

ANALYSIS BY CHAPTER

Wise Blood (1952)



Flannery O'Connor

(1925-1964)

1

Wise Blood is one of the five best novellas in American literature, alongside *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd* by Melville, *The Bear* by Faulkner, and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Hemingway. It has been ignored and slighted by Postmodern critics and academics who oppose religion and sense that O'Connor's satire of Atheists is directed at them more than at hicks in the sticks. Feminists in particular dislike it because throughout her fiction O'Connor depicts women like them as spiritual grotesques.

Hazel Motes is a name with meanings that emerge gradually as the story develops, calling attention in particular to perception by evoking hazel (Nature, nut) eyes and motes in the eye. The plural Motes makes him a social type, one representing many, in the tradition of Realism. The style also is Realistic in its concrete details, precise descriptions, sense of movement and vivid characterization, as of the inquisitive woman passenger facing him: "She was a fat woman with pink collars and cuffs and pear-shaped legs that slanted off the train seat and didn't reach the floor"—like a child. Since the 19th century the train had been a popular cultural symbol of advancing civilization and material Progress in America. Like Hawthorne and Thoreau, O'Connor counters the modern faith in materialism with a spiritual vision. Scenes in literature are often set on trains to convey a sense of determinism, of a character being carried along toward some inevitable fate. Hazel Motes is leaning "at a forward angle" from the start, impelled toward his destiny. At the same time he also feels an impulse to jump out a window of the train.

In cultural history Motes is a representative type of the common soldier returning from war disillusioned and damaged. War has conditioned him to feel insignificant, like a mote afloat to nowhere. Nearly all of the major American writers of the early 20th century were bitterly disillusioned by World War I and felt it was

a lot of slaughter for nothing, especially those who drove ambulances in the war—as expressed by Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, Dos Passos in *Three Soldiers*, Cummings in *The Enormous Room*, Malcolm Cowley and others in literary criticism. In *Wise Blood* (1952), O'Connor withholds which war Motes is returning from—WWI or WWII—thereby making them equivalent because her first subject is the devastating psychological effects of any modern war. Universality is an aesthetic ideal of both Realism and its outgrowth Modernism. Aesthetically, *Wise Blood* is Modernist like T. S. Eliot, Hemingway, and Faulkner, but so unique it sets O'Connor apart, especially for her Gothic humor. *Wise Blood* expresses a larger vision than Faulkner's grimly Gothic first novel *Soldier's Pay* (1926), which also begins with a horribly damaged young veteran returning from WWI on a train. Hemingway's masterpiece "Soldier's Home" (1925) is the classic treatment of the psychology of the returning soldier.

The woman passenger Mrs. Hitchcock sitting opposite to Motes is materialistic and tags people by their apparent social status, squinting at the price tag on his cheap suit: "She felt that that placed him." Motes cares so little for appearances that he has not removed the tag. The woman is conventional and makes stock responses: "Well...there's no place like home"; "time flies." She is light and shallow, he is dark and deep: His eyes are "set in deep sockets" and his skull "under his skin was plain and insistent"—like death. Having placed him socially, the woman feels "fortified against" his deathlike face with "a nose like a shriek's bill" and his eye sockets "so deep that they seemed, to her, almost like passages leading somewhere." Ironically, the thematic motif of eyes leads to blindness.

His name shortened to Haze suggests that he is in a haze, confused, notwithstanding his apparently strong even fanatical conviction. He keeps repeating his home town, Eastrod as if he cannot get beyond his early conditioning. "Eastrod filled his head and then went out beyond." He is east of Eden and uprooted by the war like the expatriates of the 1920s, but he is a common man too provincial for Paris: "'You might as well go one place as another,' he said. 'That's all I know'." He is in a wasteland like the rootless people in Eliot's famous poem. The porter tells him he got on the wrong train, but Haze says he is "Going to the city." This is the traditional course of the young man from the country who wants to get ahead in the world. Haze is no Ben Franklin, however, he is an all too common man, spiritually grotesque actually: rigid, rude, sarcastic, and racist: He recognizes the porter as a "nigger from Eastrod." As an American Adam who fell from Eden in the war, Hazel Motes has the snake inside him now. Though he looks just over 20 years old, Haze has a stiff black hat on his lap "that an elderly country preacher would wear." The war has aged him, as it does most people. In his bitter disillusionment Motes now looks like an old traveling evangelist, a relic of the Puritan founding.

The woman passenger facing him, complacent Mrs. Hitchcock, rambles on about her family, including John Wesley, the name of a boy who will be murdered with his family in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The reader is likely to stereotype Motes as an evangelical preacher as soon as he says to the woman, "I reckon you think you been redeemed," then repeats it. O'Connor loves to present an apparent stereotype and then contradict it, trapping some readers in a recognition of their own prejudice.

Motes and Mrs. Hitchcock go into the dining car, where he is subject to prejudice when he gets blocked by the steward while she is allowed in with another woman. "Haze's face turned an ugly red." The steward in black is compared to a crow and seats him "with three youngish women dressed like parrots," one of whom "had a bold game-hen expression." Comparing people to animals is a characteristic of traditional literary Naturalism, which is appropriate to Motes, a crude and clumsy man subject to forces beyond his control, "falling against two tables on the way and getting his hand wet in somebody's coffee... He sat down and wiped his hand on the tablecloth. He didn't take off his hat." O'Connor's vision is religious rather than Naturalistic: people without spiritual grace behave like animals.

After appearing to be an evangelical Christian like those who yell at you in parks, Motes surprises the reader by telling one of the young women dressed like a parrot, "'If you've been redeemed,' he said, 'I wouldn't want to be'." Instead of trying to save her soul he insults her by saying he would not want to be like her—like a parrot. "Then he turned his head to the window. He saw his pale reflection with the dark empty space outside coming through it." The "dark empty space" outside is a metaphor of his own emptiness inside. "A boxcar roared past, chopping the empty space in two." Modern civilization, the train,

has split him in two psychologically, separating his mind from his soul and his head from his heart—“dissociation of sensibility” as T. S. Eliot called the modern condition.

One of the women laughs at him and, leaning forward, he declares that he would not believe in Jesus “even if He existed. Even if He was on this train.” The woman is even more contemptuous: “‘Who said you had to?’ she asked in a poisonous Eastern voice.” The word “poisonous” associates her with a snake, “Eastern” with the urban East Coast and its materialism, artificiality, and corruption, as in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Eastrod is the antithesis of East Egg.

Sleepy in his upper berth, “he thought where he was lying was like a coffin.” He thinks about his grandfather, one of his brothers, and his mother—all dead in their coffins yet still alive somehow, as if he has not lost his expectation of an afterlife. “He had a strong confidence in his power to resist evil; it was something he had inherited, like his face, from his grandfather...the Bible was the only book he read.... His friends in the army told him he didn’t have any soul and left for their brothel.” All he wanted then “was to believe them and get rid of it once and for all...to be converted to nothing instead of to evil.” A belief in nothingness, that life is meaningless, is the premise of modern Existentialism. Ironically, Motes kept his mother’s glasses “in case his vision should ever become dim.” His vision is already dim. “He had all the time he could want to study his soul in and assure himself that it was not there.”

The first chapter ends with his dream of identifying with his mother in her coffin and the lid closing down. He needs to become the mother of himself in the sense of being spiritually reborn. Feeling buried in his berth, he calls out to the porter to save him, exclaiming “Jesus,” but “The porter didn’t move. ‘Jesus been a long time gone,’ he said in a sour triumphant voice,” expressing the loss of faith common to many people in the postmodern world. There is no resurrection on this train.

2

Motes is a comic figure as he misses his train, chases his hat and has to wait six hours for the next train. His destination is the fictional town of Taulkinham, a name ironically upper-class British in the backwoods of Tennessee. All over America there are small towns that once had great ambitions—Paris, Texas; Rome, Georgia; Moscow, Idaho. Haze is a mote in the bright lights of the little Big City blinking “frantically”—a lost soul with “no place to go.” In the railway station he goes into a toilet stall with WELCOME scrawled on the door and “something that looked like a snake.”

Sitting in the “narrow box” of the stall continues a motif of confinement in boxes like his berth on the train. He does not want to be boxed as a preacher by the cab driver, yet he dresses and acts like one. “‘Listen,’ he said, ‘get this: I don’t believe in anything.’” The apparent evangelical is actually a nihilist. O’Connor is referring to liberal reformers and academics when the cab driver says, “‘That’s the trouble with you preachers,’ he said. ‘You’ve all got too good to believe in anything’.”

Motes takes the cab to “The friendliest bed in town!” as advertised on the wall of the toilet stall, the address of Mrs. Leora Watts, a last name connoting energy and enlightenment, which seems unlikely but turns out to be true. The first impression of Mrs. Watts is mundane: “sitting alone in a white iron bed, cutting her toenails with a large pair of scissors.” A lady would use small scissors. Mrs. Watts is a big “greasy” whore in a pink nightgown too small for her. “The pink tip of Mrs. Watts’s tongue appeared and moistened her lower lip.” Her pointed teeth are widely spaced and “speckled with green... If she had not had him so firmly by the arm, he might have leaped out the window,” just as he considered jumping off the train. He has come to a brothel because, “What I mean to have you know is: I’m no goddam preacher.” He is determined to sin to escape the coffin of his faith.

3

At night Motes walks through the city without looking in store front windows or up at the sky. “No one was paying any attention to the sky.” It is the author who sees an orderly universe, in contrast to the “old chaos of the sun” that Wallace Stevens sees in his postmodern poem “Sunday Morning” (1915): “The black sky was underpinned with long silver streaks that looked like scaffolding and depth on depth behind it were thousands of stars that all seemed to be moving very slowly as if they were about some vast construction

work that involved the whole order of the universe and would take all time to complete.” Not only is the universe orderly, it is also a purposeful and evolving work of art. In contrast, like Captain Ahab sailing against the wind, Motes strives on with his neck “thrust forward as if he were trying to smell something that was always being drawn away.” Like Ahab he wants revenge for his wound. His white whale is Christ (in *Moby-Dick* the white whale is Christ-evoking). His shadow corresponds to his dark hidden self that must be reconciled through spiritual death for psychological growth to go forward: “When it was by itself, stretching behind him, it was a thin nervous shadow walking backwards.”

This is the “Unreal City” of Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (1922), provincial compared to London but no less a symbol of the spiritually desolate Postmodern psyche. The City as commerce is represented by the huckster in front of the department store, a secular preacher turning a potato peeler into a fetish. The potato peeler is another box, another unnecessary gadget sustaining the “religion of business” satirized by Sinclair Lewis in *Babbitt* (1922): “The man stood in front of this altar.” Motes is distracted by a blind man in dark glasses with a girl passing out leaflets, another vendor. The boy Enoch Emery, figuratively blind himself, punches Motes to get him to look at the peeler salesman and listen to him preach the gospel of the machine. The peeler machine is a metaphor of society reducing an individual to conformity: “He stuck in a brown potato in one side of the open machine...and as he turned the handle, the potato went into the box and then in a second, backed out the other side, white.” The black novelist Ralph Ellison elaborates this theme in *Invisible Man*, published the same year as *Wise Blood*, particularly in the episode in the Liberty Paint factory. The box was previously a symbol in Naturalistic fiction, as when Henry in *The Red Badge of Courage* feels like he is trapped in a “moving box.” The box is also, later, a motif in Postmodern fiction called “Cybernetic,” based on the metaphor of the machine (1950s-70s): Barth, Beckett, Barthelme, Burroughs, Pynchon, McElroy, Vonnegut.

The blind man claims to be a preacher and begs for handouts while the girl distributes leaflets. The nature of the relationship between the preacher and his “child” becomes suspicious when she starts calling herself a bastard. Motes watches the preacher with ambivalence, “jerking his hands in and out of his pockets as if he were trying to move forward and backward at the same time.” Then he buys a peeler and follows the blind man and Enoch Emery follows along hoping to get money from him to buy himself a potato peeler. This is satire of the absurdly acquisitive common man, in the mood of Thoreau. Enoch works for the City and does not “go in for a lot of Jesus business.” Following the blind preacher, Motes is blind to a traffic light and gets lectured by a policeman who uses a racial slur in claiming that society treats everybody equally: “Men and women, white folks and niggers, all go on the same light.”

Enoch vouches for Haze, assures the policeman he will look after him and lies by claiming this is his home town. Enoch sounds like a character out of Mark Twain when he describes his foster mother as “hard to get along with...she sho was ugly. She had theseyer brown glasses and her hair was so thin it looked like ham gravy trickling over her skull.” Enoch tells how he escaped her clutches by pulling the sheet off her in bed and exposing himself to her naked, giving her a heart attack. They catch up to the blind preacher and the girl and the preacher exposes himself as not blind at all when he “reached out suddenly and his hands covered Haze’s face; then again when “Haze ducked down a step but the blind man’s hand shot out and clamped him around the arm... ‘I can see more than you!’ the blind man yelled, laughing. ‘You got eyes and see not, ears and hear not, but you’ll have to see some time’.” The blind man who is not really blind proves to be an accurate prophet.

Motes denies he has been following the preacher: “I wouldn’t follow a blind fool like that. My Jesus.” By juxtaposition his repeated exclamation “My Jesus” seems to equate the preacher with Jesus as he tries to dissociate himself from both of them. Ironically, Haze is too blind himself to notice that the preacher is not really blind, and by analogy neither was Jesus. Now in his blindness Haze declares himself a preacher to the crowd: “‘Don’t I have eyes in my head? Am I a blind man? Listenhere,’ he called, ‘I’m going to preach a new church—the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified. It won’t cost you nothing to join my church’.” No morals required. “What do I need with Jesus? I got Leora Watts.”

The lonely Enoch follows Haze trying to make friends but is rejected: “You act like you think you got wiser blood than anybody else,” Enoch says, “but you ain’t. I’m the one has it. Not you. *Me*.” Haze is too consumed by lust to have wisdom in his blood. In the room of his new savior Mrs. Watts, “His throat got

dryer and his heart began to grip him like a little ape clutching the bars of its cage.” Mrs. Watts has a grin like “the blade of a sickle,” evoking the popular image of death. “It was plain that she was so well-adjusted that she didn’t have to think any more.”

In his memory of going to a carnival as a boy, inside a secret tent a crowd of men stood “looking down into a lowered place where something white was lying, squirming a little, in a box lined with black cloth. For a second he thought it was a skinned animal and then he saw it was a woman.” Her white skin recalls the peeler box reducing all potatoes to the same white shape. His father compares the box she is in to a casket, associating lust with death, the lure of the flesh to being trapped in a box—like addiction to porn. The naked woman has a “cross-shaped face,” but there is no salvation in sex. Haze recalls his puritanical mother washing clothes, a paragon of rigid moral purity, her cleanliness next to Godliness. His mother conditioned him to be a puritan and his walking miles with rocks in his shoes to purge his feeling of guilt prepares for his shocking act at the end of the novel.

4

By now Haze has a face both fragile and “like a gun no one knows is loaded.” He goes out to buy a car for the first time in his life, another machine representing the secular City, like the train and the potato peeler. At a used car lot he has a buy-at-first-sight experience: “It was a high rat-colored machine with large thin wheels and bulging headlights.” Rat-colored for joining the rat race in the City, the car is another box, as Haze buys into the prevailing values of America. The salesman has a face like an “eagle’s” and says the price of materialism is the sacrifice of spirituality: “Jesus on the cross.... Christ nailed.” What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul? His irreverence is expressed when his windshield wipers “made a great clatter like two idiots clapping in church.”

When he stops on the road and a truckdriver tells him to move his “goddam outhouse” out of the way, Haze declares himself indifferent to other people: “I don’t have to run from anything because I don’t believe in anything.” He asks for directions to the zoo and the truckdriver answers “Did you escape from there?” The insult is apt. Without any belief at all, Hazel Motes is like an animal who is a pain in the ass and may be a danger to other people, like The Misfit in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” Enoch Emery the fool will deliberately try to become an animal.

5

Wise Blood is systematically psychological like the fiction of Hawthorne. Haze is driven by ideas in his head, while Enoch is instinctive: “He had wise blood like his daddy.” His brain was “divided into two parts. The part [heart] in communication with his blood [instincts] did the figuring but it never said anything in words. The other part [head] was stocked up with all kinds of words and phrases.” Enoch works as a guard in CITY FOREST PARK: “The park was the heart of the city. He had come to the city and—with a knowing in his blood—he had established himself at the heart of it. Every day he looked at the heart of it; every day; and he was so stunned and awed and overwhelmed that just to think about it made him sweat.” Of course, what makes him sweat the most is looking at women in the park. He is lustful like Haze, but inhibited too: “He visited a whore when he felt like it but he was always being shocked by the looseness he saw in the open. He crawled into the bushes out of a sense of propriety.” He feels guilty about his lust and imagines that anyone who caught him peeking at women would think he saw a devil.” Though he guards them he hates the animals in the zoo because his “wise blood”—his individuating psyche or human instinct—is impelling him toward transcendence of animality.

At the center of the park, his heart, is a mystery. The setting in *Wise Blood* expresses the archetypal paradigm of spatial metaphors: City, Garden (park), and Wilderness contained in the museum—“the dark secret center of the park.” The mystery at the center is ineffable and Enoch cannot explain it, he can only show it to a “special person” who “could not be from the city but he didn’t know why.” His blood tells him “the person would come today.” Ironically, this echoes the coming of Christ. Haze the anti-Christ arrives and they both watch a woman by the swimming pool with her straps down. Enoch experiences the traditional religious conflict between the spirit and the flesh, one of the major themes of American literature first expressed by Anne Bradstreet in her poem “The Flesh and the Spirit” (1678). “Enoch was looking both ways at once.” Earlier he is said to be “trying to balance himself.”

Now, feeling a sense of mission, he rises up and follows the spirit. Still another preacher in the story, Enoch tries to persuade Haze to go along with him to the mystery, like a disciple converting followers to Christ. He approaches the mystery through rituals that move from postmodern civilization represented by the grotesque waitress in the FROSTY BOTTLE and back through wilderness in the zoo, the typical path of individuation from City to Wilderness except that here the Wilderness is contained, artificial. The birds in the zoo are caged and those in the museum are dead. Enoch must try to individuate through the artificial environment of the Unreal City, rather than in a true Wilderness—literal or figurative—as he might have through human relationship. His experience is artificial, pathetic and absurd—a parody of Existentialism. Pynchon and other Postmodernists later satirized the quest as atheists, whereas O'Connor the Modernist affirms transcendence through the redemption of Hazel Motes. When Haze rejects Enoch by throwing a rock that hits him in the forehead, the incident echoes the biblical David killing the giant Goliath with his slingshot. Haze cannot kill Enoch, who becomes Gonga—a Goliath of popular sentimental falsehoods—he can only seek to redeem himself and transcend this world.

They look down at a shrunken man in a glass case: “He was about three feet long. He was naked and a dried yellow color and his eyes were drawn almost shut as if a giant block of steel were falling down on top of him.” Enoch expects a revelation: “Oh Jesus Jesus, he prayed, let him hurry up and do whatever he’s going to do!” In one sense (1) this is hyperbole comparing the shrunken man with Jesus, whose influence has shrunk in the world. God is dead in secular postmodern society, figuratively relegated to a museum. In the showcase glass the reflected eyes of Motes “were like two clean bullet holes.” (2) The mummy reflects Enoch’s own spiritual death and shrunken humanity. When Haze sees the mother’s (wholesome living mummy’s) face reflected near his own “his neck jerked back and he made a noise. It might have come from the man inside the case. In a second Enoch knew it had.” (3) The mummy has spoken to Haze in a figurative sense, as an image of his own eventual death and decay without an afterlife. If he heard the mummy speak literally, it would confirm the afterlife and make it less likely he would go on to preach against Christ. (4) To Enoch, however, the event is paranormal: The noise Haze makes seems to be channeled from the shrunken man. Enoch has had a transcendent experience: “He rolled over and lay stretched out on the ground, with an exalted look on his face. He thought he was floating.”

6

Haze Motes the spiritually blind man follows the preacher he thinks is blind, then he drives to a movie theater with blinding lights. “The lights around the marquee were so bright that the moon, moving overhead with a small procession of clouds behind it, looked pale and insignificant.” Artificial civilization is so dominant now that it has displaced Nature in consciousness, blinding us with illusions epitomized by the movies beckoning the world to its ticket box.

When he climbs onto the hood of his car Haze preaches materialism: “that church where the blind don’t see and the lame don’t walk and what’s dead stays that way.... Jesus was a liar.” He is articulating the Atheism of cultural elites in the Postmodern period of the 20th century. O’Connor places liberal secular critics and academics in the awkward position of agreeing with a crude religious fanatic. She made them so uncomfortable, especially the Feminists, they ignored *Wise Blood*.

Haze rents a room in the building where the blind preacher lives with his daughter. The landlady asks him what church he preaches and he says, “The Church Without Christ.” The landlady is no theologian: “Protestant?” O’Connor makes a Catholic joke when Haze confirms that, yes, his anti-Christian church is indeed Protestant, implying that now the Protestants need a Reformation. His room is another box a little larger than his car, with no fire escape—like an omen. At this point Haze is destined for the fires of Hell. Interested in the girl rather than the preacher, in lust rather than spirit he visits them in their room. When he leaves, the “blind” preacher “from a hole in the window shade, watched him get in his car and drive off.” The girl likes Haze for his eyes: “They don’t look like they see what he’s looking at but they keep on looking.” The fake blind man is also a fake Christian and “his face was thoughtful and evil.”

The calculating girl and the naïve Haze decide to seduce each other, she to get away from her father and he “to prove he didn’t believe in sin.” He takes it for granted that she is innocent. He buys a flexible white panama hat with a striped band that is the “opposite” of his rigid black hat, transforming from a puritan into

a liberal. He has converted to materialism: “Nobody with a good car needs to be justified.” The fake blind preacher shows his news clipping to Haze that proclaims his promise to “blind himself to justify his belief that Christ Jesus had redeemed him.” He does not show Haze the subsequent clipping, “EVANGELIST’S NERVE FAILS.” Instead, the fake ran away from Jesus. Haze is running away from Jesus too, and he places blind faith in his machine, and in the mechanic who assures him it is a good vehicle, rather than in the honest mechanic who says it cannot be put “in the best order.”

7

Haze drives into the countryside to see how well his car works after repairs. “The sky was just a little lighter blue than his suit, clear and even, with only one cloud in it, a large blinding white one with curls and a beard.” The cloud is the reductive popular image of God as an old bearded white man in the sky, as Michelangelo painted Him on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. This traditional image of God is “blinding” like the bright cloud. Haze is identified with this naïve conception by the nearly matching blue of his suit, indicating that, despite his efforts, he has not escaped his nature as determined by his early conditioning, a theme elaborated by Poe, an early influence on O’Connor, in his story “William Wilson.” The cloud is an image of superficial popular beliefs in general, personified in a cartoon God.

Nor can Haze escape his body, his lust—all that he has without spirit. Sabbath is hidden in his backseat. Her last name Hawks indicates her predatory nature and her middle name Lily promises death, yet also perhaps resurrection. Haze changes “his ugly tone...remembering that he was going to seduce her.” An advice columnist advises Sabbath Lily to adjust to the modern world and she replies, “What I really want to know is should I go the whole hog or not.” Up to now she has only gone part hog. “That’s my real problem,” says the postmodern Sabbath. “I’m adjusted okay to the modern world.” Haze kicks her foot “roughly away from his” and she accuses him of sexual harassment. She is a postmodern Feminist in the making. “The blinding white cloud was a little ahead of them, moving to the left.”

They stop in the countryside with a distant “telescoped view of the city. The white cloud was directly in front of them.” Haze is obsessed with the religious history of her apparent father: “How did he come to believe?” Haze asked. ‘What changed him into a preacher for Jesus?’” Sabbath Lily leads him out of his head into a field: “I can save you,’ she said.” Sabbath declares “I got a church in my heart where Jesus is King,” but she immediately converts to the church of Haze without Jesus. She is an easy lay. Haze assures her that in his church she would be an equal: “There’s no such thing as a bastard in the Church Without Christ,’ he said. ‘Everything is all one. A bastard wouldn’t be any different from anybody else.’” Haze is preaching barbarism. Without Christ there is no morality. Everybody can be as much of a bastard as they please—in marriage and everything else. “That’s good,’ she said.” O’Connor is satirizing the popular liberal platitude that “Everything is all one”—the monism of Emerson and Asian religions—because the real world is full of bastards from whom we should differentiate ourselves. For secular liberals the platitude serves to eliminate guilt, establish moral relativism, and advance collectivism.

Sabbath Hawks “pulled open her collar and lay down on the ground full length. ‘Ain’t my feet white, though?’ she raised them slightly.” The image of white recalls the naked white girl he saw in a tent at the carnival when he was a boy. Haze spurns and leaves her—broken down and apparently out of gas. She follows him to a store with a gas pump where they look into a cage at a bear with only one eye and bird shit on his back and a hawk perched above him with most of its tail gone.” The hawk is identified with Miss Hawks, the shitty half-blind bear with Haze. The caged animals prefigure their likely future together. He just wanted to seduce the girl, peel her like a potato—not marry her.

Once again Haze puts all his faith in his car and drives away with Sabbath. “The blinding white cloud had turned into a bird with long thin wings and was disappearing in the opposite direction.” The modern faith in machines—secular materialism—takes people in a direction opposite to traditional ideals and away from God. That the cloud transforms into a bird indicates that God is manifest in various forms and cannot be reduced to an anthropomorphic cartoon.

Enoch is a counterpoint to Haze: “Sometimes he didn’t think, he only wondered; then before long he would find himself doing this or that, like a bird finds itself building a nest when it hasn’t actually been planning to.” This comparison of Enoch to a bird identifies him with the cloud at the end of the preceding chapter, implying that he acts on instincts deriving from God, rather than acting on his own ideas like Haze: “His blood was more sensitive than any other part of him.” His blood, instinct, is wise enough to know that the shrunken man in the museum represents “a mystery beyond his understanding,” whereas the headstrong Haze is driving his car in the opposite direction.

Green is a motif throughout the novel connoting growth and forward movement—train seat, car interior and window shades, the teeth of Mrs. Watts, Enoch’s park uniform. Enoch lives in a little green room in an attic. “There was a mummified look and feel to this residence, but Enoch had never thought before of brightening the part (corresponding to the head) that he lived in.” This is further evidence that O’Connor is using the systematic head/heart psychology traditional in American literature since Anne Bradstreet and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The “mummified” look of the room identifies Enoch spiritually with the mummy in the museum, while the green of the room is hopeful—but fading.

Enoch’s blood is wise at least in knowing, unlike Haze, that “what he didn’t know was what mattered.” His washstand is in three parts, standing on “bird legs.” This piece of furniture “had always been the center of the room and the one that most connected him with what he didn’t know.” The cabinet symbolizes his psyche with the paradigm of archetypal metaphors in vertical form: a *head* piece at the top, a mirror of himself in the middle surrounded by *hearts*, scrolls and flowers; and the “lowest part” a cabinet like a “tabernacle” meant to contain a slop jar, representing the *body*, which Enoch mistakenly identifies with his *soul* as connoted by “tabernacle”). The washstand on bird legs where he cleanses himself in the center reflects his psyche dominated by his head in a *vertical* mode of consciousness, dissociated from the mystery of the spirit and “mummified.” His soul is like a dead bird in the museum.

Instinctively seeking the center “where the meaning was,” Enoch goes not to Nature but to the center of the City business district, to “the center of a small alcove that formed the entrance to the drug store.” He buys popcorn from a boy “who was there to serve the machine.” He comes upon Hazel preaching to people that “What you need is something to take the place of Jesus.... Give me this new Jesus, somebody, so we’ll all be saved by the sight of him!” Haze has realized that he cannot save the world from Jesus by himself, that he needs a new Jesus who will save everybody on sight—bastards and everybody—with no questions asked and no morality required. In front of a drug store he is heralding a second coming like pitching a miracle drug, hawking religion like the fake Asa Hawks, and like the hawker of potato peelers.

Haze has turned away from the profane Sabbath: “He abandoned the notion of seducing her and tried to protect himself”—prefiguring the general response of males to Feminism later in the 20th century. Haze thinks he sees truth in a fake blind man who refuses to see him. “Haze couldn’t understand why the preacher didn’t welcome him and act like a preacher should when he sees what he believes is a lost soul.” Despite all his preaching, Haze is a lost soul himself, seeking truth from a liar.

He goes to a whorehouse with a Catholic boy who will repent only after he has had his fun and enjoys himself more than Haze, who does not even believe in sin—he thinks. Though she is a devoted Catholic, O’Connor is an ecumenical critic of Christians, like Melville. Haze Motes preaches materialism standing on the nose of his car like an animated hood ornament. His first apparent disciple turns out to be another preacher who calls himself Holy. Onnie Jay Holy. He claims to be a “radio star” but he wears no socks. He wears a white hat like a cowboy Good Guy, has “showy sideburns” and claims he can play a guitar that he did not bring with him. Preaching to people emerging from the movie theater, the phony Holy takes the spotlight away from the authoritarian Haze, who has been driving people away by preaching blasphemy. “No one had followed him.”

The new Holy man preaches liberalism and attracts people in increasing numbers: “‘Every person that comes into this earth,’ he said, stretching out his arms, ‘is born sweet and full of love.... I was sweet inside, like ever’body else...’” Sabbath Hawks, for one, makes this sentimentality ridiculous. Onnie Jay the con man is a kinsman of the Duke and the King in *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). The liberal panders to ignorance: “If you don’t understand it, it ain’t true.... Nobody knows nothing you don’t know.... This church is up-to-date.... It’s based on your own personal interpretation of the Bible, friends. You can sit at home and interpret your own Bible however you feel in your heart it ought to be interpreted.” Liberal academics and judges who interpreted texts subjectively according to their personal politics during the late 20th century were prefigured by Onnie Jay Holy. The postmodern fantasist Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. once said, “You are what you pretend to be.” Vonnegut got rich pretending to be a liberal.

Haze keeps trying to inform the audience: “This man is lying.” But no one pays any attention because Onnie Jay is so sweet and has flattered their vanity and promised them easy salvation. This satire of liberalism is in the tradition of Hawthorne’s “The Celestial Railroad” (1843) and Melville’s phony holy man in *Pierre* (1852), Professor Plotinus Plinlimmon, especially when Onnie Jay solicits money from the audience. The most famous literary portrayal of corrupt evangelism is *Elmer Gantry* (1927) by Sinclair Lewis. In contrast, Haze demonstrates that, however wrongheaded, he has integrity: “It don’t cost you any money to know the truth! You can’t know it for money!”

He tries to escape Onnie Jay in his car, but it lurches back and forth so much “He had to grip the steering wheel with both hands to keep from being thrown either out the windshield or into the back.” He is badly shaken. His only disciple turned out to be a fraud. His lurching car expresses (is the objective correlative for) his own frustration at his misplaced faith. The machine becomes the vehicle of his revenge. “Haze turned his head and looked at him long enough to see the smile before it was thrown forward at the windshield. After that the Essex began running smoothly.”

Resorting to ridiculous flattery, Onnie Jay compares Haze to Jesus Christ and Abraham Lincoln. Haze is outraged by the lie, having become a deliberate sinner and even an anti-Christ, yet once again he displays integrity: “You ain’t true.” He realizes that Onnie Jay is just a huckster like the potato peeler salesman and shoves him out of his car, but the car fails him again. Looking to cash in, Onnie Jay tries to persuade Haze that he needs a business partner: “I’m an artist-type. If you want to get anywhere in religion, you got to keep it sweet.” He sees economic potential in this new Jesus concept: “‘All it would need is a little promotion.... I kind of have had that idear about a new Jesus myself,’ he remarked. ‘I seen how a new one would be more up-to-date.’” Haze tells him “There’s no such thing as a new Jesus. That ain’t anything but a way to say something.” Onnie Jay accuses Haze of being one of those “innerlectchuls,” linking him to academics. “‘Get your head out of my car door, Holy,’ Haze said.” Then the liberal preacher outs himself as not Holy at all: “‘My name is Hoover Shoates,’ the man with his head in the door growled.” He vows to run Haze out of business: “I can get my own new Jesus.”

Still in his car, Haze falls asleep and dreams “he was not dead but only buried. He was not waiting on the Judgement because there was no Judgement, he was waiting on nothing.... He kept expecting Hawks to appear at the oval window with a wrench, but the blind man didn’t come.” His own blindness is indicated in the dream by his (1) continuing to believe that Hawks is blind; (2) expecting Hawks to come to his rescue; (3) fixing his car with a wrench. That “the blind man didn’t come” is evidence that Haze’s unconscious—his own wise blood—senses that Hawks is no savior.

Upon awakening at midnight, Haze picks the lock on the door of Hawks’ room, sneaks in and lights a match to look at his face. Hawks opens his eyes. “The two sets of eyes looked at each other as long as the match lasted.” Finally he sees that Hawks is not blind at all.

Now he realizes that he is the blind one. In his disillusionment, he becomes a Postmodernist: “there’s no truth”; “Your conscience is a trick”; “kill it.” Hoover Shoates shows up with a double of Hazel Motes who preaches that a new Jesus is coming. Haze sees his double as his conscience, like William Wilson in the story by Poe: “If you don’t hunt it down and kill it,” he says, “it’ll hunt you down and kill you.” When

he leaves, a woman says of Hazel, "He's nuts." Sabbath Lily is waiting in his bed and tells him he is obliged to take care of her now that Hawks has abandoned her: "He's just a crook." Haze finally succumbs to her charms and climbs into bed with her. She has "bright green eyes" and promises to teach him how to be "pure filthy right down to the guts, like me."

11

Enoch breaks into the glass case of the mummy with a "wrench," suggesting that this may be the salvation of Haze rather than Hawks, who in his dream never comes with a wrench. At the same time, however, Enoch is satirized for darkening his face so that "he would be taken for a colored person," but then he "realized as soon as he got out of the museum that since no one had seen him to think he was a colored boy, he would be suspected immediately and would have to disguise himself." Enoch was said to be a thief when he was first introduced and he is clearly not a reliable thinker. The boy is ridiculous in dark glasses and a black beard, taking the shrunken man to his room like "a baby." He anticipates that now something important is going to happen, but his notion of rebirth goes no deeper than personality. "He pictured himself, after it was over, as an entirely new man, with an even better personality than he had now." Even better? His personality is so unattractive he has no friends. Comical rather than tragic like Haze, Enoch is grotesque in his foolishness, conceit and clumsy failures.

When nothing happens, Enoch sticks his head into the "tabernacle" of his washstand where the mummy is hidden with his slop jar. "At the first instant he had thought it was the shriveled man who had sneezed, but after a second, he perceived the condition of his own nose." In retrospect, this parallel suggests that Enoch was similarly mistaken in thinking the mummy had made the noise that caused Haze to run out of the museum. The noise was not paranormal after all. There is no "new jesus": "His expression had showed that a deep unpleasant knowledge was breaking on him slowly. After awhile he had kicked the ark door shut in the new jesus' face, and then he had got up and begun to eat a candy bar very rapidly." He needs his religion sweet, just as Onnie Jay Holy preached. Calling his cabinet an "ark" is a satirical analogy to the Ark of the Covenant in the Bible.

Now disillusioned with Haze for preaching faith in a new jesus, Enoch wants revenge, a parallel to Haze wanting revenge against Onnie Jay: "he wanted to get rid of the new jesus so that if the police had to catch anybody for the robbery, they could catch Hazel Motes instead of him." Now he sees the shrunken man in completely material terms, as nothing but "a dead shriveled-up part-nigger dwarf." Loss of faith brings out the worst in him. When he reads the poster advertising the coming appearance of Gongga the gorilla his faith is suddenly revived by opportunism: "To his mind, an opportunity to insult a successful ape came from the hand of Providence. He suddenly regained all his reverence for the new jesus." He interprets the new jesus subjectively the way he likes—as sanctioning lies, insults, and even murder—just as Onnie Jay Holy preached that he could. He converts back and forth as fast as Sabbath in the sack. Gongga arrives in a truck and "appeared at the door, with the raincoat buttoned up to his chin and the collar turned up." At first Enoch is fooled by the fake gorilla just as Haze was fooled by the fake blind preacher.

The apparently real gorilla represents wild Nature uncontained by civilization, by the zoo where Enoch feels safe. "Enoch was terrified and if he had not been surrounded by the children, he would have run away." The growls of the gorilla "appeared to issue from a black heart." The first two children brave enough to step forward and shake hands with the gorilla are both little girls. Enoch feels like insulting the gorilla with an obscene remark "but his brain, both parts, was completely empty." Then the gorilla fills his heart: "It was the first hand that had been extended to Enoch since he had come to the city. It was warm and soft." He pours out his life history to a beast, trying to make friends, a parallel to Haze and his first disciple, who turned out to be a fake. "'You go to hell,' a surly voice inside the ape-suit said...and the hand was jerked away." Seeing the "ugly" human eyes behind the celluloid gorilla eyes and hearing the human voice, Enoch runs away humiliated. "Enoch had an urgent need to insult somebody immediately." He hands over the mummy to Sabbath and insults her, cruel now like Gongga.

Sabbath is just as comical and pathetic as Enoch, thinking about Haze: "He's not really sick, she said to herself going down the hall, he just ain't used to me yet." She sits down on the edge of a green bathtub and opens the package containing the mummy: "Two days out of the glass case had not improved the new jesus' condition." Sabbath sees all humanity in him: "there was something in him of everyone she had ever

known, as if they had all been rolled into one person and killed and shrunk and died.” She holds him, rocks him and talks to him like her baby—Sabbath Lily a mock madonna. When she asks “Who’s your momma and daddy?” it suggests that the little atheist jesus may be a bastard like herself.

Haze prepares to leave Sabbath, drive away and start his life over again in a different city, a rootless Postmodernist. He puts on the old glasses of his puritanical mother and they improve his eyesight. “He saw his mother’s face in his, looking at the face in the mirror.” Just then Sabbath comes in with her fake baby in her arms: “Call me Momma now.” Suddenly recognizing her “baby” as the mummy, Haze is outraged by the falsehood and grabs it away from her and smashes it against the wall. “I don’t want nothing but the truth!” he shouted.” His finality here prepares for his blinding himself: “I’ve seen the only truth there is!” he shouted.” Improving his vision of the material world does not help him see the truth. What he sees is the perverse embrace of a fake as the Postmodern baby jesus. That is why he pulls off his mother’s glasses and “threw them out the door.” His desperation is expressed in his cough: “it sounded like a little yell for help at the bottom of a canyon.” He will die in a ditch.

12

Haze wants to be saved, Enoch wants to be famous. “He wanted, some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand.” He fashions a weapon out of an umbrella by stripping it down to “a black stick with a sharp steel point at one end.” He sneaks into Gongga’s truck, implicitly kills the actor in the ape suit and steals his identity: “Burying his clothes was not a symbol to him of burying his former self; he only knew he wouldn’t need them anymore.” He has decided to become a (fake) gorilla. He will never wear clothes again. He puts on the gorilla suit: “For an instant, it had two heads, one light and one dark.” Covering up his real head, in a sense burying it like his clothes, he pretends to become a happy gorilla “whose god had finally rewarded it.” Instead of individuating toward transcendence, Enoch becomes a murderer, regressing to the primitive in a comic echo of the atavism theme in Naturalism.

A violent hippie ahead of his time, Enoch in an ape suit is O’Connor’s satire of the pantheism that soon would become popular in the countercultural revolution of the 1960s and then in the sentimental environmentalist movement. Enoch the friendly fake tries to shake hands with a man sitting beside a woman at a romantic viewpoint but the man quietly escapes in fear, abandoning the woman, who is even less attracted to a wild gorilla and “fled screaming down the highway.” Enoch’s failure here parallels Haze’s failure to convert anyone. After the 1960s, however, fakes became very successful.

13

Haze follows his double, Solace Layfield, the man paid by the promoter Hoover Shoats to steal and exploit his ploy that a new jesus is coming. They are both driving “high rat-colored cars,” suggesting that both are rats themselves for preaching against Christ, though Solace has mitigating circumstances—his tuberculosis and his wife and six children to support. Haze rams the other car into a ditch. Solace coughs as Haze did when “it sounded like a little yell for help at the bottom of a canyon.” Haze accuses Solace of being untrue because he believes in Jesus. The irony here is as extreme as in *Huckleberry Finn* when Huck thinks he’s going to hell because he believes in Jim. “Two things I can’t stand,’ Haze said, ‘—a man that ain’t true and one that mocks what is’.”

So he kills Solace. He knocks him flat with his car, runs over him and then backs over his body. His brutality to his double prepares for his violence against himself. By killing any man he has in a sense killed himself—the humanity in himself—a point emphasized by making the victim his double. Conscience is a solace to the human race, where it exists, and Solace corresponds to the conscience of Haze, as in Poe’s allegory “William Wilson.” In Chapter 10 Haze preaches that “Your conscience is a trick” and you had best “hunt it down and kill it.”

Ironically, Haze the atheist who does not believe in sin puts himself in the position of a priest “leaning his head closer to hear the confession” while telling the dying man to shut up, as if he has two heads like Enoch putting on his gorilla suit. For Haze is seeking salvation himself while preaching against it. When

Solace prays “Jesus hep me,” indicating that he is saved, the atheist Haze slaps him on the back with a death stroke, which evokes in contrast the slap bringing life to a newborn.

At the gas station, still misplacing his faith, Haze tells the attendant that “nobody with a good car needed to worry about anything.” He declares himself a materialist: “He said it was not right to believe anything you couldn’t see or hold in your hands or test with your teeth.” O’Connor has picked up a major theme of Hawthorne, as in “The Artist of the Beautiful.” Haze realizes now that in preaching blasphemy he was “believing in something to blaspheme.” In frustration he blasphemes Jesus some more while the car he believes in instead is leaking gas, oil, water, and air out a tire. His materialism is symbolized by a car that will not get him where he wants to go just as Calvinism was satirized by Oliver Wendell Holmes as an old buggy falling apart in “The Deacon’s Masterpiece” (1858).

Haze does not get far. A patrolman stops him, another double who mirrors his own belligerence and prejudice in a postmodern world without morality. The patrolman pushes his car into a ditch, just as Haze had done to Solace. The buzzard overhead knows and the parallelism in the structure of *Wise Blood* implies that Haze is also going to die like Solace. He has invested his identity and all his faith in his machine. Now he has nothing. His illusions end with his car in a ditch like a grave, as happens also to the car in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” where the grandmother is blinded by her liberal faith. In O’Connor’s stories there is usually an epiphany as in James Joyce, a transforming revelation or reception of grace. In *Wise Blood* this happens to Haze when he looks at his car in the ditch.

The patrolman leaves him, saying, “Well, I’ll be seeing you,” whereas Haze walks to the store to buy quicklime to blind himself. Losing everything shocks him into realizing that he cannot escape, that sin is real and that to expiate a sin as terrible as murder requires an extreme penance. He realizes the magnitude of his guilt and is matter of fact to his landlady about what he must do to redeem himself. His landlady reacts to his behavior as most people would. Hazel is nuts. However, though she is “not religious” herself, Haze is a true prophet in forcing her to face the meaning of death for the “first time.”

14

Mrs. Flood the landlady represents the flood of materialists in the modern world--envious, acquisitive, greedy, dishonest people. “She liked to see things.... What provoked her most was the thought that there might be something valuable hidden near her, something she couldn’t see. To her, the blind man had the look of seeing something.” Just the opposite of the landlady, Haze no longer sees material things. Many ironies in the last chapter are generated by this traditional contrast between physical sight and inner vision. The blind seer is recurrent in cultural histories around the world. As Haze says, “If there’s no bottom in your eyes, they hold more.”

He sounds like his puritanical mother when he declares, “I’m not clean.” He does penance by walking miles with rocks and broken glass in his shoes and sleeping with barbed wire wrapped around his chest, mortifying his flesh. “He might as well be in a monastery,” thinks the landlady. “Why had he destroyed his eyes and saved himself unless he had some plan, unless he saw something that he couldn’t get without being blind to everything else?” He is dead to the material world: “Anyone who saw her from the sidewalk would think she was being courted by a corpse.” She suggests he buy a guitar and strum it for her (like Onnie Jay Holy). He tells her “You can’t see.” When he gives her his money “She realized now that he was a mad man and that he ought to be under the control of a sensible person.”

Mrs. Flood is a moral relativist, dishonest, hedonistic and liberal—in effect a follower of Onnie Jay: “I believe that what’s right today is wrong tomorrow and that the time to enjoy yourself is now so long as you let others do the same.” Haze tells her, “You can’t see.” When she proposes marriage, he knows it is time to leave. “If she was going to be blind when she was dead, who better to guide her than a blind man? Who better to lead the blind than the blind...?” Proposing to him, she claims “I got a place for you in my heart, Mr. Motes,” she said and felt it shaking like a bird cage.” She wants to cage him like a bird in the zoo. Yet she is better than many landlords. “I’m as good, Mr. Motes,” she said, “not believing in Jesus as many a one that does.” This is criticism of sinful Christians in the tone of Mark Twain. “You’re better,” says

Haze. 'If you believed in Jesus, you wouldn't be so good'." As Faulkner said, "I think the trouble with Christianity is that we've never tried it yet."

The landlady is annoyed by an intuition that Haze is seeing something "over her head." She imagines "his head bigger than the world, his head big enough to include the sky and planets and whatever was or had been or would be." Physical blindness and ascetic discipline have expanded his consciousness, but he is like a man "walking in a tunnel and all [he] could see was a pin point of light." This is the most typical description of the death experience given by people who have come back to life after dying—flatlined on the scope. The landlady identifies the dying Haze with those who followed "the star on Christmas cards. She saw him going backwards to Bethlehem and she had to laugh." Haze is identified with the wise men before they have arrived and seen the baby Jesus, except that he is going to it "backwards." The two policemen who find Haze unconscious in a ditch resemble the plumpish Onnie Jay Holy—fat with yellow hair and sideburns. One of the cops gives him a blow to the head with his club. Take that. Society as represented by the cops does not even notice when he dies in their patrol car on the way back to the landlady's to pay "his rent"—as if he had not paid enough.

The landlady does not notice either, welcoming his corpse: "I see you've come home." She waives his rent. "She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin." Staring into his eyes with hers shut, blinding herself, indicates that she is beginning to develop inner sight like Haze. He is her blind "guide" as she puts it, but he is moving away from her into the darkness. To her he is still alive at the end of the story. At the end Haze becomes the "pin point of light" that she has identified with (1) the star that signaled the birth of Christ and guided the wise men to him; (2) the light of heaven at the end of the death tunnel; and, implicitly, (3) union with God. Ironically, after blaspheming against Christ through the whole story, Haze himself becomes a Christ-evoking figure to his only disciple. Yet more ironically, he himself has yet to see the light. His thinking is still "backwards." But since his car died in the ditch he has been impelled blindly toward redemption by his "wise blood." The wisdom in his blood came by the grace of God from the blood of Jesus Christ crucified in redemption. Haze's last gesture in the novel indicates that he is still groping: "His hand was moving along the edge of the ditch as if it were hunting something to grip."

This point of light image also concludes "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" (1935) by Katherine Anne Porter, with different implications. Both stories end ironically. Hazel Motes' landlady may have just begun to develop faith, whereas Granny loses faith at the last moment.

Michael Hollister (2015)