any ultimate hope as well. Flannery O'Connor's final task, therefore, is to show how Tanner's faith is fictionally as well as religiously valid, despite everything that counts against it and without authorial commentary merely asserting it to be such. In my view she accomplishes this task admirably by preparing for Tanner's redemptive death through the interconnected flashbacks in which he reluctantly owns up to his sin and yet does willing penance for it. Surely this hard-won faith is the source of Tanner's extraordinary confidence as he stumbles out of his daughter's apartment with his heart thumping like 'a great heavy bell whose clapper swung from side to side but made no noise.' Despite the terrible knowledge that he will not get to the New York train station, much less to Georgia, Tanner walks through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil, not even an anonymous grave in a loathsome place. He is bound for a City (to cite the Psalter Tanner apparently knows by heart) not made with hands but eternal in the heavens.

When Tanner collapses into what will be his ending, he dreams...of the casket trick and its jaunty punch line. Nor is he disturbed by the jeers of the black man next door, who taunts dying Tanner with the doubt that there is no ultimate reckoning, only the animal extinction he is now facing. Freed of all fear and ready to die even at the hands of this heartless Negro, Tanner again addresses him as 'Preacher,' asks for his help, and makes his final affirmation of faith: 'I'm on my way home.'

Evidently scandalized by the pathos of the old man's dying condition and surely offended by his truculent faith, the black actor apparently subjected Tanner to a last humiliation. For when Tanner's daughter returns from the grocery, she finds her father dead, his head and arms stuffed through the banister, his legs dangling 'over the stairwell like a man in stocks.' O'Connor chooses wisely not to narrate this final brutality, but to report it indirectly from the daughter's point of view. Rather than making the reader wince at the infliction of such torment, the already finished violence may serve as a quiet reminder of another Humiliation, where also the significance lay not so much in the pain suffered as in the atonement wrought.

There is, however, no extraneous theologizing from Miss O'Connor, no attempt to make Tanner into a Christ figure who somehow reenacts the Passion in modern secular terms. Instead, the story's title echoes throughout the latter part of the narrative to suggest how Tanner's initial hope is realized in the end. His final degradation notwithstanding, he has made his way home. The entire action of the story bears this affirmation out: Tanner has confessed his sin (albeit unwittingly in a series of remembrances meant to justify his racial pride), received his judgment, done his penance, and thus gone to his eternal destiny well prepared.

It is such a triumphant completion, despite the macabre death, that O'Connor ends the story with an extraordinary light touch. No sooner has the daughter buried her father in New York than she is stricken by her act of bad faith. In her own small show of penitence, she has his body disinterred and sent back to Georgia for burial. 'Now,' we are told, 'she rests well at night and her good looks have mostly returned.' This sardonic conclusion serves as a zany contrast to Tanner's own description of her 'flat dumb face.' More importantly, it prevents any tragic reading of the story as the account of a pathetic creature meeting his sad end among aliens in an alien place. There is, on the contrary, hardly a more jubilant story in Flannery O'Connor's work....

Tanner wins through to such a redemption of his own sinful past and to an acceptance of a grisly death only after a slow and painful self-recognition. Perhaps it is not inappropriate to regard Tanner's spiritual journey as being similar to Flannery O'Connor's own, and to view this story as her final testament in the face of her ultimate extremity. There is no question but that 'Judgment Day' is a splendid capstone on her whole career, bringing it back full circle to the point where it began. For while this story sounds her old theme of judgment and wrath, it also breaks new fictional ground which, sadly, she never lived to till. In the end it was given Flannery O'Connor to narrate convincingly what she had known all along but never

fictionally embodied: that the world is not so much assaulted as redeemed by grace, and that the final as well as the first word it speaks to man is not No but Yes.”

Ralph C. Wood  
“From Fashionable Tolerance to Unfashionable Redemption”  
*The Flannery O’Connor Bulletin* (Autumn 1978)

“Tanner is an old man near death, and he knows it, and his single-minded desire to get home is informed by a perspective that has already moved beyond time... The local and the eternal for him are one. In his imagination he arises from his coffin at his hometown railroad station to announce the end of time and the arrival of ‘Judgment Day’.... He is the most sympathetically handled adult protagonist in all her stories.... The calm assurance in this late work, the compassionate view of its central figure and the harmonizing in him what are elsewhere presented as battling conscious and unconscious forces may suggest that, had she lived, O’Connor’s fiction would have moved into a mellower phase—a view that might be supported by pointing to ‘Parker’s Back’.”

Frederick Asals  
*Flannery O’Connor: The Imagination of Extremity*  
(U Georgia 1982) 141

“The mature style of ‘Judgment Day’ is richer than in either of the earlier versions, but the greater change lies in another realm: Tanner’s personality and his attitude toward his predicament, and the action his spirit leads him to take in dealing with it. This is a radical departure from the first flaccid sufferer, a permanent prisoner of his pride. Tanner is a more humble but much more powerful and courageous old man, ready to reverse his early sinful mistake—coming north to avoid working for the newly-rich black man who has just bought the field in which Tanner and his old black friend, Coleman Parrum, have built a shack and are living. Tanner now knows exactly what he wants, which is to get back to Georgia, dead or alive, and he takes heroic steps to accomplish this end, even after he has suffered a stroke.

Again the current social scene of the sixties and the new open hostility of many blacks, is taken into account, and this time it is the friendly overture of the white man that is contemptuously repulsed by the black actor who lives on the same floor. Tanner had hoped they might go fishing together, but his approach is so anachronistically tactless that his effort to make some human contact is foredoomed, even dangerous. This failure makes him all the more eager to get home to his former housemate and real friend. He now knows that he would be willing to work for the new black land-owner or anyone else, in order to stay where he knows he belongs. He has renounced his former pride and he humbly sets out for home, toward what seems for him a beatific vision: the sight of the face of the stationmaster in his green eyeshade (a vaguely Jungian image), and the wrinkled face of Coleman, bending over him—or even over his coffin—in the cold early morning air of home. Tottering off, fortified by a psalm, he meets his fate, but gains his destination, with all that it implies in Flannery O’Connor’s imagery.

His aggressive grappling with the difficulties he has created for himself suggests the development in the author’s sense of how all difficulties ought to be met. Adversity in her own life, endured and countered with faith and energy, had strengthened her, clarified her thinking, and steadied as well as focused her hope. She seems to have preferred to leave as implicit recommendation his active courage, humility, and sureness of vision in exile, rather than the pitiable despair and paralysis of Dudley. Perhaps, too, she simply wanted to get the poor old man out of New York, ‘no kind of place’.”

Sally Fitzgerald  
Introduction  
*Three by Flannery O’Connor*  
(Penguin/Signet 1983) xxxiii-xxxiv

“For many whites ‘the epitome of chaos’ is integration—requiring an acknowledgment of sameness and depriving them of their superior white identity. Fearing dependence on blacks is a peculiarly Southern fear. Dudley asserts his superiority over and independence from Rabie and from his black neighbor. This theme will be more rigorously pursued in those stories addressing racial conflicts, but we should notice here that being helped up the stairs by his black neighbor amounts to a surrender of self from Dudley’s perspective—a loss of power....

O'Connor's last story about race, 'Judgment Day,' most explicitly condemns the dominant white's relation to the black as one-sided and narcissistic. The white face reflects and perpetuates the black mask without understanding the Negro's need for distance from white stereotypes of blacks. Time and experience sharpened O'Connor's satiric impulses in this story, which clearly directs our attention to interactions between the races and defines the racist character with no uncertainty: Tanner's heart is 'hard and tough as an oak knot,' a criticism with a Hawthornian edge.

In an early draft, Tanner considers killing Negroes who 'Make a monkey out of him.' In the published story, Tanner considers murdering the black doctor who buys the land out from under his shack, and he threatens his black workers with stabbing. A very early draft even more clearly reveals Tanner's aggressive instincts. As he contemplates his abilities to work Negroes, he explains that he refrains from murder because 'he was not going to hell for killing a nigger. There was too little pleasure in it,' a comment reminiscent of The Misfit in 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find.' Tanner prides himself on his ability to overpower the blacks with his wit, but he often exhibits murderous impulses.

Ironically, this powerful 'master' first appears in the story as an impotent old man. The story starts with its 'hero' in the stance of an infant being dressed by his daughter. The outer reality of his infantile stance matches that of his inner, regressive, moral state: he sees his daughter as what he must 'escape,' someone he wants to get 'out of the way.' Tanner in fact sees his daughter as a threat, and he sets up barriers against her intrusions like a small child defending his territory. This authority figure becomes so encapsulated in his own narcissistic concerns that he cannot relate constructively to others. Tanner fails to develop channels of communication with his daughter. His daughter and servant are mere reflections of his own needs.

Barriers between family members—evident when Tanner's daughter talks to herself rather than to her father, for example—lead to the issue of barriers between races. Tanner in fact cannot relate to blacks except as inferiors. His daughter treats them as things, measuring one's status, when she brags about how many blacks used to work for her father. Tanner gloats over his daughter's reduced status because a Negro moves into the apartment next door, showing that his attitudes formed the source of hers. Tanner's condescending approaches include calling the black neighbor 'John' ('Head?'), thus refusing him his true identity—and also 'preacher,' which, *according to the sexist view*, is one of the more feminine and passive occupations open to Negroes. These subtle attacks [Tanner is trying to be friendly] by Tanner create in this black 'actor' 'some unfathomable dead-cold rage [which] seemed to...shrink him.' He further feels 'A tremor [which] racked him from his head to his crotch'—a tremor suggesting impotence as this white man emasculates the black man by refusing to allow him his role as 'actor.' [Italics added.]

There is much in this story to suggest that *O'Connor's sympathies are with the Negro actor and not with Tanner* [the murderer?] In the first place, Tanner's treatment of his black servant parallels his treatment of the neighbor in that it is reductive and involves a show of *masculine power*. Tanner drains Coleman's *power*. When Coleman first meets Tanner, he is said to watch the white boss 'as if he saw an invisible *power*'; he focuses on the white man's *power*, even though he himself, being twice Tanner's physical size, very visibly represents physical strength. Coleman's name contains the idea of 'coal,' a *powerful* energy source and the source of punning in an earlier draft when Tanner says, 'You don't look like no coal man.' In the unpublished story mentioned above, 'The Coat,' a black man is in fact murdered after his Coleman lamp runs out of fuel. That Tanner finally drains Coleman of *power* is communicated by depicting his shrinkage over time.... [Italics added. Feminists are obsessed with *power*.]

This striking comparison using the bear-monkey metaphors does not appear in early drafts and was consciously added at a late stage of the writing process. It suggests that Tanner drained Coleman of his sense of identity, his power to be his own self. An earlier version also offers a suggestion of shrinkage and even more clearly supports the idea of Tanner's being walled up within his own self. He does not understand reciprocal relationships: 'Coleman had been on his hands for forty years. They were both old now, him sewed up in a wall of flesh and the other twisted double with no flesh at all.' Coleman is Tanner's 'doubled-up shadow,' an image suggesting not only that at bottom they are alike because they belong to the same human species but also that this black servant suffers enormous pain.

Tanner represents, on the one hand, the inability to understand true suffering. He is characterized by 'failing vision'—and this blindness Tanner would impose on others: that is, the blindness of being unable to see that we all suffer a 'common lot.' In order to assert his power over Coleman and to make him see the world his way—to see differences rather than similarities between them—he carves a pair of glasses for his black worker. The glasses force Coleman to 'see' and 'accept' the master-servant relationship.

When Coleman puts on the glasses, however, what is emphasized is *Tanner's* inability to see. Tanner's whole sense of existing depends on his assuming the social role of superior white rather than on developing his own integrity. The insubstantial nature of Tanner's dependence on role-playing and the racist's false sense of self-worth is suggested often. Tanner experiences only 'an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot. The vision failed him before he could decipher it.' Tanner sees for only an instant that Coleman is suffering like himself; his vision is fleeting, lost.

It is difficult to see Coleman as 'sharing' anything of Tanner's; he is merely surviving in a world where the power lines are not on his side of the track. I do not wish to underestimate the importance of ambivalence in Tanner's relationship to Coleman. There is certainly love involved, but it is primarily self-love. There is no *real* giving on Tanner's part; the giving is Coleman's. Tanner expects 'Judgment Day' to confirm his own salvation, but *O'Connor intimates his damnation throughout the tale*. When Tanner attempts to 'escape' his daughter, his body is described as being 'like a great heavy bell whose clapper swung from side to side but made no noise.' There is no substance to his inner self because it depends on assuming the social role of superior white rather than on developing his own integrity." [Italics added]

Suzanne Morrow Paulson  
*Flannery O'Connor: A Study of the Short Fiction*  
(Twayne 1988) 18-19, 72-75

Michael Hollister (2014)