

Wise Blood Study Guide

Wise Blood by Flannery O'Connor

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Introduction

The story of a man named Hazel Motes, who denies his Christianity and takes desperate measures to prove his disbelief, Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* made its debut in 1952. Harcourt Brace published the novel right after O'Connor spent a difficult winter suffering from symptoms that doctors later diagnosed as systemic lupus erythematosus. Critics concur that the disease greatly affected O'Connor's life and work, while they question the specific effects it had on her fiction. Many think that O'Connor's use of the grotesque arose from her own experiences with a disease-ravaged body, yet the general consensus is that O'Connor's religious southern upbringing was the most important influence on her writing.

When *Wise Blood* first appeared, critics gave it little attention and few accolades. O'Connor was not well known, and she was writing at the same time as famous writers William Faulkner and Daphne du Maurier. Critics viewed O'Connor as a minor writer, and put her in the same category as other Southern writers of the time, based on her use of violence and bizarre characters. The novel's religious meaning, later to become its strength, escaped recognition. Critic Isaac Rosenfeld, for example, stated in *New Republic* that Motes "is nothing more than the poor, sick, ugly, raving lunatic that he happens to be."

While most reviewers believed O'Connor's own testimony to the religious meaning in *Wise Blood*, novelist John Hawkes criticized O'Connor as being somewhat captivated by the Devil. Since that time in 1962, however, critics have defended O'Connor's purpose. They applaud her ability to present her basic theme of Christ's redemption of mankind. In the final analysis, critics now view *Wise Blood* as an outstanding religious novel.

Author Biography

Flannery O'Connor wrote from her experiences as a Roman Catholic raised in the Protestant South. Her religion and regional upbringing greatly contributed to her themes and writing style. Yet critics agree that her father's death from lupus-as well as her own later suffering from the same disease-were also significant influences on her writing.

Born Mary Flannery O'Connor to Edward Francis and Regina Cline O'Connor on March 25, 1925, in Savannah, Georgia, O'Connor lived in that southern city until the Great Depression forced the family to seek job opportunities elsewhere. O'Connor and her parents moved to Milledgeville, Georgia, where her grandparents lived and where she attended high school and college. While the family was living in Milledgeville, O'Connor's father died of systemic lupus erythematosus ("lupus" or "SLE"), a disease that results when the body's immune system goes out of control. O'Connor was thirteen at the time.

During her high school and college years, O'Connor demonstrated a talent for cartooning and writing. The characters she drew and the writing she did provided an often sarcastic view of the difficulties of growing up. O'Connor graduated from Peabody High School in 1942 and continued to write. She completed an A.B. degree in 1945 at the Georgia State College for Women (now Georgia College at Milledgeville) and, in 1947, a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing at the prestigious University of Iowa Writers' Workshop.

O'Connor worked on her first novel, *Wise Blood*, during late 1948 and early 1949 while living in Connecticut and New York. She submitted it to Harcourt Brace for publication during the winter of 1950-51. At that same time, she began to show early symptoms of the disease that killed her father. Suffering from fatigue and aching joints, the twenty-five-year-old O'Connor moved back to the southern climate in Milledgeville, where she was living when she received her diagnosis of lupus.

While lupus attacked her body with greater force over the years, O'Connor continued to write, and always with spiritual undertones. She endured pain and disfigurement from the disease and its treatments without allowing them to shake her faith. She constantly believed that the human body was not the real body; the only true body was the body of the resurrected. Critics agree that, her writing reflects this unwavering trust. For example, O'Connor's characters often exhibited grotesque appearances, actions, or personality traits-the imperfections resulting from a society that has lost its sense of spiritual purpose.

During the fourteen years after her diagnosis, O'Connor authored another novel and several short stories. She was the recipient of a number of awards, including O. Henry Memorial Awards in 1957, 1963, and 1964; a Ford Foundation grant in 1959; a National Catholic Book award in 1966; and the National Book Award in 1972, which she won for her book *The Complete Short Stories*. O'Connor died of lupus-related renal failure on August 3, 1964, in Atlanta, Georgia.



Plot Summary

A New Church

Set in the fictional town of Taulkinham, Tennessee, Flannery O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, tells the story of a confused and isolated young man who attempts to shed his obsessions with Jesus and Christian redemption. As a child, Hazel Motes-"Haze" for short-felt certain that he was destined to become a preacher like his grandfather. This certainty begins to fade when, at eighteen, he is drafted by the army and sent overseas. Haze spends four years away from home and, as a result, finds ample time to study his soul and assure himself "that it was not there." The novel explores the repercussions of that decision and chronicles Haze's life from the time he is released from the army until his death a short time later.

Upon leaving the army, Haze returns to his hometown of Eastrod only to find it run down and deserted. He takes a train to nearby Taulkinham, where, as he tells one of the passengers, he plans to do some of the things he has never done before. He spends his first night in town with a prostitute whose name he finds written on a bathroom wall. However, it is not long before his inner conflicts lead him elsewhere. The following night, he is handed a religious pamphlet by a young girl accompanying a blind preacher. Haze discards the leaflet but is drawn to the pair and follows them down the street. He is himself followed by Enoch Emery, a lonely eighteen-year-old boy who repeatedly informs Haze that Taulkinham is an unfriendly city.

When Haze and Enoch catch up to the preacher and the girl, the blind man tells Haze that he can "smell the sin on [his] breath" and "hear the urge for Jesus in his voice." Haze responds by saying that he does not believe in Sin and that Jesus does not exist. He then announces that he, too, is a preacher, and that he is going to preach a new church: the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified. The name is eventually shortened to The Church Without Christ.

A New Jesus

The next morning, Haze suddenly decides to buy a car. He finds an old Essex on a used car lot and drives to the park where Enoch spends his afternoons. He has come to ask the boy for the preacher's address, but Enoch, who has long awaited the chance to share his "secret mystery," tells Haze that he must first show him something

Enoch leads Haze through a daily routine of pointless rituals until finally bringing him to a museum in the center of the park. The building is filled with glass cases and Enoch's "secret" mystery"-the body of a small naked man shrunk by Arabs contained in one of them. Frustrated by the boy's foolishness, Haze hits Enoch on the forehead with a rock and leaves.



Haze eventually finds the blind preacher and rents a room in the boarding house, where he and the girl live. Hawks, the preacher, shows Haze a newspaper clipping explaining how he promised to blind himself to prove that Jesus had redeemed him. Haze reads the clipping three times before leaving. He claims that nobody with a good car needs to be Justified. After he is gone, the narrator reveals the existence of a second clipping telling how Hawks lost his nerve and did not actually blind himself.

Meanwhile, Enoch has decided that his life will never be the same. He believes that he has "wise blood" and is certain that something awful is expected of him. He tries to resist but eventually succumbs to the urgings of his blood. Led by his resignation, he happens across Haze preaching from his car. Enoch does not know about the Church Without Christ and is surprised to hear Haze talk of redemption and of the need for a new Jesus. When Haze then asks to be shown where this new Jesus can be found, Enoch, almost paralyzed in shock, whispers, "I got him, I can get him. You seen him yourself."

Despite Enoch's reaction, Haze does not have much luck attracting followers. Then, one night, an apparent disciple appears. As Haze's listeners begin to disperse, a man named Hoover Shoats steps up and tells how the prophet (Haze) changed his life. However, Shoats distorts Haze's words by telling the crowd that the new church is based on the Bible. He later threatens to put Haze out of business when he learns that the new Jesus does not actually exist. The following night, while Haze is again preaching from the nose of his car, Shoats arrives with his own hired prophet: a man dressed exactly like Haze. Haze is shocked by the image he sees and leaves.

During this time, Enoch, thinking that he has found the new Jesus, steals the shrunken figure from its glass case. He is on his way to deliver his discovery when he passes a crowd of kids waiting to meet Gonga the gorilla, a movie star. Enoch waits his turn to shake the ape's hand, but when his turn comes the ape-suited man tells Enoch to go to hell. Enoch runs off in humiliation and delivers his package to Haze. The latter is not impressed by the shriveled body of the dust-filled figure and throws it out the door.

After an afternoon spent fidgeting in his room, Enoch experiences an "awakening" when he finds the schedule for Gonga's tour. He quickly travels to the star's next public appearance, where he attacks and strips the gorilla in the back of his truck. Enoch then runs into the woods, buries his clothes, and puts on the ape suit. He proceeds to mimic the gorilla's gestures of hand shaking, repeatedly extending his hand and shaking at nothing, but his efforts prove futile. After a few moments of practice, Enoch approaches a young couple, hand extended and still wearing the ape suit, but they run away.

On the night Hoover Shoats and his hired prophet, Solace Layfield, appear for a second time, Haze follows his twin home. He forces Solace to stop on the side of the road and runs him over with his car. Haze then tells the injured man that there are two things he cannot stand, "a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is." Solace dies and Haze, intending to leave town, drives off. Haze's plans change when his car is pushed over an embankment by a patrolman who initially pulled him over because, as he tells Haze, "I



just don't like your face." Left without any means of transportation, Haze walks back to town and buys a bucket and some quicklime. He has decided to blind himself.

A New Hope?

In the final chapter, Haze, now referred to as the blind man, continues to live in the boarding house. His landlady, the complacent Mrs. Flood, thinks there may be some money to be made off the blind man and makes plans to marry him and have him committed. But she becomes accustomed to watching his face and soon decides that she would like to keep him. She suspects that he knows something and wishes she could penetrate the darkness and see for herself what was there. However, when she finally brings up marriage, the blind man gets up and leaves the house. Two days later, he is found lying in a ditch by two policemen; he dies moments later. The policemen bring him back to Mrs. Flood, who, upon looking into Haze's eyes to find out what has cheated her, feels that "she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin." She then sees the blind man moving "farther and farther into the darkness until he was [but a] pinpoint of light."



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

We meet the main character Hazel (Haze) Motes who is sitting on a train. He shifts his gaze between the passing scenery and the other end of the car. His seatmate, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, tries to make conversation but Haze pretty much ignores her. He is holding a stiff black hat and is wearing a new suit, but he has an army duffel at his feet. Mrs. Hitchcock had a hard time looking anywhere except Haze's eyes that are the "color of pecan shells" and seem "like passages leading somewhere" such that she keeps trying to look *into* them.

Haze has been looking at the porter and he excuses himself to go see him. When he gets there, he hints about his hometown, Eastrod, Tennessee. Then, when the porter does not take the hint, Haze "accuses" him of being from there. The porter says he is from Chicago and continues with his work.

When Haze returns to his seat, Mrs. Hitchcock continues talking and Haze says he is heading to Taulkenham "to do some things [he's] never done before." They then decide to go to the dining car. Mrs. Hitchcock goes in before him and he eventually is seated with three women. The steward keeps winking at the women and gives Haze very slow service. He eventually goes back to his car and asks the porter to help him up to his upper berth. He again confronts the porter about being from Eastrod. The berth reminds him of a coffin and he remembers his grandfather, two younger brothers and father in their coffins. He had been sure that they would not let the coffins close and had even re-opened his brother's coffin after they had closed it.

We then learn a little bit of history about Haze. He leaves home at the age of eighteen to join the army, but vows to return in four months exactly. He wants to return to be a preacher just like his grandfather. When he leaves, he takes only his black Bible and his mother's silver-rimmed reading glasses. (He had attended the county school to learn to read and write, but was taught that it was best to only read the Bible.) When he is first invited "to sin" by his army friends, he tells them that he is from Eastrod, Tennessee and that "he [is] not going to have his soul damned by the government or any foreign place..." His friends tell him he is mistaken because he has no soul. Throughout his travel with the army, Haze takes time to examine his soul and concludes that it truly is not there.

Four years later, the army releases him and he immediately takes a train home. When he arrives at Eastrod, he is surprised to find only the "skeleton" of a house. Inside the house, the only thing that remains is his mother's dresser. He secures it to the floor with wrapping cord and leaves a note in each drawer that says, "this shiffer-robe belongs to Hazel Motes. Do not steal it or you will be hunted down and killed."



Haze, still in the berth, then turns his thoughts to his mother and the look on her face through a crack in her coffin. He gets claustrophobic, hangs his head out of the berth, yells to the porter that he is sick and needs to get out. The porter does not move to help him.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter serves several important functions as the opening of the novel. First of all, we get a sense of who the main character is and where he came from. Hazel Motes is young man, recently released from the army. He had first intended to spend the typical four months in service, but it stretched into a four-year stint. Through the description of the train ride and the people that Haze meets, we get the sense that Haze is in a fog or confused. He cannot seem to concentrate on any one person or event (talking to Mrs. Hitchcock, sitting at dinner with the three ladies, and his confrontations with the porter). Above all, we begin getting the sense of his internal struggle about religious beliefs.

The next purpose of this first chapter is to set up several themes and motifs that will be carried throughout the book. The first one is the fear of death and being closed up in a coffin. Everyone important to Haze has died and he has had a difficult time with each one being closed up in a coffin. This fear is further addressed when Haze becomes fearful in his upper berth on the train. The second motif has to do with Haze's original plan to be a preacher after his stint with the army. We find out that Haze is wearing a bright blue suit and stiff black hat that causes him to look like a preacher. Since he had always planned to return from the army to be a preacher in his hometown, this is fitting but because there was no one there when he did finally return home full of confusion in terms of his religion, his outfit shows irony that he will not be actually fulfilling his plan. The third motif set up in this chapter is Haze's eyes. His eyes catch everyone's attention. They are deep and thoughtful and draw in even strangers. The fourth important event that happens to Haze is that when he returns home there is not one there. The house is empty and the people are gone. He has no place to go. Finally, Haze mentions the religious symbols of redemption, Jesus and souls to several people, but he mentions it with sarcasm as though he does not truly believe in it anymore. This sarcasm is a foreshadowing device to help us wonder how his religious beliefs will play out throughout the story.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The next morning, Haze steps off the train at a junction and it leaves without him. Luckily, he does not trust anyone, so he has brought his duffel with him. Six hours later, he catches the next train and arrives in Taulkenham at six in the evening. He observes all the lighted signs and walks up and down the station several times trying to decide what to do. He wants privacy, so he decides to go to the men's room. When he gets in there, he notices that the walls are stalls are littered with graffiti. After studying the inscriptions, he finally notices one for Mrs. Leora Watts – "The friendliest bed in town!" He writes down the address, hails a taxi and heads towards her house. The taxi driver wonders why a preacher would be heading to her house. After Haze denies being a preacher, the driver says that his hat and the look on his face give away that he is a preacher. Again, Haze denies it.

Haze enters Mrs. Watts' house and finds her in the bedroom. He sits on the bed and tells her that he is there for the "usual business." He then tells her that he is not a preacher. She tells him that she does not mind if he "ain't a preacher."

Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter carries on the theme of Haze looking like a preacher. Neither the taxi driver nor Mrs. Watts believe that Haze is not a preacher. He is quick to tell people that he does not believe in anything, so his looks betray the fact that he is trying to do anything to break away from being the Christian preacher he was supposed to be. His similarities to the image of a Christian preacher only go skin deep. Underneath, he lacks convictions and beliefs (or so he says) and participates in illicit sex. (Of course, Mrs. Watts' reaction shows that it does not surprise her that a "preacher" has come to her).



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Haze spends his second evening in Taulkenham walking around downtown until he sees a man who has set up a table to sell potato peelers to the crowd standing around him. He singles out Enoch Emery, a teenaged boy, and uses him to try to warm up the crowd. Across from Haze is a tall man with a scarred face who is wearing a black suit with a black hat and dark glasses.

This man begins moving through the crowd using a white cane, (he is blind) and behind him, a girl begins handing out pamphlets. This angers the salesman and he tries selling a peeler to the blind man (who blows off the salesman). The salesman ups the ante and offers peeled potatoes to the first person who will buy a peeler. The blind man then announces that he is a blind preacher and asks for money in place of repentance. The salesman gets angry and begins yelling, gathering a completely new crowd.

Haze looks at the pamphlet, sees that it says "Jesus Calls You" on the front and tears it into tiny pieces that he drops on the ground. The young girl who is handing them out tells him that she saw him.

Enoch tries to buy the dollar-fifty peeler for a dollar and sixteen cents and the girl tries to buy one for a dollar. The salesman tells both of them to keep their money. Haze puts two dollars on the table, grabs a peeler, and head in the same direction as the blind man and the girl. Enoch catches up with him and begin talking.

Enoch tells him that he has been in the city for two months and he works for the city zoo. They both agree that they do not go for the "Jesus business." Enoch continues to tell Haze of his life history as they follow the blind man and the girl. When he was twelve, he went to live with the "welfare" woman who eventually sent him to a Bible academy. After escaping there and eventually escaping her (he says he caused her to have a heart attack) he went back to live with his daddy. Now, at the age of eighteen, his daddy made him come to the city. He has been there for two months and does not know anyone yet.

As they are walking, Haze crosses the street on a red light and a policeman stops him. Enoch helps him get away with out too much trouble. Eventually, they catch up with the blind man and the girl at the library – they are waiting for a meeting to get out so they can handout their pamphlets and ask for money. As they approach, the blind man says he "can smell sin on [Haze's] breath." He asks Haze why he was following them. Haze gives the potato peeler to the girl and says he was following *her*. She does not want it, but the man makes her take it.

The blind man says he can hear the "urge for Jesus in his voice." Haze says he's come a long way "since [he'd] believed anything." The blind man tells Haze that he knows that



a preacher left his mark on him. He tries to get Haze to repent his sins of "fornication and blasphemy" to the group coming out of the library and to hand out pamphlets. Instead, Haze warns people of the man and begins telling people that he is going to start a new church without Jesus. After the people clear away, Haze begins walking away and the man yells after him that his name is Asa Hawks if he needs to find him later.

Enoch says that Haze looks familiar and says that he has spent the summer in Melsy (a town near Eastrod) once... Haze denies ever being there. Enoch then complains about how rude people are in the city and that after two months he still does not know anyone. He wants Haze to lend him money to "get a woman" for the night. Haze blows him off and heads towards Mrs. Watts' house. Enoch gets mad and tells Haze that Asa Hawks wants him to bring Haze back to him. Haze gets to Mrs. Watts' house and feels uneasy about going in because he was not very successful with her the night before. All she said was "that Jesus-Saving hat!"

When Haze was small, his father took him to a carnival in Melsy. There he had sent him to see the monkeys while he headed towards a tent that was titled "SINsational" and "Exclusive." Haze had snuck in, seen it was a fat woman in a coffin-like box, and snuck out again. As soon as he got home, his mother knew something had happened and asked him what he had seen. She had hit him in the legs with a stick and told him that Jesus died to redeem him. Young Haze then put rocks in his shoes and walked a mile to the creek. He took his shoes off and put his feet in the sand. He thought this would satisfy "Him," but nothing happened to make him believe it did.

Chapter 3 Analysis

We meet three new characters who all seem naïve, innocent and good. Enoch over all just seems eager finally to have a friend in the city. He is lonely and even though he seems innocent and good, we get the sense there's more to him when he tells about "causing" the welfare woman to have a heart attack. Asa Hawks and the girl leave an impression on Haze because it would have been very simple for him to just walk away and never see them again. The fact that he follows them shows that he is intrigued by what they have to "offer."

We again see the motif of Jesus and redemption permeating Haze's life. Even something as simple a street sales pitch turns into questions of redemption and repent for Haze. He cannot seem to escape his internal struggle. He continues to try to break away from his upbringing by ripping up the pamphlet, but cannot completely make the move because then he follows Asa and the girl. We also find out another possible reason for Haze's doubt. He tried to repent as a child when he walked with rocks in his shoes and saw no signs of forgiveness.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Haze wakes up in Mrs. Watts' bed early the next morning and leaves with the mission of buying a car. Since he only has fifty dollars, he knows he must shop around to find something suitable. By late morning, he has made his way through all the better lots and he finally finds one between two warehouses that looks promising. He walks in and heads towards the back of the lot. A boy who had been sitting outside the office tells him he cannot just walk in there, but Haze keeps going. Sitting in the last row is the car Haze knows he is going to buy. As he is looking at it, the boy sits on a nearby car and curses in his throat "Jesus on the cross," and "Christ nailed."

The owner of the lot (also the boy's father) comes out and he and Haze negotiate a price of forty dollars. They take it out for a test drive and the boy sits in the back cursing "Sweet Jesus, sweet Jesus..." Haze takes the car and drives until he gets to the highway. There, he has to stop for a bunch on pigs to cross the road and then a black pick-up truck pulls out in front of him. It moves very slowly and since his horn does not work, Haze is stuck behind him.

The road goes down a hill with a high embankment. Painted on a boulder are the words "Woe to the Blasphemer and Whoremonger! Will hell swallow you up?" The pick-up truck goes on, but Haze stops. He sees in small letters underneath written "Jesus Saves." Haze sits there, formulating a plan and he does not notice an oil truck approach from behind. The driver gets out, approaches Haze and asks him what he is doing. Haze tells him that he is reading the sign and that "no one is a whoremonger that wasn't something worse first." He then says he does not have anything to run from because he does not believe in anything. Haze then asks where the zoo is because he wants to see a boy who works there (Enoch). He turns the car around and heads back into town.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The newest thing in Haze's life is his "new" car. He spends a lot of time selecting it and knows that it is just right for him. So far it has only led him to more symbols and reminders of Jesus (the sign on the boulder and the boy at the dealership), but he again is sure to tell people (this time the truck driver) that he does not believe in anything so he doesn't have to worry about anything. It is almost as though he is trying to convince himself as well as others of his "non" beliefs and to justify his sins.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Enoch wakes up with a feeling that something important is about to happen. He knows a secret and knows that this is the day he will be able to show it to someone – he knows this "by his blood." He works his shift at the gate of the park and then enters the park for his daily routine: visiting the swimming pool (not to swim, but to secretly watch the women), going to the Frosty Bottle, visiting the zoo, and finally, *there*. He knows something is special about his "mystery." He had sensed that the park was the heart of the city, so he established himself there. This mystery was the heart of the park, and everyday he visited it. The mystery is out in public in a glass case with a card telling about it, but Enoch knows – senses – something about it that no one else knows. He knows he needs to show it to somebody, but it has to be the right person.

This day, as he approaches the pool, no one is there yet. He moves to the bushes as the woman with the two boys approaches the pool. He has watched this woman in the past. As she enters the bathhouse, he thinks about his routine. He cannot just go to the "special place." He must go to each of his stops everyday to build up the excitement and mystery of the secret.

As the boys dive into the water, Enoch hears the grating noise of an old car. The car passes a few times, then eventually parks. Enoch sees Haze get out of the car and sit down halfway down the slope to the pool. Enoch walks around the pool, sits down behind Haze and quietly studies him.

In the meantime, the woman lies down to sun herself and removes the straps to her suit. Enoch whispers "King Jesus." Haze jumps up and runs to his car. Enoch pulls his attention from the woman and follows Haze to the car. He knows that Haze is the one who needs to see the "mystery."

Haze asks Enoch for Asa Hawks' address since Enoch had told him the night before that he knew where they lived. Enoch wants to show him the mystery first, so he gets in the car and says he will tell him after he shows him this "thing." The only problem is that Enoch must first go to the Frosty Bottle and the zoo. He gets Haze to the Frosty Bottle, orders his milkshake and harasses the waitress. The waitress gives it right back to him by talking to Haze. She asks him why a clean boy like him is hanging out with a "son of a bitch" like Enoch. She goes on for a while and finally Haze says, "I AM clean." He repeats himself and says, "If Jesus existed, I wouldn't be clean." Enoch finishes his milkshake and pulls Haze out promising the address if he follows him. They get to the zoo. Enoch gets so angry at the zoo because the dirty animals are treated better than he is.



Haze stops at the last cage, which Enoch thinks is empty. Haze stares at it and will not move. Enoch looks in and finally sees the one open eye of a hoot owl. Haze announces to the owl "I AM clean."

They continue on to the "Museum" which is where Enoch is taking them. They go inside and find the right room. In the middle of the room are three coffin-like boxes. Enoch directs Haze to the last one. Inside are three bowls, a line of weapons and a body. The man is about three feet long, dried and yellow with his eyes drawn almost shut. Enoch says that the card tells that the man used to be normal height, but he was tortured by the "A-rabs" for six months. Haze stares at the man. As Enoch waits, the woman and her two boys enter the room. She approaches the glass and looks in. When her reflection appears, Haze jerks up and makes a noise. Enoch "knows" the noise had come from the man in the box. Enoch chases Haze out of the room.

Haze tries to get the address from Enoch, but he could not remember it at that point. Haze, who had grabbed Enoch earlier, lets go of him and Enoch falls against a tree. As he looks up, he sees Haze throw a rock and hit him in the head. When Enoch regains consciousness, his head is still bleeding and he realizes that he is expected to do something and this is just the beginning.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Enoch begins to play a larger role in the story. We find out that he is not the innocent, naïve boy that we see when he and Haze originally meet. This could be a parallel to the "outside" of preachers and that they all are "human" underneath as well. Finally, we begin to see signs that Enoch is perhaps mentally ill or at the very least amidst his own internal struggle to finally be accepted by someone. We know that there is something "special" about Enoch's blood as he thinks it tells him to do things. This is foreshadowing that Enoch will have quite a large role in the rest of the novel.

Haze still continues to have his own struggle about whether or not Jesus exists. He tells the waitress that he is clean and if Jesus had existed, he would not be. This is just another means of justifying his recent actions of blasphemy and illicit sex. Since Jesus does not exist in Haze's mind (or at least he is trying to convince himself of that) then he has done nothing wrong and is "clean."

Finally, we see Enoch's secret. While Haze is once again faced with the confining nature of coffin-like structures, we have to wonder what role the man in the box will in fact play.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Since Enoch did not give Haze the Hawks' address, Haze drives around until he finds Asa and the girl. Once he finds them, he follows them until they go home and notes their address. Haze then goes back downtown and parks his car outside the movie theater. Standing on the front of his car, Haze begins preaching his new church: "The Church without Christ." This is a church that has no rebirth – the dead stay dead, the lame stay lame and the blind stay blind. He continues telling his "story" to every group that exits or approaches the theater until the woman in the ticket booth threatens to call the police if he does not leave. He then goes to three other theaters and finally to Mrs. Watts' house.

The next day, Haze goes back to the house where Hawks and the child live and rents his own room. He finds out in which room Hawks and the girl live and knocks on the door. The girl opens the door slightly and tells her "papa" that it is "the one that keeps following me." Hawks comes to the door with an unfriendly look on his face. After Haze tells him that he lives there now and that he has started a church without Christ, Hawks asks him why he cannot leave them alone. Haze challenges Hawks to save his soul since he claims to be such a great preacher. Hawks pushes the door shut, takes off his glasses and looks through a window shade to see Haze get in his car.

The girl tells her papa that she likes Haze's eyes and wonders why Papa does not like him. Hawks calls him a "Jesus-hog." The girl says that if he helps her get Haze, he can go away and do as he pleases without her.

Haze sits in his car and decides he will try to seduce the girl to show Hawks that he is right about the Church without Christ. He also knows that he does not want to go back to Mrs. Watts, so seducing the girl will serve two purposes. Since Mrs. Watts had cut an obscene picture out of the top of his hat the night before, he buys a new, white one. Later that afternoon, he returns to the Hawks' room and barges in when the girl opens the door. He asks Hawks why he does not get Jesus to cure his blindness. Hawks tells Haze that he cannot save him but that he can save himself. Then he hands Haze an article with the headline "Evangelist Promises to Blind Self." After Haze reads the article three times, the girl tells him that Hawks did it with lime.

Before Haze leaves the room, he hands the girl a note that says, "I never saw anybody that looks as good as you before is why I came here." He really thinks the girl is quite homely looking, but is trying to seduce her to make his point to Hawks.

Hawks reads the note and realizes that Haze has left with his newspaper clipping. The girl reminds him that he has another one that says "Evangelists' Nerve Fails." He had been able to spread the lime onto his face, but not into his eyes.



Haze takes his car to a garage to get it fixed, but the mechanic tells him it is not fixable. He then goes to another garage where the mechanic says the car is great: he will fix it overnight.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Throughout this chapter, we see more of Haze's internal struggle about his religious beliefs because he begins verbalizing his so-called lack of them. Everywhere he goes, he "preaches" about how Jesus is a liar. He is trying to do everything in his power to get away from the religious convictions of his childhood, but something keeps calling him back to Asa Hawks. His need to have Hawks "save his soul" at the same time that he concocts plans to prove to Hawks that Jesus doesn't exist shows that he still is unsure himself about what to believe – he just can't quite let go of his upbringing. Even his new hat, although white, still looks like a pristine preacher's hat.

The idea of redemption is once again repeated in this chapter. This time, Haze preaches that there is no sin because there was no fall from the Garden of Eden. Because of this, there is no judgment and no need to worry about one's actions. It is as though he is once again justifying his recent actions. His eyes play a role in his new relationships as well. While he tries to seduce Hawks' daughter for his own personal purposes, she really likes him – especially his eyes. Once again, his eyes draw other people to him.

Haze's relationship with his car illustrates a few things about his personality. When he takes it to the mechanics to get it fixed up, he spends much time trying to convince them that it is a good car. He is looking for reassurance that someone else will back up his belief in his car – he is doing what he can to get people on his side.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The next day, Haze takes his newly fixed car into the country to see how it runs. Suddenly, he hears someone clearing her throat. Hawks' daughter sits up – she had sneaked into the car. At first, Haze is upset with her, but then he changes his tone when he remembers that he is supposed to be seducing her. She climbs into the front seat and starts telling Haze about herself. Her name is Sabbath Lily Hawks and her mother died right after naming her. Her parents were not married, which makes her a bastard. She believes that a bastard cannot enter heaven, so she wonders if it really matters what she does on Earth. Haze is dumbfounded. He cannot figure out how someone who blinded himself could have had a bastard. She confirms that Hawks did not used to believe but that now he does.

Sabbath convinces him to turn down a dirt road and to walk through a field to sit under a tree. He tells her of his new Jesus that is all man and no God. He tells her there is no such thing as a bastard in his new church. In his mind, however, he knows that her case is helpless.

Sabbath starts flirting with Haze after he lays down for a rest. He suddenly wants to get back to the car for fear that someone will steal it. The car will not start, so he heads for a nearby service station. The man there drives them back to the car. Once they get to the car, the serviceman begins looking it over. Haze tries to convince him that it is a good car that just needs a push to get going. The man pushes it a ways with his truck and it does start. The man pulls his truck alongside Haze and tells him that he does not own a thing. Haze once again says that it is a good car that will get him where he needs to go.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Two more characters lose their innocence in this chapter. First, we find out that Asa was not always the Evangelist that he claims to be. He is the father of a "bastard" and Sabbath claims that he used to be an unbeliever. This catches Haze's attention because he cannot understand how an unbeliever can now be a believer. We also see more of the fact that Sabbath is not the innocent little Christian girl she leads people to believe. She thinks that because she is a "bastard" she can do anything she wants without recourse. We especially see this play out when *she* tries seducing Haze.

The car continues emerging as a metaphor for Haze's religious beliefs. All the convincing he does to the serviceman that the car is a good car is similar to the "preaching" he does about his new religion. Both seem undesirable to onlookers, but Haze believes with a little convincing they will soon see his side. Finally, Haze says that the car will get him where he needs to go. This is also true about his religion. He thinks

that his religion will also get him where he needs to go – all they both need is just a little push.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Enoch Emery knows it in his blood that something is about to happen. He knows that it started happening when he showed the man in the glass case to Haze. He knows something is going to happen because he starts doing strange things. He starts saving his pay, cleaning, and brightening his room. He washes all the furniture and even ends up painting the bottom cabinet of his washstand. He decides that is because it will be used for something even though he does not know exactly what yet.

Enoch know that he cannot rush his blood into telling him what to do, so he waits. For a week, his blood is "in a secret conference with itself" and just tells him once and a while what to do. On the day that Enoch knows something is going to happen, he decides he wants to stay in bed, but cannot. He goes to work and plans to go immediately home afterwards and go to bed. On his way home, he stops at a Walgreen's and buys some popcorn. Then, he stops at the fountain counter and tells the waitress that something is going to happen to him today. He gets up and hurries out. The whole while, he is thinking that he does not want to do it because it will be something that is not his business and will probably be against the law. He stops in front of the new movie house and tries telling himself that he will not go in. Before he knows it, he is going in for a balcony seat. He watches all three shows "against his will" and finally makes his way out. He sits against the wall of the theater trying to get his grip.

Enoch then starts walking home and sees Haze preaching from the hood of his car. He hears Haze preach about the Church without Christ and ask for a new Jesus "that's all man, without blood to waste." All at once, Enoch know what he needs to do. He does not know how he'll steal the man out of the glass case, but he does know that he has a place all set up to keep him in his room until Haze is ready for it.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Enoch Emery is definitely a round character. He has many sides to him almost as though he has multiple personalities. He claims that his blood tells him what to do and treats his blood as a "ruler" or "dictator" that must be followed regardless of the type of task. Enoch and Haze are very similar because they are both alone in the world and are trying to figure out ways to gain acceptance. Haze is using his new religion to gain "followers" and Enoch is becoming a follower to give Haze what he wants to gain acceptance from him.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Hawks continues to avoid Haze as much as possible so that Haze does not see him drunk. The avoidance confuses Haze even more. If he really is a preacher, then why doesn't he try to save Haze's lost soul? Haze decides to stop trying to seduce Sabbath when she comes to his room one night. He chases her out with a chair. Hawks tells her she needs to work things out with Haze because he is leaving in a few days and she will need Haze to take care of her.

Haze still is not successful with his church – he still is the only member. Since he does not believe in praying, all he can do is worry. One night, he notices a man following him as he preaches. As the last group of people begins walking away, the man jumps up by Haze and draws them back in. He says that Haze has changed his life and he is willing to take all night to tell them how if it takes that long. He begins fabricating lies about Haze's church and even changes the name to The Holy Church of Christ without Christ. Haze tries to tell them that Onnie Jay Holy is lying, but Onnie Jay will not let him say a word. Finally, Haze gets into the car and tries to drive off when Onnie Jay begins asking for money from each person. The car is not working the greatest, so it just kind of sputters along the road. Onnie Jay Holy jumps in the car and tells Haze they just lost ten dollars by leaving so soon. Onnie Jay wants to "work" with Haze.

Haze tells Onnie Jay that he is not true and tells him to get out of the car. After a brief argument, Haze tells Onnie Jay that he has seen all of him that he wants. Onnie Jay tells Haze that he has good ideas; he just needs someone like Onnie Jay to promote them. After Haze slams Onnie Jay's thumb in the car door, Onnie Jay tells him that his real name is Hoover Shoats and warns Haze to watch out. Hoover vows to "run [Haze] out of business."

Since Haze's car will not start, he stays in it for a while and dreams he is not dead, but buried nonetheless. Throughout the dream, various people come to look at him, but none will help him. When he awakens, it is midnight and the car starts so he drives home. He decides to pick the lock on Hawks' door. He lights a match close to Hawks' face and the look at each other as long as the match lasts. Hawks tells Haze that now he can leave him alone. Haze leaves.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Haze begins to worry because he has no followers. When he does get one, all he wants is to get money off strangers – not at all what Haze has in mind for his new church. Adding even more confusion to Haze's internal struggle is the realization that Hawks is a complete phony. He finds out that Hawks is not blind at all. Overall, the people that

Haze once believed to be "preachers" are only in it for the money. This is just another sign to Haze that there is no truth.

Once again, the car plays a big role in illustrating the saga of Haze's religious beliefs. He uses the car as a "foundation" – that is, he preaches from its hood. As he tries to get away from the Shoat's lies, the car fails him and refuses to start. The whole foundation of his new church has failed him when he needs it most.

Haze still struggles with his "aloneness" and fear of death. He dreams that he is in a coffin and that no one will help him. Perhaps he is afraid that when he dies, God will not redeem him; God will not be there for him.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The next night, Haze goes to another theater and preaches that the only truth is that there is no truth. He also tells the people listening that they have no place to be outside of themselves. If there is no place to be outside of themselves, he preaches, how can there be a Fall, Redemption and Judgment. He also tells the few people there that the conscience is a trick and anyone who believes it exists should hunt it down and kill it.

While he preaches, a similar looking car to his circles the block a few times and pulls in a few spaces down from his. Haze does not notice Hoover Shoats and a man similarly dressed to himself get out and begin preaching from their car. Haze's "double" throws him off guard when he finally sees him and he stops preaching. The "double" stands on the car waiting while Hoover Shoats preaches from the sidewalk. Haze gets off his own car and gets closer. Hoover has taken Haze's whole philosophy, exploited it and he is now preaching of a new Jesus that can redeem them. Shoats refers to Haze's double as the True Prophet. As he is watching, a woman turns to Haze and asks if he and the True Prophet are twins. Haze answers that if he does not hunt it down, it will hunt him down.

Haze goes home and finds Sabbath Hawks in his bed. She tells him that she does not care what he does to her, but she has no place to go because her papa had run off. She also admits that her father is a crook. Haze's only answer is to take off his boots. She continues by saying they are just alike – filthy. The difference is that she likes it and he does not. Then, she offers to teach him how to like it. He says he would like that and gets undressed before turning off the light and getting into bed with her.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Haze views the True Prophet as his conscience. He knows that if he does not come to terms with his conscience, his conscience will come after him – and it already started when Shoats brings the True Prophet to try to ruin Haze's new church. The only problem is, is his idea of coming to terms with his conscience is to "hunt it down and kill it."

Haze also preaches that there is no "truth" and no "place." This again shows that Haze is lost in many ways. He is still trying to make up for the fact that he no longer has a home and does not know where he is going. As hard as he tries, he cannot fully break away from the beliefs he was taught, so he cannot truly break away – thus his constant struggle about what to believe.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The next morning, Enoch is quickly making his way somewhere with a package about the size of a baby. It is the man from the museum, which he had stolen the day before. When he had gotten home, he had put the "new jesus" in the cabinet he had prepared and waited. He did not know what would happen, but he pictured himself a better man for doing it. Soon, it starts raining and Enoch begins running. He is headed to Haze's house even though he has never been there before – his instincts tell him where to go. He remembers Sabbath's address and decides to start there.

He begins to feel upset by his actions. He wants to rid himself of the stolen property as soon as possible. As he begins using the umbrella his landlady gave him, he realizes it is very old and will not stay open. He ducks under the marquee of a movie house and finds out that "Gonga! Giant Jungle Monarch and a Great Star" will be appearing there in person. As he reads the poster, he thinks about the time his father brought home a tin box of peanut brittle but when he opened it, it was a spring that jumped out and chipped his front teeth. He decides that a chance to insult an ape would be great. After finding out that the ape is already ten minutes late, Enoch gets in line and waits with a crowd of children.

Although the gorilla is obviously a bored actor in a costume, Enoch is scared of it. He does not leave, though. He begins trying to think of a good insult or obscene remark, but comes up with nothing. When his turn comes, he realizes that the "ape's" hand is the first that has been offered to him since he came to the city. He stammers out his name and begins to tell the ape his life history. The actor leans forward and tells him to go to hell. Enoch stumbles away from the theater.

When he reaches Sabbath's house, he and the package are soaking wet. He asks for Haze's room and heads straight there so he can get rid of the package. Sabbath answers the door and, because Haze is asleep, she takes the package and a few insults from Enoch before he leaves. Sabbath's curiosity wins and she takes the package to the bathroom where she opens it and stares at it for a while. She eventually heads back to the room to find Haze awake and dressed. His newest plan is to go to another city and continue to preach his new church. The best part is he can do this because he has a car. Sabbath treats the man like a baby and refers to Haze as its daddy. She wonders why he is going to run off and leave them alone.

Haze reaches back, grabs the man and throws it against the wall where its head pops off. Then he picks up what is left and he throws it outside in the rain. Sabbath tells Haze she has known all along that he is "mean and evil" because he does not want anything but Jesus.



Chapter 11 Analysis

Enoch is still trying to find acceptance any place he can. Stealing the man from the museum shows that he is not afraid to break the law if it means he will be finally able to be accepted in the city. He also has a lot of built up anger from people, like his father, playing jokes on him and tries to find anyone he can to insult as a release for his anger.

Haze has decided to leave town and try again somewhere else. He knows that his "religion" has been copied and exploited here, so he wants to run away again and start over. He acts as though he will do what it takes to justify his new beliefs (or, more accurately, lack of beliefs).

Enoch finally delivers the "new jesus" to Haze, but Haze has realized that is not what he wants. Haze and the man from the museum also have many similarities. The man from the museum had been tortured (by other people) and Haze is undergoing torture of a different sort (his conscience and his internal struggle). Haze fears coffins and death and the man was a symbol to Haze of this fear. Now that the man is freed from his "coffin," Haze may be free finally to let go of his internal struggle and work towards what he truly believes.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Enoch waits with hope for something to happen in return for his services. He wants people to want to shake his hand. He waits all afternoon in his room. While waiting, he completely strips the old umbrella until he only has a black stick with a sharp point left. Later that evening, he heads out with the umbrella stick and goes to a diner. He orders his food, but the waitress begins making food for herself instead. When he tells her he is in a hurry, she tells him to go ahead and leave. Instead, he orders a slice of cake and asks the other customer for a section of the newspaper. He notices that Gongga is touring the city and will make his last appearance in thirty minutes. He leaves the diner and heads to the last theater. He hides where he can see the truck and the people shaking Gongga's hand. After the appearance, Gongga gets back into the back of the truck and, as it drives away, there is a thumping noise that the driver does not hear.

As the truck slows to go over some tracks, a figure sneaks out the back and hurries into the woods. Enoch digs a hole with a stick and buries his clothes. Then he puts on the gorilla costume. Happy as could be, Enoch sits on a rock in his costume and stares at the city.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Enoch still wants something to validate his worth – he wants people to want to shake his hand. Then he sees that Gongga is still touring the city. He gets the idea that if he is Gongga, then people will want to shake his hand and kills the actor that plays Gongga. He puts on the costume finally thinking he has some worth and that people will like him.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Hoover Shoats continues his preaching and in his second night earns fifteen dollars and thirty-five cents after paying the True Prophet (a.k.a. Solace Layfield) three dollars. This night, Haze watches them and then follows them to where Layfield drops off Shoats and continues on his way home. Haze eventually rams into the back of Layfield's car and they both stop. Layfield gets out and asks what Haze wants. Haze rams the car again until it goes into the ditch. Haze confronts Layfield who tells him he is just doing this for a job. Haze insists he take off the suit and hat. Eventually Layfield begins running away as he removes the suit. He is not fast enough, though, and Haze runs him over. After making sure he is dead, Haze wipes the few drops of blood off the car and goes back to town.

The next morning, Haze takes the car to the fill in station to get ready for the trip. While the boy works, he tells Haze it is not worth filling because there are so many leaks. Haze says to fill them just the same. Haze quickly drives out to the highway. He feels like he is not going anywhere, though, as signs about Jesus and redemption begin to bombard him. Soon, there is a siren behind him and he patrolman motions for him to pull over. The patrolman says he does not like Haze's face and needs his license. Haze does not have one. The patrolman convinces Haze to drive up to an embankment to see the view. Haze gets out of the car and the patrolman pushes the car over the embankment. The patrolman offers Haze a lift somewhere, but Haze just stares into space and does not take him up on the offer. Later, Haze walks back to town. On his way home, he gets a bucket and a sack of lime. Once home, he fills the bucket halfway with lime and adds water from the spigot outside. Then, he heads inside. The landlady asks what he is doing and he tells her he is going to blind himself. She can't understand why, if he was so down, he didn't just kill himself because that is what she would do.

Chapter 13 Analysis

First, Haze still treats the True Prophet like his conscience and hunts it down and kills "it." Then, Haze decides to leave town. As he is getting his car ready to leave, the boy at the service station tells him that is no good and full of leaks. Paralleling this to his religion, yet another person is telling Haze that his new religion is no good. As he drives away, he is bombarded with signs that Jesus lives and Jesus saves. The patrolman asks for his license and he does not have one – that is, Haze has no right to "practice" the new religion of his. Finally, when the patrolman shoves his car down the embankment, Haze lets go of his fantasy religion and realizes it's time for redemption. He blinds himself and "ruins" the one feature of his that draws other people to him. The reason he does this instead of just killing himself is that he know he must repent and this is his first step.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Haze continues living there and the landlady takes care of him. He sits on the porch every afternoon and talks little, yet she is fascinated with him. Once she finds out that he gets a government check from the army every month she feels cheated that someone who would throw their life away gets tax money. Sabbath still comes around and the landlady charges him double when she is there. Haze tells the landlady that he would pay Sabbath to stay away.

The landlady notices that he barely eats, keeps getting thinner, gets a deeper cough and develops a limp. He also walks a lot within four or five blocks around the house. One morning, while cleaning his room, she finds money in his trash can. She asks him about it and he simply says he does not need it and that he throws away leftover money. She asks him why he doesn't preach anymore and he tells her she doesn't have the time.

One day, she finds out why he limps – he walks around with gravel and broken glass in his shoes. He tells her it is to pay and it does not matter what he's paying for. This sparks her fascination for him and she begins to follow him. She "accidentally" runs into him to accompany him on his walks. She tells him that he needs her because she is the only one around to care for him. Eventually he catches influenza. She brings meals to his room and one morning discovers that he wears three strands of barbed wire around his chest. She tells him he must believe in Jesus or he wouldn't do such "foolish" things.

She has a plan to marry him because of the government checks. When she finally tries to convince him to marry her, he eventually gets up and leaves the house without even answering her. He does not return and she calls the police saying he owes her rent. He wanders in the cold and damp winter. Two days later, policemen find him. He says he wants to "go on where [he's] going." They tell him he needs to pay his rent first and one hits him over the head. He dies in the car on the way back to the house.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Haze spends his last months repenting his "blasphemous and adulterous" behavior. He has finally decided that he does believe or, at the very least, that he cannot not believe. He says that he does not preach anymore because he does not have the time – he is too busy repenting. He tells the police officers that he wants to go where he is going and they help him along the way by hitting him over the head: Haze was ready to die and get to heaven since that was the only place he knew that he could belong.



Characters

Enoch Emery

Enoch Emery meets Hazel Motes on Motes's second night in town. He becomes Motes's most dedicated follower, taking to heart Motes's call for a new Jesus. A welfare woman who believed in the "old" Jesus had removed Emery from his father's care at the age of twelve. The woman had then sent him away to attend a Bible academy and threatened him with life in the penitentiary if he did not do what she demanded of him. After having successfully escaped the woman, Emery wants nothing to do with "the Jesus kind."

Emery returns to his father's home only to be thrown out at the age of eighteen. With a pimply face that resembles a fox's, Emery does not make friends easily. To pass the time, he maintains a daily routine that consists of work and a visit to the park at the end of his shift. It is at the park that he first climbs into bushes and spies on women at the pool. He then goes to a refreshment stand, where he orders a milkshake and makes lewd remarks to the waitress. Next, he views caged animals, hating and loving them at the same time. Finally, he visits a museum in the center of the park that houses a shriveled mummy. The mummy represents something important to learn, something that he does not quite understand.

Emery feels compelled to show the mummy to someone, yet he does not know who that person is. He awakens one morning with a feeling in his blood, "wise blood like his daddy," that the person to whom he will show the mummy will appear. When Hazel Motes drives by the park that day, Emery realizes that his blood had been telling him the truth. After showing Motes the mummy, Emery again feels that his blood is telling him something—that he is going to be a part of something big that is only beginning.

Mrs. Flood

Mrs. Flood owns the boarding house in which Motes lives. After Motes blinds himself, she intends to marry and institutionalize him so that she can get the pension he receives from the government. She feels that the government owes her for the taxes she has paid over the years that were used to support people who did not deserve the help. Even though she raises Motes's room and board to get a larger share of his money, she still feels cheated. She believes Motes must have a plan for something more and that he is not sharing it with her.

Against her will, Mrs. Flood begins to enjoy her time spent with Motes. She tries to understand why he has blinded himself and why he has no interest in doing anything but sitting on her porch.

She puzzles over why he wears his shoes with rocks and glass in them and puts barbs of wire around his chest. When Motes becomes ill with the flu, Mrs. Flood decides to



marry him and keep him. He dies, however, before she can complete her plan. She tries to look into his dead eyes to see how and by whom she was cheated, but she sees nothing. When she closes her own eyes, she sees a point of light far off in the distance that eventually becomes Motes. She has a feeling that she "finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin."

Asa Hawks

Scar-faced Asa Hawks pretends to be a preacher who has blinded himself for Jesus. Dressed in black, wearing dark glasses, and pale enough to look like a corpse, Hawks uses a white cane and carries a tin cup. He implores people to repent, but if they will not he asks them to help by putting coins in his cup. His daughter, Sabbath Lily, follows Hawks, handing out pamphlets that say "Jesus calls you."

While Hawks did have good spiritual intentions at one time, along with a congregation who believed in him, he has lost his sense of purpose. This loss of direction resulted from a failure in his own faith, when he lost his courage to blind himself to justify his belief in Jesus. He senses the true Jesus in Motes, while he himself has become nothing more than a beggar, competing with street "hawkers" for the buyers' money.

Sabbath Lily Hawks

Sabbath Lily Hawks imitates her father's false morality by handing out pamphlets that proclaim Jesus's desire for people to follow him. Fifteen-year-old Sabbath Lily's large red lips contrast vividly with skin that is almost as pale as her father's and the innocence that her homely appearance might imply.

Sabbath Lily tells her father "I never seen a boy that I liked the looks of any better," and wants her father to help her get Motes. She tries desperately to seduce Motes, telling him how she has written to the lovelorn column in the newspaper asking if she should go all the way or not. Nothing Sabbath Lily tries works to change Motes's mind, until she appears one night in his bed. She tells him that she knows he is "pure filthy right down to the guts" like her, and that she can teach him to like being that way.

While Sabbath Lily does succeed in seducing Motes, it does not result in the permanent relationship with Motes that she had hoped would free her from her father. Her father leaves her, and Motes ignores her. While she says that "she hadn't counted on no honest-to-Jesus blind man," she makes such a nuisance of herself at Motes's home that the landlady finally calls social services and has her put in a detention center.

Haze

See Hazel Motes



Mrs. Hitchcock

At the beginning of the novel, Motes finds himself seated on the train across from a fat woman who has pear-shaped legs that do not reach the floor. She identifies herself as Mrs. Hitchcock and tells Motes that she is traveling to Florida to visit her daughter. Dressed in pink with a flat, reddish face, Mrs. Hitchcock tries to get Motes to talk about himself. While she is drawn to Motes's eyes, she fears something in them and looks, instead, at the price tag still dangling from his coat. She represents the first of the characters who irritate Motes by trying to associate him with preaching.

Onnie Jay Holy

See Hoover Shoats

Solace Layfield

Shoats hires Solace Layfield to pose as the True Prophet because he drives a rat-colored car and wears a blue suit like Motes's. Suffering from tuberculosis, Layfield coughs continually from the depths of his hollow-chested, gaunt body. Layfield only preaches for Shoats to earn money to support his wife and SIX children. Motes hates him for being "a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is." Motes follows Layfield one night, forces him to take off his suit, and runs over him with his car. Layfield's last words are "Jesus hep me."

Hazel Motes

O'Connor portrays Hazel Motes, the main character, as a man who takes everything at face value and wants to deny God's existence. People see Motes as a preacher, a label which he strongly protests. Even the taxi driver tells Motes that his hat and "a look in your face somewheres" make him look like a preacher.

Motes judges everyone by their appearances, yet he cannot help but search their faces for some indication of their worth. He yearns for proof that people have no connection to the divine. While he objects to his own spiritual connection, Motes feels a pull towards Christ, or "the wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark."

Motes's name and appearance depict a man who peers into the beyond. Appropriately, the name "Hazel" comes from the Hebrew for "he who sees God." Motes's prominent forehead, hooked nose, creased mouth, and flattened hair prompt the landlady to note that his "face had a peculiar pushing look as if it were going forward after something it could just distinguish in the distance." In addition, Motes's deep-set, pecan-colored eyes beckon people to surrender their wills to one who is stronger. For example, when Mrs.



Hitchcock meets Motes on the train, she feels drawn to his eyes, like they were "passages leading somewhere," but she senses danger in them, too.

In his efforts to deny God's existence, Motes attempts to establish the "Church Without Christ." He buys a car and uses it as his church, preaching from its hood. The car becomes a symbol of Motes's rejection of Christ. He claims that "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified." Motes preaches that Since God does not exist, neither do sin or redemption. He offers people a new Jesus that they can see, one who can save them in a way that their Jesus has not been able to. Ironically, it is the loss of his car that results in Motes's salvation.

Prophet

See Hazel Motes

Hoover Shoats

Hoover Shoats is a plump, curly-haired man who wears sideburns and a black suit with silver stripes. Shoats recognizes a way to make money when he sees one. When he hears Motes preaching his Church Without Christ message and losing his audience, he steps in and tries to sell himself as a man who has followed-and has absolute faith in Motes and his church. Smiling, and with an honest look on his face, Shoats can convince people of almost anything.

Motes, however, does not appreciate Shoats's trying to take over. He especially dislikes his changing the church's name from the Church Without Christ to the Church of Christ without Christ. Even though Shoats does his best to convince Motes that selling the public on the new Jesus has great financial possibilities, Motes turns him down. In retaliation, Shoats hires Solace Layfield to pose as the "True Prophet" and preach the message of the Church of Christ Without Christ.

True Prophet

See Solace Layfield

Mrs. Watts

Mrs. Watts owns a house of ill repute in Taulkinham. When Motes arrives in town, he has the taxi driver take him there. He wants to prove to the driver, and to himself, that he is not a preacher and has no connection to Christ. Motes engages in illicit sex with Mrs. Watts to try to finalize this denial of religion in his life. To Motes, having sex with Mrs. Watts demonstrates that he believes in nothing.

Social Concerns

Flannery O'Connor places the events of the story *Wise Blood* in Taulkinham, Tennessee, but does not specify exact dates.

Given the events in the story and the time O'Connor wrote it, however, critics set the story sometime in the mid-twentieth century. One event that lends credence to critics' time line for the story is the protagonist's, Hazel Motes, reflection on his stint in the army and the war injury that sent him home. Given the fact that O'Connor wrote the book in the late '40s, and Harcourt published it in 1952, Motes probably served in World War II. The events of the story, then, most likely occur in the latter half of the 1940s.

Historically, in the late 1940s after World War II, Americans enjoyed a surge of population growth and prosperity. By 1950, more than 151 million Americans could take advantage of many innovations that would make their lives easier and safer, and their leisure time more enjoyable. For example, technological advances created microwave ovens and fast foods, conveniences that helped provide Americans with more time.

Medical researchers developed polio and measles vaccinations, as well as the birthcontrol pill, enabling children to live longer and couples to plan their families better.

Since people had more time and were in better health, they found new ways to enjoy their free time. Commercial hotel chains and jet transport, modern turnpikes, and faster cars contributed to increased travel in America in the 1950s. Americans became passionate about automobiles and the conveniences cars allowed.

O'Connor uses America's obsession with prosperity and its love affair with cars to provide a basis for the spiritual chaos the characters in *Wise Blood* experience. O'Connor states in *The Living Novel: A Symposium* (1957) that she believes "unparalleled prosperity" results in a "distorted sense of spiritual purpose." *Wise Blood* expands that theme more than any of her other works.

Throughout the novel, O'Connor presents motifs and images portraying a prosperous society. Money reigns as king: Mrs.

Hitchcock checks the price tag on Motes's coat; street vendors and used-car salesmen haggle over prices; and fake preachers brag about their salaries. In addition, commercial advertising takes over the landscape in the form of signs on buildings, billboards along the roadside, and the business establishments themselves. The novel's characters focus so intently on money-related issues and prosperity that their spirituality disappears and their morals disintegrate.

Religion, an institution many regard as offering moral guidance, attracted scores of Americans during the 1950s. Not only did church affiliation soar to 63.6 percent of the population, but also religious contributions, media attention, films, and books increased tremendously. For example, people's average yearly donations to the church peaked,

and movies about biblical stories, such as *The Robe*, drew huge crowds. Ministers who brought modern, positive messages attracted the thousands who believed that having a religious identification was synonymous with being an American. Even political advertising extolled the virtues of religion.

Politicians allowed the addition of "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance and adopted "In God We Trust" as the national motto. Some religious critics, however, wondered whether this wholesale acceptance of religion was sincere, or whether it was just another symbol adopted by people to demonstrate their status and prosperity.

Motes denies religion as vehemently as people of the 1950s embraced it. His acts of violence suggest extremism, as does the seemingly blind adoption of religion by Americans living in the 1950s. O'Connor draws the parallel between the novel and real life with images of a prosperous society and of people who lack spiritual purpose as a result of it.



Techniques

Until Mrs. Flood enters the story at the end of the book, O'Connor writes *Wise Blood* from the omniscient point of view, or, in other words, from a narrator's point of view. From this perspective, the author can enter the minds of all the characters and tell their thoughts. For example, O'Connor divulges that Emery secretly believes that the waitress at the Frosty Bottle is in love with him. At the end of the novel, however, O'Connor switches to the partially omniscient point of view, with Mrs. Flood telling the story. This switch comes in chapter fourteen, where Mrs. Flood ponders her relationship with Motes. O'Connor has Motes act and speak, but she does not reveal his thoughts.

Other techniques that O'Connor employs in *Wise Blood* include symbolism. Many symbolic images exist in *Wise Blood* to help portray Motes's denial of Christ. The reader first encounters the symbols of material prosperity that relate to Emery and Motes.

Emery seeks to "become something." He views the zoo, park, pool, museum, and theater as conveniences that people who have achieved success can enjoy. Motes sees his car, a modern luxury, as proof that he has achieved his success in denying his religious upbringing: "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified," he declares.

In addition to the symbols of prosperity, literary experts have noted symbolic representation in characters' actions. First, both Motes's leaving Sabbath Lily and his throwing out the new Jesus and his mother's glasses stand for his initial efforts to rid himself of his religious past. Second, killing his "twin," Layfield, represents Motes's destruction of another portion of his conscience. Motes's final symbolic attempt to deny his connection to Christ occurs when he blinds himself.

Along with symbolism, O'Connor weaves images of animals throughout her prose.

Many critics have observed that the characters in *Wise Blood* exhibit animal-like tendencies. Not only do their names and appearances suggest beasts, but their actions also simulate those of animals. Some critics have linked Hawks's name with the bird of prey and that he turns his back on his daughter like a bird might throw its baby out of the nest. Other critics have noted that several animal images relate to Emery, who resembles a hound dog with mange. Like a dog, he crawls on his belly and burrows under bushes to watch the woman at the pool. He even "becomes" a gorilla. Literary experts speculate that O'Connor uses animal images in this story to emphasize the characters' grotesqueness and their distorted spirituality.

Flashbacks also have a presence in *Wise Blood*, with two occurring in the text. One happens when Motes is riding the train and dreaming about his grandfather. He pictures his grandfather preaching from the car hood and pointing Motes out as an example for sinners. Motes's night with Mrs. Watts prompts the second flashback.

He remembers attending a carnival at age ten, seeing a naked woman, and his mother's punishing him for it. Both incidents depict Motes's strict upbringing and unhappy childhood.



Thematic Overview

Christ's redemption of humanity comprises the main theme of *Wise Blood*. The characters exhibit the qualities of people who have a misdirected sense of spiritual purpose, if they have any spiritual purpose at all. Motes, for example, endeavors to turn his back on his strict religious background by publicly denouncing Christ, engaging in illicit sex, and establishing the "Church Without Christ." Other characters, such as Shoats and Hawks, use religion as a means of making money. Yet, as strongly as Motes denies Christ's presence in his life, he cannot resist Christ's salvation in the end.

Motes tries desperately to find freedom from his conscience by choosing to ignore his belief in God. He believes that if he eliminates morality from his life, he can avoid Jesus. Once free of this hindrance, he will be able to do anything he wants without his conscience bothering him. He takes the opportunity to end his association with God when his boot camp buddies ask him if he is sure he has a soul. He decides at that point to exchange his soul for nothingness.

Neither he nor any other of the characters, however, ever fully finds the freedom they seek. While Motes endeavors to deny Christ, Motes's very association with the other characters forces them to momentarily realize Christ's presence.

The "Hazel Motes without a soul" can behave in any manner he wants. If he believes in nothing, then right and wrong do not exist. Thus, Motes tells the taxi driver he believes in nothing, then engages in sex with Mrs. Watts to prove to himself that he has eliminated his conscience, the religious upbringing that has always guided his recognition of right and wrong.

Motes preaches that the conscience is a trick. He tells people that "if you think it does [exist], you had best get it out in the open and hunt it down and kill it, because it's no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you." Motes thinks that he has succeeded in eliminating his conscience. Yet, Solace Layfield represents to Motes what is left of his conscience—his consciousness, or his remaining thoughts of his religious past. He hunts down and kills Layfield to try to rid himself of his consciousness once and for all.

Throughout the novel, readers can also see how characters substitute the role of religion in their life with something else, such as materialism. In *Wise Blood* materialism corrupts mankind. If people focus on acquiring wealth and material goods, then they have little time for spiritual growth and awareness. They will engage in immoral acts because they must ignore the difference between right and wrong to prosper.

For example, Motes and Emery see having a car and living the life of modern society, respectively, as ways to accomplish their goals. They kill without remorse, feeling justified in doing what is necessary to succeed. Additionally, Hawks lives a lie to make a living, and Shoats uses Layfield to con people out of their money. Other references to money throughout the novel emphasize the characters' preoccupation with it: Mrs.



Hitchcock observes the price of Motes's coat; street vendors and car salesmen argue over prices; Shoats and Layfield reveal their salaries; and so on. Spiritual chaos reigns as a result of mankind's obsession with material prosperity.

Pursuing the American Dream, the idea that everyone has the same rights economically, politically, and socially, is a quest for many of the characters in *Wise Blood*. Emery wants "to become something. He wants to better his condition until he is the best. He wants to be THE young man of the future, like the ones in the insurance ads. He wants, some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand." To Emery, the city and its institutions represent the American Dream.

They become his daily routine because he believes that being a part of the city's prosperous lifestyle will help him achieve his ambition. Motes, too, sees the American Dream as being a goal he can achieve through material prosperity. While he does not aspire to BE someone, he views car ownership as proof that he has accomplished his goal in life—to deny his relationship with God through the establishment of the Church Without Christ. Like people who are living the American Dream, Motes feels that his car is the mark of a person who has "made it."

Along with the theme of materialism in the novel, O'Connor also deals with appearances and reality. Often, appearance and reality oppose one another. In *Wise Blood*, however, appearance and reality both support and oppose one another. First, Motes looks like a preacher. Everyone thinks he is a preacher. In fact, while Motes hotly denies it, he actually is a preacher. On the other hand, even though Motes tries to act like someone who has no religion, the reality is that he cannot escape it. From Motes's point of view, his appearance denies his reality. From everyone else's viewpoint, Motes's appearance reflects his true nature.

Themes

God and Religion

Christ's redemption of humanity comprises the main theme of *Wise Blood*. The characters exhibit the qualities of people who have a misdirected sense of spiritual purpose, if they have any spiritual purpose at all. Motes, for example, endeavors to turn his back on his strict religious background by publicly denouncing Christ, engaging in illicit sex, and establishing the "Church Without Christ." Other characters, such as Shoats and Hawks, use religion as a means of making money. Yet as strongly as Motes denies Christ's presence in his life he cannot resist Christ's salvation in the end.

Moral Corruption

Materialism corrupts mankind. If people focus on acquiring wealth and material goods, then they have little time for spiritual growth and awareness. They will engage in immoral acts because they must ignore the difference between right and wrong to prosper. For example, Motes and Emery see having a car and living the life of modern society, respectively, as ways to accomplish their goals. They kill without remorse, feeling justified in doing what is necessary to succeed. Additionally, Hawks lives a lie to make a living, and Shoats uses Layfield to con people out of their money. Other references to money throughout the novel emphasize the characters' preoccupation with it: Mrs. Hitchcock observes the price of Motes's coat; street vendors and car salesmen argue over prices; Shoats and Layfield reveal their salaries; and so on. Spiritual chaos reigns as a result of mankind's obsession with material prosperity.

Change and Transformation

Two characters in *Wise Blood* undergo changes that directly reflect the book's major themes. According to Erik Nielsen in *New Orleans Review*, Motes experiences several obvious transformations throughout the novel, while Mrs. Flood's single metamorphosis culminates the story. Motes's first transformation occurs when he decides in boot camp that he has no soul. He turns his back on his strict religious upbringing and becomes an atheist driven to immoral behavior. His second change results in his telling the taxi driver that he does not believe in anything; he becomes a nihilist. Motes's blinding himself represents his third transformation—a final effort at destroying his conscience. Living as a dutiful Christian in Mrs. Flood's house, Motes lives out his final stage in life. His ultimate transformation is from life to death. Mrs. Flood's transformation begins when Motes blinds himself. While she originally planned to marry him to acquire his money, she eventually grew fond of Motes and decided to care for him out of concern. According to M. J. Fitzgerald in *The Reference Guide to American Literature*, "There is only one person in the book who retains a human



ambiguity in response to the call of religion and of Christianity and yet is transformed and converted by contact with Hazel."

Free Will

Hazel Motes tries desperately to find freedom from his conscience by choosing to ignore his belief in God. He believes that if he eliminates morality from his life, he can avoid *Jesus*. Once free of this hindrance, he will be able to do anything he wants without his conscience bothering him. He takes the opportunity to end his association with God when his boot camp buddies ask him if he is sure he has a soul. He decides at that point to exchange his soul for nothingness. Neither he nor any other of the characters, however, ever fully find the freedom they seek. While Motes endeavors to deny Christ, Motes's very association with the other characters forces them to momentarily realize Christ's presence.

Flesh vs. Spirit

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Conscience

Motes preaches that the conscience is a trick. He tells people that "if you think it does [exist], you had best get it out in the open and hunt it down and kill it, because it's no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you." Motes thinks that he has succeeded in eliminating his conscience. Yet Solace Layfield represents to Motes what is left of his conscience-his consciousness, or his remaining thoughts of his religious past. He hunts down and kills Layfield to try to rid himself of his consciousness once and for all.

Appearances and Reality

Often, appearance and reality oppose one another. In *Wise Blood*, however, appearance and reality both support and oppose one another. First, Motes looks like a preacher. Everyone thinks he is a preacher. In fact, while Motes hotly denies it, he actually is a preacher. On the other hand, even though Motes tries to act like someone who has no religion, the reality is that he cannot escape it. From Motes's point of view, his appearance denies his reality. From everyone else's viewpoint, Motes's appearance reflects his true nature.



American Dream

Emery wants "to become something. He wants to better his condition until he is the best. He wants to be THE young man of the future, like the ones in the insurance ads. He wants, some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand." To Emery, the city and its institutions represent the American Dream. They become his daily routine because he believes that being a part of the city's prosperous lifestyle will help him achieve his ambition. Motes, too, sees the American Dream as being a goal he can achieve through material prosperity. While he does not aspire to BE someone, he views car ownership as proof that he has accomplished his goal in life-to deny his relationship with God through the establishment of the Church Without Christ. Like people who are living the American Dream, Motes feels that his car is the mark of a person who has "made it."

Style

Point of View

Until Mrs. Flood enters the story at the end of the book, Flannery O'Connor Writes *Wise Blood* from an "all-knowing" point of view, or, in other words, from a narrator's point of view. From this perspective, the author can enter the minds of all the characters and tell their thoughts. For example, O'Connor divulges that Emery secretly believes that the waitress at the Frosty Bottle is in love with him. At the end of the novel, however, O'Connor switches to the partially omniscient point of view, with Mrs. Flood telling the story. This switch comes in Chapter 14, where Mrs. Flood ponders her relationship with Motes. O'Connor has Motes act and speak, but she does not reveal his thoughts.

Setting

Taulkinham, a small town in Tennessee, sets the stage for the events that take place in Wise Blood. Although the author does not provide a particular time in history, Critics believe that the book takes place in the mid-twentieth century.

Symbolism

Many symbolic images exist in *Wise Blood* to help portray Motes's denial of Christ. The reader first encounters the symbols of material prosperity that relate to Enoch Emery and Hazel Motes.

Emery seeks to "become something." He views the zoo, park, pool, museum, and theater as conveniences that people who have achieved success can enjoy. Motes sees his car, a modern luxury, as proof that he has achieved his success in denying his religious upbringing: "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified," he declares.

In addition to the symbols of prosperity, literary experts have noted symbolic representation in characters' actions. First, both Motes's leaving Sabbath Lily and his throwing out the new Jesus and his mother's glasses stand for his initial efforts to rid himself of his religious past. Second, killing his "twin," Layfield, represents Motes's destruction of another portion of his conscience Motes's final symbolic attempt to deny his connection to Christ occurs when he blinds himself.

Grotesque

O'Connor portrays her characters as grotesque, or bizarre, in their appearances and natures. While many critics disagree over O'Connor's reasons for her use of grotesque characterization in *Wise Blood*, Marshall Bruce Gentry offers a unique view in a *Modern Fiction Studies* article. He suggests that while the characters' grotesqueness might be



what critics view as a negative sign of their helplessness and individualism in an uncaring society, it might also present the positive traits that allow them to rejoin a community with whom they feel a kinship. In *Mystery and Manners*, O'Connor says of her own work that her characters "have an inner coherence, if not always a coherence to their social framework. Their fictional qualities lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected." Gentry submits that while readers might interpret Motes's actions as basically evil, those actions actually stem from an inner adherence to a belief system that eventually leads him to salvation, or a rejoining with his religious past.

Imagery

Critics agree that the characters in *Wise Blood* exhibit animal-like tendencies. Not only do their names and appearances suggest beasts, but their actions also simulate those of animals. For example, Daniel Littlefield, Jr., says in *Mississippi Quarterly* that Hawks's name corresponds with the bird of prey, and that he turns his back on his daughter like a bird might throw its baby out of the nest. Littlefield also notes that several animal images relate to Emery, who resembles a hound dog with mange. Like a dog, he crawls on his belly and burrows under bushes to watch the woman at the pool. He even "becomes" a gorilla. Literary experts speculate that O'Connor uses animal images in this story to emphasize the characters' grotesqueness and their distorted spirituality.

Doppelganger

O'Connor uses Solace Layfield as Motes's doppelganger to represent part of Motes's consciousness. "Doppelganger" means spirit-like twin or counterpart. Layfield resembles Motes so much that one woman in the book asks, "Him and you twins?"

Flashback

Two flashbacks occur in *Wise Blood*. One happens when Motes is riding the train and dreaming about his grandfather. He pictures his grandfather preaching from the car hood and pointing Motes out as an example for sinners. Motes's night with Mrs. Watts prompts the second flashback. He remembers attending a carnival at age ten, seeing a naked woman, and his mother's punishing him for it. Both incidents depict Motes's strict upbringing and unhappy childhood.

Historical Context

Post-World War II Growth and Prosperity

Immediately after World War II, Americans enjoyed a surge of population growth and prosperity. By 1950, the more than 151 million Americans could take advantage of many innovations that would make their lives easier and safer, and their leisure time more enjoyable. For example, technological advances created microwave ovens and fast foods, conveniences that helped provide Americans with more time. Medical researchers developed polio and measles vaccinations, as well as the birth control pill, enabling children to live longer and couples to plan their families better. Since people had more time and were in better health, they found new ways to enjoy their free time. Commercial hotel chains and jet transport, modern turnpikes, and faster cars contributed to increased travel in America in the 1950s. Americans became passionate about automobiles and the conveniences cars allowed.

O'Connor uses America's obsession with prosperity and its love affair with cars to provide a basis for the spiritual chaos the characters in *Wise Blood* experience. O'Connor states in *The Living Novel: A Symposium* that she believes "unparalleled prosperity" results in a "distorted sense of spiritual purpose." *Wise Blood* expands that theme more than any of her other works. Throughout the novel, O'Connor presents motifs and images portraying a prosperous society. Money reigns as king: Mrs. Hitchcock checks the price tag on Motes's coat; street vendors and used-car salesmen haggle over prices; and fake preachers brag about their salaries. In addition, commercial advertising takes over the landscape in the form of signs on buildings, billboards along the roadside, and the business establishments themselves. The novel's characters focus so intently on money-related issues and prosperity that their spirituality disappears and their morals disintegrate.

Religion

Religion attracted scores of Americans during the 1950s. Not only did church affiliation soar to 63.6 percent of the population, but also religious contributions, media attention, films, and books increased tremendously. For example, people's average yearly donations to the church peaked, and movies about biblical stories, such as *The Robe*, drew huge crowds. Ministers who brought modern, positive messages attracted the thousands who believed that having a religious identification was synonymous with being an American. Even political advertising extolled the virtues of religion. Politicians allowed the addition of "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance and adopted "In God We Trust" as the national motto. Some religious critics, however, wondered whether this wholesale acceptance of religion was sincere, or whether it was just another symbol adopted by people to demonstrate their status and prosperity.



Hazel Motes denies religion as vehemently as people of the 1950s embraced it. M. J. Fitzgerald states in the *Reference Guide to American Literature* that the "mystery of the impulse towards holiness ... and the destructiveness of that impulse when carried to extremes" is the basis of *Wise Blood*. Motes's acts of violence suggest extremism, as does the seemingly blind adoption of religion by Americans living in the 1950s. O'Connor draws the parallel between the novel and real life with images of a prosperous society and of people who lack spiritual purpose as a result of it.



Critical Overview

While criticism of O'Connor's work varies from discussions of her ability to write short stories and novels to the question of her place among regional writers, the religious nature of her work reigns as the most important issue. Four theories have evolved over time.

First, O'Connor's earliest critics held that O'Connor's work had no connection to religion. Isaac Rosenfeld, one of O'Connor's primary critics, vehemently denied seeing any religious meaning in *Wise Blood*. Tills reflected the general consensus of other reviewers at the time. He said in a 1952 issue of *New Republic* that Hazel Motes "is nothing more than the poor, sick, ugly, raving lunatic that he happens to be." Some critics still hold this theory.

Other early critics spoke of O'Connor's writing with nearly as much hostility, yet they could not deny that her writing had to be taken seriously, if not admired. Influential magazines such as *Time* and the *Kenyon Review* published reviews of her work, giving it more attention than most beginning writers could even imagine. In 1955, there were twenty-seven articles published about her work; in 1960, the number doubled.

Skeptics still existed, however, and still do today. Critics adhering to the second school of thought related to O'Connor's work accept her religious intent, but they question whether her own religious vision was sufficiently positive to relay her intended message. They wonder if her views were too negative, represented by characters who are too grotesque to give her religious message credence. It is claimed by some that O'Connor's writing connects very little to real life or real problems. A few have felt that, though there may be some religious overtones in the book, the characters are more like creatures than people. Lewis Lawson writes in *Flannery O'Connor* that Haze is like a cartoon character, "unreal" and "a vehicle whose attitudes and actions would personify a spiritual view which [O'Connor] wished to reveal." Critics like Lawson place O'Connor's work in the School of Southern Gothic.

A third school of thought maintains that while religious themes do underlie O'Connor's writing, they appear to have a somewhat satanic influence. Andre Bleikasten, for example, writes in *The Heresy of Flannery O'Connor* "Even though O'Connor defended her use of the grotesque as a necessary strategy of her art, one is left with the impression that in her work it eventually became the means of a savage revilement of the whole of creation. One may wonder whether her Catholicism was not, to some extent, an alibi for misanthropy. And one may also wonder whether so much black derision is compatible with Christian faith, and ask what distinguished the extreme bleakness of her vision from plain nihilism."

The reviews published in 1960 reflect the trend towards positive criticism of O'Connor's work that began in 1958 with an article written by Caroline Gordon, O'Connor's friend and mentor. Gordon's views represent the final school of thought on O'Connor's writing. Adherents to this theory claim that O'Connor stands far above other writers in her ability



to get to the heart of theological reasoning and to create characters that react realistically to their varying religious instincts. Gordon attacks several of O'Connor's most vocal critics in an issue of *Critique* that is devoted entirely to the work of O'Connor and J. F. Powers, a fellow Catholic. Gordon condemns O'Connor's contemporaries for their inability to create characters or plots that were true to religious doctrine. Gordon believed that O'Connor not only wrote with sincere religious intent, but proficiently portrayed that intent in her characters and plots.

Today, Critics applaud O'Connor for her artistry. They recognize *Wise Blood* as a standard against which other writers should measure their work. They praise O'Connor's expert portrayal of the South, her concise and yet lively style, and her distinct ability to use grotesque characterization to emphasize the irony of life. Finally, critics honor her unwavering Christian faith, which underlies all of her writing. They understand that her unfailing belief offers hope for her characters as well as her readers.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



Critical Essay #1

Jeffrey M. Lilburn is a writer and translator specializing in twentieth-century American and Canadian literature. In the following essay, he discusses the themes of faith and religion in Wise Blood.

The world of *Wise Blood* is a spiritually empty, morally blind, cold, and hostile place. Over the years, critics have often referred to Flannery O' Connor's first novel as dark and grotesque. They then use words such as repulsive, depraved, and unredeemable to describe its characters. There can be no denying that the inhabitants of *Wise Blood* are frequently deceptive, chronically unkind, and brutally violent. Both the principal character, Hazel "Haze" Motes, and his young and simple follower, Enoch Emery, inflict and become the victims of acts of violence. Haze murders a man by running him over with his car, while Enoch beats and strips a man for his own personal gain. Yet despite the violence and seemingly unconscionable behavior exhibited by these and other characters, the cast of displaced wanderers who populate *Wise Blood* do have another trait in common: they are searching for something better.

In her Introduction to the second edition of *Wise Blood*, O'Connor describes Hazel Motes as a "Christian malgré lui" (a Christian in spite of himself). At twelve, Haze thought himself destined to become a preacher like his grandfather, but by the time he reaches early adulthood he convinces himself that he does not have a soul. Claiming that he does not "believe in anything," Motes embarks on a desperate mission to rid himself of his deeply rooted Christian beliefs. He founds the Church Without Christ and begins preaching a new Jesus that is "all man, without blood to waste." According to Robert Brinkmeyer, Jr., Haze's preaching constitutes his attempt to "sunder forever the body and the spirit." It is also his way of negating the "nameless unplaced guilt" instilled in him during childhood by his mother and grandfather. However, Haze's attempt to eradicate the presence of Jesus from his life is ultimately unsuccessful. For O'Connor, a Christian writer who wrote about Christian concerns, it is Haze's inability to escape Christ and realize his conversion to nothing that raises him above the novel's other characters.

In addition to his religious struggles, Haze must also contend with solitude and homelessness. Upon his release from the army, he returns to his home town of Eastrod, Tennessee, only to find it run down and deserted. When he arrives in Taulkinham the following day, his situation does not improve: he is confronted with the realization that he has no place to go. This rootlessness and sense of displacement is, in fact, a condition shared by most of the novel's characters. Enoch Emery, for example, has only been in Taulkinham for two months and has spent much of his life moving and being moved. The same is true of Asa and Sabbath Hawks, who also move from place to place, begging for money and handing out religious pamphlets. Such widespread and long-lasting restlessness suggest that there is something seriously wrong with the world in which these characters live. It also suggests a common desire for something better.



The link between displacement and the striving for something other, or better, is made explicit when Haze purchases the rundown Essex. He tells the man who sells him the car that he wants it "mostly to be a house" because he "ain't got any place to be." But it becomes evident that Haze buys the car not to provide himself with a place to be, but for its ability to bring him someplace else. He brags that his car will get him anywhere he wants to go, and plans to make a new start in a new city. Such a plan is made possible by "the advantage of having a car," something that could move "to the place you wanted to be."

Significantly, it is also atop the nose of his Essex that Haze preaches his new Jesus to a flow of exiting moviegoers. But the faith Haze places in both his car and his new savior is misguided. Instead of becoming the means through which he finds inner peace ("nobody with a good car needs to be justified," he tells Hawks), Haze uses his Essex to maim and kill another human being. The car leads Haze past signs that read "Jesus Saves," but he does not heed them. It is not until the car is destroyed that he recognizes his mistake and ceases to flee that which he knows he must accept. Similarly, it is only when Enoch delivers the manifestation of the new Jesus to Haze's door that he recognizes its worthlessness. He realizes, as Margaret Peller Feeley suggests, that his false idol is "merely the incarnation of all people who reject the true God and make a god in their own image."

Like Hazel, Enoch follows a misguided path in an effort to find his reward. Hurt and dejected by the unfriendly reception he has received in Taulkinham, a city where everybody wants "to knock you down," Enoch longs to become a somebody. He wishes to better his condition and be like the young men he sees displayed in insurance ads. But instead of working towards that goal, Enoch buries himself in the rigidity of a daily routine. Even after he steals the "new Jesus" from the museum, his brief moment of action is once again followed by passivity. He sits at home waiting for something to happen but, not surprisingly, the fake savior does nothing.

Enoch's final actions are even more pathetic and futile. Impressed by the line of people who wait to meet Gongga, a Hollywood movie star, he dreams of someday seeing a "line of people waiting to shake his hand." Unfortunately, he chooses to realize this dream by borrowing Gongga's persona and stripping the hired gorilla-man of his animal suit. Instead of becoming a somebody, Enoch loses himself completely and disappears into the suit. Such a strategy is doomed, Robert Donahoo argues, because the change is "superficial." According to his reading of the novel, Enoch's bestial transformation is representative of the "American tendency to address a problem by changing its appearance." Enoch's plan ultimately fails, and he is last seen alone and unchanged.

One of the major themes of the novel is faith and religious belief, but for most of the characters faith has become little more than an annoyance that is sold on city streets. It is not a relevant or meaningful part of their lives. Hoover Shoats, for instance, uses religion as a means for commercial profit, preying on the easily manipulated and the easily swayed. He is attracted to Haze's idea of a new Jesus, not for any spiritual reasons, but because he thinks it is a lucrative opportunity that simply needs a little promotion. Conversely, Asa Hawks is made uncomfortable by Haze's religious



preoccupations and refers to the young anti-preacher as a "Goddam Jesus-hog." Hawks, of course, has personal reasons for disliking Haze's activities-reasons that resurface when Sabbath reminds him that he too was once like Haze but eventually "got over it."

The idea that faith and religious belief are things one must get over, an obstacle to be overcome, is echoed by Mrs. Flood. She is unable to understand Haze's motives for blinding himself or for his walking with rocks in his shoes, much less for the more extreme act of wrapping himself in barbed wire. She tells him that these kinds of acts are no longer done, that they are something people have quit doing. Her attitudes and complacency reflect those of the society around her and provide an important clue as to why so many of the characters in *Wise Blood* are dissatisfied with their current situations. An oft-quoted passage from William Rodney Allen's reading of the novel explains what O'Connor seems to imply. Allen likens secular man living without God's grace to the many caged animals in the novel-both are hopelessly trapped. Stripped of its spiritual dimension, Allen argues that the world "is merely a prison for an odd collection of inmates-a zoo for the human animal."

Haze takes his first real steps away from that zoo after his car is rolled over the embankment. It is at this moment that Haze experiences what many critics agree is his moment of awakening. Staring into the "entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank grey sky that went on, depth after depth, into space," Haze appears to perceive that which has eluded everyone else. The sky, complete with blinding white clouds with curls and a beard, is frequently described in *Wise Blood* but is never noticed by the people walking beneath it. Brinkmeyer has suggested that these celestial descriptions are the only hints of the divine in the novel. One might even read them as suggesting the presence of God. Whatever it is Haze sees, it is his recognition and appreciation of the depth before him that finally allows him to end his quest for some other place. It is also immediately after this revelation that he decides to blind himself. Allen has suggested that as Haze stares into the distance, his illusion of freedom destroyed, he perceives the dimension of spiritual freedom and blinds himself to see even deeper into that freedom.

But not every critic focuses on the religious aspects of O'Connor's novel. Jon Lance Bacon, for example, offers a reading of the novel that provides a different twist to some of the scenes already discussed. He argues that in *Wise Blood* O'Connor depicts a society pervaded by advertising and marketing techniques. In short, Bacon reads the novel as a critique of American consumer culture. Citing influential texts such as Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride*, Bacon discusses the increasing influence that corporate capitalism exerts over individual identity. He observes that the citizens of Taulkinham are inundated with commercial appeals and that the boundaries of the urban setting are defined by electric signs. He offers Enoch as the character most identified with consumerism, describing him as "pathetically vulnerable to advertisers' messages." It is by appropriating the imagery of consumerism, Bacon argues, that Enoch hopes to become a new man; he anticipates a new and improved self, but the ape suit only leads to a loss of identity. Similarly, the value Haze attaches to his car is indicative of his susceptibility to the kind of thinking fostered by consumer society: the



ownership of an automobile allows him to conceive himself as a totally free individual. It is only after the car is destroyed, Bacon notes, that he is forced to consider a reality other than the material world.

Still, a reading of O' Connor's fiction must take into account the author's religious concerns. In her introduction to *Three by Flannery O'Connor*, Sally Fitzgerald reminds readers that O'Connor herself thought the novel "a very hopeful book." It is true that Haze's act of self-mutilation does have a positive effect on the selfish and self-centered Mrs. Flood. Her attitudes change when, at the very end of the novel, she begins to feel that she has been cheated of something of a non-material nature. Initially, she felt cheated financially, but when Haze dies she thinks that he may have known something she did not. In the final scene, she stares deeply into the dead man's eyes, hoping to find the way into the pinpoint of light she sees before her. Brinkmeyer argues that this final chapter shows Mrs. Flood's faith slowly emerging; her selfish common sense "giving way to something closer to kindness and charity." Moreover, Feeley reads this as the most affirmative of O'Connor's endings: "That so limited and venal a creature can be moved signifies hope for all." Ultimately, it is up to each reader to decide whether or not hope and affirmation are to be found in O'Connor's twisted tale.

Source: Jeffrey M Lilbum, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1998



Critical Essay #2

*In the following excerpt, Ciuba examines how most of the characters in *Wise Blood* are unable to look beyond the surface of people and things. Only Hazel Motes, who himself begins by judging people at "face value," learns how to look beyond the literal and thus understand the divine nature of the universe.*

In *Wise Blood* Flannery O'Connor continually seems to stare at the faces of her characters. She does not just describe and constantly refer to the faces of Haze Motes and his fellow sinners with the hard, sharp eye that served her as a cartoonist in college and with the deep awareness that produced a haunting self-portrait with peacock in later life. She also focuses in vivid detail on the nameless faces of minor figures whose very existence in the novel depends on their description as they are suddenly caught by O'Connor in close-up. Enoch Emery remembers that the Welfare woman who cared for him was not old "but she she was ugly. She had theseyer brown glasses and her hair was so thin it looked like ham gravy trickling over her skull" A red-haired waitress at Walgreen's has "green eyes set In pink" so that she looks like a picture of a Lime Cherry Surprise, while another at the Paris Diner shows "a big yellow dental plate and the same color hair done up in a black hairnet." A woman with "a square red face and her hair ... freshly set" carries a "cat-faced" baby as she listens to Haze preach.

All of these faces in O'Connor's portrait gallery of a novel lack both depth and completeness. As an artist, she flattens a three-dimensional world into two so that her characters resemble Haze's face at the moment it is pressed to the glass of his car watching Asa and his daughter: "a paper face pasted there." Moreover, O'Connor avoids portraying all the features of these faces, preferring to concentrate on striking and invariably ugly physical characteristics. Her extreme selectivity and exaggeration turn characters into spiritual cartoons. The unholy fools of *Wise Blood* exist not so much in the fullness of their flesh and blood but in the reduction to a set of yellow teeth, a pair of icy eyes, a patch of blotchy skin. Yet if O'Connor's gaze obliterates much, it leaves the essentials of the soul to be seen in the distorted outlines of the body.

O'Connor's caricatures illustrate her creed as novelist and believer. In her essays she repeatedly stresses that the writer must start where all human knowledge begins—the senses. Her art does not originate with philosophical questions, abstract problems or social issues but with whatever is near at hand and in front of her face. She quotes with approval Ford Madox Ford's injunction that the novelist cannot have a man appear long enough to sell a newspaper in a story without providing enough detail to make the reader see him. The starting point of literature is thus the literal. Because of her commitment to the surfaces of the world, O'Connor cannot do other than begin with the faces of her characters....

Since her characters so often live on this two-dimensional plane, far removed from their divine origins, she renders their faces in the most superficial terms. In *Wise Blood* O'Connor demonstrates that although literalism is a necessary approach to the world, it is unwise and sometimes even bloody as the final means of understanding it. The



mistake that all of her comic caricatures make is that they only take the world at its face value and never really see the value in faces.

O'Connor dramatizes the limits of such literalism at the novel's beginning in the purblind sight of Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock. As she sits "facing Motes in the section" of the train, she is forced to look at his deep-set, pecan eyes and prominent skull. Haze's face invites the aspiring visionary to go beyond her sentimentalized faith that "yes, life was an inspiration." Captivated yet baffled by Haze's eyes, drawn continually to them yet irked because she can only try to see into them, Mrs. Hitchcock nearly confronts the tremendous and fascinating realm of the holy in the human world. Yet she never discovers the image and likeness of God in his creation, for she will not surrender herself to the depths beyond depths of Haze's face. Instead, she stubbornly defends herself against its challenge by concentrating only on face value. As she squints at the price tag on the sleeve of Haze's suit, she learns that it "had cost him \$11.98. She felt that that placed him and looked at his face again as if she were fortified against it now."

Mrs. Hitchcock can only look at Haze if she abstracts him into a class and category. Having reduced a person to a price tag, she tries to protect herself against the summons from the mystery that she dimly senses by keeping her eye on the surface offered by Haze's face. O'Connor provides the first description of Motes from the viewpoint of Mrs. Hitchcock as if this lady were trying to steel herself against the invitation of his eyes by immersing herself in the superficial details of the rest of his features: shrike's nose, creased mouth and flattened hair. Mrs. Hitchcock prefers to see only the two-dimensional reality directly in front of her face rather than what O'Connor calls "the image at the heart of things." O'Connor represents Mrs. Hitchcock's failure to perceive the world in all its roundness by appropriately flattening her out. Glimpsed by Haze on her way to her berth, her hair a mass of knots and knobs that "framed her face like dark toadstools," she becomes nothing more than surfaces herself in O'Connor's mercilessly precise portraiture.

Mrs. Hitchcock is the first of O'Connor's literalists who, lacking their creator's profounder vision, view the world only on one level. Virtually every other character in the novel repeats her sin....

All of these foolish faces in *Wise Blood* seem blind to Paul's vision of how "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). However, O'Connor with open face herself shows in Haze how one human image is made to conform to the divine model. Haze Motes develops from the literalism of Enoch Emery to the anagogical vision of Flannery O'Connor. Throughout much of the novel he consistently judges people by their face value. Although one mechanic already warned him that his dilapidated Essex could not be saved, he entrusts it to a huckster at a different garage, "certain that it was in honest hands." The scarred face and dark glasses of Asa Hawks, another salesman of salvation, convince Haze that this fraud once blinded himself for Jesus. The naif cannot understand how such a preacher could have fathered an illegitimate daughter like Sabbath Lily. When Haze looks at her homely face, he wisely reasons that the innocence of Sunday's child, normally full of grace,



virtually beckons his blood to seduction. Actually, this paleface with her large, red lips hopes to seduce him because she has never seen a boy that she "liked the looks of any better." "

Each fails to lead the other into temptation on their trip into the country. Although Sabbath poses alluringly on the ground, Haze lies a few feet away and covers his face with his hat. His very literalism is a far greater lust, for in the dark this would-be Solomon tries to determine whether a bastard like Sabbath Hawks can be saved in his new religion. He finally concludes, "There wouldn't be any sense to the word, bastard, in the Church Without Christ." His inclusiveness, however, does not result from discovering the Father's prodigal love which transcends all superficial distinctions but from deciding to take language merely at face value. Since Haze believes in the Church Without Christ, he must speak a language without any inherent Logos. The Word, indeed any word, even *bastard*, is Just a sound devoid of sense. Hence, sin has no existence outside of speech. When Asa Hawks quite accurately charges Haze with "Fornication and blasphemy and what else?" Haze dismisses the accusation, "They ain't nothing but words... I don't believe in sin."

Just as Haze separates word from concept until a name means nothing, he divorces Jesus' humanity from his divinity. His literalism drives him to seek a new Jesus, "one that's all man, without blood to waste." This Jesus is purely human, for Haze's nihilism demes the plenitude of being which characterizes divinity. A Jesus who cannot spend himself extravagantly is hardly God. The consequence of rejecting the incarnation is that there may be crucifixion but no resurrection, suffering but no redemption. Such a divorce destroys all significance, leaving behind merely emptied physical signs. "Where in your time and your body has Jesus redeemed you?" Haze asks the few faces who listen to him for proof in the flesh. "Show me where because I don't see the place." Salvation becomes as meaningless as Sin if the senses provide the sole guide to reality. When someone seems to suggest that the site of salvation may be in the conscience, Haze warns that conscience must be hunted and killed "because it's no more than your face in the mirror is." Since Haze's face values exalt the letter over the spirit, Enoch brings him a literal version of his new Jesus. A Jesus without blood to waste is nothing more than an embalmed corpse. Haze's word for word reading of the world eliminates the divine word so that only dead flesh and hollowed language remain.

Such blindness causes Haze constantly to overlook the visible features of the invisible God. He lives in the desert of Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" where there is "No place of grace for those who avoid the face." Throughout his aborted idyll with Sabbath, he misses the significance of the brilliant white cloud "with curls and a beard" that follows his car. As Richard Giannone notes [in *Thought*, Vol. 59, 1984], the portrait in the heavens recalls the face of Moses, which glowed so brightly with divine glory that he had to veil it from the Israelites. Again God shows his presence by shining forth upon his creation, but *Hazel*, Hebrew for "he who sees God," puts on his own veil by covering his face with his hat.

Always in the dark, Haze misses another theophany when the car that he trusted to the supposedly honest mechanic breaks down. A one-armed attendant of a service station



gives him a can of gas and his car a push-all gratis. These freely done services shine forth as rare and mysterious acts of goodness in a novel where so many prophets are profiteers. Like Haze but in a radically different sense, this good man so hard to find works for nothing. But his gratuitous kindness only provokes one more expression of Haze's nihilistic egotism. "I don't need no favors from him," Haze boasts to save face. And when Sabbath praises his Essex, he completes the one-upmanship of his lame triumph, "It ain't been built by a bunch of foreigners or niggers or one-arm men." Haze can only respond to this stranger's generosity by labeling his appearance. Such reductionism removes the attendant's graciousness from the realm of amazing grace so that he becomes nothing more than what is observed, a man with one arm. By taking him at his face value Haze avoids an encounter with mystery, which might expose his true dependency and demand that he bestow favor on others. Despite his reduction of salvation to the superficial, Haze hears a call to see beyond the surface. He escapes being another of the novel's spiritual caricatures by becoming what Lewis A. Lawson calls [in his *Another Generation: Southern Fiction since World War II*, 1984] "an oxymoron as character." Haze searches for the value in faces *malgré lui*. As if the need for such wisdom were in his blood, he has the same face as his grandfather, a fiery fundamentalist preacher. The way he sits on the train in chapter one typifies his spiritual posture throughout the novel: he strains forward to see. He especially longs to look into the eyes of Asa Hawks that are hidden by dark glasses. And although he gives Asa's daughter the fast eye, he sends her a note that demonstrates a deeper understanding of language than Enoch's taking each word at its face value: "BABE, I NEVER SAW ANYBODY THAT LOOKED AS GOOD AS YOU BEFORE is WHY I CAME HERE." When this rare good woman asks him whether he meant the adjective in its physical or moral sense, he answers, "The both." A confirmed literalist like Enoch would not even perceive a possible pun.

Since Haze recognizes such double dimensions as well as constantly resists them, his literalism makes him half right rather than completely wrong. His attention to surfaces could become the starting point for a return to the divine source on which O'Connor always keeps her eye. When he criticizes a crowd so apathetic to the atonement that even if Jesus had saved them, "You wouldn't do nothing about it. Your faces wouldn't move, neither this way nor that," he is as much insightful as overly insistent. He may emphasize appearance too much, but he recognizes that redemption should transform the stony expressions of their spiritually stolid lives.

O'Connor forces Haze to face the limits of his literalism in two scenes that demonstrate the absurdity of taking the world at face value. After putting on his mother's glasses, Haze sees in the mirror "his mother's face in his." He hastens to take off the spectacles, for he recognizes his own sinfulness in the accusing image of his guilt-obsessed parent. Yet before he can remove them, "the door opened and two more faces floated into his line of vision." Sabbath enters the room like a mock-Madonna, cradling the pseudo-savior of Enoch Emery whom she shows Haze as his own child. O'Connor stages a horribly fitting Christmas tableau for Haze's new religion. In the Church Without Christ, the Virgin with Child becomes a whore with a dwarfed corpse, and Haze, the founder and father of lies, plays the role of daddy to a dead god.



Haze stares at this burlesque nativity with his head "thrust forward as if he had to use his whole face to see with" and then lunges at the "squinting face" of his shriveled infant. The mommy and the mummy reflect the same image which Haze just spied in the looking glass. Glimpsing the depths of his own nothingness, he destroys the empty offspring of sin which his whole nihilistic faith has fathered. The iconoclast seems to brace himself for a blow of retribution, but it does not come immediately. He tries to flee in his car the truth of Sabbath's charge that he has never wanted anything except Jesus, but his flight ends in an about-face so that his way is God-ward (2 Cor. 3:4).

The violence which Haze expected as punishment is also a stroke of good fortune. Although O'Connor mentions that Haze was driving very fast, the patrolman offers neither speeding nor travelling on the wrong side of the road as reasons for stopping him. Rather, he simply says, "I just don't like your face," and calmly pushes Haze's car over the cliff. Even if the officer's summary justice results from seeing "the ramshackle car and its unlicensed driver as a public threat" [Sr. Kathleen Feely notes in *Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock*, 1972], his method of law enforcement is so extreme that mere motives cannot adequately explain it. The very perverseness is O'Connor's point, for the scene dramatizes the consequences of living in a world where appearance has become the absolute law. When reality extends no farther than the surface, a person's face provides sufficient justification for pronouncing last judgment.

O'Connor could have planned no more appropriate climax for Haze's career. Having taken the world at face value, he is himself taken at face value. He suffers because of his own sin, but the effect of this chastisement is revelatory. As he gazes into the blank sky, he comes face to face with his own void. "His face didn't change and he didn't turn it toward the patrolman. It seemed to be concentrated on space." However, this vision is decidedly not superficial, for the empty heavens extend "depth after depth, into space." Haze "sees beyond the visage of evil," Jonathan Baumbach observes [in *The Landscape of Nightmare. Studies in the Contemporary American Novel*, 1965], "the ugly veil masking the real world, to the sight of limitless space—a manifestation of the infinite." In the face of such a sublime panorama, Haze discovers his profound nothingness. For the rest of his life he must submit himself to the consuming power of this same three-dimensional negation, converting physical deprivation into spiritual purification.

The superficial Mrs. Flood cannot understand such a paradoxical road to salvation. In words that might be applicable to virtually every literalist in the novel, O'Connor comments that Haze's landlady "was not a woman who felt more violence in one word than in another; she took every word at its face value but all the faces were the same." Mrs. Flood reads life word for word and understands each as a repetition of its predecessor. By turning God's word into just another linguistic face in the crowd, she denies the saving presence of the Logos which assumed a human image. Obsessed with Haze's face, she tries to take him at face value, yet she consistently fails to categorize or understand him. She notices that his "face had a peculiar pushing look, as if it were going forward after something it could just distinguish in the distance," but her own eyes prove that Haze surely cannot see: he has burned out his sight with lime. When he explains that he does penance because "I'm not clean," Mrs. Flood, blind to



the figurative dimension of language, replies, "I know it ... you got blood on that night shirt and on the bed. You ought to get you a washwoman."

Mrs Flood recognizes sight but not insight, physical but not spiritual cleanliness. Haze has moved beyond such a literal View. He has turned the facial vision often developed by the blind into the gaze of a soul which has turned its face to God. His strange and violent actions force his landlady to search for the divine dimensions that she prefers to ignore. Holding his dead body, she struggles to go beyond face value. She peers into ill's face, now just a skull beneath the skin, and tries to penetrate the deep tunnels of his eyes. Although Mrs. Flood has not yet attained Haze's beatific vision, she has at least become dissatisfied with her former way of reading the world. If she could ever get beyond "the beginning of something she couldn't begin," Mrs. Flood might discover like Jacob (Gn. 33:10) the truth which O'Connor's own artistry incarnates: seeing the face of a man in all its graciousness could be like beholding the very countenance of God.

Source: Gary M. Ciuba, "From Face Value in the Value in Faces: *Wise Blood* and the Limits of Literalism," in *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. XIX, No 3, Summer, 1989, pp 72-80.



Critical Essay #3

*In the following excerpt, Littlefield explores how the materialism of modern society shown in *Wise Blood* helps articulate O'Connor's major themes of Christian redemption and the grotesque.*

Much of the Criticism of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952) has centered around her themes. For the most part, such criticism has illustrated and therefore confirmed, through analyses of her fiction, what Miss O'Connor had said about herself that as a writer she is orthodox Christian (specifically Catholic), that her major theme in fiction is the redemption of man by Christ, and that she depicts the grotesque in society.

But the critics have ignored a significant point of her personal philosophy that appears as a motif in her fiction: that material prosperity has had ill effects on man's spiritual well-being. It is basic to the grotesqueness in modern society, it stunts man's spiritual growth, and it makes man's salvation more difficult, if not impossible. *Wise Blood* is her longest and most significant rendering of these ideas although they clearly appear in many of her other works....

Wise Blood takes as its theme the redemption of man by Christ, a theme basic to most of O'Connor's work. It is the story of Hazel Motes, "a Christian *malgré lui*," who in his attempt to deny his belief in Christ establishes his Church Without Christ, but who cannot avoid the visitation of grace upon him and subsequently blinds himself to "justify" his belief in Christ. The reader sees in Hazel, as well as in the other characters, a grotesqueness, a distortion of spiritual purpose that O'Connor speaks of....

The major characters-Hazel Motes, Enoch Emory, Asa Hawks, Sabbath Lily Hawks, Hoover Shoats, Mrs. Flood-all have one thing in common; they are all motivated by religion in one way or another. Melvin J. Friedman says [in "Flannery O'Connor: Another Legend in Southern Fiction," in *Flannery O'Connor*, ed. Robert E. Reiter] that "Hazel Motes meets a succession of false religionists and we are intended to measure the sincerity of his convictions against the hypocrisy of theirs." He includes Enoch among the hypocrites, but as will be shown later, Enoch is every bit as sincere as Haze (he was worshipping the new Jesus, even though he did not know what it was, before he heard Haze preach). The significant thing here is that the division of characters into the sincere and hypocritical also separates the characters according to the way in which material prosperity affects their motives: the latter pursue it as an end while the former use it (though often symbolically) as a means to an end.

Prosperity does not mean wealth here, for as Miss O'Connor has said, most of her characters are poor. No character in this novel attains material prosperity, but a number of them *pursue* it. As a basis of that pursuit, most of them use religion-either a perversion or distortion of Christianity or religion in general. They adopt the tone and jargon of the high-pressure salesman and offer the people the "bargain" or the "something-for-nothing" routine.



Early in the novel the reader finds a man selling potato peelers on the street. He draws a crowd and offers his "bargain" to them. Then Asa Hawks and his daughter Sabbath Lily appear on the scene. She is handing out pamphlets that say "Jesus Calls You" (one is reminded here of the Uncle Sam posters), and he is begging, using religion as his persuader: "Help a blind preacher. If you won't repent, give up a nickel." The potato peeler salesman recognizes immediately that Hawks has a "gimmick" or a "racket," that he is hawking his wares, as his name implies, just as if they were potato peelers. The salesman says, "What the hell do you think you are doing?.. I got these people together, how do you think you can horn in?" In other words, he recognizes Hawks for what he is—business competition. Hawks is an ex-evangelist of sorts who ten years before had promised his congregation to blind himself to justify his belief in Jesus. But his nerve had failed. Since that time he has faked blindness, which he uses to gain sympathy in begging. Here obviously is a man whose sense of spiritual purpose is distorted; yet, ironically, he has insight into Haze's problem. When Hawks first meets Haze, he says, "I can hear the urge for Jesus in his voice." Haze curses him and he says, "Listen boy, ... you can't run away from Jesus. Jesus is a fact."

Sabbath Lily Hawks helps her father beg by handing out pamphlets. She is a fifteen-year-old bastard who spouts perverted scriptures ("A bastard shall not enter the kingdom of heaven!") and tells gruesome tales about Jesus's visitation of horrible punishment on the sinful. She is "pure filthy right down to the guts" She tells Haze, "I like being that way, and I can teach you how to like it. Don't you, want to learn how to like it?" Through Sabbath, O'Connor makes significant commentary on one aspect of our prosperous society: the panacean approach to moral and spiritual problems. In this case, it takes the form of the love-10m column in the newspaper. She writes Mary Brittle to find out if she should "neck" or not. Since she is a bastard and bastards do not enter the kingdom of heaven, she wants to know what difference it makes. Mary replies, "'Light necking is acceptable, but I think your real problem is one of adjustment to the modern world. Perhaps you ought to reexamine your religious values to see if they meet your needs in Life. A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper perspective and do not let it warf you. Read some good books on Ethical Culture!'" As if this were not enough, O'Connor gives Sabbath's reply to it: "'What I really want to know is should I go the whole hog or not? That's my real problem. I'm adjusted okay to the modern world.'" Here we see the humorous and the serious, the normal and the abnormal—in short, the grotesque. But the ironic truth is that, for O'Connor, Sabbath *is* "adjusted okay to the modern world" to the extent that it has produced this spiritual chaos in which she and the other characters wander.

Hoover Shoats, alias Onnie J. Holy, sees this panacean approach to spiritual problems as a money-making "gimmick." He knows that Haze's Church Without Christ is an idea to capitalize upon, and he wants to form a business partnership with Haze. One night when Haze begins to lose his crowd, Shoats steps in and begins the preselling technique of selling himself: "I want to tell you all about me." Then he gives a testimonial about what the Prophet (Haze) has done for him. He follows that with the "something-for-nothing" technique: "I'm not selling a thing, I'm giving something away!" Shoats then preaches the value of the Church of Christ Without Christ (a change in title which Haze does not like). Like any good salesman, he tries to create faith in his product and make



it appealing: "... you can absolutely trust this church-it's based on the Bible." Each member can "interpret" the Bible any way he chooses. The church is also up-to-date. Shoats then asks for the dollar it takes to become a member. And what is a dollar? "A few dimes! Not too much to pay to unlock that little rose of sweetness inside you!"

Shoats gives Haze his qualifications for the business partnership. He once had a radio program called "Souls-ease," fifteen minutes of "Mood, Melody, and Mentality," the title of which sounds more like a commercial for a mattress manufacturer than a program of spiritual inspiration. He sees that the idea of a new Jesus has possibilities: "All it would need is a little promotion." But Haze rejects the partnership and slams the car door on Shoats's thumb. Shoats threatens, "I'm going to run you out of business. I can get my own new Jesus and I can get Prophets for peanuts." He then hires Solace Layfield, who looks like Haze and has a car like Haze's, to pose as the True Prophet. Thus, Miss O'Connor again reveals the distorted sense of spiritual purpose in the form of commercialized religion.

Mrs. Flood, Haze's landlady, also pursues material prosperity as an end. She plans to take advantage of Haze's blindness and asceticism. Since he has no use for money, she plans to marry him in order to get control of his government pension. When the policemen kill Haze, she feels that she has been cheated in some way, but in what way she is not sure.

The two characters who use material prosperity, though often symbolically, as a means to an end are Enoch Emory and Hazel Motes, the central character. Enoch's ambition is "to become something. He wanted to better his condition until he was the best. He wanted to be THE young man of the future, like the ones in the insurance ads. He wanted, some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand." The achievement of this goal will be his reward from the new Jesus. All of his actions are motivated by his religion.

The symbols most closely related to Enoch are those of the city and its institutions-the zoo, the park, the pool, the museum-and the movie theatre, all of which represent the leisure afforded by the prosperous society. When we first meet Emory, he tells Haze that he has been in Taulkinham only two months and that he already works for the city. We find that he works at the zoo and that his life has become the routine life of modern society.

This routine is best revealed in his worship of the new Jesus, which he had discovered but did not recognize until he heard Haze preach. His religious ritual becomes a daily routine, all of which takes place in and involves those institutions maintained by the city: "Every day when he got off duty, he went into the park, and every day when he went in, he did the same things." He goes to the pool and hides in the bushes to watch women. This is among the things he must do to "build up to" visiting the center of the park. HIS next step is to go to the FROSTY BOTTLE, "a hotdog stand in the shape of an Orange Crush." There he makes suggestive remarks to the waitress who he thinks secretly loves him. The FROSTY BOTTLE, a symbol of crass commercialism (and, therefore, material prosperity) intruding upon ground usually denied it, becomes a part of his



religious ritual. His next stop is the zoo where he looks at the animals with awe and hate. He has to go by them before he can proceed with the ritual. He feels that they wait "evil eyed for him, ready to throw him off time." One is reminded here of what was evidently one of Miss O'Connor's favorite quotations from St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "The dragon sits by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is necessary to pass by the dragon" The animals are the dragon he has to pass to get to his new Jesus. The temple of worship, in which dwells the new Jesus (a mummified man, three feet long), is called M V S E V M, and Enoch shivers to pronounce it: "Muvseevum."

Enoch steals the new Jesus for Haze, expecting a reward for his action to follow: "He pictured himself, after it was over, as an entirely new man, with an even better personality than he had now." Ironically, he is later transformed, and he finds his method of achieving that transformation on his way to deliver the new Jesus to Haze. In front of a movie marquee he sees Gonga the gorilla, a great movie star. Enoch immediately recognizes Gonga as a symbol of success in the modern world. Here is someone who has "become something" Moreover, he has a long line of children waiting to shake hands with him. This product of the motion-picture industry becomes Enoch's motivating force. He usurps the position of the man in the gorilla suit by evidently killing him and stealing the suit in an effort to realize his ambitions.

With Hazel Motes, as with Enoch, material prosperity is basic to the achievement of his goal to establish the Church Without Christ. The major symbol here is the automobile, perhaps *the* symbol (if there is such a thing) of the modern, mechanized, prosperous world. Haze's car is an old Essex with one door tied on, a horn that does not work, and windshield wipers that "clatter like two idiots clapping in church." In the car-buying scene, O'Connor sends the reader through the sales routines again. There is the haggling over prices; the salesman demonstrates how the car runs and stresses its quality. He wouldn't take a Chrysler for it, and it wasn't made by a "bunch of niggers" or, as Haze later says, Jews or one-armed men.

That Miss O'Connor devotes a chapter to this event is significant. The car becomes literally and figuratively the rock upon which Haze builds his church. Literally, it *is* his church. He climbs up on the hood and preaches his Church Without Christ, just as his grandfather had preached from the hood of his old Ford. Figuratively, it becomes the symbol of his disavowing the existence of Christ. When he finds that Asa Hawks has supposedly blinded himself to justify his belief in Jesus, he says, "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified." It becomes his escape, literally from Taulkinham and figuratively from Christ. It is what saves him from a visitation of grace. After the patrolman pushes the Essex over the hill and destroys it, Haze gives himself over to Christ, blinds himself to justify his belief, and mortifies his flesh by wearing barbed wire around his chest and putting rocks and glass in his shoes. He has no concern for money, and even throws it away. Material prosperity makes man's salvation more difficult or impossible. The only one saved is Haze, and that is possible only after a long struggle and after he loses his car—the symbol of material prosperity....



Miss O'Connor devotes very little space in *Wise Blood* to filling in the details of the setting within which these characters move. However, she quite often focuses our attention on certain details that relate to the motifs and images of the prosperous society. Throughout the novel is an emphasis on money. On the first page we find the lady on the train squinting to see the price tag on Haze's suit. There are the street vendors and the used-car salesmen who haggle over prices. We are even told to the cent how much Shoats and Layfield make and what Layfield's salary is. The examples are endless. There is also an emphasis on commercialism in the form of advertising. One of the first things Haze sees in Taulkinham is signs: "PEANUTS, WESTERN UNION, AJAX, TAXI, HOTEL, CANDY." Several times O'Connor brings to our attention the CCC snuff and the 666 (a cure-all patent medicine) advertisements that appear on the roadsides. She also tells us of a cow dressed as a housewife and of calendars that advertise funeral homes and tire manufacturers. The FROSTY BOTTLE is itself an advertisement. Such details are used to purpose in a novel that contains so few details of setting. They support the motifs and images of material prosperity that underlie the themes of this novel.

In *Wise Blood*, Miss O'Connor presents her basic theme of the redemption of man by Christ. That redemption is difficult because of the distorted sense of moral purpose in the characters. They wander in moral and spiritual chaos, and only one of them is redeemed. The rest remain grotesque and bestial. In her presentation of these themes, as well as the characters and their motives, Miss O'Connor uses symbols, images, and details drawn from the society of "unparalleled prosperity," a society which provides little assurance of the joy of life. Thus, she produces in *Wise Blood* an underlying theme that material prosperity is basic to the spiritual chaos which she felt was rampant in our society.

Source: Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* 'Unparalleled Prosperity' and Spiritual Chaos," 10 *The Mississippi Quarterly*, Vol. XXIII, No.2, Spring, 1970, pp 121-33.

Adaptations

Director John Huston adapted *Wise Blood* to film in 1979. Brad Dourif starred as Hazel Motes. Other cast members included Ned Beatty, Harry Dean Stanton, Dan Shor, and Amy Wright. Rated PG, the film is distributed by Universal Studios Home Video.



Topics for Further Study

Wise Blood depicts a man who denies Christianity to the point of extremes. Like Hazel Motes, many people feel a pull towards holiness that can result in destructiveness when the impulse is carried too far. Psychologists often study this phenomenon in cult followers. Research one of the recent cult suicides/massacres (e.g., Jonestown, Branch Davidians, Heaven's Gate) to try to understand the "cult mentality." Explain cult members' actions in terms of Hazel Motes' actions in the novel and in terms of impulse carried too far.

Form a panel of "specialists" who will come together to present their views on the characters' motives in *Wise Blood*. These "specialists" should include a psychologist, a member of the clergy, a business person, and a representative of the community at large. The "specialists" must speak as experts in their particular areas of expertise and be prepared to cite examples of the characters' actions that will validate their views.

Hazel Motes and Enoch Emery both see their obtaining material prosperity as a way for them to accomplish their goals. What do Hazel and Enoch acquire and accomplish, respectively, that symbolizes their prosperity and proves to them that they have "made it?" How do people today prove to others that they have "made it"? Be ready to defend your thoughts.

Create a mask for one of the characters from *Wise Blood* that depicts the character's particular expression in a specific scene from the story. (For example, show Sabbath Lily Hawks at her most seductive.) Be prepared to explain the scene and the reasons for the expression you have chosen for your character.



Compare and Contrast

Late 1930s and 1940s: Reeling from the effects of the Great Depression, Americans conserved their money.

1950s: Americans became avid consumers, spending more and more money to buy the new products that technological advances provided them.

Today: With the advent of shopping services on the Internet and television, as well as the proliferation of shopping malls (which first began in the 1950s), and a strong economy, consumerism defines much of American life.

Late 1930s and 1940s: Population growth was at a virtual standstill. People did not want to have children for whom they could not provide. 1950s: America experienced a baby boom related to the improved economy. The American people thought that having more Americans would better support the growing economy.

Today: The Baby Boomers are aging, causing increased concerns about health care, while an increasing percentage of population growth is due to a new influx of immigrants from Asia, Mexico, and the Middle East.

Late 1930s and 1940s: Americans viewed cars as workhorses; they took people where they wanted to go.

1950s: Americans began their love affair with automobiles. Faster, sleeker cars were available as well as better roads and services. Cars became symbols of prosperity and luxury.

Today: Cars are still a central part of American culture and a major status symbol; people are often defined by whether they drive a minivan, a sport utility vehicle, or a compact car. Cars become increasingly expensive due, in part, to safety regulations, spurring an increase in used car sales.

Late 1930s and 1940s: People went to church as a matter of routine. The Protestant ethic dominated.

1950s: A religious awakening began, with church affiliation at an all-time high. The Catholic Church became an American institution.

Today: Increasing numbers of people are staying away from traditional churches, such as the Catholic Church, to the point that many religious leaders are concerned about shrinking memberships. More people who still wish to go to church are attending nondenominational congregations that stress social issues as much as -or even more than- religion.

What Do I Read Next?

Flannery O'Connor's "Everything that Rises Must Converge," first published in 1964, and included in the 1965 short story collection of the same title, comprises such themes as acculturation, aging, death and dying, disease and health, and the African-American experience. Set in the newly integrated South of the 1960s, it tells the story of Julian, a recent college graduate who is too attached to his mother. HIS prejudiced mother suffers a stroke during an incident with a black woman, and Julian feels the overwhelming effects of his dependency.

"The Lame Shall Enter First," another short story included in the *Everything that Rises Must Converge* collection, weaves a disturbing story of a father's misdirected love, and his son's resulting suicide. The widowed father and grieving son seek solace beyond each other's embrace and are both influenced by a disturbed and disfigured young man who claims to be under Satan's power.

A Good Man is Hard to Find is the title story of O'Connor's 1955 short-story collection by the same name. Originally published in 1953, the story is about a self-centered, smug grandmother and her family, who are traveling through the South, where a murderer is rumored to be hiding. When the family wrecks the car, three men confront them; Grandmother recognizes the murderer as "The Misfit." He kills the rest of the family first and then toys With Grandmother's emotions before killing her.

William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, published in 1930, influenced O'Connor's thinking and writing. Told in a stream-of-consciousness style using grotesque characterization, the story explores the nature of grieving, community, family, and society.

Nathaniel West's writing also influenced Flannery O'Connor's thinking and style. She recommended *Miss Lonelyhearts*, in particular, to her friends. Published in 1933, the novel concerns a male newspaper columnist who tries desperately to give advice to the lovelorn. When he becomes involved with one of his correspondents, he is killed.



Key Questions

Flannery O' Connor began writing *Wise Blood*, a novel that attacks America's obsession with prosperity and secularized religion, in 1948. Before completing the novel, she published a few of its chapters in various magazines. This was two years before she learned she had lupus. The entire complex novel, her first, was published finally in 1952.

1. Hazel Motes and Enoch Emery both see that obtaining material prosperity is a way for them to accomplish their goals. What do Hazel and Enoch acquire and accomplish, respectively, that symbolizes their prosperity and proves to them that they have "made it?" How do people today prove to others that they have "made it"? Be ready to defend your thoughts.
2. Create a mask for one of the characters from *Wise Blood* that depicts the character's particular expression in a specific scene from the story. (For example, show Sabbath Lily Hawks at her most seductive.) Be prepared to explain the scene and the reasons for the expression you have chosen for your character.
3. *Wise Blood* depicts a man who denies Christianity to the point of extremes. Like Hazel Motes, many people feel a pull towards holiness that can result in destructiveness when the impulse is carried too far. Psychologists often study this phenomenon in cult followers. Research one of the recent cult suicides/ massacres (e.g., Jonestown, Branch Davidians, Heaven's Gate) to try to understand the "cult mentality." Explain cult members' actions in terms of Hazel Motes's actions in the novel and in terms of impulse carried too far.
4. Form a panel of "specialists" who will come together to present their views on the characters' motives in *Wise Blood*.

Literary Precedents

In addition to writing from her experiences as a Roman Catholic raised in the Protestant South and from her struggles with lupus, Flannery O'Connor was also affected by other American authors, both from the North and South. Told in a stream-of-consciousness style using grotesque characterization, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, published in 1930, influenced O'Connor's thinking and writing. Nathaniel West's writing also influenced O'Connor's thinking and style. She recommended his books, *Miss Lonelyhearts* in particular, to her friends.



Further Study

John Byars, "Notes and Discussion Mimicry and Parody in *Wise Blood*," in *College Literature*, Vol 11, No 3, 1984, pp. 276-79.

A review that describes ironies in the novel that O'Connor communicates through the use of twins. grandfather, Layfield, and Hawks Byars also supports O'Connor's use of parody through various animal incidents.

Robert Fitzgerald, "Introduction" to *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965

Fitzgerald shares his personal memories of O'Connor as a close family friend He describes her difficult times with lupus and provides insight into some of her writing.

Robert Golden and Mary Sullivan, *Flannery O'Connor and Caroline Gordon: A Reference Guide*, G K Hall, 1977.

This book provides a complete guide to reviews, articles, and books about Flannery O'Connor and her work. In addition, the introduction Written by Golden explains Criticism of O'Connor's works in terms of four schools of thought about the religious issues they raise.

Laura Kennedy, "Exhortation in *Wise Blood*. Rhetorical Theory as an Approach to Flannery O'Connor," in *Flannery O'Connor New Perspectives*, edited by Sura Rath and Mary Shaw, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 152-68.

Kennedy explains the three distinguishable features of exhortative discourse and demonstrates how O'Connor's work meets the requirements.

Robert Phillips, *Coping with Lupus*, Avery, 1991.

Tills book provides an explanation of lupus and the ways It can affect the body. Along With a straightforward description of the function of the body's Immune system, the book also addresses other effects on people-emotional, relational, and financial.

Jonathan Witt, "*Wise Blood* and the Irony of Redemption," in *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin*, Vol 22, 1993-94, pp 12-24

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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