ABSTRACT

Blessed Wounding: The Theological Import of Paratactic Style
in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction and Hebrew Narrative

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This dissertation explores the theological connection between narrations of God's wounding blessing and the paratactic style of Hebrew narrative and Flannery O'Connor's fiction. This connection is evidenced in the wounding of patriarch Jacob in Gen 32 and the self-blinding of protagonist Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*. In both cases, the climactic moments are rendered without syntactical clues to their meaning. At once bewildered and enticed, readers are left to interpret the terrifying character of divine action without narratival help. Centrally, I argue that sparely narrated encounters with grace fittingly illustrate the theological claim that God's blessings sometimes also wound. I capture the spare paratactic style that contributes to Flannery O'Connor's distinctive literary voice by drawing out Flannery O'Connor's style in two ways: through an examination of her revisions to *Wise Blood* in consultation with her writing mentor Caroline Gordon and exploring the qualities her style shares with biblical Hebrew poetics. I then turn to instances of narrating wounding blessings in Jacob and Hazel, transposing the distinctive feature of biblical Hebrew narrative—the *wayyiqtol*—onto *Wise Blood*'s climactic

moment. Finally, after establishing O'Connor's spare style, I return to the theological theme of wounding blessing to demonstrate how spare style invites readers into their own encounters with grace analogous to the vulnerability found in prayer. The relationship between the way a story is rendered and its impact on readers demonstrates the value of literature not only for thematically addressing theological truths but also as cultivating a posture for divine encounter.

Blessed Wounding: The Theological Import of Paratactic Style in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction and Hebrew Narrative

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CW	*Collected Works*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1988.
HB	*The Habit of Bein*g, Edited by Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.
MM	*Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, Edited by Sally Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.

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Flannery O'Connor once wrote that a "story that is any good can't be reduced, it can only be expanded. A story is good when you continue to see more and more in it, and when it continues to escape you. In fiction two and two is always more than four" (MM, 102). No one has made me a better reader of stories than my supervisor Dr. Ralph Wood. He has taught me what it means to return again and again to a story in order to see more and more in it. The seeds of this dissertation were planted in a seminar with Dr. Wood where we carefully attended to many of the great Catholic fiction writers of the twentieth-century. He has been a faithful gardener, as it were, not only planting the seeds but cultivating them through his supervision from this dissertation's planting to harvest.

I also want to thank Dr. Natalie Carnes for helping draw together theologically the seemingly odd pairing of Flannery O'Connor and biblical Hebrew narrative. She identified an idea in its nascent form and provided an avenue to draw it out with the language of wounding and blessing. I also want to thank the Department of Religion at Baylor University, and specifically Dr. W. H. Bellinger Jr., for not only permitting but encouraging my interdisciplinary approach between theological and biblical studies. Further, I want to thank my outside reader, Dr. Luke Ferretter, for posing questions and opportunities from a fresh angle. At a crucial time in working out the shape this project would take, Dr. Jonathan Tran gave me a great gift by articulating for me something that had always been true, but of which I had not taken notice: while my interdisciplinary concerns might appear disconnected, they are both rooted in my love of story.

Advocating for the value of story in a theological imagination serves as my baseline and end-goal in this dissertation. In addition, I would like to thank The Donald A. Driskell Endowed Fund for the Glenn O. and Martell B. Hilburn Endowed Graduate Research Scholarship, whose funding provided the means for archival work at Flannery O'Connor archives at George College & State University's Flannery O'Connor Special Collection and Emory University's MARBL's Flannery O'Connor and Sally Fitzgerald collections.

As in raising a child, so in writing a dissertation, it takes a village. From Baylor's interview weekend, through coursework, preliminary exams, proposals, prospectuses, and dissertations, Mandy Brobst-Renaud, Rebecca Poe Hays, and Lacy Crocker Papadakis have been constant companions on the doctoral journey. This process would have been longer, more painful, and less enjoyable without your friendship and commitment to doing this together. I also want to thank my theology cohort, particularly Thomas Breedlove and Nicholas Krause for reading and providing essential feedback on chapter drafts. Prior to my time in Waco, Dr. Hans Boersma and Dr. Iain Provan challenged, cultivated, and encouraged me in my desire to bridge my training as a biblical scholar with my theological convictions. Their patience and investment continues to pay dividends in my scholarly work. I also want to thank my parents who have supported me in my academic pursuits, despite them taking me far from home.

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DEDICATION

To LG

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Difficulty of Flannery O'Connor's Fiction

O'Connor's most well-known short story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," narrates a family road trip to Florida turned blood-bath when their car careens off the road and into a ditch only to be welcomed by an escaped convict and his two cronies. As the family is methodically sent off into the woods to be shot, the convict Misfit and proper-lady grandmother are foregrounded at the side of the road discussing, of all things, Jesus Christ. The story abruptly comes to climactic end when the grandmother reaches tenderly toward the Misfit only to receive three swift shots to the chest with the Misfit's disconcerting proclamation: "She would of been a good woman…if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (CW, 153). While unsettling, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is also humorous, leaving readers unnerved at the end of a horrific story that made them laugh out loud as much, if not more than, lament.[1] The play between humor and violence appears throughout O'Connor's writing leaving readers unsure whether to laugh or cry, or both. O'Connor's style of storytelling does not make it any easier for readers, as it characteristically fails to explain, justify, or remedy the acts of violence that often and suddenly erupt in the stories' climaxes.

[1] In fact, a recording of O'Connor reading "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is available online and the audible giggles of the crowd heighten the play of the comic and tragic in the story: https://youtu.be/sQT7y4L5aKU.

O'Connor's fiction frequently puzzles readers for two primary reasons: its strange style of narrating climactic moments without recourse to cause or motive, and its peculiar use of violence as a means of redemption. While some critics celebrate O'Connor's spare climactic narrations and use of violence as key aspects of her distinctive quality as a fiction writer, others identify these same qualities as deficiencies and distractions from otherwise powerful stories.[2] Rowan Williams picks up on these two disparate responses to the discomfiting effect of O'Connor's storytelling: "O'Connor deliberately confuses our sympathies in ways that not every critic seems to recognise… We are not given a stable judgement in the way the story is told."[3] As Williams highlights, these destabilizing narratives prevent readers from reducing O'Connor's stories to formulaic meaning even as they also invite them to go deeper. Readers must inhabit the world of the text rather than reach easy conclusions that leave them disengaged from the stories. Just as the characters are confronted with the ironic truth "that the gift of life is the gift of daily 'terror', the terror of being aware of reality in the light of God," readers too must be so confronted through O'Connor's violent and difficult narrative style if they hope to grapple with her stories.[4]

In this dissertation, I will demonstrate that O'Connor's recourse to grotesque action and spare paratactic narration in climactic moments offers a profound fictional embodiment of the theological truth that God's blessing is often a wounding that blesses.

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[2] Among those who identify O'Connor's style as detrimental are Joann Halleran McMullen and Sarah Gordon, discussed later in this chapter.

[3] Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Harrisburg, PA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 123.

[4] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 121.

I will also show that this surprising integration of skeletal style and disturbing violence is not unique to O'Connor. On the contrary, it may help illumine her deep saturation in the narrative world of Scripture. As I will demonstrate, biblical Hebrew narrative often employs similar means of narrating events, requiring readers to discern for themselves how characters are similarly wounded in their blessing and blessed in their wounding. These inferential demands on readers opens them up to an analogous sort of wounding and blessing.

Parataxis and the Difficulty of Reading

Parataxis characterizes the bare style of O'Connor's fiction. Rather than hypotactically—deriving from the Greek *hypo* "below" and *taxis* "arrangement"—narrating events where subordinate clauses modify the main clause, O'Connor's fiction paratactically—the Greek *para* "side-by-side" contrasts to *hypo* "below"—unfolds events without frequent modifying clauses.

Both O'Connor's fiction and biblical Hebrew narrative employ parataxis for narrating the fierce climacterics of their stories. Parataxis is characterized by its spare form of storytelling, without overt description or explanations of motive and cause. It entails gapped narration where independent clauses are linked together without obvious causal connection. The hypotactic style of "telling rather than showing," by contrast, makes subordinate clauses and phrases fall below the main sentence-line to explain such causal links.[5] The heightened textual silence in paratactic narration requires readers to

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[5] In *Understanding Fiction*, Cleanth Brooks Jr. and Robert Penn Warren distinguish "telling" from "rendering" characters as the former features "direct presentation…with rather flat and typical characters" while the latter employs indirect characterization, so as to renders characters "humanly credible" (Cleanth Brooks Jr. and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, Second Edition [NY: Appleton-Century-

infer unspoken connections within the gaps.[6] Narrative critic Meier Sternberg notes that when "the narrative become[s] an obstacle course… reading turns into a drama of understanding—conflict between inferences, seesawing, reversal, discovery, and all. The only knowledge perfectly acquired is the knowledge of our limitations."[7] Paratactic narration pushes readers toward a confrontation with their own interpretive limits through such dynamic interactions with the text.

Though Flannery O'Connor had no knowledge of biblical Hebrew and drew no direct influence from its style of narration, I will argue that the presence of paratactic narration in the stories of both Flannery O'Connor and biblical Hebrew offers a particular kind of reading experience that results in a wounding blessing. This paradoxical result, I shall argue, can be most clearly seen in two climactic moments: in the Genesis narration of Jacob's wrestling with the angel-man and also in Hazel Motes's self-blinding in O'Connor's *Wise Blood*.

As Ralph Wood astutely observes, grace sits at the center of O'Connor's fiction: "The conviction that the ultimate issue of our lives depends on our own reception or

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Crofts, 1959], 169–70). Using O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" as an example, Brooks and Warren emphasize that rendering (showing) rather than telling makes even such perverse of characters as the Misfit relate to the broader reading audience, showing even the most out-of-bound characters of story have "a large human significance" (170). The best way to render a character, the authors of *Understanding Fiction* note, is through dialogue, noting that "the use of speech is a rich resource for dramatic presentation" (171). Yet the artistic rendering of these characters must retain their own integrity: "An obvious test of fiction then is that the motives and actions of its characters are rendered coherent. It is the glory of fiction that the great artists have been able to render coherent so many strange and out-of-the-way, often apparently self-contradictory, examples of human nature" (173).

[6] Such terms as "gapped," "spare," "lean," and "skeletal" will serve as synonyms for the paratactic means of storytelling that lacks abundant causal connections and narrative detail.

[7] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Second Edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 47.

rejection of God's grace is the central premise of Flannery O'Connor's work."[8] O'Connor powerfully narrates her protagonists' reception or rejection of grace. For characters and readers alike, such violence-laden moments of redemption reflect the strange theological truth that grace can feel more like a tyrant than a healer. As O'Connor herself noted, "human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful" (HB, 307). O'Connor makes a similar judgment elsewhere: "This notion that grace is healing omits the fact that before it heals, it cuts with the sword Christ said he came to bring" (CW, 411). Thus do O'Connor's stories and certain biblical Hebrew narratives confront readers with the terrifying grace of God through the violent action of redemption.

To recognize the similarities in narrative style requires a knowledge not only of the themes and literary devices evident in English translations of the Bible, but also an awareness of a key feature of Old Testament narrative that is available only in the Hebrew text: the *wayyiqtol*. The *wayyiqtol* effects a gapped narration that requires readers to infer meaning from narrative silences. I will demonstrate that in the climactic moments of O'Connor stories and Hebrew narrative pericopes—paratactically narrated moments of what Williams calls "reality in the light of God"—the storytellers make a similar use of a gapped narrative style.[9] While she knew nothing of Hebrew syntax, O'Connor's stories are full of stark sentences that, as she confessed, make her characters' "fictional qualities

[8] Ralph C. Wood, *The Comedy of Redemption: Christian Faith & Comic Vision in Four American Novelists* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 90.

[9] Throughout this dissertation I am arguing for similarity, not sameness, in style. The narrative styles found in biblical Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's fiction do not function at all times exactly the same. Nor I am arguing that the parataxis found in these two narrative types is unique. Instead, I am drawing out the theme of wounding and blessing as it is illuminated in and through paratactic narration in both O'Connor's fiction and biblical Hebrew narrative.

lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected" (MM, 40). O'Connor's plain sentences become most jarring when they describe grotesque characters performing outrageous but unexplained deeds. As in biblical Hebrew narrative, readers are forced to fill in the explanatory gap for themselves, so as to stress the mysterious and unexpected quality of divine action and human response. In O'Connor's fiction and many biblical Hebrew stories, readers encounter meaning and significance precisely *by means of* a peculiar narrative style, as the *how* undergirds and enables the *what*.

Tools and Resources

This dissertation engages across disciplines—from literature to biblical studies, philosophy to theology—in order to draw out the theological significance and impact of paratactic style. Narrative criticism will serve as the lens through which I link the shared gapped narrative style in Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's fiction. This dissertation is neither an essay in biblical criticism nor theological construction, but rather a theological interpretation of Flannery O'Connor's narrative style illumined by the similar stylistic effect found in Hebrew narrative.

In addition to analyzing O'Connor's stories in their final form—primarily *Wise Blood*, but making use of others—I also reference her drafted stories available in the O'Connor archive collection at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, as well as archive material at Emory University's Manuscripts and Rare Books Library (MARBL), which houses the "Flannery O'Connor Collection" and "Sally Fitzgerald Letters." The MARBL collections also include material pertaining to Caroline Gordon,

who was both an advocate of the New Criticism as well as O'Connor's writing mentor, having made extensive recommendations about O'Connor's drafted stories.[10]

Background

Since the second half of the twentieth-century, the distinctive features of biblical Hebrew narrative have received increased attention.[11] Notably, Robert Alter's influential *The Art of Biblical Narrative* emphasizes the importance of attending to the style of Hebrew narrative, particularly in the use of direct speech and narrative silence. Alter argues that the narrator's choice to forego omniscient knowledge while relying heavily on direct speech constitutes a theological choice because narrative style serves a mediatory role between God and readers.[12] In a later work, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible,* Alter contends that many modern translations of the Bible often abandon the King James Version's superb reflection of Hebraic parataxis.[13] Parataxis, Alter argues, leaves open causal connections in the narratives so that they "swarm with

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[10] A hint at the richness of material found in Gordon and O'Connor's relationship, notably related to choices of narrative style, can be found in Sally Fitzgerald's "A Master Class: From the Correspondence of Caroline Gordon and Flannery O'Connor." The discourse reveals an acute tension between O'Connor's spare style and the influence of Gordon on her narrative choices. Cf. Sally Fitzgerald, "A Master Class: From the Correspondence of Caroline Gordon and Flannery O'Connor," *The Georgia Review* 33 (1979): 827–46.

[11] Significant works on biblical narrative and biblical poetics more broadly include: Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2002); Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998); Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd edition (NY: Basic Books, 2011).

[12] Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 155–57.

[13] Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 41.

possibilities."[14] Sternberg identifies the same paratactic style as a non-didactic means of biblical storytelling that pushes readers towards their own limits and avoids sentimentally moralistic readings of the texts.[15]

While the influence of the Old Testament on O'Connor's fiction is well-attested in O'Connor criticism, their similarities in style are either overlooked entirely or lack a robust understanding of the poetics of Old Testament narrative. By employing such a poetics, I stand with Sternberg's insistence that to speak of a poetics of biblical narrative is to focus on narrative as communication and not simply a "listing of so-called forms and devices and configuration," for "our primary business as readers is to make purposive sense of it, so as to explain the *what's* and the *how's* in terms of the *why's* of communication."[16] Sternberg's biblical poetics attends to the form of storytelling in order to draw out potential meaning from story.

The commonplace comparison between O'Connor's fiction and the Old Testament is grounded in O'Connor's own insistence that prophetic vision is a function of the imagination, for it allows the writer to have an uncanny discernment of divine mercy as it is often veiled within horrifically violent events. O'Connor writes of the expansive and imaginative function of prophetic vision in a 1959 letter to Cecil Dawkins: "According to St. Thomas, prophetic vision is not a matter of seeing clearly, but of seeing what is distant, hidden. The Church's vision is prophetic vision; it is always widening the

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[14] Alter, *Pen of Iron*, 134. Alter identifies the paratactic style in Hebrew narrative's employment of the *wayyiqtol*, which he identifies as the *waw*-consecutive. More detailed analysis of the use of terms *wayyiqtol* and *waw*-consecutive will be discussed in Chapter Four on "The Function of the *Wayyiqtol*" (121–25).

[15] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 37–47.

[16] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 2, 1.

view" (HB, 365) She also links her use of the concrete and grotesque with the expanding vision of the prophet, for "[t]he prophet is a realist of distances, and it is this kind of realism that you find in the best modern instances of the grotesque" (MM, 44). Jordan Cofer's 2014 work, *The Gospel According to Flannery O'Connor: Examining the Role of the Bible in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction*, is one of the few full-length studies of the connection between O'Connor and the Old Testament.[17] He asserts that O'Connor adopts the unrelenting directness of Old Testament prophets: "O'Connor was *shouting* to have her message heard, as her religious and artistic ambitions intersected within these *startling* figures found in her fiction."[18] Yet, Cofer turns O'Connor's work into fictional illustrations of theological convictions that could just as well have been stated discursively, quite apart from their inextricable twining of meaning and manner.[19] Cofer fails not only to note the stylistic similarities between O'Connor's fiction and certain

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[17] Jordan Cofer, *The Gospel According to Flannery O'Connor: Examining the Role of the Bible in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction* (NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). In this work, Cofer argues that O'Connor makes use of Scripture in three ways: 1) retelling biblical stories; 2) illustrating redemption through violence; and 3) startling readers by allowing them to feel the full impact of redemption.

J. Ramsey Michaels' *Passing by the Dragon: The Biblical Tales of Flannery O'Connor* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013) focuses similarly on the biblical motifs in O'Connor stories, citing examples of biblical themes present in many of O'Connor's stories. John R. May's *The Pruning Word: The Parables of Flannery O'Connor* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976) argues that O'Connor's stories function like parables in the way they interpret and render judgment on readers—but by suggesting apt analogies rather than employing startling narrative methods.

[18] Cofer, *Gospel According to O'Connor*, 5, italics his.

[19] Works that discursively demonstrate O'Connor's theological convictions in her writing: Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, eds., *The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor* (NY: Fordham University Press, 1977). Karl-Heinz Westarp, *Realist of Distances: Flannery O Connor Revisited* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1987). John Byars, "Prophecy and Apocalyptic in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," *Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* 16 (1987): 34–42; Robert H. Jr Brinkmeyer, *The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005); John D. Sykes Jr., *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and the Aesthetic of Revelation* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2007); L. Lamar Nisly, *Wingless Chickens, Bayou Catholics, and Pilgrim Wayfarers: Constructions of Audience and Tone in O'Connor, Gautreaux, and Percy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011).

Hebrew narratives, he also misses their shared underlying premise—namely, that divine destruction is meant to enable human restoration.

O'Connor's overall narrative style leaves some critics wanting. Among the more severe critics of Flannery O'Connor's writing style, Joann Halleran McMullen argues that O'Connor's "show, don't tell" narrative approach leaves readers ill-equipped to connect the meaning in the stories to Christian belief. The lack of telling in O'Connor's fiction seems likely to lead readers astray from her intended meaning, McMullen blames O'Connor's narrative style: "readers are often compelled into a non-Catholic, and yes, sometimes even anti-Catholic reading of her fiction."[20] McMullen bemoans that O'Connor's aim to draw readers towards the mystery of the Incarnation often fails. Readers must be coached to navigate O'Connor's "stylistic techniques of annihilation" to avoid an anti-Catholic misreading:[21]

> By keeping her characters largely unspecified, and by focusing on ambiguous or neutral pronoun references or indefinite noun referents such as 'the girl,' O'Connor disengages herself from her characters, who are theologically important only as instruments through which God works. This stylistic technique seems to defeat her intense personal desire to deliver an audience antagonistic to a loving, caring, Catholic God into the religious society she feels they have rejected. Despite her detailed glosses, her language guides her readers away from her theological designs. The reader might rightly ask where is the linguistic message reinforcing the Christian directive 'do unto others' or love of thy sister/brother, or that even the least of us is loved by God."[22]

[20] Joann Halleran McMullen, *Writing Against God : Language as Message in the Literature of Flannery O'Connor* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 8.

[21] McMullen, *Writing Against God*, 9.

[22] McMullen, *Writing Against God*, 17. McMullen's contention stands in opposition to the argument at the heart of this dissertation, despite our shared recognition of the distinctively paratactic style of O'Connor's narration. In Chapter Three, I explore the key features of biblical poetics, including characterization. As in O'Connor's stories, biblical Hebrew narrative leaves abundant room for inference regarding the key characteristics of the figures in the story. Whereas McMullen deems this spare quality as a detriment, I argue its benefit as a means of the often-painful work of grace in readers.

One of the most prominent examples of what McMullen describes as O'Connor's annihilating techniques is her use of spare and direct sentences: "O'Connor's sentence structure through her fiction often follows the same predictable pattern of beginning with subject-verb sentence construction with simple declarative sentences most prevalent. While O'Connor does employ complex sentences in her fiction simple sentences by far predominate."[23] This simplicity in form places substantial demands on readers to discern (or not) the divine Mystery present within the spare narrative. McMullen summarizes her work as paradoxically holding together O'Connor's religious convictions and her refusal to turn art into a proposition.[24] Yet McMullen fails to see that this seemingly oppositional relationship between theological didacticism and narrative presentation allows readers a wide net when interpreting O'Connor's stories.

In a scathing review, Sally Fitzgerald—O'Connor's longtime friend and editor of O'Connor's posthumous works and letters—pinpoints the danger of speaking of O'Connor's theological beliefs and narrative style as standing in opposition to one another as a sort of cheap and sentimental game to trip up readers:

> McMullen's inquest would reduce a unique literary legacy to a mere literary curiosity, the product of a mean-spirited writer's solitary game, its contents of no real interest to the reader, except possibly as a demonstration of an immense but fundamentally wasted writing talent; or if not that, the sad spectacle of that talent, however great, revealed as having lacked a governing intelligence able to put it to its owner's intended use, and therefore inadvertently directed to the service of a diametrically opposed purpose. Given such a choice of mounts, this reviewer proposes to walk.[25]

[23] McMullen, *Writing Against God*, 10.

[24] McMullen, *Writing Against God*, 141.

[25] Sally Fitzgerald, "McMullen's Choice: A Recent Appraisal of Flannery O'Connor," *Religion and the Arts* 2 (1998): 528.

Fitzgerald thus refuses to accept McMullen's premise that O'Connor sought to make a sentimental game of her fiction. My proposal in this dissertation is rather the opposite of McMullen's despite the shared recognition of O'Connor's distinctive story-telling: O'Connor's spare literary style makes significant interpretive demands of the reader, which fittingly narrates the equally difficult wounding that often accompanies blessing.

Sarah Gordon, in *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination*, attributes the spare and extreme form of O'Connor's style in her aim to write like a man because she was artistically dominated by her patriarchal Catholicism: O'Connor "seems as imbued with the threat of the female, of those 'scribbling women' decried by Hawthorne, as her male predecessors and model." Gordon continues, "This stance reveals at least an unconscious decision that, I believe, accounts for the disturbing quality of O'Connor's fiction—that is to say, the toughness of the narrative style and subject matter and the boldness of vision."[26] Gordon blames O'Connor obedience (possibly unconscious) to the male-dominated Roman Catholic Church as the cause of her bare narrative style. Gordon's gendered interpretation of O'Connor's paratactic style of narration problematizes rather than celebrates it, as if hypotactic style were somehow "feminine."

Donald Hardy was the first critic to pay extensive attention to the technical qualities of O'Connor's style. [27] He compares the linguistic patterns found in O'Connor's fiction to the Brown general fiction corpus, a database created in 1967, compiling selections of current American English so as to provide a basis for lexical computational

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[26] Sarah Gordon, *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 29–30.

[27] Donald E. Hardy, *Narrating Knowledge in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

analysis. Hardy employs these computational statistics to identify the essential features of O'Connor's fiction, emphasizing the frequent use of independent clauses, including a heavy reliance on coordinate conjunctions. Hardy also highlights O'Connor's above average use of negation (e.g., "not" and "-n't") as well as her use of gerundive complements (e.g., "seeing," "knowing"). Hardy thus confirms the unique quality of O'Connor's style, but he fails to link it to her theological vision.

Frederick Asals emphasizes the stylistic extremes that O'Connor employs to push her characters towards all or nothing responses to God's demands on them.[28] Asals notes that the "very leanness" of O'Connor's two novels, when set against the "heftier works" of many of her contemporaries, demonstrates O'Connor's "deliberate limitation of form."[29] Her "sharply economical style," Asals argues, conveys "bright but bare images" that produce a dramatic effect,[30] as her spare syntax intensifies the focus and impact of her characters and their actions.[31]

Yet no one has thus far coupled O'Connor's paratactic style with the revelatory power of the *wayyiqtol* in biblical Hebrew narrative. In this dissertation, I will

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[28] Frederick Asals, *Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

[29] Asals, *Imagination of Extremity*, 160.

[30] Asals, *Imagination of Extremity*, 20. Asals goes on to note that in *Wise Blood* we find a maturing of her narrative style over her earliest unpublished prose, for the novel has "a greater economy of notation, a flatter, sharper rhythm, and an expansion in suggestiveness" (21).

[31] Asals identifies the force of O'Connor's style in the "dynamics of opposition" within the human person, as seen in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, noting that "the essential cast of her imagination was far more Augustinian than Thomistic" (Asals, *Imagination of Extremity*, 200). In St. Thomas, Asals recognizes a traditional form of Catholic humanism where the faith-reason synthesis rather than opposition and paradox marks the human person. Asals surmises that because O'Connor's location was within the Protestant South, Augustine—a figure prominent in both Catholic and Protestant tradition—played a more central role in O'Connor's character formation and expression than Thomas Aquinas (Asals, *Imagination of Extremity*, 201).

demonstrate that the two narrative styles undergird a basic theological conviction shared by the ancient biblical narrator and the modern fiction writer alike: stories that embody divine wounding and blessing require readers' involvement in discerning the subtlety of paratactic narration. The gapped narrative style, with its ambiguous and abrupt qualities, invites readers to plumb the depths of meaning within a story, confronting not only the characters but themselves in their encounter with the grace which, as O'Connor famously said, must wound before it can heal.

Structure of the Task

This dissertation begins and ends with the awareness of a divine blessing that wounds through the gifting of grace. Chapters Two and Six thus serve as bookends to the intermediary chapters that illumine the distinctive features and impact of paratactic style. Chapter Two establishes the interplay of wounding and blessing. Rowan Williams attends to the theological relationship of wounding and blessing in *The Wound of Knowledge.*[32] As we shall see, Williams identifies "readiness to be questioned, judged, stripped naked and left speechless" as central to the faith of the saints.[33] The movement of conversion is a movement from self-dependence to self-surrender that confronts the human ego and demands that it be crucified. No turn from self to God can occur without such conflict. Williams, in his later Clark Lectures on O'Connor, identifies O'Connor's use of extreme irony as the means of making visible and concrete the painful and unexpected undoing

[32] Rowan Williams, *Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to Saint John of the Cross,* 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1991).

[33] Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 11.

that redemption requires.[34] After establishing the interplay between wounding and blessing, this chapter illustrates the theological effect of making narratively visible the wounding blessing in Hazel Motes's grotesque act of self-blinding and Jacob's permanent limp after his night-time wrestling with a messenger of God.

Chapter Three examines the relationship between O'Connor and her writing mentor, Caroline Gordon, to illumine the particularities of O'Connor's narrative style. While Gordon continually insisted that O'Connor should have added descriptive sinew to her skeletal narration, O'Connor refused to heed her mentor's advice: she continually produced spare literary works that make significant interpretive demands of readers. Through a focused investigation of Gordon's suggestions for final revisions to *Wise Blood* alongside O'Connor's editorial revisions, I will show how O'Connor's distinctive stylistic choices at times stand in stark contrast to Gordon's advice. Despite Gordon's dogged insistence that O'Connor abandon her parataxis for more hypotactic description, O'Connor retains her spare style throughout her writing career. Gordon fails to recognize the interpretive work of narrative gaps, most especially in narrating divine activity within the created order.

Chapter Four moves from O'Connor to biblical Hebrew narrative by identifying key features of biblical poetics, notably characterization, repetition, and pacing. This chapter plays a crucial role in providing ample foundation for the more explicit stylistic comparison between O'Connor and biblical Hebrew narrative in the subsequent chapter. The summary of key narrative features serves as the foundation for my identification of biblical narrative as a gapped style of narration through the use of the *wayyiqtol* form.

[34] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 101.

This chapter includes a close look at the history of scholarship and function of the *wayyiqtol* in Hebrew narrative. The narrative play the *wayyiqtol* introduces offers readers what Sternberg identifies as "the distance between the truth and the whole truth."[35] This distance encompasses the minimal truth of the text, which is easily accessible through the information provided, and the whole truth that is available partially, though never comprehensively, to readers through inference.

Chapter Five extends the close reading of Hebrew narrative through an examination of the function of the *wayyiqtol* in Jacob's wrestling with the angel-man (Gen 32:23–33). By establishing the literary impact of the *wayyiqtol* in Gen 32, this reading serves as a pivotal case study to demonstrate the similarities in style between ancient Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's fiction. The similarities are evident through a parallel reading of the wrestling match in Gen 32 and *Wise Blood's* climactic scene, which ends in the protagonist Hazel Motes's self-blinding. In both narratives, independent clauses function to intensify the drama of events and invite readers to infer supernatural grace from both the violent (Gen 32) and grotesque (*Wise Blood*) climactic pericopes. The transposition of the *wayyiqtol* onto the narrated events of *Wise Blood* accentuates the similarities in style.

Chapter Six strengthens the impact of the shared gapped narrative style in biblical Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's fiction by exploring how the reading event itself can both wound and bless. Paratactic style inflicts what Jean-Louis Chrétien calls a "wound

[35] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 235.

of humility," as in Gen 32's wounding of Jacob by the angel-man.[36] Because reading is a performance that requires readers to invest themselves in the meaning produced, readers engage with narrations concerning the awareness of "reality in the light of God" in Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's stories—represented respectively in Gen 32 and *Wise Blood*—in ways that require humility, particularly when such engagement is divinely wounding.[37] Using the analogue of the vulnerability and wounding often present in prayer, I demonstrate the ways that readers are themselves at risk of the terrifying knowledge of "reality in the light of God." Paratactic storytelling deeply involves readers in producing meaning in such a way that not only the characters but also the readers themselves are exposed to the wounding effect of blessing.

Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, summarizes the development of the dissertation's thesis and specific kinds of blessed reading wounds available to readers of the paratactic narration found specifically in Flannery O'Connor's work.

Significance of the Project

The theological reflection on O'Connor's paratactic style argued in this dissertation offers new insight into the interpretive impact of O'Connor's fiction. By

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[36] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (NY: Oxford University Press USA, 2003), 4.

[37] In this chapter, I make use of Wolfgang Iser's philosophical exploration of the reading event. Iser emphasizes the role of the reader in narrative gap-filling. A gap is only adequately filled when the reader actively participates with the text; a failed gap-filling is a one-sided approach where the reader's projections onto the gaps are unchanged by the text. Active participation requires that the reader be pushed into the unfamiliar world of the text, and then mediate this foreign world with her own world. Thus, for Iser the more gaps that need filling, the more readers must actively engage with the text to infer meaning. Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

bringing together two disparate conversations—narrative criticism of the Hebrew Bible with O'Connor scholarship—this dissertation presents a fresh look at what makes O'Connor's fiction not only distinctive but necessarily difficult for readers. O'Connor's use of paratactic narration fittingly recounts the mysterious place where the transcendent meets the immanent and draws readers into the play of wounding and blessing, found in protagonists such as Hazel Motes.

While the scope of this dissertation is limited to the paratactic style found in O'Connor's fiction illumined by biblical Hebrew narrative, two governing convictions both undergird and are advanced through my more narrowly focused argument: 1) the centrality of stories for forming a robust theological imagination, and 2) the recognition that narrative style plays a vital role in a story's interpretive impact. While propositions play an essential role in theological investigation—evidenced in the ongoing work of systematic and dogmatic theology—Christian theology is rooted in a cosmic *story* that begins with creation and ends in renewed heavens and earth. The use of story in sacred scripture demonstrates the profound impact stories offer by inviting readers to participate imaginatively, not only assent propositionally, in the theological truths and questions that both clarify and disturb our understanding of what it means to be finite and fallen human beings before an infinitely good God.

Excursus: Attending to the Language of the "Violence" of Redemption

Language of wounding and violence in discussing God's revelation and redemption invites criticism that is worthy of pause and consideration. The most well-represented critical position against Christian language of redemptive violence—centrally located in the discussion of the atonement—is found within feminist criticism. The

critique and resistance to Christian language of the atonement by feminist critics are extensive, and therefore only a cursory evaluation can be provided here.

Anna Fisk's *Sex, Sin and Our Selves: Encounters in Feminist Theology and Contemporary Women's Literature* provides a helpful overview of feminist critiques of the traditional Christian position of redemptive and violent suffering exemplified on the cross—a position that this chapter has partially explored.[38] The atonement theory of penal substitution stands at the center of feminist critique. Penal substitution is most readily identified with the Reformers but can be found in nascent form in the medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury in his Christological treatise *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became Man"). The central idea of penal substitution is that Christ was punished for humanity's sins against God: Christ vicariously received the judgment of the Father and atoned for sins that were not his own. Fisk refers to penal substitution as "the most blunt-edged version of Christian atonement theology," which many feminist critics regard as not only condoning violence against the innocent but also sacralizing it.[39]

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[38] Anna Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves: Encounters in Feminist Theology and Contemporary Women's Literature* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), Chapter Four: "Suffering, Sacrifice, and Sin," 104–133.

[39] Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves,* 104. Fisk draws on the often-referenced essay "For God so Loved the World?" by Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker to illustrate the critique: "[a]t the center of Western Christianity is the story of the cross, which claims God the Father required death of his Son to save the world. We believe this theological claim sanctifies violence" (Brown and Parker, "For God so Loved the World," Joanne C. Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* [NY: Pilgrim Press, 1989], 26).

A further critique of making Christ's suffering a model for the Christian life is found in Asian-Feminist Sharon Bong's concern over "'violence of abstraction'" which pathologizes violence (e.g. women as inherently weak because they are the most common recipients of violence). This danger is found in "romanticizing and appropriating the narrative of subjected positions." To avoid this danger, Bong argues must involve narrating bodies that receive violence as capable of resistance and, more broadly, making the systemic sin of the violence point towards transformation in the world (Sharon A. Bong, "The Suffering Christ and the Asian Body," Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton, eds., *Feminism and Theology* [NY: Oxford University Press, 2003], 359, 340).

Further, the creative work of feminist theologians who see in Christ's suffering a solidarity with the suffering of the female body illustrates how the violence against Christ becomes sexual violence when the sufferer's body is female rather than male.[40] Violence against women in any age—undoubtedly including first-century Judea—is most often found in domestic violence and sexual assault. In summarizing this work, Elizabeth Bettenhausen encapsulates the re-gendering work of Christ's suffering by asking: "Would women ever imagine forming a religion around the rape of women?"[41] To which Fisk fiercely responds: "'of course not: that would be horrendous.'"[42]

Fisk pushes back against these criticisms not because they are unfounded, but because they too simplistically reflect on the suffering of Christ and the suffering of bodies, including female bodies. Fisk autobiographically reflects on how her own wounds once brought about through self-mutilation: they "testify to the truth obvious to the point of banality: that suffering exists."[43] Fisk raises the concern that while feminist critics want to reject the valorization of violence with regard to the Crucifixion, in their zeal they fail to deal realistically with the world and the bodies that inhabit it. In their idealism of how the world should be, Fisk argues that these critics fall into nearly gnostic anti-body tendencies: "[J]ust as the ontological reality of the suffering body is eschewed in favor of an idealized, erotic body, so is the possibility of representing human, embodied suffering as in any way divine. Yet, arguably, throughout the world and throughout

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[40] Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves*, 106. A summary of these reimagined accounts are found in the Foreword to *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse.*

[41] Elizabeth Bettenhausen, "Foreword," *Christian, Patriarchy, and Abuse,* xi.

[42] Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves,* 106.

[43] Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves*, 108.

history, pain and suffering is not a distortion of human bodily experience: it is *constitutive* of it.'[44] Fisk worries that "a theology that refuses the representation of the wounded, suffering body because it falls short of the feminist ideal of embodiment … is unable to honor how things actually *are*."[45] This worry brings us to Fisk's central critique of the critics who want to reject any veneration of the suffering body of Christ: "the feminist deconstruction of the soteriological aspects of Christian theology … [are] a detriment of a real engagement with the complex and painful realities of the world."[46] Namely, "theology would do better to attend to how things are, rather than how we want them to be."[47] Christ's suffering can be seen not as an idealization of violence but as a truthful representation of the way of the world, a world that crucified Love.[48]

The criticism Fisk identifies and to which she responds does not capture the range of dangers in speaking of blessing and wounding in tandem. As a further example, Rosemary Radford Ruether identifies the problematic gendered dichotomy that captures much of the Christian tradition (and continues in many circles presently) in which pride and anger serve as the pinnacle of vice and, as remedy, humility and self-denial capture

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[44] Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves*, 113, italics hers.

[45] Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves*, 113, italics hers.

[46] Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves*, 104.

[47] Fisk, *Sex, Sin, and Our Selves*, 104.

[48] In *Resurrecting Wounds, Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, Shelly Rambo makes a similar response to feminists who wish to dismiss the salvific significance of Christ's suffering: "in turning away from interpreting the cross redemptively, there is a danger in not theologizing suffering at all, in avoiding any moves to narrate human suffering by way of the Christian story" Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* [Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017], 6). Later in her work, Rambo draws out her critique of "feminist theology that flees from wounds" because it fails to take note of the distinctive character of Christ's transfiguring wounds: "The movement through death, through pain, is not problematic in itself, but it needs to be reinscribed in Christian understanding. The reinscription via the scar envisions shared flesh with marks. In its marking, it is also transfigured…The memory of suffering is not there naked and exposed; it is protected, covered, and witnessed" (69).

the center of virtue. While the truths of these claims may arguably be correct, the patriarchy has twisted these virtues and vices to the detriment of women in many Christian communities. Humility has been perversely twisted into a tool to subjugate women by insisting that it is virtuous for the women not to hold herself in high esteem. Virtue is twisted in these communities, often under the Isaianic label of living as "'suffering servants' by accepting male abuse and exploitation."[49] The virtue of humility becomes perverted into a patriarchal tool of oppression.

I do not expect that my presentation of the relationship between wounding and blessing will satisfy the critics who worry that allegedly redemptive violence perpetuates systems of violence, particularly against women. Explanation of the action of wounding related to blessing might help clarify, if not entirely satisfy, critics who are rightfully wary of the claim that God acts violently in the work of redemption. There are two central ways of interpreting the act of a wounding blessing: first, as an act of trespass, harm, and violent force; or, two, as an act of purgative healing and painful medicine. The interchange of wounding and blessing—exemplified in Rowan Williams focus on a wound of knowledge—fits within the latter characterization of the action of a wounding blessing as purgative. This kind of wounding is a movement of dispossession rather than violent possession. In discussing the work of praise in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Williams comments: "the action of praise necessarily involves evoking a moment of

[49] Rosemary R. Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 186.

dispossession, a death, in order to bring the *novum* of God into focus."[50] The imagery of baptism—death of the self, life in Christ—captures this dispossessing effect.[51]

Fisk's realist argument for using Christ's suffering as a point of solidarity because suffering exists in the world (even if we object to it) aligns well with the writers I have discussed. O'Connor remarks in a letter to fellow writer Andrew Lytle that her decision to depict grace violently rests on the evil present in the world: "grace can be violent or would have to be [so, in order] to compete with the kind of evil I can make concrete" (CW, 1121). Her comment here both reflects the reality of evil in the world and her ability to render grace within the world. In the very next sentence, O'Connor recognizes that the use of force might not always be the best way to depict grace: "At the same time, I keep seeing Elias [a variation of Elijah, used in the Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible] in the cave, waiting to hear the voice of the Lord in the thunder and lighting and wind, and

[50] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 10.

[51] I realize that my distinction between force and dispossession does not cover the range of criticisms leveled against the language of wounding related to human encounter with the divine. One of the most recent and arguably best criticisms of the language of a reordered desire that causes a dispossessing wound—as articulated in Williams—is found in "Chapter Three: Speaking 'Father' Rightly: Kenotic Reformation into Sonship in Sarah Coakley" in Linn Tonstad's *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (NY: Routledge, 2016). Tonstad highlights Coakley's emphasis on "dependence on God as vulnerability," which leads to a collapse of finitude and sin when discussing the purgation necessary for union with God (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 99). Tonstad sees in Coakley's proposal in *God, Sexuality, and the Self* human union with God as both a rejection of finitude and a continual power of the patriarchy: "There is no place for the human being in the trinity unless she willfully and deliberately evacuates herself and becomes ontologically identical with the incarnate Son in the process. The infusion of divinity into the contemplative paradoxically elevates her too highly while reinforcing the figuration of the God-creation relationship in hierarchically and heterosexually gendered terms" (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 107). Tonstad's critiques leaves us at an impasse. Tonstad's desire to reject the language of ascent that appears in the early Christian tradition and continues in some strands of medieval and modern thought because of the kenotic action exemplified in Christ and imitated by the Christian leaves those, like Coakley and Williams, who appeal to tradition without much ground to stand on. This specific problem points to the broader tension between Christian theology and feminist criticism. While wrestling within this place of tension is important, ultimately one claim—inadvertently or intentionally—takes priority over the other.

only hearing it finally in the gentle breeze, and I feel I'll have to be able to do that sooner or later, or anyway keep trying (CW, 1121). O'Connor echoes the feminist concern about the danger of abstracting violence. To speak of a wounding blessing is not to argue that all blessings must wound, or at least wound in such a violent way as to create Jacob's life-long limp. Instead, speaking of the relationship of wounding and blessing brings to the fore the uncomfortable and unsentimental work of rightly ordering our desire to its proper end. The sometimes violent struggle inherent in such work is a symptom, not the source or center, of seeing "reality in the light of God."

CHAPTER TWO

Wounding and Blessing: The Artistry of Illuminating "Reality in the Light of God"

Introduction

> Come, O Thou traveler unknown,
> Whom still I hold, but cannot see;
> My company before is gone,
> And I am left alone with Thee.
> With Thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day.[1]

The hymnist Charles Wesley poetically renders the wounding and blessing of the patriarch Jacob. This event—Jacob's wrestling with the angel-man at the banks of the Jabbok river—is one of the earliest and most enduring images of the relationship between God's simultaneous wounding and gifting of a blessing. This artistically rendered image—initially in the prose of the Hebraic text and then with a long legacy in the literary realm—captures the seemingly paradoxical relationship between God and humanity as one that tears down even as it builds up, a relationship explored in this chapter.

This chapter begins with Jacques Maritain's theological aesthetics and ends with Rowan Williams' exploration of the wounding involved in knowledge of God. Tying these two sections together is an examination of the function of O'Connor's constant recourse to situations of extreme, even grotesque, violence. The relationship between

[1] Charles Wesley, "Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown" (1742).

wounding and blessing, disruption and revelation, ugliness and beauty will become evident through an investigation of how we glimpse the divine in quotidian life.

In the first section, I survey Thomistic aesthetics of Jacques Maritain in *Art and Scholasticism*, a work which O'Connor describes as having cut her "aesthetic teeth on" (HB, 216). Maritain emphasizes the integrity of the art work itself to communicate meaning. The artist imaginatively reorders the world around her to render the world in a new and revealing way. She creates a work whose integrity consists in an indivisible between its manner and substance, its form and content, so as to communicate fresh meaning to its viewer, participant, or reader. The key idea I explore is how the artist's attention to the given data of the ordinary world enables her to render the extraordinary visible, as she offers glimpses of the transcendent within the immanent. Art produces new vision through disruption of the familiar.

In the next section I turn to O'Connor's fiction to demonstrate how her Catholic faith—her religious angle of vision, at once local and cosmic—expands rather than collapses her artistic vision. O'Connor's theological convictions nourish her belief that the mysterious quality of everyday life, when viewed through the lens of the Incarnation, reveals God at work there. O'Connor employs violent and grotesque imagery to signal the moments in her fiction when the invisible spills over into the visible. As a reader of Maritain, O'Connor aims to produce a work that stands on its own merit in communicating a shocking though credible possibility of divine grace. O'Connor's aim is to show, not tell, the possibility of "reality in the light of God."

Finally, I turn to the theological relationship between wounding and blessing in encounters with the divine. Using the imagery of Jacob's scarring blessing in Chrétien's

thought and the wound of knowledge in Rowan Williams' exploration of Christian spirituality, I investigate the paradoxical relationship between wounding and blessing. While acknowledging the problematic language of violence and force when discussing God's revelation in the world, I demonstrate how the cruciform center of the Christian faith affirms the painful, even humiliating, work that is involved in the movement from human distortion and incompleteness towards divine straightening and wholeness.

Art as Transcendental Realism

In *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love,* Rowan Williams examines the opaque poetry of Welsh poet David Jones and the sparely narrated fiction of Flannery O'Connor.[2] Williams links these two artists together through the Thomistic understanding of art in Jacques Martian's *Art and Scholasticism.*[3] Williams identifies Maritain's major influence on the work of Jones and O'Connor with two central claims: the insistence on the integrity of art itself and the rootedness of the artistic work in ordinary life. Maritain argues that the artist employs her observations of the world in order to reveal what is already there in a new way that opens to the transcendent. As Williams summarizes, the artwork is "inescapably a claim about reality."[4] This claim stands on its own merit without need for a mediatory voice of the author between the art and its participant. One

[2] Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Harrisburg, PA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006).

[3] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism: With Other Essays*, trans. J.F. Scanlan (NY: C. Scribner's Sons, 1947). In the same letter that O'Connor comments on cutting her "aesthetic teeth" on Maritain's work, she also indicates that she does not wholly embrace Maritain's aesthetics: "It's the book I cut my aesthetic teeth on, though I think even some of the things he [Maritain] says get soft at time. He is a philosopher and not an artist but he does have a great understanding of the nature or art, which he gets from St. Thomas" (HB, 216).

[4] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 16.

who engages with a work of art—be it visual, literary, or performance-based—encounters a work that possesses its own integrity to communicate freely without a slavish adherence to the intentions of its creator.[5]

O'Connor speaks so often about the influence of Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism* on her art and thought that it is worth examination in its own right.[6] In *Art and Scholasticism,* Maritain outlines Thomas Aquinas's identification of art as a virtue of the practical intellect. Maritain distinguishes between speculative and practical knowledge through their transcendental *teloi*: speculative knowledge finds its perfect end in Truth, while practical knowledge finds its perfect end in Goodness and Beauty. Further, practical knowledge is divided into two parts by their respective ends: the practical order of action (*agibile*) ends in Goodness while the practical order of making (*factible*) ends in Beauty.[7] The distinction between the making and the use of a thing divides the aesthetic from the practical. The practical order of action yields right moral behavior by displaying and directing an agent's will. The practical order of making, by contrast, is a "productive

[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer echoes Maritain's insistence on the integrity of the artwork in the first part of *Truth and Method* when discussing the play offered by a work of art: "When we speak of play in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play, but the mode of being of the work of art itself" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, Second Revised [NY: Continuum, 2004], 102). Both Maritain and Gadamer insist on the ability of the work of art to communicate with its participants. Gadamer goes further than Maritain in insisting that it is not until play is exercised on a work of art that the work itself becomes wholly itself: "[the being of art] is part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*, and belong essentially to play as play" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 115, italics his).

[6] See: HB, 28, 105, 107, 144, 157, 166, 216, 218, 221, 231, 259, 274, and 417. O'Connor also references Maritain's wife, Raïssa in a January 1956 letter (HB, 125–6).

[7] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 5–6.

action," the result being a self-sufficient product measured by its own criteria and standing apart from its maker and her intentions.[8]

Possibly the easiest way to characterize the practical order of making is to consider the craftsman.[9] The craft produced reveals work of a skilled or faulty craftsman, not the other way around. The craftsman's success is measured by the thing produced and not the will or good intentions of the maker. Maritain summarizes: "So Making is ordered to such-and-such a definite end, separate and self-sufficient, not to the common end of human life [this would be Goodness, the aim of the practical order of action]; and it relates to the peculiar good or perfection not of the man making, but of the work made."[10] The work itself is the aim and concern of the practical order of making. Thus, art belongs to this practical order of inherent excellences.

Aquinas, Maritain, O'Connor, and Williams all recognize the centrality of the claim that art is an intellectual virtue of the practical order of making. The aim of the artist is to produce a work that stands on its own aesthetic merits, which Flannery O'Connor aptly summarizes when talking about the final form of a story: "A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate. When anybody asks what a story is about, the only proper thing is to tell him

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[8] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 5.

[9] While craftsmanship and the fine arts both belong to the practical order, Natalie Carnes helpfully delineates between Maritain's view of 'useful arts' and 'fine art' because fine arts are ordered toward the transcendental beautiful in a way that craftsmanship is not, though the latter can possess beautiful features: "It is an intelligibility born of creative intuition that animates artistic making, and it grants the fine arts a special—and more important—kind of beauty than crafts" (Natalie Carnes, *Beauty: A Theological Engagement with Gregory of Nyssa* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014], 37).

[10] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 6.

to read the story" (MM, 96). O'Connor's insistence on the integrity of the work of art extends into her letters when explaining to her spiritual director, Fr. McCown, the danger of turning fiction into propaganda: "The novel is an art form and when you use it for anything else you pervert it…it has no utilitarian end. If you do manage to use it successfully for social, religious, or other purposes it is because you make it art first" (HB, 156–157). A story speaks to its readers on its own terms. A story communicates what a slogan or proposition cannot.

The artist possesses the virtue (i.e., *habitus* of art) to perceive the beautiful in the world. Maritain employs the Scholastic language of *connaturality* to explain how the artist sensuously and intuitively finds pleasure in the beautiful apprehended in the created world.[11] He emphasizes that beauty represents an entirely different kind of knowledge than what is found in abstract thinking: "So, although the beautiful is in close dependence upon what is metaphysically true, in the sense that every splendour of intelligibility in things presupposes some degree of conformity with that Intelligence which is the cause of things, the beautiful nevertheless is not a kind of truth, but a kind of good."[12] Essential to this point on *connaturality* is the recognition that the same metaphysical reality—the Transcendentals of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—grounds all knowledge available to the rational human, just as different kinds of recognition reveal different properties of metaphysical realities.

[11] Maritain*, Art and Scholasticism*, 19. For more on O'Connor and the conception of *habitus*, see: Michael Mears Bruner, "Artistic *Habitus*: O'Connor's Dramatic Vision" in *A Subversive Gospel: Flannery O'Connor and the Reimagining of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2017): 108–138.

[12] Martian, *Art and Scholasticism*, 21.

Helpfully, Maritain points to the perception of beauty as being more like the "ecstasy of love" than, say, empirical scientific investigation.[13] To perceive beauty in the natural world is to "touch being itself, a likeness of God, an absolute, all that enables and makes the joy of life: we enter the realm of the spirit."[14] Thus it makes sense that the ensouled animal, the human person, is the only creature capable of re-forming the particular data of the physical world into a new thing wherein the spiritual can be freshly perceived in the physical world:

> The human artist or poet whose mind is not, like the Divine Mind, the cause of things, cannot draw this form complete out of his creative spirit: he goes and gathers it first and foremost in the vast treasure of creating things, of sensitive nature as the world of souls, and of the interior world of his own soul. From this point of view he is first and foremost a man who sees more deeply than other men and discovers in reality spiritual radiations, which others are unable to discern. But to make these radiations shine out in his work and so to be truly docile and faithful to the visible Spirit at play in things, he can, and indeed he must to some extent, deform, reconstruct and transfigure the material appearance of nature.[15]

The artist is a scavenger searching out the visible world, looking for opportunities to reform the familiar so as to unveil something hidden from common view. The transcendental property of beauty plays an essential role in Maritain's understanding of art, for the self-sufficiency of the art made, not its maker's intention, is the locus of Beauty where ultimate things can be perceived in the temporal created work.

In essays on the writing of fiction, collected in *Mystery and Manners* (MM), O'Connor explores the relationship between the observations of the artist makes about

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[13] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 22. Martian writes "The perceiver's being gripped by the beauty of art is a lower form of the ecstasy of love." Note well that the language of the ecstasy of love analogously speaks to the ultimate union of the human into the divine life in the early and medieval church.

[14] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 26.

[15] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 48–9.

everyday life and the awareness of the transcendent within the created world. O'Connor characterizes as "manners" those customary, well-established patterns of speech and action that offer concreteness and believability to fiction. Only by working within the givens of local speech and action does the artist have any chance of discerning transcendent meaning within them. In an address at a Southern writer's workshop, O'Connor critiques the participants' short stories for failing to capture the "manners" of the characters in their stories: "You get the manners from the texture of existence that surrounds you. The great advantage of being a Southern writer is that we don't have to go anywhere to look for manners; bad or good, we've got them in abundance … And yet here are six stories by Southerners in which almost no use is made of the gifts of the region" (MM, 103–4). The fact that these stories could just as well be set in Pittsburgh as Atlanta makes them artistically unremarkable and literally incredible. For a story to possess the possibility of opening to the mystery of the transcendent, it first requires that the writer attend to the manners of her particular place and time—the "texture" to be perceived in the quotidian world. If not, the story fails the artistic test of locating ultimate meaning within the local. Manners and mystery are fatally separated, causing the work to collapse on itself in mere self-reflection.

Of course, the danger of a story not taking flight can run an opposite but equally damaging outcome with an excess of manners, as in what was once called "local color" fiction.[16] O'Connor surmises that workshop participants avoided regional parlance

[16] The phenomenon of "local color" fiction arose in the late nineteenth-century and can be seen in the writing of the frontier West and, most prevalently, in the South (cf. Barbara C. Ewell, Pamela Glenn Menke, and Andrea Humphrey, eds., *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender* [Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002], xiv).

because other Southern writers have overemployed the manners of the region: "There is nothing worse than the writer who doesn't *use* the gifts of the region, but wallows in them. Everything becomes so Southern that it's sickening, so local that it is unintelligible, so literally produced that it conveys nothing" (MM, 104, italics hers). Just as the abstraction of a story from its local texture makes a story unbelievable, so does the excessive use of the regional flavor. The writer as an artist must gather, in Maritain's language, sharp perceptions of the world so as to imagine something new and credible; this process involves both keen observation and a creative use of it.

Rowan Williams uses the language of "superabundance" to describe how beauty does not serve in an oppositional but rather complementary relationship with truth. "The delight of the subject is in the recognition of what Aquinas called *splendor formae*, 'splendour of form', a sense of the work achieved as giving itself to the observer in an 'overflow' of presence."[17] Art as a subject *communicates* to the observer. Here we find Maritain's insistence that art opens onto transcendence by pointing the observer not to some new world but to the world that-is in order to reveal something before unseen, i.e., a trace of the transcendental Beauty that grounds and orders the created world in all its splendor of form. O'Connor echoes the idea of revealing what is hidden in the created order when discussing the prophetic vision of the writer: "The writer learns, perhaps more quickly than the reader, to be humble in the face of what-is. What-is is all he has to

[17] Williams, *Grace and Necessity,* 13. Williams writes: "This object is there *for me*, for my delight; but it is so because it is not there *solely* for me, not designed so as to fit my specifications for being pleased." Williams here notes that Maritain's enthusiasm in emphasizing "the gratuity of the artwork, its disinterested characters" may overstate his case and obscure his real argument (Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 13–14). His larger argument, more evident in his later work *Creative Intuition in Art*, speaks of the relationship of the artwork to the metaphysical reality that the artwork's overflow reflects. Williams worries that Maritain's early emphasis on the beauty that overflows from an artwork may downplay its link to metaphysical truth.

do with; and he will realize eventually that fiction can transcend its limitations only by staying within them" (MM, 146). Art opens up to the transcendent by embracing, rather than resisting, the limited yet creative viewpoint of the artist.

Maritain understands art as inherently logical (i.e., realistic): "It [every work of art] must be steeped in logic; not in the pseudo-logic of clear ideas, not in the logic of knowledge and demonstration, but in the working logic of every day, eternally mysterious and disturbing, the logic of structure of the living thing, and the intimate geometry of nature."[18] Williams labels Maritain's logical understanding of art as "transcendental realism."[19] Art points the observer to the world as it really is, Williams declares, in a way that illuminates the mysterious and perplexing quality of quotidian life. Art both reveals the infinite and humbles the finite.

In his 1952 A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, Maritain speaks of the perception of beauty in art as a creative intuition.[20] In one of his lectures, entitled "Poetry

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[18] Williams, *Grace and Necessity,* 21; Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 41. Williams' labeling of Maritain's approach as "transcendental realism" carries with it an extensive debate on the kind of realism that can be attributed to Thomas Aquinas. Fergus Kerr emphasizes that contemporary understanding of Thomas' realism passes through the Cartesian subjective turn (Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002], Chapter Two "Overcoming Epistemology,"17–34). The Cartesian body-mind distinction must be reunified to comprehend Thomas' understanding of the soul in the form of the body (Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 21). Étienne Gilson argues that because what has been termed "critical realism" carries with it the Cartesian epistemic assumptions resulting in idealism, the alternative is a "metaphysical realism" which Gilson identifies with Thomas's realism (Étienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012], 149). Josef Pieper draws out this metaphysical realism held by Thomas as a non-naïve realism in its synthesis of Aristotle and the Bible—rather than 'naïve' reliance on only spiritual realities *or* Scriptural revelation (Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991], 118–119). Pieper demonstrates how artistic creation grounded in the Biblical account of God's creating act offers "the natural things of the world a real, self-contained intrinsic being precisely by reason of being created" (Pieper, *Guide*, 130). The essential value of the created, material world is further reinforced by the incarnational act, whereby the Son becomes human.

[19] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 21.

[20] Jacques Maritain*, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry: The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts* (NY: Meridian Books, 1955). In this work, Maritain focuses more specifically on poetry.

and Beauty," Maritain distinguishes between beauty before "the eyes of God" and the eyes of human beings.[21] Because humans intuit the beautiful through their intellect and senses in tandem, human perception is limited by the enfleshment that is the human person—limited by residing in a particular time and occupying a particular space. Omni-perception is available only to God, so human perception is inherently limited in vision and judgments of the beautiful. Maritain identifies this distinction between limited and limitless access to beauty respectively as aesthetic and transcendent Beauty.[22] By designating human creative intuition of the beautiful as restricted to the "realm of aesthetic beauty," Maritain avoids collapsing transcendental Beauty into the immanent confines of human recognition and representation without undercutting the possibility for human access to the perfect form of Beauty.[23]

The categories of ugly and beautiful belong only to the creaturely realm of aesthetic beauty because the designation "ugly" belongs to the effect of privation on Being: ugly things "are things deprived in some respect of due proportion, radiance, or integrity, but in which Being still abounds, and which keep on pleasing the sight to that extent."[24] Only through the senses can privation be recognized as having the status of some-thing rather than no-thing. God as pure intellect sees at once all that-is and deems it as good (and thus also beautiful). Because human beings are limited in their perception of

[21] Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 125.

[22] Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 125.

[23] Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 125.

[24] Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 126.

beauty and cannot see all things all at once, they are left to make judgments of beauty with what-is before them through the cooperation of the senses and the intellect.

O'Connor identifies the strange play between the beautiful and the ugly most readily in her preface to *A Memoir of Mary Ann* (CW, 822–31). Mary Ann was a child with an inoperable tumor that caused a gross deformation across one side of her face. She spent most her short life living with the Dominican Nuns of our Lady of Perpetual Help at their Free Cancer Home in Atlanta, Georgia. O'Connor describes the girl's photo, which she received when asked to help the Sisters tell the story of Mary Ann: "It showed a little girl in her first Communion dress and veil. She was sitting on a bench, bolding something I could not make out. Her small face was straight and bright on one side. The other side was protuberant, the eye was damaged, the nose and mouth crowded slightly out of place" (CW, 823). O'Connor's exposure to the life of this little girl with a missing eye and disfigured face transformed how she understood the relationship between good and evil, the beautiful and the grotesque. While we readily recognize evil as grotesque, as ugly, "[f]ew have stared at [the good] long enough to accept that fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction… When we look into the face of the good, we are liable to see a face like Mary Ann's, full of promise." (CW, 830). If one gazes upon the face of the grotesque with honesty, that is, without, as O'Connor says, "a cliché or a smoothing down that will soften their real look," one might be surprised to find beauty and goodness (CW, 830); one might see a face, like Mary Ann's, which is on its way to perfection.[25]

[25] O'Connor artistically renders this image of the good within the grotesque in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." After hearing her cousins describe a hermaphrodite they saw in a circus tent, the twelve-year old girl protagonist imagines the hermaphrodite leading a congregation in a litany affirming that all people are

The gift of art for Maritain is its ability to expand the limited human perception of the beautiful through a movement from aesthetic beauty into transcendent reality: "art struggles to surmount the distinction between aesthetic beauty and transcendental beauty and to absorb aesthetic beauty in transcendental beauty."[26] Art increases human perception of the beautiful, enabling even the ugly to open onto the transcendent. Art "draws beauty from ugly things and monsters, it tries to overcome the division between beautiful and ugly by absorbing ugliness in a superior species of beauty, and by transferring us *beyond* the (aesthetic) beautiful and ugly."[27] Art transforms our vision, but this transformation is not instantaneous or complete.

As finite and fallen creatures, our perception of transcendent beauty cannot be deemed perfect—whole and complete—in the same way that transcendental beauty is perfect. Maritain identifies imperfect human perception as "a certain sacred weakness" and the "kind of imperfection through which infinity wounds the finite."[28] The quintessential image for Maritain of this sacred wounding is Jacob's limp after his wrestling with the angel. He derives it from Thomas's *Summa* where Aquinas is citing a homily by Gregory the Great:

> "After contemplation Jacob halted with one foot, 'because we need to grow weak in the love of the world ere we wax strong in the love of God,' as Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.). 'Thus when we have known the sweetness of God, we have

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temples of the Holy Ghost: "'God made me thisaway and I don't dispute hit…God done this to me and I praise Him'" (CW, 207). In her innocence and ability to really look, the child saw what her cousins could not: beauty in the grotesque.

[26] Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 126.

[27] Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 126, italics his. O'Connor underlined this passage in her copy of *Creative Intuition* (cf. Arthur F. Kinney, *Flannery O'Connor's Library: Resources of Being* [Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985]: 20–21, §27).

[28] Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 128.

> one foot sound while the other halts; since every one who halts on one foot leans only on that foot which is sound.'"[29]

Rowan Williams identifies this wounding-blessing effect as an "artistic moment of truth" where "the artist has to decide whether the end of the process is unavoidable tragic frustration—or a contemplative orientation towards what is never going to be contained, the world in the eyes of God."[30] These moments of revealing human fallibility through art can go the way of either comedy or tragedy, with both options truthfully speaking about the kataphatic and apophatic dimensions of knowing God.[31] The wounding effect Maritain emphasizes can be understood as a kind of humility, even a humiliation. Art illuminates our limits by offering glimpses of the transcendent that disclose meaning while making clear what we do not know. While this *could* result in a disappointment or even despair in the illumined viewer, it can also function as revelation.

Williams finds one of the key insights of Maritain's Thomistic aesthetic in the recognition that "art in one sense 'dispossesses' us of our habitual perception and restores to reality a dimension that necessarily escapes our conceptuality and our control. *It makes the world strange.*"[32] Art unsettles our preconceptions, not because it points to some

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[29] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae 180, 5 ad. 4. Maritain points to this quote in *Creative Intuition*, 128.

[30] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 21.

[31] In *The Tragic Imagination*, Williams notes how sometimes what tragedy can communicate is that some things simply cannot be communicated, thus pointing to the unspeakable: "The business of tragedy is neither to tell us that the world is more bearable than it is nor to insist that it is 'absolutely' unbearable. It is a more problematic and unsettling matter than any such generalization, in that it shows us how *some* pain can be spoken of and understood, 'humanized', and some cannot, because the words are not yet there and, so far as we can know, may never be" (Rowan Williams, *The Tragic Imagination: The Literary Agenda* [NY: Oxford University Press, 2016], 41).

[32] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 37, italics added.

vague "beyond," but rather because it points viewers back to the world itself—the world readily available to us—with fresh insight.

This dispossessing and estranging effect of art is an inconvenience, even a disruption. Williams observes that the artist's discernment in making "present the underlying structures and relations apprehended may involve a degree of imaginative violence to surface harmonies."[33] Quickly protecting his claim of the need for "imaginative violence" as a glorification or pornographic rendering of "shock and awe," Williams notes "the deliberate cultivation of what jars is as much folly, artistically, as the deliberate striving for beauty. The issue is always and only about the integrity of the work. The artist first listens and looks for the pulse or the rhythm that is not evident; but she cannot do any sort of job if she refuses to work with such pulses."[34] The artist creates through careful attention to reality—the what-is—to produce art that disrupts the status quo, not disruption for disruption's sake but for the integrity of the work of art. The work functions as a communicating subject with something to say—not simply as a utilitarian tool to sooth sweetly, shock grotesquely, or entertain pornographically.

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[33] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 26.

[34] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 26–27. In a March 7, 1958 *Commonweal* review of O'Connor's work, William Etsy accused O'Connor of belonging to the "cult of the Gratuitous Grotesque" (William Etsy, "In America, Intellectual Bomb Shelters," *Commonweal* 67 [1958]: 588). Etsy takes aim at "Good Country People," concluding that "[a]ll of these overingenious horrifics are presumably meant to speak to us of the Essential Nature of Our Time" but end up devolving into "clever gimmicks" (Etsy, "In America," 588). As will be discussed in the next section, O'Connor is never flippant in her use of the grotesque, but employs it as a means of catching the attention of a complacent audience. Still, Etsy demonstrates that the line between "imaginative violence" and "shock and awe"—despite the careful intention and attention of the author—ultimately is drawn by the reader. Of course, judgments can just as well be made about the quality of the reader as the quality of the work.

Flannery O'Connor's Moments of Excess

In a letter to Eileen Hall, editor of the book review page of *The Bulletin*, the diocesan newspaper to which O'Connor submitted many reviews, O'Connor makes some of her most revealing statements about fiction writing (CW, 987–9). In this particular letter, O'Connor responds to Hall's concerns about "scandalizing the 'little ones'" through the grotesque aspects of her fiction. Using a startling biblical example, O'Connor asks, "If a novelist wrote a book about Abraham passing his wife off as his sister—which he did—and allowing her to be taken over by those who wanted her for their lustful purposes—which he did to save his skin—how many Catholics would not be scandalized at the behavior of Abraham?" (CW, 987). The answer, of course, is not many would be left unscandalized. O'Connor continues, "The fact is that in order not to be scandalized, one has to have *a whole view of things*, which not many of us have" (CW, 987, italics added). Such an encompassing view of Scripture includes the morally suspect stories alongside the overtly virtuous ones. For a reader to be surprised by Scripture's inclusion of the story of Abraham's deceptive claim—that Sarah is his sister to assure his own (and not his wife's) safety—requires a lack of familiarity with the disobedience and moral depravity found even in the most faithful figures of Scripture. When O'Connor asks how many Catholics would not be scandalized by this story, she is implicating fellow Catholics who have not grappled with their own sacred text. To be shocked by O'Connor's fiction is to be similarly scandalized by the sacred text. Both the Scriptural witness and O'Connor's storytelling truthfully speak to the particularities of the human condition—the scandalous and offensive alongside the upright and edifying.

The integrity of the fiction writer, O'Connor continues in her letter to Hall, is found in making available the whole of human experience to the artist, since "[f]iction is supposed to represent life" (CW, 988). The fiction writer shows the reader reality through the art of *representation*: "The fiction writer doesn't state, he shows, renders" (CW, 988).[35] O'Connor's insistence on the artist making use of her everyday observations echoes Martian's claim that the artist perceives more deeply than others the transcendent trace in the created world. For both O'Connor and Maritain, the subject of art reveals the transcendent through the sensual character of the created world. Re-imagining the world through story-telling produces "a concrete expression of mystery—mystery that is lived" (CW, 988). O'Connor's artistry is found in showing—often through absence and negation rather than presence and affirmation—the hidden realities of good and evil, thus glimpsing the infinite through the finite.[36] Her fictional representations provide opportunities for readers to discern for themselves the unfathomable mystery of life.

Rowan Williams insists that O'Connor's Catholic faith adds to rather than subtracts from her artistic vision:

> Doing justice to the visible world is reflecting the love of God for it, the fact that this world is worth dying for in God's eyes. The tightrope that the Catholic writer must walk is to forget or ignore nothing of the visually, morally, humanly, sordid

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[35] Here in this proclamation of rendering not stating we sense Caroline Gordon's influence on O'Connor's aesthetics, which will be examined in the next chapter. In *The Edge of Words*, Rowan Williams similarly understand the work of representation (rather than description) to O'Connor when defining 'representation' as "a way of speaking that may variously be said to seek to embody, translate, make present or re-form what is perceived" (Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* [London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014], 22).

[36] Again in *The Edge of Words*, Williams picks up this connection between negation and revelation in "Chapter Six: Saying the Unsayable: Where Silence Happens" (Williams, *Edge of Words*, 156–185). Williams uses the idea of silence as a sort of indirect referent, an awareness of a gap in understanding: "To talk about silence, I would argue, is always to talk about *what specifically* we are not hearing' or what we decide not to listen to in order to hear differently; or what specifically we cannot say" (Williams, *Edge of Words*, 157).

> world, making nothing easy for the reader, while doing so in the name of a radical conviction that sees the world being interrupted and transfigured by revelation. The event that disrupts and questions and changes the world is precisely what obliges the artist not to try and recreate it from scratch. Irony is going to be unavoidable in this exercise.[37]

Here, Williams makes three important claims about the relationship between O'Connor's faith and her fiction. First, O'Connor's mandate to make use of the created world by artistically re-shaping it so as to reveal something previously unseen takes on extra importance because it is *this* world that God loved enough to die for it. Second, and further, this world's worth is demonstrated not only in the humiliating act of the Son on the cross but in the entire Incarnation event. In his self-emptying, the Son took on materiality with all its contingency, including dying a human death. The Incarnation does not allow O'Connor to ignore or make less important the features of creaturely existence, for these are the very things Christ took on himself. The Incarnation event and the Eucharistic event extending the Christ event into the life of the Church creates a non-negotiable challenge for the Catholic artist, as Williams comments later in his lecture: "The uncompromising specificity of the dogma of the Incarnation and the action of the

[37] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 99–100. Likely the best example of the counter-argument to Catholic faith as opening up O'Connor's artistic vision is found in Robert Brinkmeyer's *The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989). Using M. Bakhtin's monologic versus dialogic perspectives, Brinkmeyer argues that ultimately O'Connor's stories display the tension between her faith and artistic vision (23). The dialogical exchange found in the stories resides in the underlying conversation—Bakhtin's second story—between the story's characters and its narrator. Brinkmeyer identifies O'Connor's narrative voice as representing the faithful Catholic voice where the narrator takes a "sanctified position" that is "severely challenged" by the characters, resulting in a deconstruction of the narrator's omniscient voice and revealing the dangerous quality not only of O'Connor's freakish characters but of the authoritative stance of the narrator (66). O'Connor's fiction, Brinkmeyer argues, functions as a means of self-reflection by the author rather than creating a work of art that stands on its own and challenges the assumptions of readers. Sarah Gordon charges that Brinkmeyer's contention creates strawmen of both Catholicism and fundamentalism (Sarah Gordon, *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination* [Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003], 43). In addition, she points out that O'Connor herself gives no indication that she struggled with her Catholic faith but saw herself as presenting a clear Catholic vision of the world. This leads Gordon to make the opposite mistake from Brinkmeyer, claiming that O'Connor is a monological rather than a dialogical writer (Gordon, *Obedient Imagination*, 44).

Mass again becomes a key to the artist's task: the infinite cannot be *directly* apprehended, so we must take appearance seriously; it is the *infinite* that is being apprehended, so we must take appearance seriously enough to read its concealments and stratagems."[38] As the body of Christ integrates the natural with the supernatural—with the Real Presence mediating that integration in the life of the Church—so does the artist mediate between these two realms by drawing out the particular and beautiful in the created world and discerning the mystery of God in it.

Third, O'Connor's use of irony—of making the world strange in her fiction—functions as a vital tool for unveiling the supernatural realities that ground and enliven the created world. Part of what this means is that O'Connor's job is not to "tidy up the data" of the world but instead to make plausible "humanity's relation to God."[39] The grotesque aspect of O'Connor's fiction serves as the crux of relating a disordered world to its perfect Creator. Rather than defaulting to the assumption of God's absence or some configuration of a "god of the gaps," O'Connor is "always taking for granted that God is possible—thinkable or accessible or even manifest—in the most grotesque and empty or cruel faith."[40] O'Connor's use of the unusual, paradoxical, and ironic in her fiction enables her to address directly the underbelly of the human situation without sacrificing her Holy Saturday conviction that there is nothing and nowhere that God, in his love, will not endure.

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[38] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 103.

[39] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 96.

[40] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 100.

In her essay "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Fiction," O'Connor explains how her fiction bends towards the distorted and grotesque because of her belief in the mysterious qualities in the created world that point to something ultimate: "Fiction begins where human knowledge begins—with the senses—and every fiction writer is bound by this fundamental aspect of his medium. I do believe, however, that that kind of writer I am describing will use the concrete in a more drastic way. His way will be much more obviously the way of distortion" (MM, 42). The ironic making of God's grace evident through aspects of the grotesque—the cruel, the violent, the disfigured—forces the reader to pay attention to where and how God might show up in a way that avoids the two great blasphemies of storytelling for O'Connor: pornography and sentimentality.[41] Irony protects the grotesque aspect from utilizing violence for its glorification (this would be pornographic), and the grotesque protects the act of supernatural grace from becoming cheap and thin (this would be sentimental).[42] The Misfit's sneering declaration that the grandmother might have been a good woman if someone had been there to shoot her every day of her life exemplifies the use of irony to avoid both sentimentality and pornography. Whatever her final spiritual state may be, the grandmother is no saccharine saint or obviously damned soul.

In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (*Das Groteskes: seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung*)—one of the most readily referenced works on the grotesque in the

[41] O'Connor writes in her aforementioned letter to Eileen Hall: "The two worst sins of bad taste in fiction are pornography and sentimentality. One is too much sex and the other too much sentiment. You have to have enough of either to prove your point but no more "(CW, 988).

[42] Williams helpfully clarifies the language of supernatural action in O'Connor's fiction to avoid any gnostic or superstitious sentiment: "The 'supernatural' here does not of course mean the paranormal, but the action of God, perceived as it touches the human condition in ways that open up a radically 'other' depth in things" (Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 102).

broader investigation of the grotesque in literature—Wolfgang Kayser identifies the difficulty of using the designation "grotesque" because it so easily becomes "one of those quickly cheapened terms."[43] This cheapening occurs because, while the term conveys an emotional weight, it fails to speak to its specific character which distinguishes the grotesque from other indefinite terms like strange or incredible. Kayser's work presents the transformation of the language of the grotesque from its Italian roots during the Renaissance era to its use in the twentieth century, demonstrating how the word began as an ornamental caricature (as in gargoyles) and morphed into the clashing dissonance between the familiar and the strange, where the standard rules do not apply.[44] Kayser ends his work with a chapter entitled "An Attempt to Define the Nature of the Grotesque," wherein he summarizes: "THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WORLD."[45] Unlike a fairy tale, whose world operates by different rules than the familiar, the grotesque estranges those things that *should be* familiar to us with "[s]uddenness and surprise," thus producing "a situation that is filled with ominous tension."[46] The effect of grotesque estrangement disorients the spectator or reader. Kayser observes the way that humor functions within a grotesque work, commenting that "THE GROTESQUE IS A PLAY WITH THE ABSURD."[47] In making the world strange or incredible, the grotesque

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[43] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963), 17.

[44] Kayser, *Grotesque*, 17. Kayser goes on to trace the etymological root of the term "grotesque" beginning in its Italian root *grotta* (cave) with *la grotessca* used during the Italian Renaissance to refer to features of a world at odds with the familiar, one where distinctions like inanimate and animate objects collapses. The term extends into Germany in the sixteenth century to designate "the monstrous fusion of human and nonhuman elements" (Kayser, *Grotesque*, 24).

[45] Kayser, *Grotesque*, 184. All capitalization is his.

[46] Kayser, *Grotesque*, 184.

aspect of art unsettles its participant by challenging and confounding the kinds of significance that is supposedly fixed and stable.

Williams characterizes O'Connor's lynchpin scenes of the grotesque as "moments of excess."[48] The language of excess is similar to Williams' earlier use of superabundance to name that moment of overflow described by Maritain as the opening of aesthetic beauty to transcendent beauty, enabling Aquinas's "splendor of form" to shine through. But, while the language of superabundance suggests a resplendent moment of revelation, O'Connor's moments of excess take on a disruptive and often macabre appearance during

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[47] Kayser, *Grotesque*, 187. All capitalization is his.

[48] Williams uses language of excess throughout his discussion of O'Connor in *Grace and Necessity*. See 105 (on actualization of grace in finite world), 113 (on O'Connor's excessive characters), 117 (on grace as an excess), 131 (on O'Connor's artistry in identifying moments of excess as tragic or comic, and 155 (on Balthasar's discussion of the sacred in the world).

The different approaches to O'Connor use of the grotesque would easily fill volumes. A 2002 annotated reference guide to Flannery O'Connor's fiction cites hundreds of works related to O'Connor's conception of and indebtedness to others' use and depictions of the grotesque in her fiction (R. Neil Scott, *Flannery O'Connor: An Annotated Reference Guide to Criticism* [Milledgeville, GA: Timberlane Books, 2002], 998–9). I would wager that number has grown by at least another hundred since 2002, with master's theses, doctoral dissertations, journal articles, and full-length publications addressing the use of the grotesque in O'Connor's fiction.

To capture the range of judgments around her use of the grotesque, consider Carol Shloss's comments about the grotesque in O'Connor as displaying a certain Christian arrogance in comparison to Williams' designation of the grotesque as moments of excess. Shloss writes that though grotesque events are readily identifiable in O'Connor's fiction, knowing how to interpret those events often leaves readers confused. This confusion "undercuts a reader's potentially sympathetic identification with horrible experience by ironic or humorous rendering, suggesting implicitly that the categories which normally apply to our world view are no longer applicable" (Carol Shloss, *Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* [Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1980], 38–39). Shloss finds fault with O'Connor's grotesque scenes because of O'Connor's own Catholic assumptions. Shloss argues that, contrary to O'Connor's insistence that her Catholic vision makes what is eschatologically normal freakish in the present world, comes off as arrogance rather than insight: "from a theological perspective, with the life of Christ as a standard, normal human life (that is, the pattern of activities, thoughts, and expectations that are socially condoned) is severely inadequate. Given that the normal is 'freakish' in this eternal perspective, the problem for the Christian novelist is to emphasize or set apart normal character by the ugliness or deformity that [Mircea] Eliade suggested to be simultaneously fascinating and repulsive. While there is a certain logic to this reasoning, there is also a peculiar arrogance to it; for assuming that one's own religion provides the only norms for recognizing the shortcomings of human endeavor is unwarranted. The grotesque does indeed disturb categories of the normal evaluating mind, but it does not necessarily imply that the unstated standard for recognizing proportion is Christian" (Shloss, *Dark Comedies*, 40–41).

"a moment when the irony is most intense; it is not that the finite rises without interruption to a degree of sublimity but that the actuality of grace is uncovered in the moment of excess—which may be in a deliberately intensified gracelessness—without doing violence to the narrative surface."[49] Moments of excess reveal grace through drastic action without bringing into question the integrity of the story. Timothy J. Basselin, in his work on O'Connor and disability, highlights that "In contrast to modernity's dealing with imperfections, God's mercy is never sentimental…grace or the possibility for grace arrives only through the experience of grotesque limitations; mercy is forged in the fires of suffering."[50] It is precisely this avoidance of sentimentality that renders her stories credible.

The moments of excess as revelations of grace in O'Connor's fiction are dangerous and unpredictable. Far from being sentimentalized, grace appears to the characters of O'Connor's stories more often as a threat, even "as a death sentence," than as hopeful or salvific.[51] Williams highlights the tragic and violent dimensions of grace in her stories as an honest grappling with the non-deterministic choices that grace offers: "O'Connor is insisting on a perception of grace that is *not* necessarily the introduction of a meaning or even an absolution…. grace is an excess that *may* make for significance or

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[49] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 104. Williams uses "A Good Man is Hard to Find" to illustrate his point. If the dialogue between the Misfit and the grandmother had ended with an embrace of the Misfit rather than three bullets in the grandmother's chest, the narrative would have ended as a feel-good story rather than a revelation of grace: "It is a risk-charged incident, veering towards sentimentality, then brutally pulled back" (Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 107).[49] The story needs the radical turn from recognition to repulsion in order to be a believable moment of excessive grace by the grandmother and excessive rejection by the Misfit.

[50] Timothy J. Basselin, *Flannery O'Connor: Writing a Theology of Disabled Humanity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 2.

[51] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 114

forgiveness, but needn't. Yet without the breakthrough to the level of hunger and 'futureless' passion, there is no forgiveness."[52] The grotesque nature of these moments of excess protects characters and readers alike from any illusions about the grace revealed. Like the news of the birth of Christ, the revelation of the infinite within the finite can appear a threat as often as a gift.

Insightfully, Williams articulates how O'Connor's fiction evokes "reality in the light of God" without recourse to a convenient invoking of divine presence: "When hunger is faced without illusion, in the way she argues only a believer can face it, what the artist achieves is exactly the representation of what Maritain calls the 'woundedness' of the world in its entirety. Without the evocation (not invocation) of God in these narratives, the scope of the human actuality would be denied or reduced."[53] O'Connor's identity as a fiction writer who is also a Catholic enables her to take in the world through her senses and reason, and to freely represent those perceptions in her art because it is God, not the world or O'Connor, that does the work of redemption. Further, it is *this* world, in all its eccentricities and deformities, wherein God acts. Williams' emphasis on O'Connor's evocation rather than invocation of God speaks truthfully to what it means for human perception of the uncreated within the created world.

If O'Connor were to insert narratival comments that overtly announce the intervention of divine grace, the work of art as representation would undercut its own aim and insert the artist into the communicating work that belongs to the art, not its maker. As

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[52] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 117, italics his. Here we find Williams' "terror of being aware of reality in the light of God" that was discussed in Chapter One.

[53] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 120.

Williams rightly states, “Explanation is reduction; it is trying to contain another in your own identity.”[54] Thus, O’Connor refuses to explicitly invoke supernatural grace in her fiction. The outcome of O’Connor’s choice as an artist to render rather than state leaves meaning unstable. This instability is another version of O’Connor’s comment to Eileen Hall that grace can be made believable by honestly representing the world as it is, not as we think it should be. As will be seen in the subsequent chapter, O’Connor’s refusal to explain comes up against continual criticism from Caroline Gordon that readers might be left with insufficient evidence to make any kind of confident judgment about the stories. For Williams, by contrast, such instability and insufficiency are ingredient to any real relation of humanity to the God whose ways are not our ways:

> A ‘humanism’ that denied the facts of mental and physical suffering and above all the capacity of the human for untruth would be ultimately murderous; her narrative is out to show how literally true that is. A God who fails to generate desperate hunger and confused and uncompromising passion is not god at all… If God is real, the person in touch with God is in danger, at any number of levels.[55]

To summarize: The presence of the grotesque in O’Connor’s fiction artistically renders the wounding effect of creaturely encounters with supernatural grace. O’Connor narrates grace with a realistic vision that understands grace as being deemed a call to death as much as a gift of new life. The grotesque as moments of excess disrupts patterns of radical autonomy or morality-driven piety, setting the scene for characters to accept or reject the invitation of grace. These scenes play out in a complex fashion where violence and redemption are often so entangled that they are hard to distinguish precisely because O’Connor seeks to represent reality as it-is in her fiction. O’Connor confidently renders

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[54] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 120.

[55] Williams, *Grace and Necessity,* 117–18.

the possibility of grace—"reality in the light of God"—through the lens of her Catholic faith, which gives her the wide view of the world in relation to God.[56] O'Connor's fictional rendering of encounters with grace succeed because she creates evocative scenes that signal to attentive readers the possibility of what is invisible—goodness, truth, beauty, transcendence, God—within the visible realm. O'Connor's grotesque storytelling offers a vision wherein, like Jacob after wrestling the angel, characters and readers gladly limp along, affirming that paradoxical claim that "to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Wounding and Blessing

Jacob's wrestling with the angel and subsequent limp captures the enigmatic quality of the divine coming into contact with the human. When St. Thomas writes that "when we have known the sweetness of God, we have one foot sound while the other halts," he captures the strange quality of encountering the divine: moments of grace, of revelation, produce a grounding limp more often than angelic flight. Why does a limp, rather than flight, encapsulate encounters with the divine? In this section, I will explore the connection between blessing and wounding through the writing of Jean Louis-Chrétien and Rowan Williams. The link between invitations of grace with receptions in humiliation, plays a central role for both thinkers. Just as O'Connor's fiction disrupts

[56] As I indicated in Chapter One, there is debate about the influence and impact of O'Connor's Catholicism on her fiction. Marshall Bruce Gentry points to four schools of thought regarding the relationship between O'Connor faith and storytelling: 1) complete denial of any theological authorial intention; 2) an overtly orthodox Catholic vision, which is evidenced in her fiction; 3) a harsh dogmatic Catholic vision, which is evident in her fiction; and 4) question O'Connor's Catholic faith entirely, possibly arguing for a demonic vision evident in her fiction (Marshall Bruce Gentry, *Flannery O'Connor's Religion of the Grotesque* [Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1986], 3). Gentry notes that the first option was in vogue during the early years of O'Connor criticism, but by the time of his writing in the mid-1980's had fallen out of fashion (Gentry, *Religion of the Grotesque*, 3). The third option is evident in Brinkmeyer's *Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor*, which is discussed above. My position clearly belongs in the second camp where I recognize O'Connor's confident and robust Catholic faith.

quotidian life to gift characters and readers with new sight, so too do understanding and narrating grace produce a disruptive effect alongside the gift of a new thing.

Chrétien helpfully complicates the language of victory and defeat in his essay "How to Wrestle with the Invisible," where he employs the motif of Jacob's wrestling with the angel to illustrate his point.[57] Chrétien begins his exploration with the claim that "[t]here are victories that weigh heavily and overpower. There are also defeats that revive, where new, unlooked-for strengths spring forth suddenly from the wounds received."[58] Success can weaken rather than energize one's resolve, and failures can enliven rather than diminish one's determination. Chrétien points to Rilke's "The Beholder" (*Der Schauende*) to express the ultimate image of defeat that strengthens the one defeated after pondering the damage done to trees after a fierce storm:

> How small that is, with which we wrestle,
> what wrestles with us, how immense …
> What we triumph over is the Small,
> and the success itself makes us petty.
> The Eternal and Unexampled
> *will* not be bent by us.[59]

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[57] Jean Louis Chretien, "How to Wrestle with the Irresistible" in *Hand to Hand* (NY: Fordham University Press, 2003), 1–17.

[58] Chretien, *Hand to Hand*, 1.

[59] Translated by Chrétien (see Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 1–2), italics his; original German:

Was wir besiegen, ist das Kleine,
und der Erfolg selbst macht uns klein …

Was wir besiegen, ist das Kleine,
und der Erfolg selbst macht uns klein.
Das Ewige und Ungemeine
will nicht von uns gebogen sein.

Rilke's poem moves from the image of the battered tree to the biblical image of Jacob's wrestling in this stanza. With the same suddenness that the storm assaults the tree, so does the angel appear to Jacob in the middle of the night:

> Whomever this Angel overcame
> (who so often declined the fight),
> *he* walks erect and justified
> and great out of that hard hand
> which, as if sculpting, nestled round him.
> Winning does not tempt him.
> His growth is: to be the deeply defeated
> by ever greater things.[60]

Rilke defines Jacob's growth precisely in his defeat. The profundity of this claim expands in Rilke's parenthetical note that Jacob had up to this point avoided conflict through cutting corners and running away from the consequences of his deception.

Chrétien uses Rilke's poetic rendering of Jacob's blessed defeat to differentiate two different kinds of wounds. On the one hand are wounds that scab and heal over. These wounds serve to remind the receiver of their past defeat. On the other hand are wounds that "*must* not heal."[61] Notice Chrétien's imperative claim: these kinds of wounds cannot be permitted to heal. These wounds must not heal because "they are the sources of our loving intimacy with our highest task, the one we have received, impossibly, without

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[60] Translated by Chrétien (see Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 2), italics his; original German:

Wen dieser Engel überwand,
welcher so oft auf Kampf verzichtet,
der geht gerecht und aufgerichtet
und groß aus jener harten Hand,
die sich, wie formend, an ihn schmiegte.
Die Siege laden ihn nicht ein.
Sein Wachstum ist: der Tiefbesiegte
von immer Größerem zu sein.

[61] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 2, italics added.

having sought it."[62] This type of wound does not turn into a scar that from time-to-time might make the receiver recall something that happened long ago; instead the wound is the means of the message that the wounds impart: revelatory grace.

Chrétien locates Jacob as the eponym of this second kind of wounding where, together with his wounding, also came a new name: "Eponym of the highest struggle, he is thus in addition the eponym of the name lost and found, the eponym of changes of name insofar as this struggle left nothing of his existence intact, neither body nor identity, insofar then as the event of the intimate confrontation is also the advent of the unforeseen and new intimacy."[63] Jacob's living wound, his limp, cannot be separated from the blessing of the new name. Jacob needed to experience a displacement—the literal paralleling the figurative—in order to enter into a new and unforeseen blessing.[64]

Chrétien's claim that God's blessing via wounding runs contrary to a common conception that God's blessing is synonymous with favor, physical and emotional security, even financial prosperity. Yet, wounding aptly characterizes the experience of God's revelation and blessing both in Scripture—as we have seen in Jacob's blessing and

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[62] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 2.

[63] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 2–3.

[64] The dialectic relationship between activity and receptivity plays a central role in Chrétien's large religious phenomenological account. In *La Voix Nue: Phénoménologie de la Promesse*, Chrétien grounds phenomenology of the promise in the fact that even at a person's first breaths she is already in a position of receptivity and response: "Les yeux qui s'ouvrent pour la première fois, et les bras qui pour commencer se tendent ne s'avancent que dans ce qu'elle a déjà ouvert, et promis déjà. A ce qui les requiert, ils ne peuvent correspondre que pour l'avoir entendue. Origine de tout commencement, appel béant dans tout appel, elle n'est pourtant pas première. (Jean-Louis Chretien, *La Voix Nue: Phénoménologie de La Promesse* [Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990], 7). The naked voice is the voice of the *Parousia*, which no person, at no point in his or her life, is capable of receiving in its fullness. These encounters leave wounds, but these wounds, like Jacobs's, open up rather than shut down fulfillment of the promise. Chétien likens these kinds of wounds to the wounds of Christ, which do not disappear after the resurrection: "La gloire n'oublie pas le temps de lea souffrance, mais libére à sa plénitude la lumiére emprisonnée en son couer, hors duquel elle ne lançait que de fugitifs éclairs" (Chrétien, *La Voix Nue,* 31). The glorified body retains the blessed wounds, with the fullness of glory radiating out of those wounds.

limping—and in the history of Christian spirituality. In *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to Saint John of the Cross*, Rowan Williams examines the seemingly paradoxical characterization of knowledge and revelation of God as wounding from the New Testament witness through writings of the sixteenth-century Spanish mystics, Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross.[65] Williams delves into the work by examining the "strangeness of the ground of belief" that pushes against any tidy account of the Christian faith.[66] What characterizes the saints whom the church holds up as exemplars in faith is their willingness to surrender to poverty, humiliation, even death because of their Christian convictions. What lies at the center of their faith? The radical claim that God works in history, and because of that fact Christians cannot but reinterpret all of history—including their own—in light of divine activity. Williams emphasizes how Christian spirituality cannot escape the materiality, the this-worldliness, of life: "If the heart of 'meaning' is a human story, a story of growth, conflict, and death, every human story with all its oddity and ambivalence, becomes open to interpretation in terms of God's saving work."[67] Escapism from this world is a non-option for the Christian because it is into this world that God became man.

Christian spirituality, then, is not a private and internal activity but rather a public and embodied one. The goal of the Christian life is not to enter a disembodied Nirvana, but experience *shalom* in its proper sense of completeness and perfection: "'Spirituality' becomes far more than a science of interpreting exceptional private experiences; it must

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[65] Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*, Second Revised Edition (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2003).

[66] Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 11.

[67] Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 12.

now touch every area of human experience … And the goal of human life becomes not enlightenment but wholeness—an acceptance of this complicated and muddled bundles of experiences as a possible theatre for God's creative work."[68] The event of the Incarnation affirms embodied life with all its entanglements and limits.

God's action in history precedes the Incarnation as evidenced in the older Testament. Part of the muddled character of God's work in history lies in the difficulty of understanding how the workings of God in ancient Israel connect with the new thing brought about by Jesus Christ. Williams emphasizes that the often problematic relationship and incorporation of the old law within the new confirms the witness of the Incarnation wherein God takes to himself all the ambiguities and limits of earthly life: "If God is to be seen at work here [the relationship between the God of the Jewish people and the God of the Christian people], he is indeed a strange God, a hidden God, who does not uncover his will in a straight line of development, but enters into a world of confusion and ambiguity and works in contradictions—the new covenant which both fulfills, and radically alters the old."[69] While Williams' recognition of confusion does not appease concerns and critiques of potential supersessionism, even nascent anti-Semitism, his affirmation of God as strange and hidden goes a long way in explaining the difficulty of understanding God's working in history as forming a straight, progressive line from the genesis of the world up to the present time.

A central part of understanding the wounding effect of encounters with God comes about through examining precisely what occurs when the human person is

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[68] Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 12.

[69] Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 14.

confronted with the divine; namely, all idols are exposed in stark relief. These idols, of course, can be found in many things, but arguably the most common human proclivity for idolatry is the distorted view of the self.[70] The self-autonomous and self-sufficient person faces a definitive threat when confronted with the divine. As Williams aptly summarizes, "Because it is menacing and painful to be confronted with the knowledge that our constructions of controlled senses are liable to self-emptying, we readily turn to violence against the bearers of such knowledge."[71] Glimpses of divine grace can unsettle delusions of control, making grace manifest as menace rather than a gift.

O'Connor recognizes not only the intrusive nature of grace, but also the diminished understanding of grace as both a real and often an unwelcome presence in modern life: "Our age not only does not have a sharp eye for the almost imperceptible intrusions of grace, it no longer has much feeling for the nature of the violences which precede and follow them" (MM, 112).[72] O'Connor's stories play up the startling effect of grace precisely because of our own forgetfulness and domestication of grace. In one of O'Connor's most famous lines, she contends that the work of the writer who is also a Christian is to alert the malaise modern readers to their need for redemption: "to the hard

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[70] Sarah Coakley helpfully describes this distortion of the self as rooted in perverted desire, with a distorted longing for possession, coercion, and control rather than submission to the will and desires of God (Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 15).

[71] Williams, *Wound of Knowledge,* 17.

[72] O'Connor also touches on the modern person's confusion of grace with something more pithy and ultimately dangerous in her preface to *A Memoir of Mary Ann*: "One of the tendencies of our age is to use the suffering of children to discredit the goodness of God, and once you have discredited his goodness, you are done with Him … In the absence of this faith now, we govern by tenderness. It is a tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ, is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber" (CW, 831).

of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures" (CW, 806). Grace must be rendered both strangely obvious and strangely indispensable for the modern person. The violence that precedes and/or follows grace shakes the characters and readers out of any delusional conceptions about what we confront when grace reveals itself in the world.[73]

Grace demands a response. Williams characterizes this response as a moment of "acknowledgment of God as God who is present in and works in human failure and helplessness—so much so that it can be said he 'forces' people into a decision to acknowledge or not to acknowledge their failure."[74] In moments of grace, the recipient must respond to the gift of grace with a "yea" or a "nay." Grace enables the possibility for the participant to respond; grace is not an act of coercion, but instead one of cooperation or refusal. In effect, graced moments corner a person into choosing one path or another, to reject or receive what the graced moment communicates: "reality in the light of God." For the person to receive the "new thing" that Christ offers is to accept and invite the undoing that precedes remaking.

Williams takes up the Pauline conviction that to understand our redemption requires attention to being like Christ, in his life, his death, and his resurrection. Christ as incarnate Lord places suffering at the center of the obedient life. Obedience, rather than self-determination, characterizes the Christian life. For the Christian to become like Christ involves an "unselfing," a displacing of our desire to control those around us and

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[73] Note well, I am discussing violence here in the context of O'Connor's storytelling. I am not arguing that God's grace is literally violent. O'Connor artistically renders the dispossessing effect of grace in her fiction with often violent scenes to catch the reader's attention.

[74] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 16.

results in making room for the other, both the neighbor and God.[75] Here, Williams stresses that to *know* God in disruptive moments of grace signals an experiential sharing in the divine life rather than conceptual mastery, a "conformity to God," rather than "a subject's conceptual grasp of an object."[76] To know God is to surrender the desire for control. This release of control captures at least in part the wounding effect of blessing. Accepting the gift of grace—participation in the divine life—demands that we lay down all the weapons of the ego: control, mastery, winning.

The incarnate life of Christ demonstrates the inherent choice to submit or resist "reality in the light of God." This Christoform condition offers people the freedom to choose submission or rejection, surrender or control, discipleship or self-mastery. Christ's life shows both the possibility and consequences of freely choosing the way of submission. Ultimately, to choose the way of submission—of saying "yea" in acknowledgment of our own failure in the light of God—is a union of wills: "salvation is the encounter and union of these two wills, when human beings will to be what God wills them to be. And Christ, in this system, is preeminently the one in whom God's freedom and ours are perfectly expressed."[77]

The result of the union of wills is best characterized by Augustine's infamous autobiographical line in his *Confessions* Book I.1: "You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Rest characterizes the union of the human

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[75] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 23. Williams discusses the idea of unselfing in relation to otherness and dispossession in his essay "Hegel and The Gods of Postmodernity" (Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007], 25–34.

[76] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 23.

[77] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 41.

will with the divine will, but we should not understand this rest as easy or comfortable. The rest Augustine speaks of here is the result of a person's desire being directed towards its proper end; it is rightly ordered love. Williams emphasizes that in Augustine, as in the earlier Cappadocian Fathers, redirected desire characterizes the affirmative acknowledgement of the believer's failures in the light of God. Properly directed desire—the result of a conversion moment—does not instantaneously rectify the perversions and idolatries in a person's life. In fact, conversion's shifting of desire often unsettles a person's life even as she finds rest in God as the proper object of her desire: "The beauty of God … is the vison of an indescribable loveliness that calls our hearts out of darkness, breaking down the barriers of false love, right ordering those desire and impulses by which we live."[78] Human desire directed towards its proper end recasts everything that is capable of becoming idols. Strangely and yet logically, finding a resting place in God creates a restlessness in daily life. Only God and no other end—be it human striving, material possession, or any other created thing—can satisfy human desire. The Christian suffers in this process because the soul's journey to God through rightly directed desire remains constrained by the limits of fallenness and finitude.[79] Thus, a joyful suffering—evidenced in language of "purgation" through prayer, contemplation, and asceticism—disrupts and reorders the human will.

[78] Williams, *Grace and Necessity,* 85.

[79] This movement of the soul's journey towards God through rightly-ordered desire is epitomized in medieval Christian works such as Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Teresa of Ávila's *The Interior Castle*.

For more on the connection between desire and wounding framed by Gregory of Nyssa's theology, see Carnes, "Chapter Four: Bodies Luminous and Wounded: The Spirit Manifests the Beauty of the World," *Beauty*, 183–250.

Williams illustrates that in Augustine's thought, desire is cultivated through both the appealing and the reprehensible: "the compulsion towards the love of God comes not only from the loveliness but also from the horror of the world."[80] The "hope for fulfillment of joy" encourages properly ordered desire along, but also hope "for the healing of the world's wounds."[81] Williams' Augustinian language of human desire's proper end as found both in the resplendent beauty and horrific wounds of the world echoes the discussion earlier in this chapter on the function of the ugly and the beautiful in Maritain's aesthetic. Just as art draws out beauty from ugly things, so also does a person whose desires have been rightly ordered see the possibility for new life in the wounds of the world. Hope recasts both the beautiful and the grotesque in the world.

Returning to Chrétien's image of Jacob, we may say that there are wounds that disrupt in order to usher in something new. Jacob's example is a religious, not a moral one: "he summons up for us not a law, but the paradox of faith."[82] Jacob's wounding is the violence of love, which can come as a shock, even as a violent storm. Chrétien describes the onslaught of violent love as the "irresistible power that raises us, and knocks us down, loses us, and finds us, in a dizzying whirlwind."[83] Encounters of this sort signal a defeat that opens that way to victory, a loss that brings in unforeseen new life.

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[80] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 88.

[81] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 88.

[82] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 5.

[83] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand,* 10.

Conclusion

In an early journal entry written after her father's death from lupus, O'Connor noted:

> The reality of death has come suddenly upon us and a consciousness of the power of God has broken our complacency like a bullet in the side. A sense of the dramatic, of the tragic, of the infinite, has descended upon us, filling us with grief, but even above grief, wonder. Our plans were so beautifully laid out—ready to be carried to action when with magnificent certainty God laid them aside and said, 'You have forgotten—mine?'[84]

O'Connor's metaphor of "a bullet in the side" as a means of God's revelation imaginatively renders the possibility of wounds that bless—in this case, as her father's death disrupts the projected arc of her life.

In this chapter, I began with Maritain's Thomistic concept of art that insists on the integrity of the work to communicate for itself and the need for the artist to observe and refigure the observable particularities of quotidian life to reveal traces of the transcendent present, but obscure in the created world. I then moved to O'Connor's use of the excessive, the grotesque, to reveal the possibility and presence of grace in her fiction without threatening the internal integrity of her stories and truthful rendering of the presence of God's grace in the world. I ended this chapter with an examination of the paradox that there is such a thing as a wounding blessing.

I will not return overtly to the theme of wounding and blessing until Chapter Six when I explore how the way in which stories like Jacob's wrestling in Genesis and

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[84] "From one of Flannery's notebooks," box 42, folder 3, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Sally Fitzgerald, reflecting on this passage, surmises that this entry is not only a reflection on her father but a foreshadowing of her own suffering with lupus ten years later (Sally Fitzgerald, "Rooms with a View," *Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* 10 [1981]: 17).

Hazel's blinding in *Wise Blood* are narrated create a wounding-blessing opportunity in real-life readers as well as fictional characters. In the next three chapters, I will draw out the similarities in how these two stories are told (Chapter Five) through an examination of O'Connor's editorial process (Chapter Three) and the inner working of Hebrew biblical poetics (Chapter Four).

CHAPTER THREE

A Defect in Style?
Caroline Gordon, the New Criticism, and Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*

Introduction

At the start of a friendship that would last through Flannery O'Connor's tragically short life, acclaimed novelist and literary critic Caroline Gordon writes a nine-page letter to O'Connor regarding the draft-form of *Wise Blood.*[1] Gordon praises O'Connor for her current draft: "I admire tremendously the hard core of dramatic action in this book. I certainly wouldn't want to soften it up."[2] The remainder of the letter entails a number of recommendations to improve the flow and clarity of *Wise Blood*: "I think that the whole book would gain by not being so stripped, so bare, by surrounding the core of action with some contrasting material."[3] Gordon jests that the bare quality of O'Connor's draft runs "the danger of making excessive demands of readers. He is not very bright you know, and the most intelligent person, when he is reading fiction, switches his intellect off and—if the author does what he is trying to do—listens like a three or thirteen year old child."[4] Gordon identifies *Wise Blood*'s crucial scene, where Haze Motes is pulled over by the police officer, as a place that O'Connor moves too quickly in a way that minimizes

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[1] This letter is found in Sally Fitzgerald, "A Master Class: From the Correspondence of Caroline Gordon and Flannery O'Connor," *The Georgia Review* 33 (1979): 831–46.

[2] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 832.

[3] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 833.

[4] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 834.

the impact of the episode on readers. The final form of *Wise Blood* indicates that O'Connor heeded Gordon's advice but only to a certain degree, for O'Connor still demands a lot—some might say too much—of readers in the novel's final events that conclude with Hazel's self-blinding.

In this chapter, I explore the relationship between Gordon and O'Connor to illuminate how Gordon's expectations for O'Connor's writing style were met and thwarted throughout O'Connor's writing career. While one can never get inside the mind of another, my exploration will raise the central question of intention regarding O'Connor's temperamental reception of Gordon's advice: why did O'Connor accept some, but not all of Gordon's recommended changes? My exploration begins with a brief look at Caroline Gordon's narrative style in her most famous story "Old Red" to place the narrative style between master and student in stark relief. I then move to an overview of the contours and influence of New Criticism—Gordon being one of its strongest advocates—on O'Connor. I continue by attending to the mentoring relationship that began in the revisions of O'Connor's first major publication and ended with O'Connor's untimely death. Finally, I turn to a closer reading of the correspondence between Gordon and O'Connor in the drafting of *Wise Blood* that typifies the extent to which O'Connor followed her writing mentor's advice. Through both wide and narrow examinations of their relationship, the contours of O'Connor's particular style of storytelling—which at times frustrated and confounded Gordon—will be drawn out. Summarily, despite Gordon's ongoing insistence that O'Connor add more meat, as it were, to her bare-boned

stories, O'Connor's stories never stray too far from the lean style of storytelling found in *Wise Blood*.[5]

Caroline Gordon's "Old Red"

Because this chapter's concern centers around the Caroline Gordon's evaluation of Flannery O'Connor's fiction, I begin with a brief look at Gordon's own writing style at work in her most famous story, "Old Red."[6] Gordon's fiction is known for its use of symbol. The function of symbolism in her fiction, as one critic comments, "moves *toward* abstraction rather than proceeds from it."[7] O'Connor notes that Gordon's use of symbol in "Old Red" served as an introduction to "what I could be expected to do with a symbol" (HB, 200).

The employment of symbol in "Old Red" revolves around the story's namesake: a fox named Old Red. The aged protagonist Aleck Maury recalls his first sighting of Old Red:

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[5] It must be noted that while I could make judgments about Gordon's theological or philosophical impulse for recommending the radical changes and therein argue for Gordon's deficient theological imagination when confronted with the imaginative and theological artistry of O'Connor, I am avoiding this line of argumentation all together. My concern in this chapter is to establish O'Connor's distinctive paratactic style. It also must be said that O'Connor took the majority of Gordon's advice and her stories are better for it. To pit Gordon against O'Connor undercuts their important mentoring relationship. Gordon herself recognized the genius and originality of O'Connor's work and saw her advice as an offering, not a mandate, for O'Connor's consideration: "I feel like a fool when I criticise your stories. I think you are a genius… I might as well come out with it. I also think you are one of the most original writers now practising. It really is presumptuous for me to offer you suggestions. But you have asked for them and since you have more talent and more humility than most of the young people who ask for my criticism I shall just set forth my notions as they come into my head" ("Comment and analysis 2nd revision, January 21, 1958," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University).

[6] Caroline Gordon, *Old Red and Other Stories* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963).

[7] Tom Landess, "Introduction," *The Short Fiction of Caroline Gordon: A Critical Symposium*, Studies in Literature (University of Dallas). Southern Series. (Irving, TX: University of Dallas Press, 1972), 2, italics his.

> An image had risen in his memory, an image that was familiar but came to him infrequently of late and that only in moments of elation: the wide field in front of his uncle's house… They would be waiting there in that broad plain when they had the first sight of the fox. On that little rise by the river, loping steadily, not yet alarmed. The sun would glint on his bright coat, on his quick turning head as he dove into the dark woods.[8]

At the story's close, the elderly Maury again recalls Old Red:

> He ran slowly, past the big boulder, past the blasted pine to where the shadow of the Pinnacle Rock was black across the path. He ran on and the shadow swayed and rose to meet him. Its cool touch was on his tongue, his heaving flanks. He had slipped in under it. He was sitting down, panting, in black dark, on moist earth while the hounds' baying filled the valley and reverberated on the mountainside.[9]

In both of these reflections on the fox, Aleck Maury returns to the present: in the first instance his memories of exhilarating hunts shift to his present walk along the riverbank with his fishing rod, and in the second instance the movement from the memory of Old Red resting his well-worked body on cool rock to the old man lying in bed imagining his deceased wife. The vibrant and striking images of Old Red reverberate against Maury, a feeble man who now takes up fishing rather than the hunt and lies awake at night groaning in pain and remembering days gone by.

Gordon's narration of Maury's recollection of the fox evidences her artistry in symbolic description. O'Connor praises Gordon's ability to introduce readers to "a complete world" where "the meaning comes from the things themselves and not her imposing anything. Right when you finish reading, you don't think you've read anything, but the more you think about it the more it grows" (HB, 187). O'Connor is not alone in this assessment. One review of "Old Red" describes her world-making skill as a kind of

[8] Gordon, "Old Red," 134.

[9] Gordon, "Old Red," 146.

"telling" by making a subtle "showing" of "selected details that form the basis of realistic fiction."[10] Gordon's fiction thus extends from the concrete to the abstract as her narrative Gordon's literary style works "from the inner reality outward."[11]

The majority of the story narrates the interior life of Aleck Maury, playing out his memories of the past and his feelings about the present as he lies in bed at night. The interiority of Gordon's story contrasts starkly with O'Connor's focus on the action of her characters that rarely offers glimpses into their interior thoughts and feelings. Gordon's interior world is filled with rich description—as seen in Maury's description of the fox sightings—while O'Connor's spare style leaves readers with ample interpretive work to fill-in a scene. That is, Gordon's hypotactic style, when set alongside O'Connor's paratactic narrative style, reveals the essential difference between Gordon and O'Connor.

I avoid making any critical assessment of the *quality* of Gordon's work in comparison to O'Connor's fiction. Instead, this brief look at "Old Red" reveals the disparate styles of the two authors. O'Connor welcomed Gordon's advice yet never adopted the interior-focused and luxurious narrative style found in "Old Red." As will be seen in the remainder of the chapter, the relationship between O'Connor and Gordon was always tense: O'Connor the student sought to learn from her teacher but, at times, remained unwilling to flesh out scenes that Gordon recommended as guides to the reader. As a result: O'Connor never ceases to make tremendous interpretive demands on the reader.

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[10] Robert A. Wiggins, "Caroline Gordon: 'Old Red and Other Stories' (Book Review)," *Studies in Short Fiction* 1 (1963): 67.

[11] Wiggins, "Caroline Gordon: "Old Red," 68.

New Criticism, Gordon, and O'Connor

In *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and the Aesthetic of Revelation*, John D. Sykes Jr. dedicates a chapter to exploring O'Connor's relationship with New Criticism, the dominant interpretive method in the mid-twentieth century America.[12] Sykes introduces Caroline Gordon as a striking influence on O'Connor, as well as fellow contemporary southern writer, Walker Percy:

> Along with her husband, Allen Tate, Gordon represented three allegiances that help us place O'Connor and Percy in context: she was closely committed to a theory of literature we may broadly call New Critical, she was a self-conscious Roman Catholic and she was a southerner. Although Percy's philosophical interest in language theory and his inclination toward the novel of ideas would lead him away from New Critical ideas, O'Connor seems to have resonated deeply with the older writer's [i.e., Gordon's] views on the nature of fiction. And this New Critical bent was to have consequences for her fiction.[13]

Sykes identifies the influence of New Criticism on O'Connor as beginning prior to her relationship with Gordon during her graduate studies at the University of Iowa in 1945: "Although as a whole the Iowa's Writer's Workshop was a hardly a New Critical bootcamp…clearly the atmosphere was permeated with the attitudes and the personalities of the movement."[14] New Criticism is centered on showing over telling within narrative, an idea which Sykes identifies in Gordon's advice to O'Connor again and again: "'Don't state, render!'"[15] Sykes recognizes this New Critical emphasis on rendering as one of the

[12] John D. Sykes Jr., *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and the Aesthetic of Revelation* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2007), "Chapter One: O'Connor and New Criticism," 9–38.

[13] Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation*, 10.

[14] Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation*, 11.

[15] Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation*, 17.

two poles of O'Connor's fiction, the other being Catholic dogma.[16] Sykes states the tension between these two poles summarily: "She [O'Connor] believed she had something of great importance to say to an audience who greatly needed to hear it, yet she was committed to a poetics that prized ambiguity."[17] O'Connor's literary identity encapsulates two distinct influences: the New Critics' prizing of ambiguity and the prophetic voice of the Catholic faith in the modern world.

Sarah Gordon comments on how these two poles—the New Critical and theological—reveal O'Connor's struggle to find her authorial voice in drafting of *Wise Blood*: "a work deeply influenced by O'Connor's reading in the moderns, her assimilation of the New Criticism, and the emergence of a stringent Catholicism as the bedrock of her fiction"[18] S. Gordon's dismissive notion of the stringency of O'Connor's religion prompts her negative conclusion that O'Connor forced her fiction to fall in line with the patriarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.[19] Even so, S. Gordon helpfully points out that the many drafts of *Wise Blood* disclose the "painstaking process of the novel's creation and the author's groping for subject matter consonant with her Christian vision and with the stylistic demands of the New Criticism."[20] While the extent to which one can distinguish between O'Connor's Christian vision and New Criticism's literary style is rather more complicated than S. Gordon presents—an issue which serves as a central

[16] Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation*, 17.

[17] Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation*, 19.

[18] Gordon, *Obedient Imagination*, 89.

[19] This critique of the RCC's patriarchal influence serves as the central theme for S. Gordon's feminist reading of O'Connor's fiction in *Obedient Imagination*.

[20] Gordon, *Obedient Imagination*, 89

feature of this dissertation—identifying O'Connor as both Catholic and New Critic reinforces Sykes' overall assessment.

To understand the atmosphere of New Criticism requires a quick overview of its rise and central tenets.[21] New Critics are characterized by a concern for close and careful reading of texts where the concern is primarily with the text itself, rather than attempting to get behind or around the text. This form of criticism arose in direct response to a scientifically-oriented academy that some identified as failing to engage imaginatively with primary texts.[22] As one author notes: "This [failure of attention to the text] is where the New Critics came in: they managed persuasively to trace the contours of a text-centered approach, giving substance to the phrase 'the text itself' and demonstrating in action the interpretive tools the study of the text required."[23] Pedagogically, the concern to return to the text itself enabled teachers to empower their students to engage and interpret texts from the outset of their studies without requiring the acquisition of laborious pre-reading strategies.[24] A prime example of this concern for students to approach literature directly is seen in Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Fiction,* which, first published in 1943, served as a text in one of

[21] I follow Sykes lead when he notes that "New Criticism itself is better understood as a *collection of attitudes and orientations* than as a critical system" (Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation*, 12, italics added).

[22] William E. Cain, "Literary Criticism, Vol. 5 of *The Cambridge History of American Literature,* Sacvan Bercovitch and Cyrus R. K. Patell, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 505. Cain notes: "The rise of the New Criticism, then, occurred because of demands inside and outside the academy for an end to traditional forms of scholarship and literary appreciation; these were judged to be conservative, irrelevant, irresponsible, and at odds with creative writing and cultural needs. Almost always these calls were accompanied by a commitment to primary texts and by the appeal that the academy end its ivory-tower detachment. Few people during the 1920s and early 1930s were sure what examining the text itself might actually entail or how, specifically, it would supply English departments with a social mission. They knew what was needed but not how to do it" (505).

[23] Cains, "Literary Criticism," 505.

[24] Cains, "Literary Criticism," 544.

O'Connor's 1945 classes at the Iowa's Writers Workshop.[25] In the book's preface entitled "Letter to the Teacher," the authors lay out their central and quintessential New Critical claim:

> This book is based on the belief that the student can best be brought to an appreciation of the more broadly human values implicit in fiction by a course of study which aims at the close analytical and interpretive reading of concrete examples. It seems to us that the student may best come to understand a given piece of fiction by understanding the functions of the various elements which go to make up fiction and by understanding their relationships to each other in the whole construct.[26]

New Criticism certainly did not ignore formalist concerns for structure and textual patterns, but it returned the delight of reading to the classroom, enabling students to be drawn into the text without being bogged down by background ideology, historiography, and so on.[27] The central aim was to imbue students with an appreciation of the irreducible quality of fiction, whose meaning cannot be encapsulated in an abstract propositions.

In the appendix to *Understanding Fiction*, entitled "Technical Problems and Principles in the Composition of Fiction—a Summary," one gains insight into how New Criticism translates into judgments about good and less good artistry. While there is "no single, special technique or formula for writing good fiction," it must authentically

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[25] Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation,* 11.

[26] Cleanth Brooks Jr. and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, Second Edition (NY: Appleton Century-Crofts, 1959), xiii-xiv.

[27] Despite the great benefit wrought by New Criticism's concern with a return to the text itself, it suffered from a lack of concern for authorial intention. Cains notes that the New Critics either downplayed or even ignored the plight of and discrimination against African Americans and women (Cain, "Literary Criticism," 547–558). Thus did the "fiercest opposition" to New Critics arise during the heightened social awareness of the 1960s and 70s: "They [social protestors] declared that pious talk about aesthetic values and reverence for close reading of literature cloaked anti-human institutional realities and prevented students from striving to end the evils of the world outside the academy" (560).

represent human experience.[28] Narratival unity remains central to the artistic rendering of what is distinctively human:

> A good writer knows in his very bones that fiction involves not the mere exploiting of a bag of tricks, but the careful study of the possible relationships among the numerous elements which go to make up a piece of fiction. He knows that characterization, setting and atmosphere, plot, style, tone, symbolism, theme, and various other elements must be functionally related to each other to create a real unity—a unity in which every part bears an expressive relation to the other parts.[29]

Brooks and Warren proceed to lay out ten central features that writers must attend to in order to achieve a "real unity" of story to their readers: 1) how a story begins, including vital background information; 2) sufficient descriptive rendering of setting and scene; 3) story's mood; 4) right sort and amount of character and setting description; 5) key illuminating moments; 6) a decisive climactic moment; 7) narrative tension building towards illuminating moment; 8) clear trajectory of interest guiding readers to central conflict; 9) sufficient denouement; and 10) portrayal of characters dynamically as a "complex of potentialities for action."[30] In addition, there are six non-organizational elements that compromise good fiction: 1) creating interest and curiosity in readers; 2) making clear the central character whose fate is at stake; 3) maintaining consistent and clear narratival point of view; 4) creating a necessary distance created between readers and characters; and 5) finding an appropriate story length.[31] Notably, especially for my argument, Brooks and Warren make repeated use of Gordon's most famous short story,

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[28] Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, 644.

[29] Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, 645.

[30] Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, 646–657, quote from 656.

[31] Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, 657–667.

“Old Red,” as an exemplary case of good storytelling. As we will see later in this chapter, their concern for readers plays a principal role in Gordon’s recurring critiques of O’Connor’s narrative style. Namely, Gordon’s advice to O’Connor on *Wise Blood* reflects the New Critic’s points of concern regarding the coherence of the story.

S. Gordon offers a hypothesized psychological account of O’Connor’s attraction to the New Critics: “O’Connor’s shy and self-conscious demeanor may well have been drawn to the emphasis in the New Criticism on the necessary impersonality of the work of art and the need for the writer to erase herself from the work.”[32] While there is no demonstrable evidence for such psychologizing, S. Gordon is correct to say that the New Critical desire to let the art stand apart from the artist as it represents itself maps onto her Thomistic view of art, as expressed in her essays.[33] “Art is a word that immediately scares people off, as being a little too grand. But all I mean by art is writing something that is valuable in itself and that works in itself… St. Thomas said that the artist is concerned with the good of that which is made” (MM, 65). For New Critics and Thomists alike, the story itself is the locus point of meaning-making, as O’Connor repeatedly emphasizes: “The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning, and the purpose of making statements about the meaning of a story is only to help you experience that meaning more fully” (MM, 96). Such experienced meaning depends, in turn, on *how* a story should be told and thus on the question of style. By looking at the mentoring a relationship between C. Gordon and O’Connor, I will illumine the

[32] Sarah Gordon, *Obedient Imagination*, 85.

[33] Most notably in “The Nature and Aim of Fiction” and “Writing Short Stories” in MM.

distinctively spare character of O'Connor's storytelling as the student at times rejects the advice of her mentor, a quintessential New Critic.

Gordon and O'Connor's Writing Mentorship

Gordon and O'Connor's friendship began when Robert Fitzgerald sent along a copy of the *Wise Blood* draft to Caroline Gordon in 1951. Gordon's response, which will be examined more closely in the next section, launched a mentoring friendship that would last through to O'Connor's final completed publication before her death, "Parker's Back."[34] The timing for the handoff of O'Connor's writing from Fitzgerald to Gordon just so happened to mark the nascent moment of O'Connor's professional writing career, which comprises two novels—*Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960)—and two collections of short stories—*A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1955) and *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (1965).

Even before their writing mentorship began, Gordon influenced O'Connor's literary imagination. In a 1957 letter to Betty Hester, O'Connor comments that Gordon's short story "Old Red" (1934) "introduced me to what I could be expected to do with a

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[34] Near the end of her own life, Caroline Gordon narrates to Sally Fitzgerald her final meeting with O'Connor within weeks of O'Connor's death: "'She was in the hospital, and I went over with the Abbot and Fr. Charles. The Abbot said, 'We can't see Flannery until [her mother] has gone down. You wait out here, and I'll let you know when the coast is clear.' But she was late in going down (to lunch) and she caught him. She said, 'What are you doing here?' He said, 'I've come to give your daughter spiritual consolation. Is that all right?' She left, he beckoned to us and we all went up. I knew that Flannery was quite ill, but I didn't realize how near death she was. She took a notebook out from under her pillow and said, 'They say I mustn't do any work, but that it is all right to write a little fiction.' We exchanged conspiratorial grins, each of us doubtless holding the opinion that writing fiction is the hardest thing in the world. But I still did not realize how near death she was. This was about two weeks before she died" ("Transcript of Interview by S. Fitzgerald with C. Gordon, dated October 31, 1978," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University).

symbol and I sat down and wrote the first story I published ["The Geranium" (1946)]."[35] Yet S. Gordon maintains that the relation between the two stories extends beyond the use of symbol: "I believe that 'The Geranium' resembles 'Old Red' in other significant ways that O'Connor does not acknowledge. Although the tone and thematic concerns of the stories are markedly different, both 'Old Red' and 'The Geranium' have, as background, father-daughter relationships that leave much to be desired."[36] While both share in the father-daughter relationships and in use of third-person-limited point of view, the tenor of the stories is ultimately different, as O'Connor's story is marked by "sharp, vivid images and strong, often monosyllabic verbs, [which] signal the O'Connor style that is to come."[37] C. Gordon's ongoing influence is evident in many of O'Connor's letters, including one where O'Connor alerts an English professor to her mentor's warning against the dangers of the omniscient narrator (CW, 923) and also commending the unifying effect of the right use of point of view , when writing to Betty Hester (HB, 157).

Gordon received a draft of everything O'Connor wrote from *Wise Blood* forward, and just as O'Connor's gratitude lasted throughout their friendship, so did Gordon's frustration with O'Connor's limiting narrative viewpoint.[38] At one point, Gordon describes the importance of point of view with the imagery of an imprisoned reader:

> I think of [POV] this way: The reader is, as it were, a prisoner, seated on a stool so low that he cannot see out of the window. Therefore he sees of the human

[35] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald, Reprint edition (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 200.

[36] Sarah Gordon, *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 71–2.

[37] Gordon, *Obedient Imagination*, 76.

[38] "To Flannery, undated 1953," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

> scene only what he sees reflected in the eyes of the figure at the window. At first glance this would seem to restrict what he see: he will see only what is reflectedin [*sic*] a pair of eyes. But when you stop to think of it that is all anybody can see ordinarily: what he sees through his own eyes. If he sees through his own eyes what is reflectedin [*sic*] another pair of eyes he will see twice as much as the next man, who is looking only through his own eyes sees. Here is a great mystery of the craft. I can't explain it. I merely try to tell you how it seems to me.[39]

For Gordon, the job of the narrator is to provide the reader with "another pair of eyes" to see with a doubled vision available through storytelling. Because Gordon identifies this doubled vision as the essential quality of writing and reading, she holds O'Connor to a high standard of narration. Gordon wants to provide the imprisoned reader ample information to see for herself by means of the narrator's vision. This reflective narrative vision involves both the panoramic and the scenic. Gordon identifies O'Connor as mastering the scenic—which is precisely what makes O'Connor's stories at once formidable and believable—but needing to develop more of the panoramic viewpoint that unveils the circumambient scene surrounding the central action. Hence, Gordon's insistent call for O'Connor to add landscaping to the narrative action.

In one of Gordon's last letters before O'Connor's death in 1964, Gordon offers her persistent critique against a too limiting point of view in "Parker's Back." Gordon advises O'Connor to add a "panoramic opening" so as to set the scene for Parker's obsession with tattoos—a suggestion to which O'Connor complied—and to change the title to something like "Under Every Green Tree" in order to open up the allegorical level of the story—a proposal O'Connor did not adopt.[40] Where Gordon wanted O'Connor to

[39] "To Flannery, May 21, 1953," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

[40] "To Flannery, undated 1964," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

open up her scenes to a wider view of landscape and deeper insight into characters inner-lives, O'Connor appears to have received and amended her stories according to Gordon's advice only to a certain degree. This partial adoption of Gordon's critique appears again and again throughout their friendship.[41]

A prime example of the tension between Gordon's concern for opening up a scene for readers and O'Connor's narrowly-focused point of view is evident in her most famous and also most straightforwardly-told stories, "A Good Man is Hard to Find." One of O'Connor's most troubling recourses to spare storytelling is found in this story when she narrates "[a]nd the grandmother's head cleared for an instant" to indicate a change in the grandmother (CW, 152). Following this opaque line, the grandmother speaks to the Misfit, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children" (CW, 152). While the grandmother's moment of clarity and utterance to the Misfit could signal a conversion moment wherein the grandmother's words function as a confession, they could just as

[41] The examples are too abundant to cover in detail here, but consider the following as a sampling. On "A Circle in the Fire," Gordon suggests that O'Connor provides readers the reason why the two women's hats stand in opposition—one stiff and the other out of shape ("To Flannery, undated 1953"). O'Connor does not make the change. On "A Later Encounter with the Enemy," Gordon suggests that O'Connor bulk up the description of the old man seeing his family history flash before his eyes as death comes for him ("To Flannery, undated 1953"). The published version of the scene provides vivid descriptions of his wife, son, and mother (CW, 261). On " The Displaced Person," Gordon points again to O'Connor's common weakness of "too restricted a viewpoint at crucial moments," especially the scene where Mrs. Shortley stands in the field and receives a vision. Gordon recommends that in this scene—and scenes like it—O'Connor shift from the limited point of view of the character to a broader view: "to soar above the conflict, to view it as if through the eyes of an eagle" ("To Flannery, undated 1953"). In the published version, there is no sign of an eagle-eyed view of this scene (CW, 301). On "The Enduring Chill," Gordon encourages O'Connor to take on elevated speech in the climactic close of the story when Asbury is assaulted by the whirlwind-like power of the Holy Spirit. Gordon insists that O'Connor must not use –"you cannot say" colloquial language of the Holy Spirit as she does in the final line describing "the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire" ("Comment and analysis on 3rd revision, January 26, 1958"). In the published version, the ice-fire analogy remains (CW, 572). But, in that same story, Gordon insists that O'Connor rework the initial scene when Asbury steps off the train, so that the sun plays a central role in the landscape because it functions antiphonally in the story at its start and end. In the published version, the opening scene reflects Gordon's recommendation (CW, 547).

well evidence an attempt to manipulate the convict into sparing her life. The Misfit's response, on the other hand, is far from vague when he reacts to the grandmother's affection with her execution.

Gordon's playful frustration with O'Connor's style is on display in an undated 1953 letter regarding a working draft of the story: "I told you some months ago that I thought your stories suffered from too narrow a focus. I also told you that the omniscient narrator does not speak colloquially—but hereyou [*sic*] are, at it again."[42] Gordon goes on to comment that the story does not possess the "proper dimension" with the narrator speaking as commonly as he does, emphasizing that O'Connor's inability to master the omniscient narrator's voice is a "major fault" in her work.[43] Gordon worries that O'Connor's "terrific, unremitting, almost unbearable effort to achieve intensity" contributes to a less than authoritative narrative voice.[44] Regarding the narrow focus of O'Connor's narration, Gordon points to the moment the grandmother hears the gunshots that signal her son and grandson have been killed in the woods: "just after the two pistol shots we *need* to know how the road, the woods look after these shots were fired."[45] In the published edition, Gordon's insistence on the need for the scene's landscaping were met, though possibly not to the extent Gordon hoped; it reads: "There was a pistol shot

[42] "To Flannery, undated 1953," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

[43] "To Flannery, undated 1953," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

[44] "To Flannery, undated 1953," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

[45] "To Flannery, undated 1953," box 56, folder 9, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Emphasis Gordon's.

from the woods, followed closely by another. Then silence. She could hear the wind move through the tree tops like a long satisfied insuck of breath" (CW, 149).

In 1978, Sally Fitzgerald, Robert Fitzgerald's wife and one of O'Connor's closest friends, interviewed Gordon in her final years for a never-completed biography of O'Connor. In sharp-edged words frequently found at the end of a hard-fought life, Gordon summarizes her thoughts on O'Connor's fiction:

> Flannery O'Connor had a defect in her style which would have ruined a lesser writer: she could not write a complex sentence. A complex sentence is a sentence that contains more than one clause, dependent for writers on the word 'that.' E.g., "He told her that they ought to move to Atlanta for the winter months, that their child was not getting a proper education in Milledgeville." Or, "He told her that he was tired of the South, and that he wanted to go west." "He told her that he did not want to eat grits very morning." Now he can tell her or she can tell him any number of things, all depending on the word 'that.' Flannery did not understand the composition of a complex sentence. She told me that this [*sic*] because she went to school in Milledgeville to the nuns for half the year and to a progressive school in Atlanta for the rest of the year.

Gordon continues,

> She could write only one kind of sentence—a simple, declarative sentence. When she strove for poetic effect, she put two of these sentences together in an effort to make a complex sentence. This is the reason some of the stories are failures.
>
> Violence in her stories made her a best-seller among readers who had no idea what she was saying. She would never have made it as a writer if she had not had the riches of the liturgy behind her.[46]

[46] "Transcript of Interview by S. Fitzgerald with C. Gordon, dated October 30, 1978 in San Cristobal de Las Casa, Chiapas, Mexico," box 4, folder 10, Coll. 1101, Sally Fitzgerald papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Fitzgerald notes that Gordon is mistaken on O'Connor's schooling: "Note: C.G. was confused on the point of Flannery's parochial schooling and progressive schooling: F. attended parochial school in Savannah and in Atlanta until she was twelve years old; then the O'Connors moved back to Milledgeville, where she attended the progressive school attached to the College there–the Peabody school. It was here that she felt her education ended, and where she developed a permanent scorn for 'progressive' schools. SF."

While harsher in tone than her earlier correspondence, Gordon reiterates later in life many of the irritants she found in O'Connor's writing; summarily, most notably, Connor's paratactic style.

Yet what Gordon defines as the central "defect" in O'Connor's fiction is arguably *the* central characteristic of O'Connor's storytelling: paratactic narration. In the following section, I take a closer look at Gordon's advice and O'Connor's response to this advice on the ground, as it were. The final comments and revisions of *Wise Blood* demonstrate the consistent strain between Gordon and O'Connor concerning how a story is told. Without discounting O'Connor's great respect and willingness to be mentored by Gordon, her editorial choices demonstrate the nascent tension between Gordon's concern with the panoramic view and O'Connor's stubborn insistence on keeping her stories straight and spare in order to have her characters and readers confront realities that a more complex style—while seeming to clarify—would have actually obscured.

Caroline Gordon and Wise Blood

Caroline Gordon's critique that O'Connor demands too much of readers involves narrative pacing: "It takes much longer to take things in than we realize. In our effort to keep the action from lagging we hurry readers over crucial moments. But anything that is very exciting can't be taken hurriedly."[47] While she makes a number of suggestions for slowing down scenes, Gordon highlights three pivotal moments in *Wise Blood* "where a few strokes might make a lot of difference": 1) the discourse on Enoch's "wise blood" in Chapter Five; 2) Hazel, Sabbath, and Enoch's meeting in the boarding house; and 3) the

[47] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 834.

scene with Hazel and the patrolman.[48] By comparing these three scenes in an earlier undated draft—which the matching page numbers in Gordon's letter and the archived material suggest was most likely the 1951 draft Gordon reviewed—to the final published edition of *Wise Blood*, I will demonstrate the extent to which O'Connor acted on the advice of her writing mentor.[49] The focused attention in this chapter on the ways O'Connor both did and did not heed her mentor's advice lays the groundwork for the later examination (Chapter Five) of the theological fruit of O'Connor's distinctive literary style. This exploration is important for my broader argument because it attends to O'Connor's deliberate choices in narrating her stories, a deliberation that sometimes goes against her writing mentor for whom she had the utmost respect.

Before moving to the three central scenes Gordon highlights, a brief summary of some of the minor suggestions Gordon made and the ways O'Connor revised (or did not) is in order. Gordon offers a number of notes on the early chapters of *Wise Blood*, including expanding the description of the Taulkinham train station's bathroom stall and providing a more rounded characterization of the taxi driver. On the bathroom stall, Gordon remarks, "I need to see the inside of that toilet. The scene would be much more real if we could see what it was like before you begin telling us of his situation: 'He had no place to go,' for instance. The fact that you haven't set your stage properly, haven't

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[48] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 837.

[49] Flannery O'Connor Collection, Special Collections, Ina Dillard Russell Library, Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA, 149a. O'Connor signals that she is reworking a draft under the advised comments returned from Gordon, among others: "Bob Giroux and Mrs. Tate [Caroline Gordon] made some suggestions for improving my book and I have been working on these and have by now about come up with another draft of it, of which I will have one copy—readable but with a good many inked-in corrections—I hope in a few weeks" (CW, 889). The archived 1951 draft contains O'Connor's promised well-marked changes.

showed us what the little room looked like, takes away from the drama of this scene, which otherwise would be one of your best"[50] Regarding the taxi driver, Gordon reiterates the New Critical motto: a character "must be rendered. That is, the reader must be given enough details to enable him to visualize the man…One gives a character like this a different kind of attention from the kind one gives important characters. Nevertheless, one must give him his due."[51] Commenting on Hazel's exchange with the taxi driver, Gordon also offers a crucial judgment concerning dialogue: "It is dangerous, I think to have a character emit more than three sentences in one speech. If he does you get an unlifelike effect. If he has to say more than that you ought to dramatize the fact that he is making quite a long speech…Speeches need air around them—a liberal use of white space improves almost any dialogue."[52]

In both matters, O'Connor faithfully heeds Gordon's advice.[53] But regarding the more pivotal scenes, O'Connor usually refuses to soften her unflinching gaze. Such directness is required by her prophetic vision, "seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of *seeing far things close up*" (MM, 44, italics added). This denial of Gordon's insistence on the need for air to breathe paradoxically opens up rather than

[50] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 839.

[51] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 839–40.

[52] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 840

[53] In the scene with the taxi driver, O'Connor follows Gordon's recommendation of "white space" to break up the dialogue. Midway through the dialogue, she inserts two descriptions—the first of Haze and the second of the driver (which ends up appearing earlier in the final version): 1) Haze "leaned forward and gripped the back of the front seat. 'It's just a hat'" and 2) "He [the driver] did not disturb the position of the cigar when he spoke; he could speak on either side of it" (cf. Flannery O'Connor Collection, Special Collections, Ina Dillard Russell Library, Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA, 149a, 18). Pointing out that the image of the cigar and speaking on both sides of it is at once comical but also suggestive that the taxi driver is not likely to be speaking the truth.

closes down all that stands around and outside the sparely narrated scene. Hence my insistence on qualifying the widespread notion that O'Connor unwaveringly submitted to her mentor's advice.[54]

Enoch's "Wise Blood"

The fifth chapter of *Wise Blood* contains a clear example of O'Connor's sidestepping of Gordon's recommendation. Gordon critiques this chapter because O'Connor provides too much narrative *telling* in place of *showing*:

> This is the only part of the book where you rely on statement rather than rendition. I *think* it is because you are uncomfortably aware of the difficulty of putting over Enoch's conviction that he has 'wise blood.' (It's a hellishly difficult problem!) I don't think you handle it quite right. You rather give your show away beforehand. That is, you tell us what Enoch did every day before you show him in the act of doing it. If you sum up what is going to happen before it happens the reader is not interested in it when it does happen…But suppose you had prepared a little for your wise blood in previous chapters, say when Enoch and Haze first meet…suppose Enoch let drop a few words to the effect that he, too, has a secret power. Maybe several times.[55]

Gordon suggests two means of strengthening the content of this chapter. First, she dissuades O'Connor from first announcing that Enoch's daily ritual is to walk through the

[54] Often the relationship between Gordon and O'Connor is caricatured as O'Connor taking all of Gordon's advice in full. As a quintessential example, Daniel Moran in *Creating Flannery O'Connor: Her Critics, Her Publishers, Her Readers* remarks in passing that O'Connor trusted Gordon's instincts "absolutely" (cf. Daniel Moran, *Creating Flannery O'Connor: Her Critics, Her Publishers, Her Readers* [Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2016], 19). John D. Sykes, Jr. emphasizes Gordon's influence as a New Critic on O'Connor to an extent that potentially runs the risk of overstating the case. Sykes attributes some of O'Connor's non-New Critic moves in her early work to "immaturity." Continuing, "She simply had not yet developed her skills to Caroline Gordon's level." Cf. John D. Sykes, Jr., *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and the Aesthetic of Revelation* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2007), 19. I want to argue that O'Connor's divergences from Gordon's advice and style—which show up at times in both her early and later writings ("A View of the Woods" as a prime non-New Critic example in the latter)—demonstrates O'Connor's own crafting of her stories in a way that heeds the advice of her writing mentor without simply falling in line with her. As was evidenced in Chapter Two, O'Connor embraced the limited viewpoint because she saw it as a truthful way to narrate the possibility of the transcendent within the finite world, the possibility of seeing the infinite through the finite.

[55] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 836–37. Italics hers.

city zoo after work, before narrating Haze's joining Enoch in his disturbing ritualistic journey through the zoo. Second, she encourages O'Connor to leave some hints for readers earlier in the novel to prepare them for Enoch's declaration that he has wise blood.[56] In both cases, Gordon intends these suggested revisions to clarify and emphasize the dramatic action of the chapter.

Notably, O'Connor amends her draft minimally in light of Gordon's broad critique. O'Connor leaves the description of Enoch's daily practice as-is in the final version of her draft, seemingly ignoring Gordon's recommended changes. The only change made to Chapter Five from the 1951 draft to the published edition comes in the introductory paragraph. On the 1951 draft, O'Connor adds a handwritten note—likely made after reading Gordon's recommendation—in an earlier chapter where Haze and Enoch have a verbal exchange after the initial run-in with Asa and Sabbath Hawks: "'I got wise blood like my daddy,' he said. I know a heap of thing you don't know and you'll probably need me!"[57] In the published edition, this amendment is split up so that it appears in two different iterations. The first appears in the same dialogue between Haze and Enoch, when Enoch tries to provoke Haze, "'You act like you think you got wiser blood than anybody else, he said, but you ain't! I'm the one has it. Not you. *Me*'" (CW, 33, italics original). The second appears in the opening lines of Chapter Five: "That morning Enoch Emery knew when he woke up that today the person he could show it [the shrunken mummy] to was going to come. He knew by his blood. He had wise blood

[56] In Chapter Five, O'Connor references Enoch's wise blood nine times (CW, 44, 45 [twice], 49 [twice], 51, 54, 55, 57).

[57] Flannery O'Connor Collection, Special Collections, Ina Dillard Russell Library, Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA, 149b, 36).

like his daddy" (CW, 44). These additions are the only changes O'Connor made regarding Gordon's recommendations. While it is not entirely clear why O'Connor chooses to keep her description of Enoch's daily ritual as-is, without amply preparing the reader for it or to drop hints that Enoch believes he has wise blood, it is clear that O'Connor's priorities are not the same as Gordon's—namely, O'Connor does not share Gordon's concern that the readers may be uninterested or unprepared for the unveiling of Enoch's claim to have wise blood.

The Meeting of Haze, Enoch, and Sabbath[58]

After her general statements on the *Wise Blood* draft, Gordon notes that there are "one or two devices used by many novelists that I think you would find helpful:"[59] a creative use of landscape description to draw out the inner-life of characters and breaking up fast-paced scenes with descriptions.[60] The former device, Gordon notes, could aid in the scene of Haze, Enoch, and Sabbath's meeting at the boarding house, while the latter could enhance the climactic scene just before Haze's self-blinding.

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[58] There is a bit of confusion here because when Gordon summarizes her more expansive notes she refers to "the scene where Haze and Sabbath and Enoch first meet" (cf. Gordon, "Master Class," 837). The true *first* meeting of the three comes near the beginning of the novel in the scene with the potato peeler salesmen (CW, 20–22). While this technically serves as the first meeting, the scene Gordon refers to here comes much later in *Wise Blood* when Haze, Sabbath, and Enoch meet at Haze's boarding house, a blow-up that ends with Haze throwing the "new jesus" shrunken mummy out the fire-escape window (CW, 106–7). By referencing her earlier comments about changes that should be made to the scene, Gordon clearly is referencing the latter rather than initial meeting because she describes each of the three characters trying to respond the best they could to their own emotions in the moment. The true first meeting sparked none of the emotional depth that would require a careful rendering on O'Connor's part, whereas the latter scene does depict all three characters in emotional turmoil.

[59] Gordon, "Master Class," 833.

[60] Gordon, "Master Class," 835.

Gordon notes that though O'Connor often uses a scenic landscape to reflect the mood of the characters, O'Connor would "get a much more dramatic effect by having it [the landscape] contrast with them."[61] Using the scene between Haze, Sabbath, and Enoch at the boardinghouse as an example, Gordon advises the use of the landscape to contrast the mood of the scene: "If the night sky were beautiful, if the night were lyrical the sordid roles the characters have to play would seem even more sordid."[62] The turmoil between the divergent agendas of the three characters centered in the scene on the shrunken mummy might be contrasted, Gordon suggests, with a tranquil evening landscape. Instead of heeding Gordon's advice, O'Connor has a storm raging when Haze opens the fire escape to dispose of the ravaged shrunken mummy: "The rain blew in his face and he jumped back and stood, with a cautious look, as if he were bracing himself for a blow" (CW, 106).[63] O'Connor thus keeps the external scene as dark and charged as the explosive atmosphere within the boardinghouse.

Gordon goes on to note that while O'Connor does well by focusing in on the character, it might be with too intense a gaze:

> [H]ere are three young people trying to do as best they can what they feel they ought to do. Sabbath wants to get married. Enoch want to live a normal human life. Haze, who is a poet and a prophet, wants to live his life out on a higher level. You convey that admirably, I think, by emphasizing his fierce dedication to his ideals. But the scene itself is too meagre for my taste. Your spotlight is focussed [sic] too relentlessly on the three characters.[64]

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[61] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 834.

[62] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 834.

[63]In fact, O'Connor makes four other references to the rain in the space of a page and a half (CW, 106–7).

[64] Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 834.

O'Connor's spotlight remains harshly in place in the published version. She maintains her intense gaze on an intense scene, refusing to draw the reader's gaze away from the encounter that turns out to contain the makings of Hazel's attempted escape from Taulkinham and all that he has wrecked there.

Haze and the Patrolman

Gordon notes a troubling hastiness in O'Connor's narration of Haze's encounter with the police officer. The climactic event that follows this incident underscores the decisive character of Haze's encounter here on the road. Gordon provides several recommendations for improving the draft form of this scene, including a desire to know Haze's facial expression as he peers over the embankment after the officer pushes Haze's car over the edge.[65] Gordon writes, "I want to know how Haze's face looked then."[66] O'Connor heeded her mentor's advice by adding: "His face seemed to reflect the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space" (CW, 118).[67]

Notice, though, that O'Connor offers a description of "how Haze's face looked then," but in an indirect way. Readers are not told precisely how his face looked, but rather how it appeared to have the look of something else. O'Connor depicts the distance

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[65] Gordon also writes that she wants to know how the officer's face looked when he questions Hazel after pushing the Essex over the edge of the embankment (Fitzgerald, "Master Class," 835).

[66] Fitzgerald, "Master Class,"835.

[67] The 1951 draft includes a handwritten note just after the line (indicated by italics): "Haze stood for a few minutes, looking over at the scene. *His face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went depth after depth, into space*" (cf. Flannery O'Connor Collection, Special Collections, Ina Dillard Russell Library, Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA, 149g, 36). This amendment likely serves as O'Connor's first run-through of adopting Gordon's advice.

before Haze as reflecting off his face and in so doing provides a nearly opaque descriptor of his face in that moment. O'Connor could have applied Gordon's advice—as she often did—in a more straightforward manner by describing Haze's emotional response either through description of his face non-metaphorically or through internal dialogue. A straightforward description of Haze's moment of conversion would have pummeled readers instead of allowing them to infer a mystical experience that gains credibility through the readers' engagement with the text.[68] In addition to the metaphorical description of Haze's face reflecting the landscape before him, O'Connor returns to Haze's face once more, following his exchange with the officer: "His face didn't change and he didn't turn it toward the patrolman. It seemed to be concentrated on space" (CW, 118).

When considering the changes O'Connor made to this vital scene and the ways she adopted and resisted Gordon's advice, a brief consideration of O'Connor's convictions about how divine grace works in the created world illumines O'Connor's stylistic choices in Haze's moment of conversion. In an April 4, 1958 letter to Betty Hester ("A."), O'Connor writes about the narration of conversion in fiction: "It seems to me that all good stories are about conversion, about a character changing…The action of grace changes a character. Grace can't be experienced in itself" (CW, 1067). Because its always mediated, supernatural grace must be narrated indirectly, "in a story all you can

[68] Ralph Wood demonstrates the interpretive opportunity in O'Connor's addition: Looking away from himself for the first time, he beholds the infinite space—'depth after depth' (CW, 118)—of the sky. The firmament is not cold and frightening, as Pascal found it at night, but alive with a burning mercy, a purging peace. And having preached the counter-gospel that nothing is true but one's own body and place, Motes must work out his salvation precisely there, by mutilating the flesh that he had once deified… Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 169.

do with grace is to show it is changing the character" (CW, 1067). These are Rowan Williams' "moments of excess" from Chapter Two where grace is revealed by its effects.

O'Connor confessed that most of her readers do not "know what grace is and don't recognize it when they see it." Thus do her stories of conversion—of supernatural grace radically altering human life—often appear "hard, hopeless, brutal, etc" (CW, 1067). Without the hard work of unveiling the grace that enables Haze Motes's post-conversion actions of asceticism, his self-blinding appears brutal rather than redemptive. This difficulty in narrating the action of grace demonstrates the tension between Gordon's advice and O'Connor's own storytelling. Gordon advises O'Connor that "[t]he minute we are unable to visualize it [the action] we quit believing it," and yet the most profound moments of grace in O'Connor's stories can only be recognized indirectly.[69] Because grace resides in the realm of the supernatural, the supra-rational, its narration requires a different kind of visibility—an excessive moment that directs the reader to something hinted at the margins of a scene.

Throughout her extensive comments on the 1951 draft of *Wise Blood*, Gordon recommends additional scenic details to make the interpretive task easier on readers. In three central scenes, including the climactic scene of Haze's transformation, O'Connor made only minor changes in the face of her mentor's major critiques. These minimal changes result in a final version that is spare, difficult, and intense in its central scenes. While we cannot get inside the mind of O'Connor, the published version of *Wise Blood* suggests her intentional choice to retain the unrelenting gaze on the central moments that leads to Hazel Mote's conversion.

[69] Fitzgerald, "A Master Class," 835.

Conclusion

An examination of Gordon's comments and O'Connor's amendment in *Wise Blood* and a wider look at Gordon and O'Connor's writing mentorship draws attention to the particularity of O'Connor's style of storytelling. Throughout her writing career, O'Connor maintains a consistent resistance to painting scenes with too vividly landscaped brushstrokes or too complicated syntax. While, of course, her skill in writing develops in the course of her career, O'Connor does not stray from bold and bare narrative that often leaves readers just as confounded: from Haze Motes dead in the back of a patrol car from her first published novel, to Obadiah Elihue Parker weeping like a baby at the close of her final completed story. Despite her profound respect for Caroline Gordon, O'Connor prefers readerly consternation to authorial explanation. Thus does she quietly resists Gordon's repeated pleas for her to abandon a simple and seemingly obtuse style of narration.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, O'Connor refuses to provide readers with what some might consider sufficient information to read her stories well. O'Connor resists a more hypotactic rendering of *Wise Blood*'s central scenes. Instead, she renders the central moments paratactically, resulting in a spare narration rooted in the concrete world and capturing the divine workings of grace only indirectly. In the next chapter, I turn away from O'Connor and return to an ancient form of storytelling, biblical Hebrew narrative. Surprisingly, despite the radical differences between O'Connor's and ancient Israel's storytelling, both forms of narrative share in paratactic style and narrations of encounters with divine grace. Discussion of biblical Hebrew poetics enriches not only our

understanding of the archetypal stories found in the Hebrew Bible, but also the theological outworking of O'Connor's spare narrative style.

CHAPTER FOUR

Biblical Poetics and the Paratactic Style of Narration

Introduction

One of the best known descriptions of biblical Hebrew narrative outside of biblical studies comes by way of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.*[1] In the opening chapter "Odysseus' Scar," Auerbach distinguishes between Homeric and Hebraic epic narratives. Auerbach uses a scene in the *Odyssey*—where later in his life Odysseus's nursemaid recognizes him after she touches his scar—to reflect on the epic's style of narration: "the syntactical connection between part and part is perfectly clear, no contour is blurred. There is also room and time for orderly, perfectly well-articulated, uniformly illuminated descriptions of implements, ministrations, and gestures; even in the dramatic moment of recognition."[2] In the Homeric epic "men and things stand out in a realm where everything is visible," and because everything is visible readers are not troubled with a concern for the unspoken backdrop.[3] Auerbach contrasts this entirely foregrounded narrative with "an equally ancient and equally epic style from a different world of forms": Abraham's binding of

[1] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). Originally published in 1953.

[2] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 3. Auerbach summarizes the whole of the Homeric epic similar to this particular scene: "the basic impulse of the Homeric style: to represent phenomenon in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations" (cf. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 6).

[3] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 3.

Isaac.[4] Whereas the scene of recognition with Odysseus's scar foregrounds all information readers need to assess the full picture of the scene, the Gen 22 scene sparingly narrates the events:

> [I]f we conceive of Abraham in the foreground, where it might be possible to picture him as prostrate or kneeling or bowing with outspread arms or gazing upward, God is not there too: Abraham's words and gestures are directed toward the depths of the picture or upward, but in any case the undetermined, dark place from which the voice comes to him is not in the foreground.[5]

Auerbach sets the Homeric style of foregrounding over against Old Testament narrative as serving to draw readers into the ambiguous depths of an unnarrated background in order to identify the significance of the narrated events.[6] Here in two ancient styles of narrating epics—one Greek and the other Hebraic— two radically different styles of narration confront us.[7] While the broad strokes he uses to distinguish between the Homeric and biblical epic narratives may overstate the case at times, Auerbach pinpoints

[4] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 8.

[5] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 9.

[6] In the case of Gen 22, Auerbach notes that the great moment of tension—when Isaac asks where the animal is for the sacrifice and Abraham ambiguously responds—readers must infer the tension: "everything remains unexpressed" (cf. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 11).

[7] Auerbach summarizes: "It would be difficult, then, to imagine styles more contrasted than those of these two equally ancient and equally epic texts. *On the one hand*, externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomenon, at a definite time and in a definite place, connected together without lacunae in a perpetual foreground; thoughts and feeling completely expressed; events taking place in leisurely fashion and with very little suspense. *On the other hand*, the externalization of only so much of the phenomenon as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal [and to that extent for more of a unity], remains mysterious and 'fraught with background'" (cf. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12, italics mine).

the distinctive style of Hebrew biblical narrative decades before the rise of narrative criticism of the bible and the development of biblical poetics.[8]

The way a story is told both opens up and limits its interpretive possibilities. As Michael Fishbane notes at the start of *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts:* "Form is inseparable from content, such that every textual formulation of an event constructs a unique literary reality; to imagine a different formulation of it would be to construct a different reality."[9] In this chapter, I present a bird's eye view of the function and impact of biblical Hebrew narrative style, known as biblical poetics. My purpose for occupying an entire chapter with the topic of biblical poetics is simple: a foundational understanding of how biblical Hebrew stories are told sets the groundwork for illuminating the effect of O'Connor's narration of wounding and blessing through the transposition of the *wayyiqtol* onto the climactic scene of *Wise Blood*. A robust understanding of form elucidates content.

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[8] An easy example of Auerbach's argumentative deficiencies regarding Old Testament narrative is his use of the "Elohist" as the narrator and promotion of the narrator's ideology, most notably that these religious stories "involves an absolute claim to be historical truth" (cf. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 14). Auerbach continues the language of absolutizing by arguing that readers must subject their own realities to the dogmatic claims that make-up the background—concealed meaning—of the narrative: "Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history" (cf. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 15). While Auerbach is right to note that religious convictions root the texts and provide for a deeper reading, Auerbach's language actually flattens the possibility for interpretive play by restricting the range of interpretation to an authoritarian ideology. There are many reasons this is unconvincing, including the fact that with the slow-death of the source author (i.e., Jahwist, Elohist, Priestly, Deuteronomist), trying to assert any universal and authoritative Old Testament theology becomes quite the task. In addition, as we will see in this chapter, the minimal foregrounded material offers readings interpretive exploration that is not restricted to submitting to some external reality that imposes a particular religious structure of reality on readers, but opens up a number of levels of inference and investigation that include but are not limited to religious claims concerning the cosmos.

[9] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), xi.

As was seen in the last chapter, O'Connor's spare form remained with her throughout her writing career, despite Caroline Gordon's continual advice to make less demands on readers. Biblical Hebrew narrative similarly makes demands in readers as it narrates reality illumined by God. I begin the chapter with a definition of biblical poetics that underscores the unique artistry of storytelling found in the Old Testament. Attending to the artistry of biblical narrative includes the need to attend to the issue of historicity by asking the question of the relationship between art and history. Following my introduction to the field of biblical poetics, I turn to the particular style of biblical Hebrew narrative: parataxis. An essential element of the artistry of biblical narrative is the dramatic action offered to readers between the bare bones "truth" of a story and the "whole truth"—only fully available at the divine level of omniscience, but available to readers as opportunities for exploration and inference. After demonstrating what Meier Sternberg deems the drama of reading found in biblical narrative, I unfold the definitive features of paratactic style in biblical Hebrew narrative, most notably evident in three vital areas for interpretive play through gap-filling: characterization, pacing, and the function of the *wayyiqtol*.[10] Vital for this survey of biblical poetics is the recognition that the stories we find in the Old Testament read very differently in their original language

[10] It should be noted that because the scope of my study is limited to biblical narrative parallelism, a central feature of biblical poetry, will not be explored. While parallelism is distinctive to biblical Hebrew poetry and not to narrative, the function of parallelism strengthens my insistence that the artistry of biblical writers invites readers into profound interpretive play, which cannot be fully captured without attending to the Hebrew text. For more on parallelism, see: Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Wilfred Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques,* ed. Mary Watkins, *JSOT* Sup 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986); David J A. Clines, "The Parallelism of Greater Precision," in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry,* ed. Elaine Follis (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 77–100; James Kugel*, The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

than in translation. While suggesting that something is lost in translation stands true of any translated text, I will demonstrate in this chapter that much of the distinctive character of Hebrew narrative—its paratactic style of narration—is often rendered unrecognizable when glossed in translation.

Defining Biblical Poetics

In *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Adele Berlin distinguishes between poetics and interpretation through a baking metaphor.[11] Poetics, Berlin argues, is like a cake recipe, concerned with how a text comes together to become what it distinctly is. Interpretation is the tasting, as it were, of the text where the concern is not with the mechanics of a recipe but the final product. While poetics and interpretation are symbiotically related, they remain distinct.[12] Berlin works backwards from the final product of the text through an inductive study to discover the literary devices at work that make-up the final product.[13] At the heart of Berlin's study lies the conviction that "[i]f we want to understand a biblical story, we must first take seriously the effort to learn how

[11] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 15. Originally published in 1983.

[12] Ibid., 16. Berlin warns against the tendency to confuse an artistic choice for a pure historical sign of development. There are dangers in source and form criticism, where the assumption is not of a literary whole (i.e., final form), but rather a conviction that all incongruities (e.g., gaps, inconsistencies, repetition) indicate historical development: "To be sure, there are gaps, inconsistencies, retellings, and changes in vocabulary in biblical narrative, but these can be viewed as part of a literary technique and are not necessarily signs of different sources. The whole thrust of source criticism is toward the fragmenting of the narrative into sources, while, at the same time it ignores the rhetorical and poetic features which bind the narrative together" (cf. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation,* 121). We will see this same insistence echoed later in this chapter in the work of Meier Sternberg and Robert Alter.

[13] In Berlin's work, her primary concerns are with characterization and point of view (cf. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 20).

stories are told, specifically how biblical stories are told."[14] In seeking to understand the poetics of biblical narrative, Berlin insists that biblical stories are art and, like all art, requires a *relational* understanding of the work with the observer. Biblical narrative, as literary art, communicates through its poetics to a receptive reader who actively engages the text. Biblical narrative "suggests what it does not show" by means of literary devices such as characterization, repetition, variation, and point of view.[15]

Undoubtedly the most influential work on the artistry of biblical Hebrew narrative is Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative.[16]* While Berlin focuses on the "recipe" of literary devices that make-up the final narrative, Alter intentionally avoids an investigation of poetics apart from the practical task of reading the narratives themselves. In his emphasis on reading, Alter shares the New Critics' concern, discussed in the previous chapter, with the text itself. Alter identifies his method as diverging from the two opposing approaches that Berlin classifies as the distinct but symbiotic categories of poetics and interpretation. Poetics, Alter argues, exists apart from an interpretation in the realm of structuralism where a formal presentation of literary devices coheres only abstractly to the texts in their final form.[17] The opposing approach of interpretation

[14] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 21.

[15] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*,139. Here, Berlin applauds Auerbach's distinction between the Homerian epic as it provides the reader everything they need to know to understand the story and Old Testament narrative where readers must infer background knowledge in providing readers with only the bare minimum information about the narrative. Cf. Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[16] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (NY: Basic Books, 2011). Originally published in 1981.

[17] An example of an approach that comes near the pure realm of structural is Jean Louis Ska's *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2000). While Ska provides helpful language to analyze biblical narrative, the work focuses more on the structural elements in narrative (time, plot, narration, point of view, etc.) than on the ways these

focuses on the performance of a text on readers where interpretation resides *solely* in the response of readers to the text, which undercuts any possibility of a text as possessor of meaning.[18]

Alter bypasses these two opposing approaches—one he identifies in abstraction and the other in radical subjectivism—by modeling "a third approach, not really between these two alternatives but rather headed in another, more practical direction."[19] Alter identifies his approach as standing apart from formal poetics because he finds too much particularity in the stories themselves to impose a system without misrepresentation: "the actual operation of these tales are too manifold and too untidy to be contained in any symmetrical frame of formal taxonomies, neatly labeled categories, tables and charts, without distortion."[20] While avoiding abstracting of the text by a system of rules, Alter also aims to avoid making an individual's interpretation the sole authority of a text's meaning. Alter recognizes that he offers his own particular interpretations of the texts he evaluates but quickly adds that while a text has no singular meaning (e.g., via the historical-critical method) readers must be attentive to the ways the stories tell themselves. The *way* a story is told provides "the range of intended meanings—theological, psychological, more, or whatever—of the biblical tale."[21] Alter's "third way" emphasizes the artistry found in the telling of a story—as reflected in the title of his work

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features work in particular texts. This sort of analysis can offer the illusion of uniformity in the structure of biblical narrative that, as Alter argues, runs the danger of imposition rather than illumination in reading.

[18] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 178.

[19] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 178.

[20] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 178.

[21] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 179.

as the *art* of biblical narrative—similarly to Berlin's emphasis on the communicative act of a story with its readers. Unlike a more formal conception of poetics, the scholarship around biblical poetics stands strongly in a tradition that emphasizes the play between the inner-workings of how a story is told and the interpretive possibilities available to readers.

Because we are dealing here with ancient stories that developed over a long period of time, an analysis of biblical narrative could focus on the curt style of narration as the result of a heavily redacted text that was put together piecemeal resulting in a semi-coherent whole.[22] While there is no doubt that the Old Testament narratives as we have them are a result of textual transmission and redactions spanning generations, Alter warns against a modern critique of incoherency or lack of unity regarding these ancient stories: "[t]he biblical text may not be the whole cloth imagined by pre-modern Judeo-Christian tradition, but the confused textual patchwork that scholarship has often found to displace

[22] For a visual representation of the piecemeal approach, Richard Elliot Friedman's *The Bible with Sources Revealed* color codes proposed sources for the books of the Pentateuch (Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* [San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005]). Friedman offers six source options, plus an additional "other" category: J (an early source making use of title 'YAHWEH' origination in the Southern Kingdom), E (contemporary source to J originating in Norther Kingdom and making use of more generic name 'Elohim'), RJE (later redactor of J and E produced after the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in 8th century BCE), P (priestly source from the 5/6th centuries offering alternate reading of history to J and E), D (includes 'Dtn' for law code, 'Dtr' for Deuteronomistic History and two further revisions of this history in 'Dtr1' and 'Dtr 2') and R (final redactor and compiler of the Pentateuch).

Outside of the Pentateuch, scholarship on the book of 1 Samuel serves as a prime example of a diachronic and fragmented approach to a text. P. Kyle McCarter *Anchor Bible Commentary* on 1 Samuel serves as a case study in a piecemeal approach (P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel*, *Anchor Bible Commentary* 8 [NY: Doubleday, 1980]). McCarter finds the receptions of 1 Samuel inconsistent and reflecting varying degrees of copying errors, intentional scribal omissions and expansions. McCarter finds inconsistencies in the narratives of Saul and David that "have a heterogeneous appearance even to the untrained eye" (McCarter, *1 Sam*, 12). According to McCarter, various traditions are brought together to make the book into a literary whole, including: the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH), Solomonic, prophetic history, and older independent narrative themes (e.g. the Ark Narrative, the Saul Cycle, and the History of David's Rise).

such earlier views may prove upon further scrutiny to be a purposeful pattern."[23] Within biblical narrative we find a coherent artistry that despite being foreign to our modern sensibilities conveys in its style a particular kind of reading experience. The subsequent discussion adheres to the conviction that the study of biblical poetics investigates devices as they function in particular texts as artistic strokes that communicate meaning to readers.

Viewing the biblical narrative as a united whole rather than a piecemeal collection of disjointed parts leads to the important discussion of the relationship between history and artistry in historical narrative. Berlin warns against the tendency to confuse an artistic choice for a pure historical sign of development. Source, form, and redaction criticisms, among others, ground their investigations in the assumption that incongruities (e.g., gaps, inconsistencies, repetition) indicate historical development rather than a literary whole (i.e., final form) whose incongruities reflect an artistic choice. Berlin pushes back against the critical stance that historical development trumps artistry:

> To be sure, there are gaps, inconsistencies, retellings, and changes in vocabulary in biblical narrative, but these can be viewed as part of a literary technique and are not necessarily signs of different sources. The whole thrust of source criticism is toward the fragmenting of the narrative into sources, while, at the same time it ignores the rhetorical and poetic features which bind the narrative together.[24]

In short, biblical poetics privileges artistry over historical fragmentation.

Emphasizing the artistry of biblical narrative over against critical diachronic methods raises the question: is biblical narrative history or fiction? An answer to this

[23] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 133.

[24] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation,* 121

question that does not swing to the extremes of historical literalism or fabrication finds itself in a muddled middle. In *The Art of Biblical History*, V. Philips Long wrestles with the language of "fictionalized history" and "historicized fiction" that Alter uses in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.[25] Long notes that while Alter recognizes some distinction between these two terms, Alter is not careful enough in distinguishing between them.[26] In both cases, the modifier fails to undercut the basic principle of the header word. "Historicized fiction" carries with it the assumption that at its core, the narrative is a fictionalized account with historical elements thrown in. Whereas, the term "fictionalized history" communicates the notion that, while embellished, the account remains a historical one of events that empirically occurred.

Avoiding the confusion of these phrases altogether, Long adopts the language of "history-writing" or "historiography" to identify the type of stories in biblical narrative.[27] Historiography offers a means of identifying the artistry of biblical narrative without running the danger of over-emphasizing the fictional element, for historiography "might be fairly described as a kind of verbal representational art, with a visual type of representational art such as painting."[28] Long, who himself is a painter, recognizes that representational art—e.g., a landscape painting—suggests both a referent in the real-world and the imaginative strokes the artist makes. Central to this comparison is the

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[25] V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 61.

[26] Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 61 cf. 14: "He [Alter] does show awareness of a distinction on occasions; see, e.g. *Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 25, 33–34, 41. But his lack of clarity on this important point still leave him open for criticism."

[27] Long, *Art of Biblical History,* 58–87.

[28] Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 63.

observation that there is no clear delineation between the literal (i.e., historical/referential) and fictional (i.e., artistic/imaginative) works of art. The way representational artwork is judged as representation is by its context: "the difference between a narrative whose primary purpose is aesthetic is the degree to which the artist is constrained by the actualities of the subject matter."[29] Thus, Long deems that real events constrain historical-writing found in biblical narrative, just as a landscape constrains the landscape painter.[30] These constraints provide boundaries for proper representation and show how the artist works within those bounds so as to display the artistry at work in history-writing.

Long acknowledges that not all of Scripture is literally and directly referential to historical events, but he also recognizes a "historical impulse" that "runs throughout the Bible, which, though not in every place and not always equally evident is nevertheless pervasive."[31] This historical impulse protects Long from falling into the polarities of claiming Scripture as either history or theology, propaganda or fantastical fiction. While Long does not eliminate the historical problem of delineating the historical elements from the fictional, his emphasis on the artistic representation of events rather than on an excavation for historical traces allows us to speak of the Bible as literature without jettisoning the historical impulse for the representation undergirding the whole of the text, if not in all its parts.

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[29] Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 68.

[30] Long uses the example of comparing the historical accounts in Samuel–Kings to the Chronicler's summarizing: "In short, what the comparison of the two renderings of the dynastic promise illustrates is the extent to which historians may be creative in their presentations, while at the same time remaining constrained by the facts" (cf. Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 86).

[31] Long, *Art of Biblical History*, 57.

The field of biblical poetics explores the distinctive features of biblical Hebrew narrative. Standing apart from the foundational convictions of traditional biblical criticisms, scholars of biblical poetics insist that artistry is the central principle for understanding biblical narrative. The narrative artistry found in biblical Hebrew narrative requires focused attention because of the particular kind of reading experience offered by the narrative. In the following section, I outline the unique tenor of biblical Hebrew narrative as a gapped or paratactic style of storytelling.

Parataxis as Interpretive Play

Between the Truth and the Whole Truth

In his important work *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, Meier Sternberg emphasizes the perplexing character of Hebrew biblical narrative: "Far beyond the normal demands of interpretation and with no parallel in Oriental literature … the world and the meaning are always hypothetical, subject to change from one stage of the reading *process* to another, and irreducible to any formula."[32] Sternberg pushes back against Auerbach's formulaic proposal of distinguishing Homeric and Hebraic epics as one of foreground and background because the polemical differentiation minimizes and distracts from the artistry of biblical narrative.[33] The mimetic play between reality (i.e., the world) and

[32] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Second Edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 47. Italics his.

[33] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 232. Sternberg comments: "Even a cursory comparison of biblical narrative with Homeric epic… will reveal an unmistakable similarity in the management of sequence. It includes deformation of chronology, playing on the resultant gaps, baited traps and false impressions, rise and fall and yoking together of hypotheses, use of uncertainty for effects stretching from plot interest to intricate characterization. (To say nothing of related correspondences, whether the technique of repetition or the capacity for extended storytelling). The Bible's art is on the whole richer and craftier, its surface incomparably less formulaic, its play more serious, its view of meaning and experience as a process built

representation (i.e., stories) creates an "obstacle course" for readers who must be taken up in the drama of reading to arrive at understanding.[34]

Readers arrive at an understanding not only of the stories, but also of their own limits as readers.[35] Biblical narrative contains a tendency toward a dramatic rendering of the distance between God and the human realm. The disparity between the omniscient God and the finite human being creates an unambiguous picture of the world order: "God knows and controls all, and humans must learn their limitations, including the impossibility of fully comprehending God's ways with the world."[36] The narrator's omniscience within the narrative produces the overarching claims of an all-knowing God relating to an often ignorant and never fully enlightened humanity.[37] With all the play available to readers, the one non-negotiable framing principle is the epistemic limits of any and all readers. Alter similarly recognizes the central principle of human limits in the act of reading biblical narrative when he notes that "[f]iction fundamentally serves the biblical writers as an instrument of fine insight into these abiding perplexities of the human condition."[38]

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rather than incorporated into the composition. But *nothing like the famous antithesis drawn by Erich Auerbach between scriptural darkness and Homeric illumination has a leg to stand on*" (ibid., italics mine).

[34] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 47.

[35] Sternberg notes: "to make sense of the discourse is to gain a sense of being human" (cf. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 47).

[36] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 233.

[37] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 184.

[38] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 176.

Sternberg identifies the dynamic process of reading biblical narrative as "maneuvering between the truth and the whole truth."[39] While these stories can easily be misread, they cannot so easily be "counterread."[40] Sternberg suggests that biblical narrative possesses a readily available storyline within a well-established world held together by an overt theological system.[41] Even a deficient reader is able to read biblical narratives as coherent stories because of the information available on the surface without any recognition of the artistry of the text.[42] "Truth" identifies these readily available principles, where the narrator provides readers with reliable information. Here "reliable" does not suggest necessarily historical accuracy but the simple assumption that the narrator can be trusted in the telling of the story: "Historians may quarrel with his facts and others call them fiction; but in context his [narrations] remain accounts of the truth communicated on the highest authority."[43] A reliable narrator assures adequate information for readers to understand the basic plot development and interpretation of the story. The story must make sense for the narrator to be trustworthy.[44] In the case of Gen

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[39] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 51.

[40] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 50.

[41] This echoes Auerbach's language of background in reading the Hebraic epic.

[42] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 54.

[43] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 51.

[44] The reliable biblical narrator stands in contrast to the unreliable narrators found often in postmodern literature. Wayne Booth identifies the unreliable narrator as presenting convoluted narratives using irony rather than clarity as the guiding principle of literary excellence. As modern readers, we have grown accustomed to the labyrinthine convolutions of novelists such as Fielding and James: "we have looked for so long at foggy landscapes reflected in misty mirrors that we have come to *like* fog. Clarity and simplicity are suspect; irony reigns supreme…Though no responsible critic has ever argued that all ambiguities resulting from irony are good ambiguities, it is astonishing to see how reluctant we have become to discriminate, to point to this or that particular difficulty, spring from irony and say, 'This is a fault.' After all, we say, it is only enemies of literature who ask that its effects be handed to the reader on a platter"

32, the narrator provides enough information for readers to understand Jacob wrestling from evening until dawn with a mysterious man, a tangle that ends with a wounded hip and a blessing in the form of Jacob's new name: "Israel."

While Sternberg argues that biblical narrative cannot be counter-read, readers often readily read too much, too little, or even erroneously as they interpret the narratives. The narrator provides reliable information to arrive at the basic truth of a narrative, but this information can be aptly described as thin. Readers are not explicitly given information on characters' inner lives—motivations, emotions, virtues and vices—nor judgments of the events that transpired. The "whole truth" lies below the surface of the narrative and is only accessible to the reader by means of inference:

> [The narrator's] statements about the world—character, plot, the march of history—are rarely complete…. His *ex cathedra* judgments are valid as far as they go, but then they seldom go far below the surface of the narrative, where they find their qualification and shading. His reference to ends and means is conspicuous by its absence, but only to one alive to the novelty and intricacy of their working.[45]

Sternberg's distinction between the truth and the whole truth in biblical narrative invites readers to attend to the interpretive treasure available to attentive readings. The whole truth reveals opportunities for imaginative readings, rather than shutting down opportunities for exploration. Gapped narration offers multivalent avenues into the text, thus providing readers with opportunities for the reader to infer further meaning or to make interpretive decisions that shut down further exploration. For Sternberg, exploration into certain gaps while resisting others contributes to the drama of reading.

(Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd edition [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 372. Italics his. Originally published in 1961).

[45] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 51–2.

The dynamic play between the truth and the whole truth results in a robust and coherent interpretation. This coherent reading should not be mistaken as the whole of the whole truth. Instead, the whole truth functions as an opportunity for the reader to explore below the surface of the basic arc of the plot. To plumb the depths of the narrative does not end in a full excavation of all the content available for discovery within the gaps; rather, readers return to the surface with sufficient inferential knowledge for a more rich and lucid understanding of the narrative. The whole truth is available in full only to God and the narrator.

Like Berlin and Alter, Sternberg identifies a distinctive artistry in the narration of Old Testament stories arguing that Hebrew biblical narrative is "without precedent in literary history and unrivaled since."[46] Because of its peculiar mode of storytelling, Sternberg warns against opposing any one system of literary analysis onto the reading of biblical Hebrew narrative. The greatest danger of all, Sternberg warns, is the concern for "application" of a universal critical strategy without concern for the particularity of the text.[47]

Biblical Narrative as Parataxis

In the analysis of fiction, scholars often identify two styles of storytelling: parataxis and hypotaxis. This distinction is spoken of as the difference between showing (i.e., parataxis) and telling (i.e., hypotaxis). Auerbach's proposal sharply delineates between the two with the Homeric epic hypotactically telling readers all they need to

[46] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 53.

[47] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 56-7.

know and Hebraic epic paratactically showing events. In *Analyzing Prose*, Richard A. Lanham distinguishes between the showing and telling models by examining the relationship between clauses:

> A style's characteristic manner of connecting its elements provides an easy way to recognize it. Whatever units a writer chooses to work with—phrases, clauses, or complete sentences—he or she must relate them equally or unequally. He or she can tell us how they are related —A *caused* B, B *came after* A—and thus subordinated one to the other, by cause, time or whatever, or can simply juxtapose them and leave the relationship up to us.[48]

In paratactic narration clauses are linked without causal connection and explicit judgments are absent. The central distinction here is between equal or unequal treatment among the prose units. The subordination of clauses indicates unequal treatment between "phrases, clauses, or complete sentences." While some narratives are more prone toward a paratactic or hypotactic style of narration, Wayne Booth warns against using the showing or telling distinction too definitively as the features of both showing and telling can appear in various degrees.[49] Booth prefers language of "various forms of telling in the service of various forms of showing" so as to illustrate the stylistic play between paratactic and hypotactic storytelling.[50] Booth's warning protects the genre from generalities that fail to deal with the particularities of individual stories. I contend that one can safely assert that some stories are more paratactic than hypotactic—and vice versa—in tendencies of narrative style without falling into the danger of complete

[48] Richard Lanham, *Analyzing Prose: Second Edition* (NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), 29, italics his.

[49] Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 16. Booth uses the prose of medieval writer Giovanni Boccaccio as an example of an author who demonstrates varying degrees of showing and telling in his stories.

[50] Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 16.

polarity between showing and telling. A strong case of this tendency towards paratactic style is found in biblical Hebrew narrative.

Sternberg describes biblical narrative as “passing off its art for artlessness, its sequential linkages and suprasequential echoes for unadorned parataxis, its density of evocation for chronicle-like thinness and transparency.”[51] Sternberg is not arguing that biblical narrative be understood categorically as primitive paratactic narration *par excellence*. Instead, the seemingly “unadorned parataxis” of biblical narrative possesses within its epistemic gaps and unsubordinated clauses a wealth of interpretive possibilities that weave an unspoken, yet rich overarching narrative through its seemingly simplistic narration.

The play between the truth and the whole truth that Sternberg presents as the drama of reading exists precisely because of the paratactic style. This play is available through the gaps within the narratives. Sternberg defines a gap as “a lack of information about the world—an event, motive, causal link, character trait, plot structure, law of probability—contrived by temporal displacement.”[52] These gaps in the narrative create discontinuity within the narrative, which leads readers to do interpretive work to repair, as it were, the continuity in the narrative. Sternberg differentiates “gaps” from “blanks” through the test of relevancy: “to make distinctions between what was omitted for the sake of interest and what was omitted for lack of interest.”[53] Therefore, not all narrative silences are equal in terms of the available play between truth and whole truth. Blanks do

[51] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 53.

[52] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 235.

[53] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 236.

not raise readerly curiosity in the same way as gaps, which invite further investigation by readers.

While differentiating between blanks and gaps, Sternberg admits the difficulty of clearly delineating between the two: "[i]n practice, however, the distinction turns out as problematic as it is inescapable, since it can appeal to no formal (and thus automatically applicable) marker."[54] Ultimately, readers judge a gap from a blank by the standard of relevancy: does it "heighten the reader's sense of suspension between the truth and the whole truth?"[55] As two case studies of differentiating gaps and blanks, consider two verses from the account of Jacob's nighttime wrestling. First, after describing Jacob and wrestling with a man until dawn, the narrative states in Gen 32:26: "And he saw that he was not able to prevail over him and he touched his hip socket and he dislocated Jacob's hip socket while wrestling with him." While the image of a wrestling bout lasting through the night and ending with a dislocated hip awakens the imagination, readers are less likely to wonder why the angel-man and Jacob were such an even match; e.g. the precise wrestling techniques of Jacob, the upper body strength of the mysterious angel-man. We can judge this lack of information as a blank because it does not offer readers play between the truth and the whole truth of the narrative. As a second case study, reflect on the dialogue between Jacob and his contender in Gen 32:28:

> And Jacob inquired: 'Please, tell me your name.'*
> And he [the angel-man] said 'Why is it that you ask for my name?'*
> And he blessed him there."

[54] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 236.

[55] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 237.

Notice the two places where information is absent from the dialogue: the angel-man does not offer his name in response to Jacob's question and Jacob does not respond to the motivation for asking for his name in the first place. How should these spaces of fissure be understood? Jacob's request for the angel-man's name sets up the subsequent question by the angel-man, but does the question heighten the curiosity of the reader? In a way, yes: throughout the wrestling, we are not told with whom Jacob is wrestling and this leads to curiosity about the identity of the one with whom Jacob contends. In fact, the subsequent question by the angel-man regarding why Jacob wishes to know his name heightens the suspense of the previous unanswered question. These two questions without reply invite readers deeper into the story—who is this man contending with Jacob? The fact that these gaps are followed by the angel-man blessing Jacob and Jacob's proclamation of seeing God face-to-face invites further consideration of who this wrestler is: how (and why) does God wrestle with Jacob throughout the night?

Alter, building off of Sternberg's repeated insistence on the play between coherence and incoherence in biblical narrative, recognizes the indeterminacy provided by the gaps as a "technique of fiction" that leads readers to a "continual suspension of judgment, weighing of multiple possibilities, brooding over gaps in the information provided."[56] Midrashic exegesis serves as a fine example of embracing the brooding effect of artistically placed gaps in the narrative where gap-filling serves as an opportunity for intertextual reading across the entire Hebrew Scriptures.[57] With the

[56] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 250.

[57] See: Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).

assumption that God is the ultimate author of the text, these readers of Torah identify the gaps as an invitation to explore the baffling stumbling blocks in the text for these gaps are part of God's plan for telling ancient Israel's story.[58]

Understanding biblical Hebrew narrative as parataxis emphasizes the role of gaps in the act of reading. Gaps invite Sternberg's drama of reading, where curiosity and a need for coherence leads readers into various avenues of interpretive play. In what follows, I outline three key areas in biblical Hebrew narrative that demonstrate the paratactic style and opportunity for gap-filling: characterization, pacing, and the function of the *wayyiqtol*.

Characterization

Characterization serves as a fitting entry-point into examination of the distinctive features of biblical narrative. The characters that populate ancient Israel's stories evidence their interior life almost entirely through exterior actions. Readers are not often told about a character's inner life but rather have to rely on cues from dialogue or action to infer a character's personality, emotions, or motives. Alter aptly describes the spare information biblical narrative offered to readers:

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[58] Boyarin comments, "God, the implied author of the narrative of the Torah, has willingly, as it were, encoded into His text the very kinds of dialogue that all of His epigones were destined willy-nilly to encode into theirs. As with all literature, so with the Torah, it is precisely the fault lines in the text, the gaps that its author has left, which enable reading…midrash enters into these interstices by exploring the ways in which the Bible can read itself" (cf. Boyarin, *Midrash*, 41).

Outside of overt midrashic intertextual readings, one of the most well-known Jewish interpreters Rabbi Abraham Ibn-Ezra could be argued using gapping as an exegetical methodology where gaps serve as opportunities for further exegetical exploration into the text, see Israel Hagay, "Gapping as an Exegetic Method in the Exegeses of Rabbi Abraham Ibn-Ezra and Rabbi David Qimhi to the Bible (DHL Dissertation, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1983).

> Biblical narrative offers us, after all, nothing in the way of minute analysis of motive or detailed rendering of mental process; whatever indication we may be vouchsafed of feeling, attitude, or intention are rather minimal; and we are given only the barest hints about the physical appearance, the tics and gestures, the dress and implements of the characters, the material milieu in which they enact their destinies. In short, all the indicators of nuanced individuality to which the Western literary tradition has accustomed us—preeminently in the novel, but ultimately going back to the Greek epics and romances—would appear to be absent from the Bible."[59]

The lack of editorial information around a character's actions or direct discourse alerts modern readers to the distinctive features of Old Testament stories. Sternberg depicts the bare descriptions of characters as offering a "haunting portrait gallery" where stereotypical character-types fail to capture the unique quality of the central biblical characters.[60] Biblical figures tend not to act predictably nor fit particular motifs of the Hero, Victor, Villain, etc. For readers to build up a picture of the characteristics of an actor requires attention to all the information the narrative provides.

Jacob serves as a prime example of a character who appears as a sleazy salesman when he gains his brothers birthright with a bowl of stew (Gen 25:29–34); a momma's boy who fools his elderly father (Gen 27); a chosen one with whom God speaks in dreams (Gen 28:10–17); a romantic who works fourteen years for Rachel whom he loves (Gen 29:15–30); and a man who wrestles with God (Gen 32:23–33). Even within one narrative, Jacob takes on a number of different characteristics. An exemplary example of the need for close reading to attend to characterization is found when Jacob steals his brother Esau's blessing in Gen 27. In this narrative, Isaac, alerting Esau to his numbered

[59] Alter, *Biblical Narrative,* 114.

[60] Sternberg, *Poetics,* 254.

days, commands his son to go out and hunt some game to make into a tasty meal in order for Isaac to bless him. Eavesdropping in on this conversation is Rebekah, who immediately schemes up a plan to trick her husband into blessing her favored son, Jacob, instead. The charade is pulled off, Jacob receives Esau's blessing, and in Hollywood-esque fashion Esau just misses the trickery of his brother and is devastated when he receives the news. Isaac, realizing what has happened, gives Esau what could at best be described as a half-blessing, which entails nothing of the most-prized Abrahamic promise. Esau, understandably fuming in rage against his brother, vows to kill Jacob and, just as understandably, Jacob flees. While Jacob at first glance appears to be the "villain" of the narrative, willfully deceiving his father to attain his brother's blessing, a closer reading reveals a more profound picture of Rebekah than of Jacob, the ostensible central character of the pericope.

In an earlier chapter, readers are told that Isaac loved Esau because he liked the taste of game, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen 25:28). The narration in Gen 27 reminds the reader of this preferential tension, particularly in the descriptors provided in vv. 5–6 when the narration shifts from Isaac giving instruction to Esau to Rebekah's eavesdropping just outside of the scene: "Now, Rebekah overheard when *Isaac spoke to Esau, his son*…and *Rebekah said to Jacob, her son:* "Behold! I heard your father speaking to *Esau, your brother*…" In these two verses we are offered two sons, one son of Isaac and the other of Rebekah. The relationship between Rebekah and Esau is frigidly evidenced in her reference to Esau, never as her son, but as Jacob's brother. In the verses that precede and follow one son—addressed as "my son" (בני)—is directed by one parent to "go," "take," and "bring" in order "to bless" (vv.3–4, 9). There are two competing

intentions by mother and father for their favored sons. Rebekah's favoritism runs rampant in Gen 27; the narrative tells us that Rebekah had been listening in on Isaac's instruction to Esau (v. 5a); Rebekah devises a plan for deception and instructs Jacob to follow her instructions exactly (vv.7–10); and even reassures Jacob when he worries that his father will realize the deception by promising that she will bear the responsibility if the plan goes awry (vv. 12–13). By attending closely to the narrative, Rebekah, not Jacob, is the agent of deception. Jacob, neither hero nor villain, is simply the obedient son who receives a stolen blessing.[61]

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[61] Much more exploratory work on characterization can be done in this pericope. For instance, Craig A. Smith proposes that the full force of Rebekah's actions are only realized once readers have reckoned with the failure of Isaac as a patriarch. In his article "Reinstating Isaac: The Centrality of Abraham's Son in the 'Jacob-Esau' Narrative of Genesis 27," Craig A. Smith decenters Jacob from his traditionally central position in the Gen 27 account (*Biblical Theology Bulletin* 31 [2001]: 130–34). By displacing Jacob, Smith makes the argument that this pericope is in fact a commentary on Isaac. Through this re-arranging of focus, Smith is permitted to sidestep entirely any internal ethical assessment of Jacob's (and Rebekah's) deception. Smith's argument for the centrality of Isaac in Gen 27 rests on a chiastic structure defined by the marriages of Esau in the broader narrative, placing the blessing of Gen 27:26–29 at its center:

A 26:34–35: Esau marries
B 27:1–4: Isaac instructs son Esau "to go" and prepare meal
C 27:5–17: Rebekah devises a plan to deceive Isaac
D 27:18–25: Jacob and Rebekah execute plan
E 27: 26–29: *Isaac blesses Jacob*
D' 27:30–41: Jacob and Rebekah's plan exposed
C' 27:42–46 Rebekah devises a plan to protect Jacob
B' 28:1-7: Isaac instructs son Jacob "to go" and find a wife
A' 28:8–9 Esau marries.

This structure places blessing not only at the center of the narrative—which serves as the clear climax of this pericope—but also makes Isaac as the blesser an interpretive key for understanding the story as a whole. The pay-off for Smith is that blessing can only occur through an intentional act on the part of the blesser: Isaac here is not simply a passive blind-man fumbling in the dark, but an aged patriarch who has failed to live up to the standard set for a patriarch in the line of Abraham. The centrality of Isaac as blesser brings Isaac as a failed patriarch into stark relief. By shifting the focus from Jacob and Rebekah to Isaac through a chiastic structure, Smith uses the text's silence to "cast a suspicious light on Isaac" and emphasize the patriarch's failings (132). These failings are best evidenced through the bookended marriages in Smith's chiastic structure of Gen 27. Esau's marriages, Smith argues, direct the reading not toward Esau as an unbefitting candidate for the Abrahamic blessing but rather to Isaac's culpability as a father for not insisting on a suitable wife for his son. After establishing this groundwork characterization of Isaac, Smith attends to an interpretation of the blessing itself. In fact, Smith argues that one cannot get at a correct interpretation of this pericope without this characterization: "[o]nly by understanding the author's negative evaluation of Isaac as patriarch in this narrative does it become possible to properly understand the

Various proposals offer a number of ways to understand the character-types within biblical narrative.[62] Berlin proposes three categories: full-fledged, types, and agents.[63] The full-fledged characters are well-rounded and believable, while the types can be understood as flat and stereotypical, and the agents are those known only through their actions (e.g., the messenger). Berlin emphasizes that these three character types function in degree, where there is no strong line of demarcation that separates a full-fledged character from a flat one.[64] The danger in looking for a formula to separate the different character types arises from the sparse amount of information readers are provided about

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place of the other characters in this text" (132). This negative view of Isaac paints Rebekah as an over-stepping wife thrust into her inappropriate handling of the situation because of Isaac's failed role as the patriarch of the family; presents an easily manipulated son, Jacob, who looks to his mother rather than his father for reception of a blessing that has been prophesied to be his own; and as we have already seen, portrays another son, Esau, whose ignorance on suitable marriages is rooted in his father's failure to communicate. Smith concludes that once the correct chiastic structure of this pericope is identified, the author's intent is easily recognized. The author intends for Isaac—not Jacob, Rebekah, or even the bumbling Esau—to be judged in a negative light through the stolen blessing of Gen 27. Notwithstanding Smith's arguably problematic language of authorial intention and use of a chiastic structure as the singular key to a 'proper' interpretation, his overall characterization of Isaac helpfully infers what the narrative leaves absent. Despite the overall lack of silence on Isaac—a surprising silence when contrasted with the agency present in the other patriarch cycles of Abraham and Jacob— Smith provides a means of using that silence to the reader's advantage. Isaac's silence and passivity characterize him in profound ways when contrasted with the actions of those around and before him.

[62] Jean Louis Ska proposes two categories: the painting of a character by a narrator as centering on two parallel distinctions, complex (dynamic, round) or one-dimensional (static, flat). This leads to a discussion on character traits (made up of a character's habits) where the more dynamic and round characters have habits that conflict with an overarching trait. Ska investigates the roles of characters, which include: hero/protagonist, foils, functionary/agent and the crowd/chorus (rare in Scripture). The hero/protagonist is at the center of the story and is developed by foils. A functionary/agent is a one-dimensional character that is an instrument in the narrative. Ska discusses two forms of characterization. The first is through naming, which reveals qualities of a character, creates anticipation, or a change in destiny. The second is seen in the revealing of a character's inner life, which is done through direct narrative statements, interior monologue, revealing dialogue, myth and lyrical expression (most common in Scripture). (cf. Jean Louis Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* [Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2000], 83–94).

[63] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 23.

[64] Ska describes the spectrum of character types from flat to round as "main colours on the biblical narrator's palette. From them they can obtain many hues and shades for their different pictures" (cf. Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 85).

any of the characters in these narratives. Often nearly as much information is provided to the reader for the full-fledged character and the agent within a pericope.[65] For example, consider that Jacob and the angel-man with whom he wrestles are given nearly identical action and dialogue. While the angel-man functions as an agent—he is there to wrestle and bless, not to reveal any aspect beyond these central actions including his name—Jacob stands at the center of the narrative. This pericope is about Jacob: he remains alone on the banks of the Jabbok so that the gifts to arrive to his estranged before his caravan does; he receives the injury that leaves him with a limp for the rest of his life; he provides his name (in contrast to the angel-man) and receives a new name; he names the place of wrestling "Peniel" because of its significance in his life; and the narrator closes the pericope with a summary of Jacob.

Because the stories we find in the Old Testament are so brief and the means of sketching so spare, readers must attend to every detail offered by the narrator and signaled by the action of the characters. These narratives offer limited data for readers to imaginatively construct characters, but the scant amount of information does not mean that readers will be entirely unfamiliar with the strategies required for understanding another. Shimon Bar-Efrat describes the means of understanding narrated characteristics as "realistic" in that "[t]his approach resembles the one we adopt in real life, where we

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[65] Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 86. Originally published in 1989. Bar-Efrat echoes Berlin's insistence on a continuum model of character types when he notes, "It is not always possible to make a clear and unequivocal distinction between a primary and a secondary character. In this context it is better to refer less to two completely different categories than to a continuum, since there are distinct disparities in the level of 'secondariness' of the subsidiary characters. On the one hand, there are such characters as the messenger or courier, who fulfil only a minor technical role in the structure of the plot…while on the other, there are subsidiary characters who have such an important function that it is difficult to decide whether they are secondary or primary, particularly since a character who is secondary in one narrative may become primary in another" (Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 86–7).

usually draw conclusions about people's personalities from what they say and do."[66] Readers come to know characters similarly to how people develop knowledge of others: via direct speech and indirect action. There are times when the narrator breaks into the scene as an omniscient narrator, but more often than not the narrators provide an unembellished account of the events, leaving inference and character judgment to readers. Readers of biblical narrative assume an inquisitive and attentive posture in order to make judgments and formulations regarding the characters within a story.[67]

Biblical characters confound readers precisely because they do not fit into conventional roles. The greatest "heroes" of the Old Testament possess villainous characteristics at times: recall Noah's drunkenness, Abraham endangering Sarah out of self-protection, King David's coercive use of power to get Bathsheba into bed and betrothal, etc. Akin to real-life, readers are often not told what to think about characters from an omniscient voice of judgment but rather must navigate characters through speech and action.

Pacing

The most familiar stories to modern readers link scenes within a story by a narrative bridge that temporally connects one scene to the next. These narrative bridges assist readers in recognizing the overt connection of one scene to another. Within biblical Hebrew narrative, compact scenes connect to one another not through narrative bridges but most often through summary accounts that close a scene. An example of this kind of

[66] Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative,* 89.

[67] Bar-Efrat comments: "The method of the biblical narrator requires a constant mental effort on the part of the reader, involving careful thought and attention to every detail of the narrative" (cf. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 45).

summary is found at the close of Jacob's wrestling with the angel-man in Gen 32:33: "Because of this, the Israelites do not eat sinew of the hip, which is on the socket of the leg until this day for he struck the hip socket of Jacob in the sinew of the thigh." These summaries do not always occur, but when they do they are most often brief.

With individual stories in biblical narrative most often unlinked by narrative bridges, the stories themselves are told in a style focused on showing rather than telling. Stories are narrated without commentary or bird's-eye observations and judgments. Bar-Efrat notes the effect produced by the vast majority of biblical stories narrated without outside comment: "there are very few instances in which time stops, and these are short and of little impact. This is what gives biblical narrative its characteristic dynamic nature and its almost incessant, rapid motion."[68] To understand the speed by which an episode in the Old Testament is narrated, consider that the narration of Jacob's wrestling with the angel-man that results in the patriarch's new name "Israel" (Gen 32: 23–33) fits easily within one-page of double-spaced text. In ten verses, one of which is narrative summary, arguably one of the most significant narrated events of ancient Israel's identity is told. The narrative time, in this case an all-night wrangling, stands in stark contrast to the narrated time. To produce such laconic effect entails biblical stories being told without much in the way of scenic description or interior life, as we have already seen. Dialogue between characters and simply described actions provide the outline of a narrative that must be filled-in by readers. Most often, biblical narrative dedicates more narrative space to the events that lead up to a story's climactic moment than the climactic moment itself. Within the already curt narratives, the crux moment can come and go so quickly that

[68] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 147.

readers might not quite capture the moment *as* climax in their first reading. In the pericope of Jacob's wrestling, not even a full verse is dedicated to the climactic moment: "And he [the angel-man] blessed him [Jacob] there" (Gen 32:30c).

Bar-Efrat highlights the play in all narratives between the time it takes to narrate events—narrated time—and the time within the narrative in which events unfold—narrative time.[69] In biblical narrative, with such a contrast between narrated and narrative time, the rapidity of the unfolding of the narrative to readers creates a thrilling, even baffling reading experience. The play of internal and external times affects many dimensions of the reading experience: "[t]his twofold link with time has significant implications for the nature, possibilities and limitation of the narrative as well as for the way it is interpreted."[70] Because reading occurs through an unfolding of events—more like the experience of listening to music than the viewing of a work of art—narrators must sequentially present the story's actions to readers, allowing for withholding or even misleading readers of vital information.[71]

Returning to Alter's insistence that there is an art to biblical Hebrew narrative, the particular pacing of these stories contribute to a unique sort of reading experience for readers. Alter wryly suggests that "the Hebrew writer may have known what he was doing but that we do not."[72] The speed by which Old Testament stories unfold, providing

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[69] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 141.

[70] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 141.

[71] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 141. Bar-Efrat notes that the key difference between listening to music and reading a story is that music offers the opportunity to experience concurrent events (i.e. harmonies) at one time.

[72] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 136.

minimal commentary and clipped description of climactic moments, offers a distinctive reading experience that can leave readers with more questions than answers as one story moves to the next.

Function of the Wayyiqtol

The *wayyiqtol*, more than characterization or pacing, requires an investigation of the Hebrew text without reliance on translation to elucidate its function. Both the terminology and function of the presence of the *waw* with *pataḥ* followed by the *dagesh forte* form is a contested area of scholarship.[73] As the baseline for agreement, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (*BDB*) notes that the *waw-shewa* (וְ) of the *wayyiqtol* "is used very freely and widely in Heb., but also with much delicacy, to express relations and shades of meaning which Western languages would usu. indicate by distinct participles."[74] In biblical Hebrew, particles are used more sparingly for "their frequent use was felt instinctively to be inconsistent with the lightness and grace of movement which the Hebrew ear loved; and thus in [translated versions] words like *or, then, but, notwithstanding, howbeit, so thus, therefore, that* constantly appear, where the Heb. has simply וְ."[75] In later portions of the Hebrew Bible the construct of *waw-shewa* (וְ) plus perfect verbs appears more frequently alongside the occurrence in the imperfect likely because of Aramaic influence on the Hebrew language.[76]

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[73] For more detailed description of *wayyiqtol*, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 463–466 (29.3g–29.6g).

[74] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Reprint (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 252a.

[75] *BDB*, 252a.

[76] *BDB*, 252b.

While I adopt the language of the *wayyiqtol* in this dissertation, there has not been consensus on this terminology through the history of scholarship. The central issue is staked on the potential to convey temporal sequence through the *wayyiqtol*, and there is not a solid foundation for understanding ancient Hebrew as definitively possessing a set grammatical rule for past/present/future tenses.[77] While the term "*waw*-conversive" was the traditional designation through the early nineteenth century, this terminology carried with it the assumption of tenses at work through the presence or absence of the *waw*.[78] With the recognition that the presence of the *waw-shewa* can but does not necessarily signal past tense, the shift from conversive to consecutive language arose: the *waw*-conversive became the *waw*-consecutive and then later the *wayyiqtol* form.[79] As a result of these transformations of classification, the common narrative verb form is described by John A. Cook as part of a "strange state of affairs in Hebrew studies" where "understanding the verbal system in Biblical Hebrew have continued unabated" and at the same time "the appearance of new elementary grammars of Biblical Hebrew [have]

[77] Waltke/O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 458; 29.2a.

[78] Waltke/O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 459; 29.2d.

[79] Waltke/O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 460; 29.2g. The terminology of *waw*-consecutive fails to capture the full range of uses for the presence of the *waw* (cf. ibid., 525, 32.1e). Better for some is the distinction between "converted" as those with the prefix *waw* and "unconverted" as those without. See Mark S. Smith, *The Origins and Development of the Waw-Consecutive: Northwest Semitic Evidence from Ugarit to Qumran*, Harvard Semitic Studies 39 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991), xi–xii. Smith argues that part of his preference for the terminology of converted/unconverted is the awkward distinction of some verbs as "un-consecutive." The use of the *wayyiqtol* extends throughout biblical narrative from early to late, but in later narrative, i.e., post-exilic, other forms occur alongside the traditional *wayyiqtol* (e.g. participles, "unconverted" verbal forms). The extensive use of the *wayyiqtol* in biblical Hebrew narrative, as common to that narrative as the comma or full-stop is to English, is unique in comparison with other ancient Near East languages. In Akkadian and Ugaritic, the *wayyiqtol* functions much more statically to speak of past events (Cf. Smith, *Origins and Development*, 14–15).

increased tremendously."[80] The terminology has only become more muddled with the multitude of Hebrew grammars on the market.

The central early work on understanding the function of the *wayyiqtol* (which he terms the *waw*-consecutive) comes from Heinrich Ewald's *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament*: "This *Vav of sequence*, accordingly, is one of the most important elements of the language when consecution of *time* is concerned, as well as in the mere consecution of *ideas* and *thoughts*."[81] Ewald's definition accomplishes two vital feats: first, it allows for the ambiguity where time is often, but not always, communicated, and second, it emphasizes the importance of the *wayyiqtol* within Hebrew language. This brief discussion of the use and understanding of the term *wayyiqtol* serves as a foundation for understanding how it functions within Hebrew narrative. While most often the *wayyiqtol* signals some action in the perfect tense, its use is not always related to sequence. The *wayyiqtol* can sometimes function exegetically, that is can serve to summarize or illuminate the clause that precedes it (e.g. 2 Sam 14:5: "Truly, I am a widow; *my husband has died"*).[82] The *wayyiqtol* can also function in direct speech not as temporal action but volitionally as a request or command (e.g. "you shall…").[83] In addition to illumination and direct speech, the *wayyiqtol* can also present narratival information that breaks from a chronological unfolding to indicated a past event (e.g. Gen

[80] John A. Cook, "The Vav-Prefixed Verb Forms in Elementary Hebrew Grammar," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8 (2008): 2.

[81] Heinrich Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament*, trans. J. Kennedy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1881), 244, italics his.

[82] Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 86.

[83] Arnold /Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 88.

31:33–34: “He came out from Leah’s tent, and went into Rachel’s tent, but *Rachel had taken* the household idols…”).[84]

In *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible*, Robert Alter demonstrates how the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible not only reflects the style of biblical Hebrew narrative, but has also influenced prose style in America through narrative style, imagery, and themes.[85] Helpfully, Alter recognizes the play of biblical narration through its style of narration, notably in its abundant employment of the *wayyiqtol*: “the artfulness of biblical parataxis is precisely in its refusal to spell out causal connections, to interpret the reported narrative data for us.”[86] The use of *wayyiqtol* in the Hebrew narrative links clauses without explanatory connections. For those unfamiliar with the function of the *wayyiqtol* in biblical Hebrew text, a simple example demonstrates how it works: AND *the woman woke up in the morning* AND *she got up* AND *she drank strong coffee*. Notice how the use of “AND” creates a connecting of clauses without subordination. All these clauses are identified together only because of the use of the “and.” The *wayyiqtol* form functions like the “and” here, while also functioning as a punctuation mark in translation because English does not allow for progressive clauses without punctuation. Readers infer causal connections; for example, that she drank coffee *because* she needed the caffeine in the morning after a long night *or* she has a serious caffeine habit that she must break at some point but not this morning. It is up to readers to infer meaning from the gaps inherent in the unadorned narrative progression.

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[84] Arnold/Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 94.

[85] Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[86] Alter, *Pen of Iron*, 133.

For Alter, the use of the *wayyiqtol,* particularly in direct speech, generates narrative silence where one might expect a subordinate clause that aids in generating interpretive connections between the linked clauses.[87] Alter identifies this negative aspect of biblical Hebrew direct speech as a reflection of the freedom of the human—that is, the "stubborn individuality" that does not allow for any universal human response to universal experiences.[88] Alter repeatedly articulates human freedom as a central part of the Old Testament storytelling by seeing the human as full of paradoxes and so requiring a refined art like biblical narrative to represent this human dimension sufficiently. Attending to silences in the narrative is at the same time an attendance to the human-driven character of the stories told. The *wayyiqtol* provides opportunities for interpretive play, while affirming the epistemic limits of readers.

Sternberg's "truth and whole truth" interpretive dialectic demonstrates the interpretive play available to readers through gap-filling. This play is available through a paratactic style of narration, where causal connections and moral judgments are left to the reader. Biblical Hebrew narrative skeletal narration requires readers to put meat on the bones, as it were. Spare characterization, rapid narrative pacing, and the gapping effect of the *wayyiqtol* invite readers to explore below the surface of the narrative to provide coherence and greater significance to Old Testament stories. Paratactic storytelling demands attentive and imaginative interpretive work if readers desire to plumb the depths of meaning of any given story.

[87] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 79.

[88] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 129.

Conclusion

This chapter began with Auerbach's distinction between the Homeric and Hebraic epics as interpretive data residing in the overt foreground or obscure background, respectively. What Auerbach began in his description of Hebrew epic as "fraught with background," the study of biblical poetics captures the artistry of biblical Hebrew narrative whose bare scenes draw readers into the drama of reading. Parataxis names the gapped narrative that leaves causal connections and questions of cause, motive, judgment, etc. to the inference of readers. Characterization, pacing and the function of *wayyiqtol* demonstrate the paratactic features of Old Testament narrative and the opportunities for interpretive play by readers. With the contours of biblical narrative set, the next chapter illuminates the similarities in paratactic style between Hebrew biblical narrative and O'Connor's fiction by way of parallel readings of Jacob's wrestling with the angel-man in Gen 32 and the climactic scene of O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. As we will see, the climactic moments of these two narratives move through the events of transformations in their respective protagonists with a rapidity and spare quality that place great interpretive demands on readers. The paratactic style of both narrations heightens the subject-matter of the text: God's wounding blessing.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gen 32 and *Wise Blood*: The Wounded Victor and The Blinded Convert

Introduction

In 1952, the year of *Wise Blood*'s publication, Flannery O'Connor remarked in a letter to Robert Lowell: "Harcourt sent my book to [Evelyn] Waugh and his comment was: 'If this is really the unaided work of a young lady, it is a remarkable product'" (CW, 897). Aside from the condescending sexism of his assessment and O'Connor's mother Regina's humorous concern that Waugh doubted O'Connor's status as a proper lady, Waugh's hints at the distinctive quality of O'Connor's narrative style. Ralph Wood surmises that, while Waugh likely referred to the extensive use of violence in a work of fiction written by a woman, his comment "may also have been referring to the prophetic directness of its narrative technique. The wintry plainness of her prose, its dry and tart matter-of-factness, its spare straightforwardness—none of these traits allow any lazy luxuriation in narrative eloquence."[1] Wood's notice of O'Connor's plain unadorned style stands in contrast to Waugh's elaborate and at times grandiose literary technique.[2] The parataxis in O'Connor's fiction serves as a crucial feature of her distinctive and powerful literary voice that neither Waugh nor Wood noticed. In Chapter Three, I demonstrated how O'Connor's spare narrative style was intentional and at times defied both literary

[1] Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 159.

[2] In fact, reading Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* in my early stages of pinpointing the stylistic similarities between biblical Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's aided me in naming what the shared style was not; Waugh's extravagant means of narration placed paratactic narration in stark relief.

convention and the explicit advice of her writing mentor Caroline Gordon. O'Connor accepted Gordon's suggested revisions only in part, reservedly appropriating Gordon's ongoing appeals to add more landscaping and narrative descriptors to aid readers. Yet O'Connor maintained her spare rather than elaborate style, the paratactic rather than the hypotactic. In Chapter Four, I showed how O'Connor's skeletal narrative style possessed a certain resonance with biblical Hebrew narrative. This chapter on biblical Hebrew poetics—though outlining a conversation in a rather different discipline—provides fresh categories that can help further elucidate O'Connor's spare narration. Most notably, Robert Alter's and Meier Sternberg's discussion of paratactic narration as making extraordinary demands of readers provides new opportunities to speak of O'Connor's distinctive literary voice similarly to biblical Hebrew narrative.

As the culmination of Chapters Three and Four, this chapter establishes how reading biblical Hebrew narrative alongside O'Connor's fiction illuminates the style and force of O'Connor's storytelling. In this chapter, I will draw out the significance of the climactic moment in *Wise Blood* by attending to its narrative pacing and gaps. I will explore how Hazel's narrated conversion shares thematic and stylistic features with a much older story: Jacob's nighttime wrestling with a mysterious man in Genesis 32:23–33 (32:22–32), as he receives the new name Israel.[3] Yet I will not argue that O'Connor's depiction of Haze's conversion placed the account of Gen 32 in its background, nor even that Gen 32 plays an essential role in understanding the events of *Wise Blood*. Instead, I will draw out the similarities in paratactic style through the presence and transposition of

[3] The two verse listings reflect the difference in verse numeration between the Hebrew Bible and the English translations (the English translations are listed parenthetically).

the *wayyiqtol* to signal an underlying theological conviction concerning a fitting narration of divine self-disclosure in human activity. The chapter breakdowns into three sections: 1) an exploration of Jacob's crippling victory and the function of the *wayyiqtol* in the Hebrew narrative pericope; 2) a survey of the climactic scenes of *Wise Blood*—in the destruction of Hazel's omnicompetent Essex and his subsequent self-blinding that brings him a new kind of sight—including a transposition of the *wayyiqtol* onto the scenes to draw out the paratactic style of narration; and 3) a reflection on the interpretive pay-off in the shared skeletally-narrated conversion moments of Jacob and Hazel.

Wrestling, Wounding, Naming: Jacob's 'Crippling Victory'

Central for illuminating O'Connor's literary style through a side-by-side reading with biblical Hebrew narrative is the need to identify a suitable biblical story to serve as case study. The story must well represent the qualities of Hebrew narrative more generally as discussed in Chapter Four. The narrative of Jacob's nighttime wrestling in Genesis 32 provides an archetypal example. In this well-known pericope, the patriarch Jacob finds himself wrestling with an unknown figure, later disclosed as a messenger of YHWH, through the night. At the end of the fight as dawn breaks, Jacob receives both a new limp and a new name. Though *Wise Blood* and the story of Jacob's wrestling match are set in different times, cultures, and languages, they share a paratactic narration of the elusive character of the human encounter with the divine in a way that leads to a disfiguring kind of blessing. As an entry-point into the Gen 32 story of Jacob's wresting with the angel-man, I begin with a survey of some of the most important scholarship concerning this pericope. This brief overview demonstrates the centrality and interpretive

opportunities of this story for the broader patriarchal narratives and the Pentateuch as a whole.

Overview: A Crippled Victor

Gerhard von Rad adopts Martin Noth's proposal–that the figure of Jacob links together older and newer redacted material—and reflects on the theological impetus for the inclusion of the older Jacob tradition into the Yahwist text.[4] Using the example of Gen 32:23–33 (32:22–32), von Rad highlights the reappropriation of the "remote and strange" narrative of Jacob's wrestling to "the hand and words of its God, and claimed as his—Jahweh's—very own."[5] Von Rad's emphasis on theological reappropriation demonstrates the benefit of redacting older stories into ancient Israel's theological narration: "The narrators often digest in but a single story of only a few verses the yield of a divine history which in fact stretches from the events spoken of down into their own

[4] In his seminal work *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (*Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, 1948), Martin Noth identifies the patriarch Jacob as the linking figure between older Pentateuchal themes and the addition of the theme "promise to the patriarchs" (Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972], 56). Noth bases this linking argument on the mention of Jacob in the small credo of Deuteronomy 26:5–9, "where only Jacob is presupposed in the cultic confession" (56). The importance of Noth's claim resides in the centrality of the Jacob tradition in the formation of the Pentateuch; this tradition served as groundwork upon which the more robust patriarchal theme could build. Noth attributes the inclusion of Gen 32:23–33 to the Yahwist (J) who took the older legend of Jacob's wrestling and redacted it into the broader corpus of Yahwist material (29, 56–7). Noth's overarching argument in this work is the proposal that a P-narrative serves as the framing element of the Pentateuch; this P-narrative is the "*literary basis of the Pentateuchal narrative*" (11, italics his). Into this P-narrative framework, the JE narrative is inserted, which is made up of older sources with the E-material being inserted into the earlier J-material (see Noth, ch.4: "J as Literary Basis of the Combined JE Narrative").

In the following summary of scholarship on Gen 32:23–33, I am not including a comparative religion analysis, which would investigate other ancient Near East parallels to Jacob's wrestling with a divine opponent. Ronald S. Hendel outlines other divine adversaries found in surrounding ancient West Semitic mythology in *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 42 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 104–9.

[5] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 167.

time."[6] In the narrative of Jacob's wrestling, von Rad identifies the exemplar case of appropriating older stories into a new context.[7] The final placement of this narrative—disrupting and forestalling Jacob's meeting with Esau—indicates to von Rad that the narrative serves as an interpretive key for the whole of the Jacob Cycle. The re-naming of Jacob as "Israel" drastically shifts Jacob from a cheater of his brother to a bearer of his people's honor. This new name also comes with an injury that will afflict him and serve as a reminder to him in each step he takes for the rest of his life.[8] Von Rad emphasizes that Jacob did not earn the blessing he receives through this new naming; in fact the story itself emphasizes "God's activity, his destructive attack and his justification."[9] This emphasis on God's activity of blessing despite the questionable character of the one he blesses undergirds the broader history into which this story is received by an all-too-human nation nevertheless set apart to be God's own.

In a more recent work, John E. Anderson takes up von Rad's emphasis on this text as a productive interruption in the larger Jacob Cycle narrative by asking, "what if God is here acting not *against* Jacob but rather *on his behalf*?"[10] Anderson employs Roland Barthes's contention in "The Struggle with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32" where Barthes recognizes the inconclusive and jarring effect of the passage

[6] Von Rad, *OT Theology*, 167.

[7] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, Revised edition (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1973), 314.

[8] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 316–17.

[9] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 320.

[10] John E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and Yhwh's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 148, italics his.

as central to engaging this pericope.[11] Here Anderson via Barthes identifies the man-angel as fighting on behalf of Esau, so when Jacob defeats the divine figure he is also defeating his brother. Barthes recognizes in this exchange an inversion that plays out in the broader narrative. There is an inverted nature to the victory because the defeated makes the decisive blow and not the victor: "the weakest defeats the strongest, *in exchange for which* he is marked."[12] This inversion follows the whole of Jacob's life with the younger repeatedly supplanting the elder. Anderson does not find a full interpretive resolution in Barthes argument but argues, instead, that the narrative also presents a play of deception by God on the trickster Jacob.[13] Jacob, the deceiver, is himself deceived in the wrestling match when the man strikes a blow to his hip.

Walter Brueggemann's reading of Gen 32:23–33 (32:22–32) takes up the observations of von Rad, Barthes, and Anderson by offering an interpretation that draws nearer to O'Connor's depiction of Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*. Brueggemann summarizes this narrated event as "The Crippling Victory," where Jacob's limp thereafter "shows others (and himself) that there are no untroubled victories with the holy One."[14] Through narrative presentation, the event possesses an "ominous" quality, which Brueggemann

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[11] Roland Barthes, "The Struggle with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:22–32" in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (NY: Hill and Wang, 1978), 125–141. Barthes notes: "what interests me most in this famous passage is not the 'folk-loristic' model but the abrasive frictions, the breaks, the discontinuities of readability, the juxtaposition of narrative entities which to some extent run free from an explicit logical articulation. One is dealing here (this at least is for me the savour of reading) with a sort of *metonymic montage*: the themes (Crossing, Struggle, Naming, Alimentary Rite) are *combined*, not 'developed.'" (140, italics his).

[12] Barthes, "Struggle with the Angel," 134. Italics his.

[13] Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster,* 156–60.

[14] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1986), 270.

quintessentially identifies in the "opaque portrayal of the figure" with whom Jacob wrestles.[15] A veil of mystery hangs all around Jacob's adversary, not only in his strength but also in his identity; the possibility that this adversary might be Esau, or a stand-in for him, reveals that "in the night, the divine antagonist tends to take on the feature of others with whom we struggle in the day."[16] Here, Brueggemann expands the reading of Esau in the divine wrestling match to a much broader scope than we find in the life of Jacob, the Pentateuch, or even the world of ancient Israel: to wrestle with God entails wrestling with our own quotidian adversaries.

In the act of renaming, Brueggemann identifies a permanent change—"something happens in this transaction that is irreversible"—which might be best coined as a conversion.[17] O'Connor describes how conversion stories can appear "hard, hopeless, brutal, etc" (CW, 1067). Her description reverberates with Jacob's wrestling and resultant limping. With the appearance of the name Israel, Brueggemann argues that an important message about Israel—the person and the people—comes to the fore: "Israel is not formed by success or shrewdness or land, but by *an assault from God.* Perhaps it is grace, but not the kind usually imagined."[18] O'Connor also insists that grace cannot be experienced in abstract telling but rather through showing the change—often destructive—wrought in the graced person. This insistence on showing rather than telling

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[15] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 266, 267.

[16] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 267.

[17] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 268.

[18] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 269.

harmonizes with Brueggemann's reading of Jacob's experience of supernatural grace through the reception of a new name.

Importantly, Brueggemann emphasizes that Jacob's new name is inseparable from his wounding, for "the crippling is the substance of the name."[19] This crippled naming prefigures the theology undergirding the incarnation of the God-Man, where "the theology of weakness in power and power in weakness" demonstrates the inverted way of grace.[20] Jacob experiences grace in his "crippling victory." He receives a new name through weakness. Hazel Motes experiences grace in his self-blinding; he receives new sight—the mote removed from his eye—through his own crippling victory.

Wayyiqtol *and Narrative Pacing*

In the last chapter, I described biblical Hebrew narrative as a paratactic style of narration in which the stories "show" more than they "tell." Parataxis, where clauses most often link together without subordination or modification, offers ample room for interpretive play on the part of readers. Sternberg describes this play as the drama of reading where readers move between the plain "truth" and the "whole truth" available through inference.[21] The function of the *wayyiqtol* in biblical Hebrew narrative evidences paratactic narration. The Gen 32 story of Jacob's wrestling with the man serves as an emblematic example of the paratactic nature of biblical narrative through the successive use of the *wayyiqtol*. Though Alter rightly highlights how the KJV often reflects Hebrew

[19] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 270.

[20] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 271.

[21] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Second Edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 51.

narrative style, the KJV at times misses the force of the *wayyiqtol*'s contribution to narrative pacing and, for that reason, I here supply my own translation to reflect the abundance of linked independent clauses:

[23] and he arose that same night
and he took his two wives and his two handmaids and his eleven children
and he crossed over the ford of Jabbok.
[24] and he took them
and brought them across the brook
and he brought across all that was his.
[25] And Jacob remained by himself
and a man wrestled[22] with him until daybreak.
[26] And he saw that he was not able prevail over him
and he struck[23] his hip socket
and he dislocated Jacob's hip socket while wrestling him.
[27] And he said: "Please, let me go for the dawn ascends."
And he said: "I will not let you go unless you bless me."
[28] And he said to him: "What is your name?"
And he said: "Jacob."
[29] And he said: "Jacob is no longer your name, but rather 'Israel' for you contended with God and with men
and you prevailed."
[30] And Jacob questioned
and said: "Please, tell me your name."
And he said "Why is it that you ask for my name?"
And he blessed him there.
[31] And Jacob declared: "The name of this place is 'Peniel' for I saw God face to face,
And yet my life is spared."
[32] And the sun arose before him just as he left Penuel,
and he was limping because of his hip.

[22] Interestingly, the verb to wrestle (עבק) is a *hapax legomenon*, which only appears in this pericope, in v. 25 and the subsequent verse. This *might* give credence to Noth and von Rad's proposal that this story comes from an ancient source that is later taken up by the Yahwist.

[23] Translations of יגע vary widely. Nahum M. Sarna translated the verb as "wrenched"—"he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket"—to convey the violence of the act. Cf. Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 227. Robert Alter emphasizes that the translation "barely touch" would be more suitable than the forceful glosses often used in its place. Cf. Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 179 n. 26). The rationale for my translation—more straightforwardly rendered from Hebrew syntax—will be argued later in this chapter.

> [33] Because of this, the Israelites do not eat sinew of the hip, which is on the socket of the leg until this day for he struck the hip socket of Jacob in the sinew of the thigh.

Notice the way that the *wayyiqtol* paces the narrative. One of the most climactic moments in the entirety of the Jacob cycle involves wrestling with what appears to be a divine messenger in the space of a verse and a half (vv. 25–26 [24–25]). The direct speech that follows the description of the wrestling provides readers with what they need in order to understand the thrust of the discourse, but the pace moves so quickly, without any sort of modifier, that even distinguishing speakers in the dialogue is quite dizzying.

J.P. Fokkelman reflects on the diminutive length of many of the most thrilling stories in the Hebrew Bible: "Some of the profoundest and most exciting stories are remarkably short but are found close to a long text which moves at a very relaxed pace."[24] These short narratives move quickly through reports, abundantly employing *wayyiqtol* without including many subordinating clauses. In the narrative material preceding and following the account of Gen 32:23–33 (32:22–32), we find what Fokkelman observes regarding the pacing of narration. Before the story of his wrestling match, Jacob makes detailed preparations for meeting his estranged brother. These preparations include precise instructions to his servants, through whom Jacob hopes the giving of gifts and assuring words will soften the exchange when Esau finally encounters

[24] J.P. Fokkelman, "Genesis" in *The Literary Guide to the Bible,* Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1990), 39. To elaborate his point further, he writes: "Consider chapters 22 and 24 [of Genesis]. In the Binding of Isaac, Abraham is cruelly ordered by God to sacrifice his son, the bearer of the promise, whose coming he has awaited a lifetime. The immense anxieties and incalculable implications of this situation are succinctly evoked in approximately 70 lines. Then, after the brief intervening episode of the purchase of the gravesite, we are pleasantly entertained by the calm flow, the epic breadth, and the posed harmony of characters, report, and speech in chapter 24, in which Abraham's servant seeks a bride for Isaac in Mesopotamia. By Hebrew standards, a great amount of space is devoted to ensuring that everything falls into its proper place—approximately 230 lines, at least four times the number found in the average story."

Jacob (Gen 32:4–6 [32:3–5], 14–22 [13–21]). In addition to these preparations, the narrative also includes Jacob's prayer to YHWH recounting YHWH's promises to Jacob and a plea for deliverance (Gen 32:10–13 [32:9–12]). Following the wrestling account, Esau and Jacob reunite via the initial approach of Esau (Gen 33:1-3); Esau's enthusiastic response to the meeting (Gen 33:4–7); and Jacob's insistence that Esau receive his gifts (Gen 33:8–14). The narratives preceding and following Gen 32:23–33 (32:22–32) both contain more descriptive content in proportion to the events they are detailing, including more subordinate clauses (e.g., instructions to servants, extended prayerful monologue, situating in what order Esau meets Jacob's wives and children, etc.). In short, Fokkelman's assessment that the narratives surrounding the most exciting stories do appear to move "at a very relaxed slow pace" holds up when reading the surrounding narratives of the exciting but brief story of Jacob's wrestling and renaming. An examination of the impact of the *wayyiqtol* on the pacing of biblical narrative, particularly seen in Gen 32:23–33 (32:22–32), will demonstrate how pacing plays an important role in the style of storytelling involved in the climactic moments of biblical narrative.

The *wayyiqtol* also amplifies the spare narrative information provided in the text. A broader investigation into the wrestling man of Gen 32 elucidates the parataxis offered through the *wayyiqtol*. The elusive quality of the figure who wrestles with Jacob—referred to only as “a man” and with the pronoun “he”—takes on a more defined character when considered in light of the earlier events at the start of the chapter in Gen 32:2–3 (32:1–2):

[2] and Jacob went on his way
and messengers of God met him

[3] and when Jacob saw them, he said: "This is God's camp"
and for that reason he called that place "Mahanaim [literally: double camp]."

While the later identification of "the man" wrestling as a likely angel (i.e., messenger of God), is helpful, the skeletally narrated event of God's camp offers readers minimal information about who the messengers are, what their intentions might be, and the significance of Jacob's encountering them. Brueggemann notes: "The affair is communicated in extreme brevity, four words in the Hebrew text [in English: 'the messengers of God met him']. The narrator gives the reader not the slightest notion of the apparently completely silent appearance, to say nothing of the fact that he wastes no words about the significance of the event for Jacob."[25] In quintessential biblical Hebrew narrative parataxis, the textual information available in the broader chapter augments the picture of the wrestling man with an extremely bare and elusive mention of divine messengers and a double camp representing the earth and the heavens. The language of a double camp in the naming of the place as Mahanaim connects with the wrestling pericope through the man's proclamation in v.29 (v.28) that Jacob has contended with God and man. To say that the man *is* God leaves the latter duality of Jacob's struggling with a mere human out of the equation. Yet, the former duality of a divine struggle signals to readers that some liminal space between human and divine has been revealed in Jacob's strife.[26] Parataxis functions in both elusive pericopes of Gen 32 to leave readers

[25] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 313.

[26] The grey area between divine and human can be rendered as a "divine being," seen in the JPS Torah Commentary translation of Jacob's proclamation in v.31 and signaling the reticence to directly name the figure God (*Elohim*), see: Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 228.

with ample room for inference in light of the minimal information provided by the narrator.[27]

To summarize: where one might expect the most detail to assure that readers do not miss any important clue—as in Caroline Gordon's advice to Flannery O'Connor seen in Chapter Three—the story of Jacob's wrestling, wounding, and renaming leaves readers trying to catch their breath and attend to what is left unsaid in the narrative. The story requires sizable interpretive work to bear interpretive and existential fruit.

The biblical narrator's stylistic choice here cannot be attributed simply to an archaic form of storytelling, though it is of course that, but rather such a curt form of narration suits the particular stories of divine-human encounter. In the following, I analyze the paratactic narration of Hazel Motes's conversion in *Wise Blood*'s climactic scene. My analysis will demonstrate the similarities in paratactic style between Motes and patriarch Jacob's transformations when confronted with the divine.

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[27] The two following disparate conclusions on the identity of the "man" demonstrate the room for inference in this passage. Sibley Towner, in his commentary on Genesis, appears confident of the identity of the man despite the sparse information provided about him: "The 'man' is*, of course*, God…The narrator makes God the most likely suspect…by having Jacob name the spot Peniel ("Face of God)." Cf. W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 230, italics added. While Towner is confident that this man is, in fact, God, Claus Westermann identifies this man as a river demon, noting that there is "*no basis* in the text for the idea of Jacob's supposed encounter with God." Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, trans. John J. Scullion, Continental Commentaries 12 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1995), 515, italics added.

An alternative account in the *JPS Torah Commentary* is centered on the geographical location of the event. Sarna identifies the fact that Jacob's wrestling and renaming occurs on the banks of the Jabbok river as no small thing: "The geographic locale of the incident is crucial to its understanding. Its true significance lines not in the river ambience as such but in its having occurred exactly at the crossing of the Jabbok. This river is otherwise mentioned in the Bible exclusively as a frontier of Israel, the limit of Israel's first victory against the kingdoms east of the Jordan after it emerged from the desert wanderings. The location at the Jabbok cannot be coincidental; it suggests that the purpose of the assault upon Jacob is to frustrate his return to his homeland, to prevent him from crossing over into the future national territory of Israel…In summation, the mysterious creature who assails Jacob as he is about to cross the future border of Israel is *none other than the celestial patron of Esau-Edom*, who is the inveterate enemy of Israel." Cf. Sarna, *JPS Genesis*, 404, italics added. This account helps explain why this event occurs amidst Jacob preparation to meet Esau.

Transforming and Transformed Vision of Hazel Motes

The great undoing of Hazel Motes' fiercely constructed claim, built up throughout *Wise Blood*, that "Nothing matters but that Jesus don't exist" (CW, 29) comes as Haze sets out on the road away from Taulkinham with murder in his wake. The events that follow involve a breaking down and building up of Hazel that leave him radically transformed. In the following, I examine the two central motifs—Hazel's car and the sky—to trace the central transformative moment and its impact on *Wise Blood*'s protagonist. This overview of the transforming and transformed vision of Hazel sets the stage for this chapter's central study: a transposition of the *wayyiqtol* into the key events of Hazel's transformation to demonstrate how parataxis functions in drawing out meaning for readers without explicit interpretive claims.

Transforming Vision: The Ruined Essex and the Depth of the Sky

The Essex. Prior to the climactic events that begin with his being pulled over and end with his intention to blind himself, Haze Motes prepares to leave Taulkinham and head to another city to preach his Church without Christ. Before the trip, he brings his car to a gas station to be serviced by a "sleeping-looking white boy" (CW, 116).[28] While Haze blasphemes Christ and praises his fine automobile, the boy works his way silently around the car before concluding that "there was a leak in the gas tank and two in the radiator and that the rear tire would probably last twenty miles if he went slow" (CW,

[28] Mark Schiebe, "Car Trouble: Haze Motes and the Fifties Counterculture" in *Wise Blood: A Re-Consideration,* John J. Han, ed. (NY: Editions Rodopi, 2011), 411.

116). Haze replies to this dire assessment, "'Listen … this car is just beginning its life. A lightning bolt couldn't stop it!'" (CW, 116).

Caroline Gordon comments that Haze's "Essex is not only a means of locomotion. It is a pulpit."[29] Wood goes even further: "Motes's broken-down Essex is indeed his deity: he sleeps in it, preaches from it, and relies on it to escape from all obligations that are not of his own choosing."[30] Hazel's Essex represents his self-sufficiency and self-justification, captured in one of Haze's most notoriously funny lines: "'Nobody with a good car needs to be justified'" (CW*,* 64). In *A Wreck on the Road to Damascus: Innocence, Guilt and Conversion in Flannery O'Connor*, Brian Ragen expands on the use of the automobile in *Wise Blood* to O'Connor's wider corpus.[31] Ragen highlights that "O'Connor often made the plots of her stories turn on what happens in—or even to—a car."[32] With the automobile comes the "myth of the American Adam" who is free to act without ties to the past or the present.[33] Included in this vision of the independent American is the refusal to accept the concept of original sin, as if this autonomous

[29] Fitzgerald, "A Master Class," 844.

[30] Wood, *Christ-Haunted South*, 15–16. Mark Schiebe places the deification of this vehicle in its 1950s context with the explosive rise of the automobile in a post-war setting: "while O'Connor was writing and Haze was driving, automobile production and car culture was at its height in America." Drawing out Wood's statement on the connection of Haze's car to his free-choosing, Schiebe identifies the car as the "quintessential symbol of American freedom." Cf. Schiebe, "Car Trouble," 406.

[31] Brian Abel Ragen, *A Wreck on the Road to Damascus: Innocence, Guilt, & Conversion in Flannery O'Connor* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1989), 55–106.

[32] Ragen, *Wreck on the Road*, 55. He continues, "A wreck brings the Misfit and his victims together; the loss of his Essex transforms Haze Motes; an old car is what interests Mr. Shiftlet at Mrs. Crater's farm; the bull impales Mrs. May against the hood of her automobile; and Tarwater accepts his calling after he has been molested by the man in the lavender and cream-colored car."

[33] Ragen, *Wreck on the Road*, 56.

creature still dwelt in innocence.[34] If the rambling man is congenitally guiltless, then he has no need of a Messiah. Ragen's description of the myth of the American Adam perfectly fits the readers' picture of Hazel Motes standing on the hood of his Essex proclaiming the Church without Christ and remaining free to move on to the next city to start anew.

The Sky. The sky motif functions throughout *Wise Blood* as a helpful demarcation of Haze's gradual transformation. *Wise Blood*'s first paragraph introduces Haze sitting on a train "looking one minute at the window as if he might want to jump out it, and the next down the aisle at the other end of the car" (CW, 3). While Haze looks *at* and not *through* the window to the view that lies beyond, a woman sitting across from Haze comments "that she thought the early evening like this was the prettiest time of day" (CW, 3). Haze, seeing the window merely as a means of escape, is contrasted with the woman who sees through the window to the "magic hour" of evening when the sun's rays strike the landscape with soft but vibrant light. A couple of days later in Taulkinham, the omniscient narrator observes that no one—Haze included—paid any attention to the "black sky that was underpinned with long silver streaks that looked like scaffolding and depth on depth behind it were thousands of stars that all seemed to be moving very slowly as if they were about some vast construction work that involved the whole order of the universe and would take all the time to complete" (CW, 19).[35] Haze's inattention to

[34] Ragen, *Wreck on the Road*, 56.

[35] This is exactly the kind of description that Caroline Gordon wanted O'Connor to employ constantly, whereas its rare appearance in the novel gives it a power that repeated uses would not have achieved.

the Dantesque quality of the night sky in his early days in the city sets up a contrastive foretaste of the moment of disruption to come later.

An even more pointed allusion to Haze's relation to the sky is found in one of Haze's most heated sermons atop the Essex:

> "I preach there are all kinds of truth, your truth and somebody else's, but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's not truth, " he called. "No truth behind all truths is what I and this church preach! Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it. Where is there a place for you to be? No place.
>
> "Nothing outside you can give you any place," he said. "You needn't to *look at the sky* because it's not going to open up and show no place behind it. You needn't to search for any hole in the ground to look through into somewhere else. You can't go neither forwards nor backwards into your daddy's time nor your children's if you have them. In yourself right now is all the place you've got. If there was any Fall, look there, if there was any Redemption, look there, and if you expect any Judgment, look there, because they all three will have to be in your time and your body and where in your time and your body can they be?
>
> "Where in your time and your body has Jesus redeemed you?" he cried. "Show me where because I don't see the place. If there was a place where Jesus had redeemed you that would place for you to be, but which of you can find it?" (CW, 93, italics added).

Haze's nihilism permeates his sermon. There is no place for you, nowhere to look for belonging, no hope for change nor absolution—all you have is yourself. Haze's fierce independence is seen in his rejection not only of any kind of kinship (seen in his humorous interactions with friendship-starved Enoch) but even of any affirmation of truth that extends beyond the self-sufficient individual—in the sky or on the earth. A train window is no more than an escape-hatch, just as a starry night is no occasion for wonder. All Haze has is his car and his determination to escape from all that does not accord with his own time and space.

Transforming vision. Just as Jacob prepares to meet Esau, so does Haze prepare his car to travel to a new city. The narrator tells us that Hazel, ignoring the warning of the gas station attendant, "drove very fast out onto the highway," but also that he "had not gone five miles on the highway before he heard a siren behind him" (CW, 117). The presence of the police car disrupts Hazel's plan just as the trajectory of Jacob's life was radically disrupted by his night visitor at Jabbok.

Narrating by means of direct dialogue, O'Connor shows the exchange between the officer and Haze as quickly becoming hostile:

> "I wasn't speeding," Haze said.
> "No," the patrolman agreed," you wasn't."
> "I was on the right side of the road."
> "Yes you was, that's right," the cop said.
> "What you want with me?"
> "I just don't like your face," the patrolman said. "Where's your license?"
> "I don't like your face either," Haze said, "and I don't have a license." (CW, 117)

Unlike Haze's previously narrated dialogue—where he and the station attendant speak past rather than to one another—this exchange registers as a confrontation and anticipates the destructive event that soon follows.

As we reach the climactic moment of Haze's conversion, the narrative itself picks up speed and intensity. With readers' attention focused in on the engagement between the officer and Haze, the essential actions constituting this climactic event come hastily one after another: the patrolman tells Haze to pull his car up to the overlook; Haze follows his instructions, getting out of the car and then looking out over the scene while the police officer pushes Haze's treasured Essex over the edge; Haze's eyes follow the car down the embankment and he stares at his idolized car lying in shambles resting on its hood with a tire and the motor missing while the officer proudly asserts, "Them that don't have a car,

don't need a license" (CW, 118). The officer, unaware of the change occurring in Haze, repeatedly asks where Haze is heading. Upon realizing that Haze has no plan to go anywhere at all, the officer leaves Haze staring into the immensity surrounding him. The police officer's act has inadvertently, or possibly providentially, slowed down Haze long enough to look out and see what had always been before him: the infinity of the space, and thus, perhaps, the Cosmic Christ who is its Alpha and Omega.[36] Yet the narrator offers no assistance toward any such conclusion; readers must ponder the significance of the scene on their own.[37]

Central to the climactic moment of Haze's transformation are his Essex and his attention to the sky. Haze's self-sufficiency symbolized in his car lies in ruins below his feet. This object that Haze staked so much on—his vocation as a preacher of the Church without Christ, a place to sleep when there was nowhere else to lay his head, a vehicle turned weapon that he used to commit murder, and his means of escape from one city to another—is wrecked. Haze himself is wrecked, and in this broken state he does what he failed to do earlier in the novel—to look out and up at the "depth after depth" of the sky. This moment of transforming vision involves a shift of the eyes away from the Essex, symbol of his autonomy and self-worship, to the sky, which he had earlier proclaimed as nowhere to find any kind of meaning: "You needn't to look at the sky because it's not going to open up and show no place behind it" (CW, 93).

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[36] Regan's discussion of the myth of the American Adam helps readers to understand precisely how this grace is experienced as Haze watches the actual vehicle of his freedom lie in ruins below his feet: "the offer of grace comes when the hero is stopped in his tracks and can run no longer. For Haze Motes that offer comes when he loses his car and with it the ability to assert his innocence and freedom by always moving on" (Ragen, *Wreck on the Road*, 105).

[37] A bit later in this chapter, I will examine this transforming moment of Hazel looking out over the embankment in more depth.

Transformed Vision: Quicklime and the Pinpoint of Light

This shifting of the eyes from the car to the sky is also a shifting of the heart, of the self which for so long had been turned in on itself and now turns towards the mysterious depths that lie outside it. When we return to Hazel Motes after his blinding, he has taken on a different pattern of life. Previously, he was on the road and shouting his nihilistic vision from car hoods. Now, we are told that he places glass and rocks in his shoes—as he did when he was a boy, to prove that he didn't need to rely on Jesus' suffering, since he could provide his own. Hazel also wraps barbed wire around his chest, radically intensifying the ascetic practices of medieval mystics. No longer atop a vehicle and seeking an audience, Haze takes solitary walks around the neighborhood without drawing attention to himself and likely appearing aimless to any onlookers. Whereas he earlier desired to set out to a new city, he now takes daily walks that lead him no further than a few blocks' radius around his boardinghouse.

The landlady incongruously describes the blinded Haze as having "the look of seeing something…of straining toward something" (CW, 120–21). After becoming attentive to the depths of space that he once ignored and subsequently blinding himself, Haze takes on a new and strange kind of sight that allows him to see differently than with his once-functioning eyes. The landlady struggles to understand the change in Haze, both in the oddness of a blind man seemingly seeing things and in his adoption of bizarre new practices:

> She could not make up her mind what would be inside his head and what out. She thought of her own head as a switchbox she controlled from; but with him, she could only imagine the outside in, the whole black world in his head and his head is bigger than the world, his head big enough to include the sky and planets and whatever was or had been or would be. How would he know if time was going backwards or forwards or if he was going with it? She imagined it was like you

> were walking in a tunnel and all you could see was a pin point of light. She had to imagine the pin point of light; she couldn't think of it at all without that. She saw it as some kind of a star, like the star on Christmas cards. She saw him going backwards to Bethlehem and she had to laugh (CW, 123).

Something curious is happening in this passage. Straightforwardly, readers are offered a further description of the quizzical kind of seeing Haze had taken on after his blinding. This kind of sight is the sight of a mystic; seeing not out into the world but somehow viewing the world in him.[38] The irony here of Haze being described as possessing mystical vision should not be lost. Unlike his zealous sermon atop the Essex preaching that the world is without truth—no truth in the world, in the sky, in the past, or in the future—Haze now possesses a sight that seemingly collapses time and space. He has undergone a profound shift not only in how he conceives the world but also in how others perceive him: Mrs. Flood, his landlady, sees Haze as a pinpoint of light, recalling the Star of Bethlehem. Perhaps too threatened by this potentially transforming link, she laughs it off. While on the surface Haze's paradoxical self-blinding sight moves him *away* from the world, since he has the looking of seeing into the depths of space, the deeper truth is that he has he has discerned the metaphysical reality that roots and places him in this world no less than the other. [39]

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[38] In thirteenth-century theologian and mystic Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*, she describes this kind of inward sight: "the visions I saw I did not perceive in dreams or sleep, or delirium, or by the eyes of the body, or by the ears of the outer self, or in hidden places; but I received them while awake and seeing with a pure mind and the eyes and the ears of the inner self." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias,* trans. Mother Columbia Hart and Jane Bishop (NY: Paulist Press, 1990), 60.

[39] Frederick Asals identifies Haze's conversion as a radical shift from this-worldly to other-worldly orientation: "when he finally stares directly at the nothing that he has so long evaded not only does repentance set in, but Hazel Motes becomes a wholly otherworldly figure. There can be little doubt of Haze's otherworldliness in the final chapter of *Wise Blood*." Cf. Frederick Asals, *Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 54–55. The problem with this kind of interpretation of Haze's conversion is the failure to attend to the holistic transformation that has occurred for Haze, as well as the rich Christian tradition that speaks of transformed sight (as an exemplary example consider Saul-Paul's Damascus Road conversion). Haze is described as acting strangely, yes:

Wise Blood closes with Mrs. Flood the landlady hovering over the corpse of Hazel Motes. Haze had been found by the police almost dead in a ditch after he had literally fled from the landlady's advances. The narrator tells us that "[Haze] died in the squad car but [the policemen] didn't seem to notice and took him on to the landlady's" (CW, 131). Upon arrival at the boardinghouse, Haze is placed on the landlady's bed and a darkly comedic one-sided conversation ensues. In rejoicing that Haze had been found, Mrs. Flood leans over the bed observing his face and trying to understand why he had rejected her offer to marry and care for him.

> She shut her eyes and saw the pin point of light but so far away that she could not hold it steady in her mind. She felt as if she were blocked at the entrance of something. She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light (CW, 131).

Sally Fitzgerald describes this closing scene as Hazel's "vision of the infinite," a "vision clarified in his blindness."[40] This final description of Haze, one conveyed to us through Mrs. Flood's own closed-eyed stare, is an image of redemption. Readers are left with Hazel Motes described as a pinpoint of light, not a corpse. This is one of the most inveterate tropes in Christian imagery: from death springs new, indeed eternal life.

The ascetic life Haze takes on after his blinding and the mystical vision he seems to attain, described crassly by Mrs. Flood, indicates the kind of transformation Haze experienced in his looking out "depth after depth" and the shift from outward to inward

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performing ascetic acts that have the appearance of rejecting the physical body and seeing without physical sight. But neither ascetic acts nor spiritual sight necessitate an otherworldly disposition. Notice that in the landlady's description of Haze, she speaks not of his possessing a mind emptied of this world, but filled with and encompassing it.

[40] Sally Fitzgerald, "Rooms with a View," *Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* 10 (1981): 13–14.

vision through his radical act of self-blinding via quicklime. The denouement of the story at face-value appears to be the physical collapse of Haze that ends in his death, but on a deeper level, the narrative suggests a parallel between the final months of Haze's life to the life of the great mystics—recall the life of St. Francis of Assisi, for instance—where bodily ascesis drives the whole person towards spiritual perfection. Is it possible that Haze's great bodily deformation is also a testimony of a graced life on its way to perfection?

Narrating the Conversions of Hazel and Jacob via Parataxis

The imagery of Jacob's wrestling in Genesis 32 serves as the quintessential image of a wounding blessing. As acknowledged in Chapter Two, the relationship between wounding and blessing is both paradoxical and a fitting description of what it means to become whole in God, which involves the sometimes humiliating act of breaking down in order to build up. The transformed vision of Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood* parallels Jacob's wounding blessing. In grotesque fashion, Haze is transformed through the disfiguration of his body, chiefly his eyes. Jacob limps through the rest of his life as a reminder of God's favor, Haze blindly moves through his remaining days while acquiring a new kind of vision—a vision of the infinite. In this final section, I explore the ways that the thematic sharing between Jacob's and Haze's blessings also share stylistic features, namely the sparely narrated moments of blessing.

Transposing the Wayyiqtol

O'Connor narrates the interior moment of Haze's conversion, as Haze looks out over the embankment, in a description akin to the paratactic style of the *wayyiqtol* in the passage recounting Jacob's wrestling with his night-visitor in Genesis 32:

> [and] Haze got out
> and glanced at the view. The embankment dropped down for about thirty feet, sheer washed-out red clay, into a partly burnt pasture where there was one scrub cow lying near a puddle. Over in the middle distance there was a one-room shack with a buzzard standing hunch-shouldered on the roof.
> [and] the patrolman got behind the Essex
> and pushed it over the embankment
> and the cow stumbled up
> and galloped across the field
> and into the woods;
> [and] the buzzard flapped off to a tree at the edge of the clearing.
> [and] the car landed on its top, with the three wheels that stayed on, spinning.
> [and] the motor bounced out
> and rolled down some distance away
> and various odd pieces scattered this way and that.
> [and] "Them that don't have a car don't need a license," the patrolman said, dusting his hands on his pants.
> [and] Haze stood for a few minutes, looking out over the scene.
> [and] his face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing and on beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth into space.
> [and] His knees bent under him
> and he sat down on the edge of the embankment with his feet hanging over (CW, 118).

By breaking down the narrative into consecutive independent clauses, one can imagine each clause linked by the *wayyiqtol* if written in biblical Hebrew prose.[41] The litany of narrative descriptions produces a similar dizzying effect as was found in the crippling victory of Jacob in Gen 32.

[41] Of course, I am pointing to similarities in style with the transposition of the *wayyiqtol*, not sameness. In this passage, O'Connor includes descriptions of the landscape that are rarely found in biblical Hebrew narrative, e.g. the descriptions of the cows in the field and buzzards in the tree.

When the officer departs after destroying Haze's car, readers are left with a view of Haze's back as he continues to stare at the sky. When the narration picks up again, Haze springs into action, but without readers receiving a "telling" account of the link between his staring at the sky and his deciding to blind himself. Again, O'Connor describes his movements towards his exterior conversion this time in a narrated pace similar to the events of Jacob's wrestling episode with the use of the *wayyiqtol*. A breakdown of the brief twelve lines that make up Haze's climactic decision evidences further similarity to the parataxis found in the Jacob story:

[and] After a while Haze got up
and started walking back to town.
[and] It took him three hours to get inside the city again.
[and] He stopped at the supply store
and bought a tin bucket and a sack of quicklime
and then he went on to where he lived, carrying these.
[and] When he reached the house, he stopped outside on the sidewalk
and opened the sack of lime
and poured the bucket half full of it.
[and] Then he went to a water spigot by the front steps
and filled up the rest of the bucket with water
and started up the steps.
[and] His landlady was sitting on the porch, rocking a cat.
[and] "What you going to do with that, Mr. Motes?" she asked.
[and] "Blind myself," he said.
And went on in the house.
[and] The landlady sat there for a while longer… (CW, 119).

O'Connor's stripped-down paratactic style provides readers only the barest description necessary to narrate his movements from the side of the road into his room where he will blind himself. Notably, O'Connor does not narrate Haze's actual blinding in *Wise Blood*. In the subsequent chapter and only through the landlady's account do readers find out that Haze acted on his declaration. Rather than following Haze into the house and describing

his self-blinding with quicklime, the narrator leaves readers at the end of the chapter with the landlady Mrs. Flood sitting on the porch, musing: “What possible reason could a sane person have for wanting to not enjoy himself anymore?” A description of Haze’s act would have been an instance of grotesque gore, whereas her banal pronouncement that the purpose of life is to have fun stands in stark contrast to the moral and spiritual power of Haze’s disfiguring act.

Here, similarities in the narrative pacing of Gen 32 are evidenced through the curt narration of Haze’s enacting the grace he first received as he looked out over the clearing onto his body through self-blinding. In both cases, we find narrations of a divine-human encounter that leave the protagonist drastically changed, yet the narrations are best characterized as spare, to the point, yet mysteriously opaque.

On Jacob and Hazel’s Paratactically Narrated Scenes of Blessing

The transposition of the *wayyiqtol* onto the climactic scene of *Wise Blood* illumines the paratactic narration of the actions that lead to Haze’s self-blinding. The parataxis evident in both *Wise Blood* and the Gen 32 pericope of Jacob’s wrestling draw together two stories radically unlike one another in setting, language, and genre. Yet, the spare style of narration alerts readers to similarities in the conversion moments of Jacob and Haze even beyond the shared theme of wounding and blessing. In the following, I outline a number of ways these stories share narrative characteristics that are highlighted and impacted by their shared paratactic style.

First, the stories of Jacob’s crippling victory and Haze’s blinding conversion share in narrative pacing: both narrative moves quickly over the most crucial events of the characters’ lives. Characteristic of biblical Hebrew narrative, the presentation of Jacob’s

wrestling with the mysterious man moves at a rapid pace from the appearance of the man, through the wrestling event, and into the gifting of a new name. The *wayyiqtol* narrates events with rapid motion, moving from one action to the next with minimal causal connection between events. In climactic scenes like the one found in Gen 32, the swift descriptions of action advance even quicker than usual. Similarly, Haze's actions from the side of the road to entering the house to blind himself moves with a rapidity that emphasizes the centrality of the events. In fact, the narrative moves so quickly that it skips over the central event itself, Haze's self-blinding. In the turn of a page, readers move from Haze walking into the house with the landlady musing on the front porch to her reflection after the deforming act. The pace of the narrative not only registers the unique quality of the scene within the broader narrations of Jacob and Haze, but makes the spare information offered in the climactic scenes carry more interpretive weight.

Second, both narratives present us with conversions that possess a dual quality: for Jacob and Haze their conversions involve physical and visible deformations as well as spiritual and invisible transformations. Because of the spare style of narration, the twofold conversion moments do not draw excessive attention nor do they overtly explain the connection between the characters' wounding and blessing. In the case of the conversion moment of Jacob, the mysterious man both dislocates Jacob's hip and gives Jacob a new name. For the rest of Jacob's life, the physical reminder of this moment will follow him with a limp. This tangible element of the transformative scene is accompanied by a less-tangible, yet very real gift of the new name Israel. Similarly, Hazel first receives the invisible blessing of new spiritual sight. A blessing that a too hasty of a reader of *Wise Blood* might fail to recognize as a decisive moment because it is followed with the non-

narrated moment just after Haze states his aim to blind himself to his landlady. A physical conversion, much like Jacob's, parallels Haze's interior moment of conversion. These dual conversion moments—visible and invisible, physical and spiritual—are two-sides of the same coin. Jacob's limp and name cannot be treated narratively apart from one another. Haze's new spiritual and physical sight go together. While the narrators do not overtly (e.g. hypotactically) spell out the pivotal connection between the invisible and visible transformations, parataxis invites readers to infer such connections and perceive the significance of both the outward and inward transformations.

Third, Jacob and Haze experience grotesque transformations. The description of Asa Hawks' scar-streaked eyes earlier in *Wise Blood* signals the damage wrought by quicklime to the face. Quicklime possesses a brutal history of violence: it was used as a weapon against enemy combatants since antiquity because of its ability to burn skin on contact once mixed with water. During the Holocaust, quicklime was used both to burn the feet of Jews as they were carted off to work camps and cover up the smell of their decomposing bodies in mass graves. To speak of Haze's self-blinding as transformative does not erase the horror of the act. Despite the redemptive function of his blinding, the image of quicklime mixed with water conjures the violence of war-craft. O'Connor's choice to blind Haze off-stage, as it were, leaves readers with only the paratactic narration of Haze's gathering of supplies and acts of preparation. The result is not to diminish but to heighten the horror of his mutilating act. The narration forces readers to render for themselves images of an act that if narrated could easily become either a sentimentalizing or glorification of violence.

Similarly, Jacob's wrestling though incredibly brief in its narration involves a grotesque wounding. While images such as Rembrandt's painting, "Jacob's Wresting with the Angel" (ca.1659), render the wrestling match as a majestic event, with a stoic angel embracing as much as wrestling Jacob, the Hebrew narrative provides clues that suggest a much more violent scene.[42] The verb (יגע) used in Gen 32:26 (32:25) translates as "to touch or strike." While translations of the angel as "striking" Jacob's hip (literally: "the hollow of his hip") communicates a level of damage exacted on Jacob—a level described later by the narrator's comments that the injury left Jacob with a lifelong limp—the English translation does not entirely capture the force of the angel-man's act. The verb "to strike" here in its current construct and with the addition of the preposition "with" (ב) suggests a violent striking force. The same verb construct is found throughout the Hebrew Bible, for instance in the warning of YHWH's punishment if the Ark of the Covenant is mishandled in 1 Sam 6:9 and the gale-force winds that collapse Job's house in Job 1:19. Within the Jewish tradition, Jacob's injury has been identified with the sciatic nerve, which connects the spinal cord with the muscles in the legs and feet.[43] Sciatic nerve injuries can make walking painful and sometimes unbearable.[44] Jacob received a serious injury in this wrestling match.

[42] Rembrandt, "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel, c. 1659," The Rembrandt Database, http://www.rembrandtdatabase.org/Rembrandt/painting/50803/jacob-wrestling-with-the-angel. Accessed 9 August 2017.

[43] Sarna, *JPS Genesis*, 228.

[44] Curiously, Haze is described as developing a limp in the months following his conversion (CW, 122). Later, Haze's ascetic practice of placing rocks in his shoes explains the cause of the limp. We have no information that would suggest O'Connor had the parallel to Jacob in mind with the mention of the limp.

Fourth, the disfigurements of Jacob and Haze are shrouded in darkness. Jacob wrestles all night and receives the match-ending blow just as dawn breaks. Haze's disfigurement results in darkness of physical sight. This thematic sharing of darkness is heightened by the elusively narrated quality of the events. Paralleling the physical darkness—in nighttime wrestling for Jacob and blinding for Haze—is the suggestion of a slippery sort of divine visitation more defined by what it cannot be than what it is. One cannot see God face-to-face and live (Ex 33:20), and yet Jacob describes having seen God face-to-face, and he does not die. Haze looks out past the rubble of his Essex to what lies beyond "to the blank gray sky that went depth after depth into space." What does Haze see? Not simply the sky. Haze looks out with the sky as his starting-point, not his endpoint.

Fifth, in both scenes Jacob and Haze are on the move. The pericope of Jacob's wrestling begins in Gen 32:23 (32:22) with Jacob sending his family and all his possessions across the Jabbok in preparation for the encounter with his estranged brother Esau. Jacob's relationship with his brother had been characterized since birth by strife and exhibited in Jacob deceiving his brother out of both birthright and blessing. Gen 32 tells us that Jacob was afraid because after years of separation from his brother he was to encounter him the next day and news had been delivered that his brother brought along a hundred of warriors for their visit. The movement that begins the pericope of wrestling describes Jacob's final preparations for meeting his brother. Just as Jacob completes his preparations—"and Jacob remained by himself" (Gen 32:25 [32:24])—readers are told "a man wrestled with him until daybreak." The preparations Jacob had made for one encounter are interrupted by a different kind of encounter. Haze is also on the move. The

climactic moment occurs after Haze has fled Taulkinham, suffered the destruction of his car, then left to stare at the gray sky before he begins walking back towards the town to blind himself.

Sixth, in these moments of transformation Jacob and Haze act essentially on their own. While a man (איש) wrestles with Jacob and gives him his new name, the pericope itself tells us nothing about this man. In fact the skeletal narration of the event, with its confusion of the two "he's" adds to the mysterious quality of the man. Jacob's proclamation offers additional information about him: "The name of this place is 'Peniel' for I saw God face to face" (Gen 32:31). Jacob evidences the elusive quality of the mysterious figure by indicating that this wrestling match was with God, not a human being. Jacob found himself alone with God. While the patrolman and the landlady make appearances in Haze's dual conversion—first in seeing Infinity, then in deciding to blind himself—the spare dialogue makes clear that Haze has undergone an utterly personal encounter with God. Both the patrolman's response to Haze and the landlady's innocent question about Haze's plan with the quicklime-filled bucket require the reader to discern the radical transformation that has and will occur in Haze.

Finally, Jacob and Haze receive, at the close of their climactic moments, something revolutionarily new. I have already spoken of the disfigurement that accompanied the transformative moments of both protagonists. Along with Jacob's limp, he receives a new name—no small thing. The name Israel marks the ancient people that descend from Jacob's line as particular and set apart. The name signals both victory and blessing. Etymologically, "Israel" speaks to Jacob's seeing God face-to-face and living. Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed. Narratively, the name Israel accompanies

blessing. Walter Moberly notes the choice of Jacob as the receiver of this new name that will follow the nation from hereafter: "One might have expected that someone of the character of Abraham would have this honour of being the eponymous ancestor of a nation called to be holy. Yet the fact that it is self-seeking Jacob and not faithful Abraham who gives his name to Israel speaks volumes for Israel's understanding of the nature of human life under God."[45] Not only the gift of a name for a nation, but the character of the principal receiver of the name "Israel" casts forward to a fraught relationship between a faithful God and a wayward people.

The radical shift in Haze before and after his self-blinding indicates that his life has been terribly disrupted and reversed. Haze moves from a violent and antagonistic street-corner preacher to a radical ascetic who quietly moves through life as a monk; from sharing a bed with Sabbath Lily Hawks, a woman in whom he has no real interest, to resisting the companionship of his landlady; from trying to escape Taulkinham in his idolized Essex to pondering on the front porch the meaning of what he has discovered and taking daily walks with his shoes stuffed with stones and shards of glass. These shifts in Haze's behavior are accompanied by his ironic description of his new sight as greater than his old sight because his eyes now have no bottom.

Along with all these similarities drawn out by paratactic narration, the most profound shared feature between these two men is that both remain "on the way" towards redemption. Neither Jacob nor Haze is so radically transformed by his wounded blessings

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[45] R. W. L. Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, Old Testament Guides 2 (Sheffield: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1992), 28.

that he becomes unrecognizably virtuous and without fault. The sparely narrated events that describe their moments of transformation and the fall-out from those climactic scenes guards against making these conversions supernaturally suspect. That is, the straightforward narrated climaxes neither run the risk of explaining away or making unbelievable the central events.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn out the similarities in paratactic narration with the help of the *wayyiqtol*. The style similarities identified in the climactic moments of Jacob's wounding victory and Haze's blinding conversion map onto the broader parataxis found in biblical Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's fiction. In Chapter Three, I delved into the writing mentorship of O'Connor by Caroline Gordon. This exploration revealed O'Connor's continual resistance to a more hypotactic style of narration, to Gordon's continual frustration. Similarly in Chapter Four, I described how biblical Hebrew employs parataxis, standing in contrast to the Homeric epic, which provides abundant narratival information for readers.

While neither biblical Hebrew narrative nor O'Connor's fiction is unique in their employment of spare narratival style—it can be readily identified in the writings of Ernest Hemingway and Shūsaku Endō, among others—the shared paratactic style along with the similar convictions about the connection between divine wounding and divine blessing suggests a weighty connection between style and content. In the next chapter, I move from sparely narrated stories to the readers of these stories. Spare stories place demands on readers that put them at risk of receiving their own wounding blessing.

CHAPTER SIX

Blessed Wounding: Paratactic Style and the Act of Reading

Introduction

Jacob's wounding victory and Hazel's blinding conversion illustrate the immediate and intense confrontation with a person's misdirected desires in encounters with divine grace. In an entry of Flannery O'Connor's prayer journal, she begins: "Dear Lord please make me want you. It would be the greatest bliss. Not just to want You when I think about You but to want you all the time, to think about you all the time, to have the want driving in me, to have it like a cancer in me. It would kill me like a cancer and that would be the Fulfillment."[1] With what might appear as a masochistic sickness at first-glance, this prayer is in fact a confession of O'Connor's desire: she desires to desire. She longs to want God in the way of the saints: an all-consuming, all-encompassing desire of the lover for her Beloved. Ironically, at the close of her prayer, O'Connor states the root cause of her plea for God to awaken a cancerous desire in her: "Oh Lord please make this dead desire living, living in life, living as it will probably have to live in suffering. I feel too mediocre now to suffer. If suffering came to me I would not recognize it."[2] O'Connor

[1] Flannery O'Connor, *A Prayer Journal*, ed. W. A. Sessions (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 36. Not all of O'Connor's admirers and critics are likely to find this prayer for dead desire to become alive like a cancer to be an appealing request. Sarah Gordon, in her review of *A Prayer Journal,* comments that while readers "schooled in the parochial ascetic tradition" may appreciate such prayers, "for other Christians and secular admirers of O'Connor's work, I suspect publication of this journal will be embarrassing, if not troubling indeed" (Sarah Gordon, Reviewed Work: "A Prayer Journal" by Flannery O'Connor, *The Georgia Review* 67 [2013], 756).

[2] O'Connor, *Prayer Journal*, 36.

asks for an illness tantamount to death in order to receive life, paradoxically awakening the dead desire in her through suffering, through death.

Brad Gooch, in his biography of O'Connor, connects O'Connor's personal and fictional life by noting that "her stories included a coded spiritual autobiography."[3] At the close of "The Enduring Chill," protagonist Asbury lies in bed after the revelation that he is not a tortured artist on his deathbed but a fool who brought undulant fever on himself by drinking unpasteurized milk. For O'Connor to depict this scene of the prideful intellectual being wracked by fever and chills because of his own stupidity hints at the possibility that O'Connor—an intelligent woman who herself prays for a desire for God so as to wrack her with (even more) suffering—subjectively identifies with Asbury.[4] The destabilization of Asbury's confidence in his own intelligence and superiority over those around him prepares him for a mysterious encounter that at once terrifies and transforms his vision for the rest of his life.

Earlier in the story, Father Finn, the rough-hewn, unsophisticated, plain country priest, had catechized Asbury—much to his disgust—by asking him such questions as these: "How do you expect to get what you don't ask for? God does not send the Holy Ghost to those who don't ask for Him …. How can the Holy Ghost fill your soul when it's full of trash? The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are—a lazy

[3] Brad Gooch, *Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor* (NY: Back Bay Books, 2010), 373.

[4] In a later letter, written April 6, 1960 to professor of English Dr. T.R. Spivey, O'Connor clarifies her view of the gift of the Holy Spirit (specifically, as available in the Eucharist) in contrast to Spivey's: "I don't think you are unfair to me in what you say about my stage of development etc. though I have a much less romantic view of how the Holy Spirit operates than you do. The sins of pride & selfishness and reluctance to wrestle with the Spirit are certainly mine but I have been working at them a long time and will be still doing it when I am on my deathbed. I believe that God's love for us is so great that He does not wait until we are purified to such a great extent before He allows us to receive him" (HB, 386).

ignorant conceited youth!" (CW, 567). O'Connor's narrator here wrestles with the crucial question of divine action—whether it is imposed by force, so that God becomes a heavenly bully, or whether there must be at least a minimal preparation for it, no matter how inadequate. That Asbury has made a more than a nominal act of repentance is figured in his retrieving of the key to the drawer containing his blistering critique of his mother for having allegedly crushed his creative powers. Now that he has been consigned to a painful sentence of lifelong illness rather than a convenient, much-desired escape via death, Asbury does not want Mrs. Fox to read his awful Kafkaesque screed of accusation against her. No sooner has he put the key back into pocket than Asbury gazes into a bedside mirror to behold a vision of his evacuated face and eyes, now emptied of all their "trash:" "They looked shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him" (CW, 572). Thus has his truest desire, though previously repudiated, been fulfilled. The lacerating God is no tormenting tyrant but the Lord who gives what his creatures most need, Asbury's sickness thus becoming also a healing and blessing: "The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of the new" (CW, 572). A new kind of suffering descends on Asbury, not of undulant fever, but of divine rapture and cleansing:

> It was then that he felt the beginning of a chill, a chill so peculiar, so light that it was like a warm ripple across a deeper sea of cold. His breathe came short. The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. He saw that for the rest of his days, *frail, wracked, but enduring, he would live in the face of purifying terror*. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazed in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend. (CW, 572, italics added)

O'Connor's prayer for her "dead desire" to be made alive is enacted in Asbury. The fever, which would wrack Asbury's body for the rest of his life, becomes like a cancer—terrorizing him with "reality in the light of God." Again and again, O'Connor blessedly afflicts her protagonists with this terrifying blessing. Her prayer that God stir desire in her suggests that this terrorizing of her protagonist is rooted in her own desire for an assault—a wounding—from God.[5]

I begin this chapter with O'Connor's plea for desire because it stands at the center of my overarching concern for the wounding and blessing effect of O'Connor's paratactic narration. The preceding three chapters have focused on drawing out the stylistically spare nature of Flannery O'Connor's through the similarly narrated stories of the Hebrew Bible. In this chapter, I make the parataxis present in these stories as a means for circling back around to the theological claim made in Chapter Two concerning the paradoxical and significant relationship between God's divine blessing and human wounding. In this chapter, I will illustrate the wounding, stigmatizing, terrifying, and blessed effect of the act of reading O'Connor's skeletal stories. All the work of the preceding chapters comes

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[5] Another clear example of O'Connor's protagonists' dead desire in need of awakening is found in "Greenleaf" when Mrs. May is shocked and embarrassed by Mrs. Greenleaf's ecstatic prayer: "'Oh Jesus, stab me in the heart!'" (CW, 507). While Mrs. May might insist that Mrs. Greenleaf be ashamed of herself for not acting as a good Christian, Mrs. May is the one who should truly be praying this prayer of blessed wounding. Richard Giannone, in *Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist*, likens Mrs. Greenleaf's behavior to the Desert Mothers in her catanyxis cry (Richard Giannone, *Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist* [Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000], 196). In Mrs. May, unlike Mrs. Greenleaf, Giannone argues there is also something of the asceticism of the desert dweller. But, whereas Mrs. Greenleaf enacts the life of an ancient desert mother, Mrs. May experiences the desert—at least until her final whispered confession as the bull gores her to death—without the life-giving work of the Spirit: "She [Mrs. May] is a desert person because she leads the desert life…As a would-be desert-dweller, she endures its physical and psychological hardships without deriving its inward grace" (Giannone, *Hermit Novelist,* 198).

The call for a stabbed heart also echoes Julian of Norwich, who in her tenth vision, as she contemplates the wounded side of Christ, comments that his blessed heart is split in two (*Revelations of Divine Love*, Vision 10, Chapter 24). This contemplation leads Julian to rejoice that Christ's wounds have turned sorrow into joy, where Christ's split side and pierced heart are expressions of his love.

together in the exploration of the ways that O'Connor's paratactic narration of reality illumined by God draws readers into their own terrifying and potentially wounding encounters with divine grace.

To demonstrate this wounding effect on readers, I first outline Wolfgang Iser's account of the act of reading. Iser's insistence on the necessarily participatory nature of readers to infer a story's meaning articulates the vulnerability and entanglement of readers in the reading event. Notably, Iser emphasizes that different styles of narrative make different degrees and kinds of demands on readers. I then turn to an analogue of the vulnerability of reading found in the act of prayer as drawn out by Jean-Louis Chrétien. Chrétien articulates prayer as a wounding event, paralleling it to the wounding and blessed outcome of Jacob's wrestling with a divine visitor on the banks of the Jabbok. My exploration of the analogue of a wounding reading to a wounding prayer culminates in Bonaventure's account of St. Francis's receiving the stigmata—where the mystical seraphic vision pierces St. Francis's heart and flesh. In the dissertation's concluding chapter, I return to readers by identifying five kinds of reading wounds that also bless in their wounding; these are wounds that humiliate, implicate, resonate, overflow, and haunt readers.

The Act of Reading

Throughout this dissertation, I have been suggesting that the paratactic style present in O'Connor's fiction and biblical Hebrew narrative makes tremendous demands on readers. Namely, readers must infer meaning—often surprising, even shocking—from a bare bones text that moves quickly, and sometimes violently, from one narrative action to another. To reflect on the theological significance of this kind of spare narrative event

for readers, I now turn to Wolfgang Iser's account of reading. Iser provides a framework for understanding what occurs in the act of reading. Significantly, Iser points to the interpretive work and risk required when readers confront gaps that require filling in a story. In what follows, I present a summary of Iser's contribution to understanding how reading impacts those who engage in it.

Discovery stands at the center of Iser's exposition on the reading event.[6] In agreement with the well-known conception of the fusing of horizons in Gadamerian

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[6] In his essay sarcastically titled "There is Nothing Inside the Text, or, Why No One's Heard of Wolfgang Iser," Michael Bérubé argues that Stanley Fish has dismantled any beneficial contribution of Iser's critical theory (cf. Michael Bérubé, "There Is Nothing Inside the Text, Or, Why No One's Heard of Wolfgang Iser," in *Postmodern Sophistry: Stanley Fish and the Critical Enterprise*, ed. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004], 11–26). Bérubé points to Fish's critique of Iser's distinction between the determinacy and indeterminacy of a text's meaning (cf. Stanley Fish, "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," *Diacritics* 11 [1981]: 2–13). In the review, Fish notes that the reason Iser lacks any notability in literary theory is that he fails to fall into one of the two reputable camps: the subversionists (to which Derrida and Fish himself belong) and those who "fight the good fight against the forces of deconstructive nihilism" (to which Hirsch and Booth belong) (Fish, "No One's Afraid," 2). Fish faults Iser for not making clear the determinate/indeterminate distinction, i.e., what qualifies as a given of the text, what is a gap to be filled, and how one arbitrates and authorizes one from the other ((Fish, "No One's Afraid," 12). Bérubé identifies Fish's critique against Iser as functioning within Fish's methodology: "The denial of determinate meaning, the insistence on the ubiquity of interpretation, and the antivoluntarist, strong-constructionist account of 'communities' that constrain any individual's activity of interpretation: these are features of nearly everything Fish has written after 'Interpreting the Variorum,"' the 1976 essay in which Fish announced his turn to the fully Kuhnian position that every ostensibly obvious "feature" of texts is actually produced by interpretation" (Bérubé, "Nothing Inside Text," 17). Bérubé finds Fish victorious over Iser in this disagreement because Fish identifies the closest thing to a fixed fact as the social and communal interpretive influence, not some determinate fact found within the fabric of the text itself.

This back-and-forth between Iser and Fish echoes an earlier encounter between Iser's professor, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jacques Derrida. The event known as "The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter: Paris 1981" is documented in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds. [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989]). Derrida's central critique of Gadamer's hermeneutics centers on the possibility for misunderstanding which, ironically, one scholar of the "encounter" deems to be the precise place of disagreement between the two great men: "The so-called encounter of Gadamer and Derrida strikes one as a classic instance of non-communication…neither really making substantial contact" (Richard J. Bernstein, "The Conversation That Never Happened [Gadamer/Derrida]," *The Review of Metaphysics* 61 [2008]: 577). Bérubé, similarly, sees in Iser's response to Fish, an extreme misconstrual of Fish's position (Bérubé, "Nothing Inside Text," 16). The reason I cite these two disagreements is that both Iser and Gadamer fall somewhere in the no-man's land Fish identifies as lying between the deconstructionists and traditionalist. Iser recognizes the need to fit into one of Fish's two categories as problematic: "When intelligent men take sides, it is not necessarily the case that one group is right and the other wrong. A new framework of thought can embrace the rightness of both sides without seeking to reconcile the incompatible. I do not assume that all my predecessors (and contemporaries) in this field are incompetent, and if my theory appears to be 'influential without being

hermeneutic theory, Iser argues that meaning arises from the engagement of the reader with the text, for "it is in the reader that the text comes to life."[7] The act of reading, then, is a "dynamic happening" where the text effects a response by the reader.[8] This dynamism produces a certain indeterminacy of meaning because meaning arises in the act of reading, not as an inert and static meaning that must be excavated from the text.

Iser's dynamic description of the reading event provides a helpful framework for understanding the impact of a particular reading experience on readers. For if reading is in fact an event that involves and affects readers, stories can create a transformative event for their audiences, potentially like the transformative experience of a story's protagonist. Iser identifies the implied or fictional reader as the location where readers and characters meet, the implied reader resides in the text and "prestructures the role" to be assumed by real readers.[9] The real-life readers are anticipated in the text by the fictional reader

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controversial', perhaps this is because it includes *truths* from various sides" ("Talk like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish," *Diacritics* 11 [1981]: 82–3). While some like Bérubé seek to explain why no one has heard of Iser, the solid fact remains that Iser's influence, like Gadamer's, continues to exert important sway on the understanding of texts and readers —albeit more quietly than the likes of Fish or Derrida. Eulogizing Iser in 2007, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan celebrates Iser's "groundbreaking intellectual trajectory," noting how Iser turned the limits of human interpretation into opportunities for "plurality and productivity in reading" (Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, "Wolfgang Iser -- In Memoriam," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and History of Ideas* 5 [2007]: 141–144). Iser's contribution to the dynamism in reading is seen in my appropriation of his theory when considering the impact of O'Connor's style on her readers.

[7] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980): 19. Iser describes these two horizons as two poles, where one pole is the artistic text created by the author and the other is the aesthetic experience, which is the realization of the text in the reader (Iser, *Act of Reading*, 21). Within the artistic pole are four perspectives (narrator, characters, plot, and fictitious/implied reader) that are brought together through the standpoint of the reader as she merges these divergent perspectives into a singular reading experience (Iser, *Act of Reading,* 35).

[8] Iser, *Act of Reading,* 22.

[9] Iser, *Act of Reading,* 34. Not all readers of Iser are convinced by his proposal of the implied reader as a structural element of fiction. In the same publication year of *Act of Reading*, Wayne Booth, author of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, posed questions related to the implied reader as construed by Iser. (Wolfgang Iser, "Interview," *Diacritics* 10, no. 2 [1980]: 57–74). Booth argues that Iser fails to personify both implied author and reader, so that the text is left void of "matters like laughter, tears, fear, horror, disgust, joy, and celebration." These responses allow for the implied reader to doubt as often as they believe the events of

similarly to the way a work of art is created with the anticipation of being seen or a piece of music being heard. Importantly, meaning does not reside in the mind of the fictional reader; instead, the fictional reader provides a vantage point from which real readers can discover something fresh, even unexpected, within a story. In an earlier work, Iser describes the role of the implied reader within the text as the invitation for real readers to suspend belief and enter into a story's foreign world: "As the reader is maneuvered into this position, his reactions—which are, so to speak, prestructured by the written text—bring out the meaning of the novel."[10] Summarily, the implied reader resides in the text as a pre-structured, potential agent for meaning-making. This potential agency is taken up by the real reader who actualizes meaning.

Different kinds of stories invite different kinds of interpretive work for readers. Iser contrasts the sort of engagement available in a didactic work such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* to a more paratactic work such as Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, we find a work that diverges from the epic style by creating characters that are like readers with concrete and relatable stories. This

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the narrative (67). Booth asks Iser, might it be possible that the implied reader—the "reader-in-the-text"—functions in the dual roles of pretender and skeptic (67–68). Booth makes this proposal because if the implied reader is in fact a "reader," then it makes sense that she would experience the text like the real reader—who simultaneously pretends the narrative is real, while recognizing she is reading fiction (68). Iser responds to Booth's critical question concerning the double effect of implied readers by noting that personification should and does occur in the text, but this bringing of the personal to the text arises from real readers, not anything inherent in the text. Thus, the relationship between the implied author (and reader) and the real reader is "all the more powerful [in contrast to an encounter with a person] as we have not encountered him in person but in a text-guided, though self-produced, image; the subsequent affective reaction something which we have produced ourselves may then account for the laughter, tears, fear, horror, etc., which Professor Booth mentioned" (69). Iser agrees that there is a double-effect in reading—belief and doubt—but that this play exists within real readers for the implied reader is merely a literary device that real readers take up in the reading event (70).

[10] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 32.

relatability allows Bunyan to aid the readers in seeing the condition of their own souls in the act of reading. Unlike Bunyan, Fielding's novels demand a level of participation by the reader that is absent in Bunyan's story. Fielding includes gaps in his work that both raise the awareness of the reader and require active participation for a complete "realization" of the text.[11]

While Iser's reading of Bunyan might be contested, his observations about the opportunities for involvement based on the style of the work prove helpful. Iser's contrast between the didactic style of Bunyan and the paratactic style of Fielding reveals the impact of literary style on the act of reading. In the next section, I explore the vulnerability involved in the reading event. In identifying spare narratives as requiring more active involvement of the reader, Iser sets the stage for more vulnerable and demanding reading experiences. The implied or fictional reader provides a built-in device for actual readers to suspend belief and enter an unknown fictional world. The kind of space made available for the implied reader (e.g., more gaps gives the implied reader, and in turn real readers, more opportunities for engagement), thus enlivening the experience of real readers in the act of reading. Different kinds of stories demand different kinds of actions on the part of readers.

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[11] Iser, *Implied Reader*, 35. Iser uses an example from *Joseph Andrews*, wherein the protagonist Joseph must resist the seduction of his late master's wife, Lady Booby, Iser writes: "Lady Booby leads on her footman [Joseph], whom she has got to sit on her bed, with all kinds of enticements, until the innocent Joseph finally recoils, calling loudly upon his virtue. Instead of describing the horror of his Potiphar, Fielding, at the height of the crisis, continues: 'You have heard, readers, poets talk of Surprise….You have seen the face, in the eighteen-penny gallery….could you receive such an idea of surprise as would have entered in at your eyes had they beheld Lady Booby when those last words issued out from the lips of Joseph. "Your virtue!" said the lady, recover after a silence of two minutes; "I shall never survive it!"' As the narrative does not offer a description of Lady Booby's reaction, the reader is left to provide the description, using the direction's offered him" (Iser, *Implied Reader*, 37–38; Iser is citing Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* [Everyman's Library] [London, 1948], I, 8: 20).

On the Vulnerability of Reading

Iser emphasizes the dynamism between text and reader. This reading event "creates the impression that we are involved in something real."[12] Unlike a subject before an object of study, the text invites exploration rather than investigation. Iser adopts the language of a traveler to describes the exploratory nature of the reading event: "it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the *adventure* the literary text offers him."[13] Readers take on a "wandering viewpoint" as they travel within the text: "the reader's position in the text is at the point of intersection between retention and protension. Each individual sentence correlate prefigures a particular horizon, but this is immediately transformed into the background for the next correlate and must therefore necessarily be modified."[14] Readers wander through the text, with their expectations continually modified and reworked as they read the story. Through this backward and forward action of reading, readers bring the story alive through their participation in meaning-making. This dynamic event entangles readers in the story they are reading. Iser points to the fact that often readers feel the impulse to talk about what they have just read, "not in order to gain some distance from them so much as to find out just what it is that we are entangled in."[15] So, readers not only produce meaning through their participation in a text but are themselves meant to be

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[12] Iser, *Act of Reading*, 67. Using J.L Austin's criteria for a successful speech-act—1) "common conventions" between speaker and hearer, 2) "procedures accepted" between the two parties, and 3) willingness to participate—Iser explores the conditions that make possible a believable reading event (Iser, *Act of Reading*, 69). While willingness lies wholly on the side of readers, the conventions and procedures for reading are first provided by the text and accepted by readers through their participation.

[13] Iser, *Implied Reader*, 282, italics added.

[14] Iser, *Act of Reading,* 111.

[15] Iser, *Act of Reading,* 131.

transformed through their reading. This idea likely comes as no surprise to those of us who have been unable to shake off the haunting effect of a scene or a story we have read, such as the massacre of a family on the side of the road in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" or the epic quest of brave hairy-footed hobbits in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings.*

Readers' entanglement in and with the text produces a form of vulnerability. Iser emphasizes the unique form of vulnerability in readers of literature. This particular experience centers on the kind of imagination required for reading. Unlike a movie or a theatre production where the characters are present to the naked eye, characters in literature are mentally imaged through the descriptive data of the narrative. Different kinds of imaging produce different effects: "Our mental images do not serve to make the character physically visible; their optical poverty is an indication of the fact that they illuminate the character, not as an object, but as a bearer of meaning. Even if we are given a detailed description of a character's appearance, we tend not to regard it as pure description, but try and conceive what is actually to be communicated through it."[16] Readers are not simply reconstructing a character in their head as a one might create an avatar online. Instead, readers construct mental images of characters as agents of communication.

This need for mental imaging of characters is only one aspect of the complex imaginative work required in the act of reading. Iser identifies the information gaps in a story as the place where readers produce something new in their reading. He distinguishes between two kinds of gaps in a text: blanks and negations.[17] Blanks are

[16] Iser, *Act of Reading*, 138.

[17] Iser, *Act of Reading*, 182.

simple gaps in the storytelling that require readers to fill-in; e.g. O'Connor never tells us about Hazel Motes's height so we must assign a height as we build a mental image of Haze as he stands atop his car preaching. Negations, on the other hand, function as points of tension in the narrative where the unfamiliarity of some aspect of the text pushes us to harmonize the world of the text with our own.[18] O'Connor's use of the grotesque serves as a quintessential example of this kind of negative tension in the text. The grotesque strains the expected and accepted ways of being in the real world. Between blanks and negations, the push-and-pull of the reading events is clear: even as readers fill-in blanks of a text, they are pulled out of their previous, often comfortable positions and forced to reckon with something unfamiliar through negation.

Iser's description of the effect of negation parallels Rowan Williams' description of art as dispossession. We saw in Chapter Two how Williams describes art as having the potential for making the world strange. Art more generally, and here with Iser, literature more specifically, calls us out of everyday experiences to engage imaginatively with new knowledge and insights that returns us to the everyday, transformed.

Within this schema, parataxis places extraordinary demands on readers because of the ample number of blanks and negations through which readers must navigate their way through a story. Paratactic narration moves quickly from event to event without modifying clauses, in stories filled with narrative gaps and without causal connection. Readers of paratactic narration are faced more frequently and more intensely with the

[18] Iser categorizing gaps as either blanks or negations partially maps onto Sternberg's distinction from Chapter Four between blanks and gaps. For both Iser and Sternberg, blanks provide less opportunities for creativity on the part of readers. Recall, Sternberg goes further than Iser in designating blanks as moments of narrative silence that are of little interest to the reader and do not require investigation to unveil more of the whole truth of a story. Iser's negations, on the other hand, function similarly to Sternberg's gaps where both are textual silences that draws readers deeper into the story.

tension of wrestling with what is left unsaid in the narrative.[19] Readers of spare stories face frequent moments that require the constructive work of gap-filling and the uncomfortable work of mediating the relation between the world of the story with the real world. In turn, readers are readily faced with the awareness of their own limits as they are required to infer meaning from a narrative that offers little clue as to what is occurring in the unnarrated portions of a story. At the same time, parataxis offers abundant opportunities for readerly involvement so as to make a story come alive. Whereas a more didactic and hypotactic form of storytelling enables readers to stand outside the text, taking in the information the narrative provides. Parataxis, by contrast, places readers squarely in the midst of the text, requiring readers to fill in the unnarrated portions of the fictional world and narrative events. In the next section, I explore how the heightened demands of readers of paratactic narration functions specifically in O'Connor's narrative style.

Readers of Flannery O'Connor

Iser's insistence on the participatory nature of reading—where both the text and readers are transformed through the reading event—returns us to the focus of this dissertation: the effect on readers of O'Connor's paratactic narrative style. Throughout this project, I have explored the distinctive style of O'Connor's storytelling and paralleled it to the spare narrative style of Hebrew narrative to draw out its unique

[19] I am not implying that gaps and blanks in a text equate to a paratactically narrated story; there are gaps and blanks in many narrative styles apart from parataxis. Instead, I am suggesting that paratactic narration *qua* spare narration necessarily features gaps that require filling. This is precisely the excessive demands Caroline Gordon accuses O'Connor of placing on her readers. O'Connor, in Gordon's view, is asking readers to fill in too much information, to do too much work, to arrive at a believable, satisfactory (and perhaps self-satisfied) reading of her stories.

quality. Before exploring the theological impact of O'Connor's use of parataxis, I will first restate its distinctive nature.

O'Connor writes paratactically. Her stories are filled with straightforward descriptions that often lack dependent clauses to draw out characters, landscape, and actions. As we saw in Chapter Five, O'Connor's sparely narrated scenes echo the use of the *wayyiqtol* in biblical Hebrew narrative, where stories unfold with a series of clauses that create the effect in English of back-to-back sequential clauses (e.g., "and he walked…and he went…and he spoke"). This skeletal narration is precisely what O'Connor's writing mentor Caroline Gordon continually critiqued. Gordon attributed this stylistic choice to immaturity and laziness. The content of the O'Connor archives reveals that, while O'Connor embraced many of Gordon's recommended changes, she never fully accepted Gordon's urging for her to create more dependent clauses to help the reader along.

Specifically, in parallel readings of Gen 32 and *Wise Blood*, the effect on readers of sparely narrated moments of conversion speaks to the power of the style itself. Readers are moved through the climactic scenes of Jacob and Hazel's conversion at a rapid pace—leaving readers overwhelmed with the swift turn of events. Because O'Connor presents the essential scenes in such a spare form, readers are left to infer precisely what occurred in the climactic moments. In Iser's language, the abundant blanks must be filled before the scene can be satisfactorily understood.

O'Connor's stories are not only sparely narrated, but the narration itself often carries with it a violent force. O'Connor narrates gruesome and morally unsettling events that fall squarely on readers without any adornment to soften the blow. As we have seen,

Rowan Williams describes the narrative force of O'Connor stories as communicating "the terror of being aware of reality in the light of God."[20] O'Connor's spare and often unnerving stories require extensive readerly involvement. They are asked to fill in gaps most decisively in the climactic moments of her narrative, as they are made to ask: Is God here? Is this how God's grace could (or should) work?'

O'Connor challenges her readers, as do few other writers, to confront the possibility that reality illumined by God is truly terrifying. I propose that the reading posture demanded by paratactic narration, particularly when narrating this divinely-illumined reality, shares features with the kind of vulnerability and potential wounding found in contemplative prayer. Hans Urs von Balthasar describes prayer as a posture deeply rooted in the character of the human person: "Man is the being created as hearer of the Word, and only in responding to the Word rises to his full dignity.… His inmost being is readiness, attentiveness, perceptiveness, willingness to surrender to what is greater than he."[21] As in reading, so in prayer: they both require both the passive stance of reception and the active stance of response.

Wounding Prayer

The analogous posture of reading spare narrative and praying is aptly illumined by Jean-Louis Chrétien in his essay "The Wounded Word: The Phenomenology of

[20] Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Harrisburg, PA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 121.

[21] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (NY: Paulist Press, 1967), 18–19.

Prayer."[22] There he argues that without prayer there would be no religious dimension for humanity because, "[i]f we are unable to address our speech to God or the gods, no other act could intend the divine."[23] Through prayer, or even the possibility of prayer, the human person makes herself vulnerable to a realm that is both invisible and intangible. Chrétien notes that in prayer the possibility of theophany, the manifestation of God in the world, must first begin with a kind of "anthropophany, a manifestation of man."[24] That is, prayer begins with a recognition of the limits of the human person. Prayer is that liminal place in which the finite and fallen realm of the human opens to the limitless and perfect realm of the divine. Prayer reveals the essential nature of the human, precisely because it attends to the transcendent.

The Vulnerability of Prayer

Chrétien stresses the vulnerability of prayer: "This act of presence puts man thoroughly at stake, in all dimensions of his being. It exposes him in every sense of the word *expose* and with nothing held back."[25] Making clear that he is not speaking figuratively, he continues: "[prayer] concerns our body, our bearing, our posture, our gestures, and can include certain mandatory preliminary bodily purifications such as ablutions, vestimentary requirements such as covering or uncovering certain parts of our body, bodily gestures and movements such as raising the hands or kneeling, and even

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[22] Jean-Louis Chrétien, "The Wounded Word: The Phenomenology of Prayer," Dominique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate* (NY: Fordham University Press, 2001): 147–175.

[23] Chrétien, "The Wounded Word," 147.

[24] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 150.

[25] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 150, italics his.

certain physical orientations."[26] The effect of prayer—in its vulnerable exposure to the Divine Other—is rooted in the vulnerability of all communication. Elsewhere, Chrétien refers to this vulnerability in speech as "the naked voice" (*la voix nue*), which makes communication—most notably the communication of divine promise—possible.[27] Prayer, then, not only makes us aware of our own limits as humans but also places us in a posture of exposure, of vulnerability, of nakedness.

Chrétien identifies the wounding effect of prayer in two significant ways. First, prayer opens the self to Another. The inner stability of self-communication gets jolted out of its normal state by making space for God: "in prayer is the first wound of the word: the yawning chasm of its addressee has broken its circle, has opened a fault that alters it. An other is silently introduced into my dialogue with myself, radically transforming and breaking it. My speech spills back over me."[28] Chrétien identifies this kind of speech as being singularly different than the speech we might utter aloud or hear addressed to us

[26] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 150. Later in the essay, Chrétien refers again to the body in prayer. He points to the fact that the voice is inherently enfleshed and that vocal prayer cannot be separated from the physical reality of the human person. This inherent connection between the body and vocalization of prayer is why the purity of the body in certain rituals is not separated from the purity of the prayer (168).

[27] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *La Voix Nue: Phénoménologie de La Promesse* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990), 7. Chrétien expounds on this idea of nakedness when he writes: "La nudité de la voix, nous exposant corps et âme à l'être, sans retour, frappe depuis toujours et pour toujours d'impossibilité la transparence, l' adéquation, la plénitude, la perfection, la parousie. Devancée, défaite, elle l'est en elle-même, et c'est là ce qui la fait, en toute parole, promettre, promettre ce qu'elle ne peut tenir." In "Wounded Word," Chrétien pushes back against a likening of prayer to a person speaking to himself. To be in self-dialogue, Chrétien insists, not only stands in distinction from prayer, but does violence to how we understand the phenomenon of prayer by conflating the speaker and the hearer. In prayer, there is always an other. In self-talk, there is only the singular "you" (Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 151). The language of nudity stresses this point: to stand before another naked—metaphorically or actually—creates an entirely different effect than staring at one's own reflection in a mirror. Whether the experience is positive or negative, seeing oneself in a solitarily vulnerable posture is unlike the experience of standing before another person. In this distinction, Chrétien is pushing back against Kant and Feuerbach, both of whom liken prayer to talking to oneself (Chrétien, "Wounded Word, 151).

[28] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 153.

because it is wholly addressed to a Divine Other who is radically unlike ourselves. The word uttered in prayer is uttered *to* God but does not inform or modify God in any way; instead, we are shown to ourselves in prayer: "To ask of God, that is, to carry out in words an act of demanding, is, by speaking to him, to say something about him and at the same time something about ourselves. *We are made manifest to ourselves in manifesting ourselves to him*."[29] Prayer possesses something of a boomerang effect in that what we send out in our utterances to God also come back at us with, in Chrétien's words, "sudden force."[30] The radical otherness we encounter in prayer creates a kind of unadulterated speech, where the rebounding effect of prayer brings our speech to God back on to ourselves:

> This act of a word wounded by the radical alterity of him to whom it speaks is pure address. It does not speak in order to teach something to someone, even if it always says something about ourselves and the world. It confides to the other what the other knows, and asks of him what he knows we need. Not even for a single moment is the word separate from the ordeal; it is undergone by and through itself, both by what it says and by what it does not succeed in saying and

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[29] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 153. In the opening of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin stresses the need to look away from ourselves and towards God in order to gain self-knowledge: "it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself. For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity. Convinced, however, we are not, if we look to ourselves only, and not to the Lord also —He being the only standard by the application of which this conviction can be produced…If, at mid-day, we either look down to the ground, or on the surrounding objects which lie open to our view, we think ourselves endued with a very strong and piercing eyesight; but when we look up to the sun, and gaze at it unveiled, the sight which did excellently well for the earth is instantly so dazzled and confounded by the refulgence, as to oblige us to confess that our acuteness in discerning terrestrial objects is mere dimness when applied to the sun. Thus too, it happens in estimating our spiritual qualities. So long as we do not look beyond the earth, we are quite pleased with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue; we address ourselves in the most flattering terms, and seem only less than demigods. But should we once begin to raise our thoughts to God, and reflect what kind of Being he is, and how absolute the perfection of that righteousness, and wisdom, and virtue, to which, as a standard, we are bound to be conformed" (Calvin, *Institutes*, I.1.2).

[30] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 153.

> by him to whom it speaks. It itself learns from this ordeal, and this is why this wound makes it stronger, all the stronger as it will not have sought to heal it.[31]

Prayer thus transforms the pattern of internal self-knowledge by introducing a conversation partner unlike any other conversation partner into our most interior spaces. This vulnerable exposure wounds us in our egoism, our self-deceptions, and our ignorance. Prayer wounds through a disruption that transforms our utterances to God into a new kind of utterance to ourselves.

The second wound, flowing from the first, centers on the dispossession required in prayer. This dispossession returns us to the idea of prayer as exposure, as naked speech. Chrétien uses the biblical imagery of Moses before God to draw out this particular wounding effect: "Moses responds to God that he does not know how to speak, and this is often the Prophets' first response to their vocation—that is to say, the very place where they hear it."[32] Moses hears the voice of God concurrently with the recognition of the feebleness of his own voice. Chrétien extends this image to St. Paul when he writes in Rom 8:26 that he does not know the right way to pray. This awareness of what we are called to alongside the awareness of our own lack produces a blessed kind of palindrome: "This is the circularity of prayer: the man praying prays in order to know how to pray, and first of all to learn that he does not know how, and he offers thanks for his prayer as a gift from God. One can be turned to God only in praying, and one can pray only by being turned to toward God."[33] Prayer radically equalizes all those who pray, because not knowing how to pray is inherent to the act itself and yet at the same

[31] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 175.

[32] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 157.

[33] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 157.

time we are gifted with the ability to pray. One cannot properly pray unless one dispossesses oneself of confidence that in prayer one knows what one is doing. Desire to pray, not technique, makes prayer possible.

Chrétien uses Kierkegaardian language to describe this paradox: “only a leap makes us enter into this circle [of prayer].”[34] There is an instability in prayer, but this instability is precisely what makes the act of praying so efficacious: “[t]he circle is not an absurd circle: it refers to the event of encounter.”[35] The result of this encounter is a kind of “inner violence” where we battle with the “dumbness in us.”[36] Chrétien describes the rigorous battle of prayer within oneself: “The true prayer is a struggle with God where one is victorious in the victory of God.”[37] Prayer wounds because it is a kind of defeat, dispossessing us in order to give victory to God. Our victory in prayer is, paradoxically, also our defeat.[38]

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[34] Chrétien, “Wounded Word,” 157.

[35] Chrétien, “Wounded Word,” 158.

[36] Chrétien, “Wounded Word,” 158.

[37] Chrétien, “Wounded Word,” 158.

[38] In *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity*,’ (Cambridge: CUP, 2013) Sarah Coakley argues that desire stands at the center of understanding the human person before God. Desire, rooted in the Trinitarian life, directs all human desire to its proper end, participation in the divine life (6). Echoing Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux (among others) as insisting on love as rightly ordered to its proper *telos*, Coakley argues that all human desire, when properly ordered, is understood primarily through a desire for God. Asceticism stands at the center of a proper understanding of human desire, for asceticism makes space for the Holy Spirit to chasten any perversion of desire away from its proper end (11). Coakley writes: “the Spirit progressively ‘breaks’ sinful desires, *in and through* the passion of Christ” (14, italics hers). In tandem with ascetic practices, Coakley sees a “commitment to prayer…[as the] willingness to endure a form of naked dispossession before God” (19). Coakley’s naming of prayer as naked dispossession echoes her discussion of contemplation in an earlier work, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), where she explores contemplation through the lens of St. John of the Cross’s dark night of the soul as well as the passive ecstatic visions of medieval female mystics (ch. 2). Coakley emphasizes here that contemplation has everything to do with reordering the disordered desires within the contemplative, a set of acts involving both an activity and passivity on the part of the one who prays. The necessary passivity and vulnerability of the

Chrétien links the dispossession in prayer to the vulnerability of a lover's speech: "In collapsing beneath him, prayer, like all lovers' speech, bears the weight of giving itself, that is to say, of losing itself. It suffers the other in coming unstuck from itself."[39] Prayer, like any utterance of love, is an action of self-giving. This language of intimacy and vulnerability echoes the long tradition of the mystics who liken the act of coming before God in the liminal space between where human and divine meet to consummation of the bridegroom and the bride.[40]

The language of bearing the weight of another to become unstuck from oneself evokes the image, once again, of Jacob's wrestling with the man on the banks of the Jabbok river. In this scene of wrestling and wounding, Jacob becomes "Israel"—a naming that transforms Jacob from able-bodied trickster to a limping, yet great patriarch—through defeat. Jacob becomes unstuck from himself and available to something blessedly new through wounding. Chrétien compares the travail of the prayer event to "struggling like Jacob all night in the dust to wrest God's blessing from him" and the wounding of prayer to "[Jacob's] keeping the sign of a swaying and limping by which [his] speech is all the more confident as it is less assured of its own progress."[41] Jacob's defeat that night is also his victory. Like Jacob, we are meant to wrestle with God in

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contemplative—exemplified in the female mystics—often gets ignored in considerations of what contemplation requires of us and transforms in us.

[39] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 161.

[40] O'Connor largely avoids nuptial imagery in the blessed woundedness of her character, lest the implied and actual reader reduce the event to Freudian terms. Only in "Greenleaf" are there any such erotic hints. Even there, as in Teresa of Avila, the divine penetration occurs in the chest, not the loins.

[41] Chrétien, "Wounded Word," 175.

prayer—to suffer the Other so as to make room for something divinely gifted within ourselves.

Like Jacob's limp, the wounding effect of prayer paradoxically strengthens the one who prays through weakness and defeat.[42] Chrétien's reference of unhealed wounds recalls his distinction discussed in Chapter Two concerning two kinds of wounds: wounds that heal and wounds that do not and should not. Chrétien notes that many wounds heal over and that those scars serve as reminders of a wounding event, but there are also wounds that "must not heal" because they reflect a level of intimacy gifted that one would not want to lose.[43] Shelly Rambo, in *Resurrecting Wounds,* refigures how we might understood the scene where disciple Thomas encounters Christ's wounds in order to emphasize the particularity of his wounds with the help of trauma theory, noting that "the return of Jesus reveals something about *life in the midst of death*. If we take the line between death and life to be more porous, as the context of trauma suggests, then resurrecting is not so much about life overcoming death as it is about *life resurrecting amid the ongoingness of death*."[44] This reconfiguration of resurrection, Rambo continues, "marks a distinct territory for thinking about life as marked by wounds and yet recreated through them." Later, exploring the significance of St. Macrina's scar, Rambo notes that her wound served as a testimony that "God was here," which does not fade because the

[42] In a further parallel, St. Paul's words to the Corinthian church in 2 Cor 12:9 illuminate the weakening and paradoxically strengthening work of grace: "but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." (NRSV).

[43] Jean Louis Chretien, "How to Wrestle with the Irresistible" in *Hand to Hand* (NY: Fordham University Press, 2003), 2.

[44] Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017), 7, italics hers.

“mark remains on the body as a sign of healing; it is a mark produced not by an internal wound but by its exterior witness.”[45] Rambo’s notion of resurrecting wounds aligns with Chrétien’s idea of unhealed wounds, since both speak of God’s ongoing albeit painful presence. Wounds that must not heal are the wounds that make us stronger through defeat, like Jacob—now Israel—whose limp does not lessen as he lives the rest of his life blessed by God.

St. Francis of Assisi’s Blessed Wounds

This image of prayer as a wound that must not heal recalls another kind of blessed wound, notably received by St. Francis of Assisi (c.1181–1226) as recollected by Bonaventure in *The Life of St. Francis* (*Legenda Maior*).[46] St. Francis’s stigmata mark a turn in medieval mystical experience from the spiritual to the physical realm, where the spiritual mystical experience imprints itself physically onto the body.[47] To receive the stigmata is to receive on one’s own body the marks of crucifixion that Christ received on the cross and retained with his resurrected body. In the preface to his account of St. Francis’ life, Bonaventure extols St. Francis’s receiving of the stigmata,

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[45] Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 47.

[46] Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis* in *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (NY: Paulist Press, 1978), 177–327.

[47] Arnold I. Davidson, “Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or How St. Francis Received the Stigmata,” trans. Maggie Fritz-Morkin, *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 451–52.

Of course, an opposite turn away from this medieval outlook occurred during the modern era. Sander Vloeburg notes this shift in “Wounding Love: A Mystical–Theological Exploration of Stigmatization,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77 (March 2016): 1–29. Vloeburg traces the development of modern medicine and the shift of pain from something purgative to something to be avoided (6). This shifts an account of the stigmata from a mystical encounter to a psychosomatic ailment or self-inflicted wound. The result of this shift was a kind of “battlefield” with the demythologization of the stigmata on the part of the scientific community and the exploitation of the stigmata on the part of the Church to align them with dogmatic claims (9).

irrefutable testimony of truth
by the seal of the likeness of the living God,
namely of Christ crucified,
which was imprinted on his body
not by natural forces or human skill
but by the wondrous power
of the spirit of the living God.[48]

In the stigmata, Bonaventure recognizes the mark of deification where the human becomes perfected by participating in the divine life. Jesus Christ, as archetype and first fruit of perfected humanity, evidences his perfection in the cruciform image. In Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey into God* (*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*), he describes the mystical ascent from the world of the senses into the divine life as necessarily passing through Christ for "Christ is the way and the door / Christ is the ladder and the vehicle."[49] The Christ Bonaventure images here is the crucified Christ, as Bonaventure summons his readers to see "him hanging upon the cross."[50]

Two years before his death, Francis received the stigmata. His stigmata aptly illustrate the relationship between wounding and blessing, vulnerability and prayer. Bonaventure depicts Francis's transformation through the crucified Christ's superabundant love. Bonaventure describes Francis praying on a mountainside at the start of a day when suddenly a Seraph—fitting the description of Is 6:2, but with wings aflame—appears in front of him. Enclosed in the Seraph's wings was "the figure of a

[48] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 182. Ewart Cousins, translator of *The Classics of Western Spirituality* collection of Bonaventure's writings, notes in his foreword that he has broken up the more poetic lines of Bonaventure's writing in "sense lines where this seemed appropriate," which takes on—as in this passage—the appearance of poetic verse (xx).

[49] Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God* in *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis*, 111, VII.1.

[50] Bonaventure, *Soul's Journey*, 112, VII.2.

man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross."[51] Bonaventure details Francis's response to this vision: "When Francis saw this, he was overwhelmed and his heart was flooded with a mixture of joy and sorrow. He rejoiced because of the gracious way Christ looked upon him under the appearance of the Seraph, but the fact that he was fastened to a cross pierced his soul with a sword of compassionate sorrow (Luke 2:35)."[52] Overcome both by the sorrow and joy at this Seraphic vision, Francis understood that to be Christ's beloved is "to be totally transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified, not by the martyrdom of his flesh, but by the fire of his love consuming his soul."[53] Bonaventure goes on to describe the effect of this event on St Francis:

> As the vision disappeared, it left in his heart a marvelous ardor and imprinted on his body markings that were no less marvelous. Immediately the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet just as he had seen a little before in the figure of the man crucified. His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the center by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner side of the hands and the upper side of the feet and the points on their opposite sides. The heads of the nails in his hands and feet were round and black; their points were oblong and bent as if driven back with a hammer, and they emerged from the flesh and stuck out beyond it. Also, his right side, as if pierced with a lance, was marked with a red wound from which his sacred blood often flowed, moistening his tunic and underwear.[54]

Bonaventure captures this scene with vivid imagery that draws out both the love-inducing vision of the Seraph with the cross-fixed Christ and the visceral description of the physical agony involved in receiving the stigmata.

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[51] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis,* 305, XIII.3.

[52] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis,* 305, XIII.3.

[53] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis,* 306, XIII.3.

[54] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis,* 306, XIII.3.

Ilia Delio, in *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ*, stresses Bonaventure's emphasis on the deification of the human as involving the necessity of the whole person—the outward body and inward ensouled creature—as being in union with the crucified Christ.[55] In Bonaventure's journey of the soul and Francis's reception of the stigmata, Delio connects the image of union in *Soul's Journey* to Francis's stigmata recorded in *Life of St. Francis*: "Bonaventure views union with Christ as the power of the Spirit that both impresses and expresses.… In describing the Stigmata, he states that Francis was both 'inwardly inflamed and outwardly marked' indicating the Francis was both impressed by the burning love of Christ and expressed this love in his own flesh."[56] Here, Delio highlights the inherent relationship in Francis's mystical experience between the outward and inward realities of divine love. The pinnacle of Francis's mystical vision unites and integrates the invisible and intangible love of God with the visible and physical wounding of the flesh.

At the close of Bonaventure's description of Francis's stigmata, he notes that "sacred blood often flowed [from the wound on his side], moistening his tunic and underwear."[57] Bonaventure reiterates this point when discussing how Francis would try to hide his wounds and, most especially, concealing the wound on his side with clothing.[58] Bonaventure declares that this wound in particular continued to give him pain and never ceased to bleed: "Francis always wore underclothes that would reach up from his armpits

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[55] Ilia Delio, *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Media, 1999), 80.

[56] Delio, *Crucified Love*, 80.

[57] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis,* 306, XIII.3.

[58] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 310–311, XIII.8.

to cover the wound on his side … the friars who washed these [underclothes] or shook out his tunic from time to time … found these stained with blood."[59] Bonaventure describes Francis's wounds as never fully healing; in fact, it seems the wound on his side was minimally healed, if at all. These wounds are the wounds Chrétien refers to as wounds that *must* not heal from Chapter Two, wounds that mark the dangerous gift of intimacy with God. Like Jacob, like Haze, Francis's stigmata wounds him in its blessing. The effect of the divine and human encounter marks and wounds the blessed individual.

Conclusion

This chapter began with O'Connor's plea that God bring her dead desire to life. O'Connor's prayer imagines this resurrecting of desire in her to be marked by suffering akin to the corroding and consuming effect of cancer. Her terrifying request is marked onto her stories when God's grace appears to her protagonists with violent and overwhelming force. Through an examination of Iser's description of what occurs in the event of reading and how the vulnerability of the reader more generally is intensified in the case of paratactic narration, I have shown the entanglement of readers with the stories rightly read. As with the personal entanglement inherent in good reading, I explored the spiritual and bodily entanglement inherent in prayer that wounds even as it blesses. I also suggested that stories about characters who are blessedly wounded might also wound and bless their readers. In the next chapter, I conclude the study of the dissertation by first

[59] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 311, XIII.8.

summarizing the work as a whole and then offering the significance of theologically imagining the impact of paratactic literary style.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Narrating Blessed Wounding and Wounded Blessing

In the chapel of the Parisian church of Saint-Sulpice stands a painting by nineteenth-century painter Eugène Delacroix. It features Jacob wrestling with an angel.[1] The painting foregrounds the wrestlers, with a deserted landscape looming behind, and with weapons and Jacob's outer clothing piled in front of them. The very edge of the Jabbok river shimmers in blue from one side of the painting, while the other side captures the scene of the gifts being sent to Esau ahead of his estranged brother Jacob's visit; the herders and servants take no notice of the remarkable wrangling scene occurring on the riverbank. The production of this painting became an antagonistic experience for Delacroix, as the work unexpectedly occupied twelve of the last fourteen years of his life. Like Jacob, Delacroix did not anticipate the solitary struggle that would result in both exhaustion and grandeur. Jean-Louis Chrétien, reflecting on the transferred impact of the subject matter of the painting onto its creator, comments, "in the very year in which the work was finished, Delacroix imagines himself dying at his task, in front of an unfinished, unfishable work … but in the end he too became Jacob, and his wounds a blessing."[2] The events of Gen 32's wrangling and blessing capture in literal terms the

[1] You can find an image of this painting under public domain: https://uploads3.wikiart.org/images/eugene-delacroix/jacob-s-fight-with-the-angel-1861(1).jpg!HD.jpg

[2] Jean-Louis Chretien, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (NY: Fordham University Press, 2003), 7–8.

entanglement of wounding and blessing, which resonates well beyond the event itself: often a great gift—of a blessed new name or work of art—comes at great cost.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation begins (Chapter Two) and ends (Chapter Six) with the theological claim that sometimes blessings wound in their bestowing. The chapters between these theological book-ends (Chapters Three–Five) explicate the spare style of two kinds of stories that narrate protagonists receiving blessed wounds. My central argument of this dissertation is that biblical Hebrew narrative and Flannery O'Connor's fiction, in their employment of often grotesque action narrated in paratactic form at its climactic moments, fittingly capture the theological contention that God's blessing sometimes wounds as well. In recognizing the connection between spare narrative style and the theological relationship between wounding and blessing, readers not only gain an appreciation for the parataxis found in these stories but are also offered an invitation through their reading to experience their own blessed wounding event.

In the Chapter One, "Introduction," I introduced the stylistic and thematic relationship between biblical Hebrew narrative and Flannery O'Connor's fiction in their mutual use of parataxis. Parataxis, evidenced in the narrative function of the *wayyiqtol* in Hebrew narrative and the quintessential bare-bones narration of O'Connor's work, conveys the unfolding action of a story through simple and straightforward prose without abundant causal or modifying clauses. While the form is straightforward, navigating paratactic narration often proves difficult because of the many interpretive gaps that require filling on the part of readers. Alongside their shared use of parataxis, biblical Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's fiction also narrate moments of divine grace breaking

into human events. In this chapter, I introduced the idea that there is a kind of similitude between spare narration and narratives of God's revelation in the world.

In Chapter Two, "Wounding and Blessing: The Artistry of Illuminating 'Reality in the Light of God,'" I argued two related claims: 1) the integrity of a work of art to convincingly communicate reality—things seen and unseen—and 2) artistically rendering "reality in the light of God" is often terrifying and violent because God's blessing often also wounds. On the integrity of art, I employed Jacque Maritain's Thomistic conception of art—to which O'Connor herself ascribes. Maritain argues that in order for an artist to create a work of art that effectively communicates reality as it-is requires sensual observation of the world and creative imagining of how to render the unseen realities through sense description. As seen in Rowan Williams' discussion of O'Connor's uses excessive moments (i.e., the grotesque) in her fiction communicating the possibility of divine grace in the world, Williams argues that rendering "reality in the light of God" requires artistically pointing to rather than explicitly narrating the event. Finally, I grounded the idea of effectively communicating divine grace in the created world in the theological relationship between wounding and blessing as Jean-Louis Chrétien discusses. Using the image of Jacob's wrestling on the banks of the Jabbok, Chrétien argues that often the ephemeral act of God's blessing is accompanied by the wounding of the blessed. At the close of this chapter, I set up the remainder of my dissertation with the claim that artistically depicting God's wounding blessing often fittingly comes in the spare narration found in biblical Hebrew narrative and O'Connor's fiction.

In Chapter Three, "A Defect in Style? Caroline Gordon and Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*," I began an investigation of literary style in Hebrew narrative and

O'Connor's fiction that continues into Chapters Four and Five. In Chapter Three, I made use of published and unpublished archive material to trace the literary relationship between Caroline Gordon and O'Connor. Critic and author Gordon served as O'Connor's writing mentor for all her published material. In Gordon's letters and editorial notes on draft stories, she continually advices O'Connor to render more explicitly the scenes of her stories—most notably in their climactic moments. Making use of one of the more extensively commented stories of O'Connor, I analyzed a *Wise Blood* draft to demonstrate that while O'Connor applied many of Gordon's revisions to the final published edition, she never ceased to make excessive demands on her readers through her employment of skeletal narration in the central scenes of Hazel Motes's conversion. I surmised that O'Connor's spare style was rendered not out of naïveté or laziness, but a deliberate choice on her part. Even in the later—often attributed as more "mature"—works O'Connor continues to sparely narrate her climactic scenes and Gordon continues to lament this choice.

In Chapter Four, "Biblical Poetics and the Paratactic Style of Narration," I turned from O'Connor's narrative style to the inner-working of biblical Hebrew poetics. In this chapter, I used Gen 32's account of Jacob's wrestling with the angel-man to demonstrate how the *wayyiqtol* creates a sparely narrated story that often gets glossed over in translation. This chapter set the stage for illuminating O'Connor's paratactic style in Chapter Five, "Gen 32 and *Wise Blood*: The Wounded Victor and Blinded Convert," where I transposed the characteristic *wayyiqtol* from Hebrew narrative onto the climactic scenes of *Wise Blood*. I demonstrated the way skeletal narration pocketed with gaps

requiring interpretive filling aptly narrates both patriarch Jacob's and street-preacher Hazel's inner conversions and outer deformations.

Finally, in Chapter Six, "Blessed Wounding: Paratactic Style and the Act of Reading," I shifted the focus from the characters in these spare stories to the readers of them. This chapter constructively draws together the earlier chapters on blessed wounds and sparely narrated stories through Wolfgang Iser's description of the reading event. Iser argues that all stories place interpretive demands on readers wherein they must vulnerably involve themselves in the reading event to produce meaning. Notably, Iser contends that more paratactic stories require greater demands and risk for readers. Reading is itself an adventure, and reading spare stories is an adventure of a more dangerous sort. I introduced the analogue of vulnerability in prayer to draw out the stigmatizing effect of reading sparely narrated stories of wounding and blessing. The sparely narrated stories of wounding blessing in O'Connor's fiction and Hebrew narrative invite readers into their own encounters of blessed wounding.

Significance of the Work: Blessed Wounding and the Act of Reading

Introduction

Analogous to wounding prayer, a certain kind of reading event can make us vulnerable to wounds that bless. Namely, in reading paratactic narration—as we find in biblical Hebrew narrative and Flannery O'Connor's fiction—the need for inferring meaning in the ample narrative gaps puts readers at risk. Paratactic narration that envisions "reality in the light of God" makes its readers vulnerable to several reading wounds that serve also to bless them. In what follows, I outline five distinctive reading

wounds that are made possible through the kind of paratactic narration found in O'Connor's corpus; these are wounds that humiliate, implicate, resonate, overflow, and haunt. These wounding reading events also offer a blessing to readers. Like the play of wounding and blessing in the stories of Jacob, St. Francis, and Hazel Motes, readers are invited into an act that can result not only in a deeper understanding of a story's showing of divine encounter, but also a real encounter with divine grace.

Readings Wounds: Humiliate

First, some reading wounds humiliate. When Chrétien describes the wounding effect of prayer, he emphasizes the imbalance of the encounter in a word spoken to God. To speak a word to a divine Other is to speak to a being radically different than ourselves. We, finite and fallen, place ourselves before God, infinite and perfect, and await a response. That vulnerability of encounter is also found in the reading event. As seen in Iser's description of the act of reading, interpreting a text is always an adventure of inference where the story is taken up by our imaginations. Gap-filling is part of all reading events, but paratactic narrative with its lack of causal connections and rapid narrative pace places greater demands on readers to fill the gaps within a text. The demanding nature of paratactic reading can be viewed as too challenging for modern readers, as Caroline Gordon asserts regarding O'Connor's narrative style. This challenge, as I have argued, is what gives O'Connor her distinctive narrative voice and impact. To combine Chrétien's and Iser's thoughts, we might say that paratactic narration both places us at the limits of our understanding while simultaneously requiring abundant imaginative work to bring the narrative world to life. Paratactic narration forces an

awareness of our limits and places great demands on us at those limits to infer and produce meaning.

This paradoxical demand, all the while revealing our inadequacy, pushes readers towards a posture of humility. Readers are humbled in reading the difficult stories that make up O'Connor's corpus because rarely can one "capture" the meaning of a story in all its complexity through an initial, or even repeated, read-through. Further, the demands and revelation of epistemic limits when reading paratactic narration can produce a more drastic effect than a posture of humility—it can *humiliate*. While humbled readers modestly recognize their own limits, humiliated readers stand overpowered in the face of their inability to fill the gaps of a story sufficiently and satisfactorily. Consider young Bevel in "The River," a boy who drowns himself in order "to count" (CW, 165) by baptizing himself fully into the river to find the Kingdom of God. Then there is nine-year-old Mary Fortune meeting her end at the hand of her 79-year-old grandfather strangling her and bashing her head repeatedly against a rock at the close of "A View of the Woods." These kinds of stories can push readers beyond wrestling with the paradoxical grotesque images of redemption via images of stolen wooden limbs and gorging bulls into antagonistic readings that never cease to confound and evade satisfactory interpretations. The humiliation of recognizing our own limits as readers invites a kind of limitless surrender before God. As in prayer, the humiliating wound of reading invites a posture of dispossession where we invite God into our defeat so that he might be victorious.

Reading Wounds: Implicate

Second, some reading wounds serve to *implicate*. This kind of wound might well be most familiar to careful readers of biblical and modern literature. As we read stories, we both identify and distinguish ourselves from the characters we imagine and entertain as we read. This kind of narrative encounter is distinctive because, as Iser emphasizes, we take up the narrative data and image a world. At one point, Iser describes this need to image the world in order to occupy it as a kind of "optical poverty" that requires readers to "illuminate the character, not as an object, but as a bearer of meaning."[3] Watching movies or theatre performances does not produce this kind of poverty because the image is given to us, the character as an object stands virtually or actually before us. Literature does not give us this image, so we must image the characters in such a way that requires our involvement in not only imagining an action but also the subject who acts.

The result of this kind of imaging produces a distinctive indwelling within the narrative: "because it has no existence of its own and because we are imagining and producing it, *we are actually in its presence and it is in ours*."[4] We must occupy the narrative world in a way more immediate and intimate than some other kinds of artistic encounter, because we provide some of the material for the narrative world and its characters in order for it to exist at all. While all literature requires this kind of imaging, spare narration demands greater personal investment both imagining and indwelling a fictional world. Further, when a character morally fails or intellectually stumbles, paratactic narration does not give us much in the way of a character's motive or

[3] Iser, *Act of Reading*, 138.

[4] Iser, *Act of Reading*, 139, italics added.

perception of the event, nor of the narrator's judgment of the action. Readers of spare narrative are left to infer meaning of characters that we were intimately involved with imaging in the first place. This produces a double-edged reading effect: confrontation with a character's failings and the possibility of our own. The characters we have played a part in creating do wrong or foolish things, and we as readers are left to infer why these characters would do such an action or speak such a word. Rather than simply seeing ourselves reflected in characters, we are much more intimately involved—we are present, in some way, in them, which makes us more vulnerable to being *implicated* by their actions. Consider the two key figures in "A Good Man is Hard to Find": the grandmother and the Misfit. In both the overly proper, prideful, and short-sighted woman as well as the intelligent, violent, and nihilistic man, we discover a bit of ourselves. Despite the seeming contrast between those two characters, by the end they find common ground in their disbelief and we are exposed to the possibility of our own. We are *implicated*.

Reading Wounds: Resonate

Third, some reading wounds resonate. Often, fictional worlds resonate with actual worlds. Earlier, I explored Iser's insistence on the entanglement of reading where despite readers' needs to "suspend" belief in order to occupy another world, the entanglement of readers with the fictional story necessarily impacts how readers see their own real world.[5]

[5] I use scare quotes around the language of suspending disbelief, because I do not wish to suggest that reading fiction is a suspension of our capacity for reason (in fact, I want to argue the opposite). In his exceptional essay "On Fairy-Stories," J.R.R. Tolkien rejects the notion of the "'willing suspension of disbelief" as describing the act of reading (*The Tolkien Reader* [NY: Ballantine Books, 1986], 60). Tolkien argues that the moment readers feel they must suspend disbelief, the enchantment of indwelling a story is removed and readers are left "looking at the little abortive Secondary World from the outside" (60). A good story-teller creates a fictional world that enchants readers, making the fictional world true and not make-believe (60–61). Tolkien's insistence on the enchanted fictional world resonates with Iser's language of the

Such a necessary involvement of readers in bringing stories to life does not allow them to sit at a safe distance far from being impacted themselves by the story.

As was evidenced in Chapter Two, paratactic narration fittingly narrates "the terror of being aware of reality in the light of God."[6] For readers of stories like O'Connor's, which are concerned with this kind of terrifying awareness, their entanglement with the stories they inhabit does not allow for a safe distance between their perception of the fictional world and its resonances in their actual one. When readers perceive characters who violently resist grace "because grace changes us and the change is painful" (HB, 307), they are confronted with the possibility that such grace—the radical and unexpected moments of the in-breaking of the infinite and perfect God into the finite and imperfect human world—might also take on a terrifying and pain-inducing quality. Possibly the most pointed moment of God's grace breaking-in through perverse and painful action is found in O'Connor's second novella, *The Violent Bear It Away* where the drugging and rape of Francis Marion Tarwater serves as his impetus for accepting his prophetic call. The fictional reality of *a* world illumined by God resonates in the reality of *the* actual world created, persevered, and consummated in God. It is precisely this resonance of worlds—fictional and real—that leads us to ask of O'Connor's often excessively violent narrations of encountering grace: Could this be how God's revelation works in the world? What would it take for me to recognize the

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participation required for readers of literature. Readers occupy a posture of entanglement, not laboratorial observation, to produce sufficient meaning from a story.

[6] Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Harrisburg, PA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 121.

good work of God in a perverse world? Could this be how I would respond when confronted with the terrifying reality of grace?

Reading Wounds: Overflow and Haunt

The particularly intense entanglement of readers of paratactic narration results in an effect that often lingers well after the reading event. In a 1970 review of *Mystery and Manners*, Miles D. Orvell begins by commenting that O'Connor's literary style leads readers through stories "like a dumb witness" where a reader "has had the experience—he is sure of that—but he has missed the meaning."[7] While this statement succinctly summarizes the confrontation of our limits when reading O'Connor's fiction, it also names the wider experience of all reading events. In fact, the *experience* of reading, any and all reading, is precisely what Orvell aims to capture when discussing the way critics must approach O'Connor's work. Building off O'Connor's own claim that discovering a story's meaning is about experience of it rather than abstraction from it, Orvell writes: "*Experience meaning.* That is what has been missing from most discussions of O'Connor's works, as, all too often, one senses a critical faculty cut off from the resources of the whole person."[8] Deriving meaning from O'Connor's stories comes about only through readerly entanglement in her fictional world, for good or ill

John D. Sykes Jr. highlights that, for O'Connor, the effect of her storytelling carries with it a force that impacts readers in a particularly violent fashion: "O'Connor intends readerly violence to all her readers, believers and unbelievers alike, not excluding

[7] Miles D. Orvell, "Flannery O'Connor," The Sewanee Review 78 (1970): 184–85.

[8] Orvell, "Flannery O'Connor," 191–92.

herself. For, ultimately, she hopes to precipitate an act of reading that is itself a kind of *imitatio Christi*, or more accurately, an *imitatio crucis*."[9] Sykes goes on to clarify why violence—for both characters and readers—plays such a central role. Violence ties in to three central theological principles for O'Connor: the centrality of the body in human salvation, the importance of suffering as seen in the tradition of monastic asceticism, and the conception of evil as *privatio boni*.[10] Sykes uses the image of Hazel Motes at the close of *Wise Blood* to evidence the theological underpinnings of violence, for Haze's asceticism reflects the role of the body in his salvation and the centrality of physical suffering to confront and expunge the evil within him. Haze's ascetical practices are understood as imitating Christ to become like him in suffering and death.

The result of a narrative style that aims to produce an *imitatio crucis* reading experience leads to the final two reading wounds I wish to explore: wounds that overflow with love and wounds that haunt. To speak of a reading experience as imitating not only the life, but the crucifixion of Christ returns us to St. Francis's seraphic vision. Bonaventure describes the experience of this vision as causing St. Francis to be filled with "joy and sorrow."[11] This vision of Christ crucified remains with and transforms St. Francis for the remaining years of his life. His stigmata are an exemplary case of *imitatio Christi, imitatio crucis*. Paratactic narrative invites its own wounding and blessing event akin, in some way, to the reception of the stigmata. Readers can receive their own wounds of love in reading, as they fill in the paratactic gaps and infer their painfully

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[9] John D. Sykes Jr., *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and the Aesthetic of Revelation* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2007), 44.

[10] Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation*, 45.

[11] Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, 305, XIII.3.

redemptive implications. This occurs when, like St. Francis, the vision of Christ crucified wounds with an overflow of love that “imprints” the beholder with the vision beheld. This wound of overflow, of excessive love, recalls Chrétien’s language of prayer being like a lover’s speech, where the language of love for another dispossesses the speaker of his or her own power. It is the speech of self-giving, like the cruciform vision of self-giving. The excessive involvement of the reader of paratactic narration involving the possibility of divine grace leaves readers vulnerable to their own seraphic vision, where they encounter not only their own limits or character flaws but the radical demonstration of love in Christ crucified.

Reading O’Connor’s skeletal and rapidly paced stories leaves readers dizzied at a story’s end. Often, this dizzying effect is not a positive one. It is not uncommon to find reader, who when asked whether they have encountered any of O’Connor’s stories, respond with furrowed brow or pursed lips, declaring that they have read her stories and are unsure what to make of their seemingly unnecessary violence. The spare quality of these stories does not help those looking for explanation for the inclusion of violence, lacking explanation for why the grotesque acts appear where and when they do. Of course, this spare quality of O’Connor’s fiction combined with excessive and violent scenes is also what makes her fiction both powerful and memorable. Often, the attitude towards the haunting effect of O’Connor’s writing style serves as the dividing line between fans and foes of O’Connor’s work.

The undeniable quality of O’Connor’s fiction is that these stories stick with readers, for good or ill. Because the narrative style of the stories places such rigorous demands on readers, the involvement with and effect of the stories stay with readers long

after the reading event. Scenes such as Haze with a bucket of quicklime in hand or the grandmother reaching for the Misfit in a desperate act of solidarity, only to have him shoot her three times in the chest, leaving her crumpled on the ground looking like a dead child, linger with readers. They recall not only the scenes themselves, but also the interpretive struggle involved with the grotesque characters and events. The haunting effect of O'Connor's fiction is captured narratively in "Parker's Back" just after Parker receives Christ's face tattooed on his back: "The artist took him [Parker] roughly by the arm and propelled him between the two mirrors. 'Now *look*,' he said, angry at having his work ignored. Parker looked, turned white, and moved away. The eyes in the reflected face continued to look at him—still, straight, all-demanding, enclosed in silence" (CW, 670, italics hers). All the more do these kinds of moments haunt readers when they carry with them the earlier reading wounds of humiliation, implication, resonance and/or encounter with the crucified Christ. What O'Connor declared about the Misfit as he may eventually recall the grandmother's saving gesture can also be said of her readers: her stories will become like a great crow-filled tree in their minds.

Theological Imagination and Paratactic Narration

My exploration throughout this dissertation of the crippled victor Jacob and blinded convert Hazel displays two protagonists who know well the effect of blessed wounds. This blessed wounding extends out from the narrative art itself and puts readers at risk of their own wrangling and transformation. Analogous to the artist laboring over his work in the image of Delacroix wearily working away on his painting for twelve years, readers engage these sparely narrated stories as an event—a participation of readers with the text that requires their creativity and vulnerability to produce a credible

interpretation of the story. This dissertation has dealt with sparely narrated stories, specifically with biblical Hebrew narrative and Flannery O'Connor's fiction as they are stories concerning (often uninvited) divine grace breaking into the created order of things. To narrate grace effectively and believably is difficult. An examination of the spare style of these narratives of grace reveals the role style plays in meaning. Grace hypotactically rendered runs the risk of saying too much about an event veiled in mystery. Paratactic narration, as in the apophatic theological tradition, recognizes how speaking in negation and leaving room for silence, opens up meaning rather than shutting it down. In a theological reflection on Shūsaku Endō's *Silence*, Makoto Fujimura observes how the authorial choice to withhold narrative information often leads to frustration on the part of readers: "The author's [Endō's] attempt to communicate nuanced truth about a God who is greater than propositions … is often met with a demand to clarify."[12] Like Endō, the biblical writers' and O'Connor's employment of parataxis, notably in narrating transformative grace, resists demands to render grace clearly and explicitly. Therein, paratactic narration fittingly renders the terrifying and splendid moments when God illumines reality.

[12] Makoto Fujimura, *Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 49.

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