1988

"Words Moving Secretly Toward Some Goal of Their Own": The Rhetorical Use of the "As If" in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor

Kellie Renee Rayburn

"WORDS MOVING SECRETLY TOWARD SOME GOAL OF THEIR OWN": THE RHETORICAL USE OF THE "AS IF" IN THE FICTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English Composition

---

by

Kellie Renee Rayburn

May 1988

"WORDS MOVING SECRETLY TOWARD SOME GOAL OF THEIR OWN": THE RHETORICAL USE OF THE "AS IF" IN THE FICTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

---

by

Kellie Renee Rayburn

May 1988

Approved by:

[redacted] _____ 6-7-88

Jennifer Randisi, Chair, English Department Date

[redacted] _____

Bruce Golden

[redacted] _____

Harold Hellenbrand

ABSTRACT

In an effort to reach readers who do not share her strict Roman Catholic beliefs, Flannery O'Connor employs a number of persuasive devices. Prominent among those devices is her rhetorical use of the "as if" construction. As a theoretical joining of the "reality" of this world with the "unknown" of the supernatural, the "as if" introduces "mystery," a vital part of the reader's experience with any of O'Connor's fictional works. By closely examining O'Connor's various uses of the construction in her short stories, the "as if's" differing effects on the reader become apparent. These effects are further demonstrated by a reader-response analysis of O'Connor's novel, Wise Blood. Highlighting O'Connor's use of this rhetorical device provides insight into one of the many ways in which she reaches readers she might otherwise alienate and encourages them to consider concepts and occurrences they might otherwise deem implausible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> "I will admit to certain preoccupations with belief and with death and grace and the devil" (Jubilee 35).

For those familiar with her writings, these words of Flannery O'Connor approach comic understatement. Christianity is not merely a motif, a theme or the recurring content of her fiction, it is its "raison d'etre." This is not a new phenomenon, as any literary scholar of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is likely to attest. It is, however, relatively strange, some might even say anachronistic, in twentieth century fiction. And yet, in the twenty-five years since her death, Flannery O'Connor's popularity has grown immensely; all of her fiction is currently in print, she is the subject of numerous books and articles and is now regularly included in fiction anthologies. What can be the reason for so much attention in an age so obviously removed from the orthodox Catholic belief to which O'Connor was devoted and by which her fiction was so deeply influenced?

Easy explanations come to mind: perhaps we are not as "Godless" as we think we are, or we are led to writers like O'Connor in search of answers--hearkening back to an earlier time when religion was a more obvious provider of them; maybe, the thought that O'Connor's writings are "religious" in nature never crosses most reader's minds and her works

are read merely because they are entertaining. A more likely explanation, and one that this paper serves to underscore, lies not so much in what O'Connor had to say, but in how she said it. In O'Connor's rhetoric lies her success and her importance. It is not that she is entertaining in spite of her message, it is that she manages to convey her message in such a way that the reader is drawn into the story instead of repelled, compelled to self-reflection instead of dismissal and, ultimately, persuaded to view the world of the story in O'Connor's terms rather than the reader's own.

Those terms do not include the dogma of any orthodox faith. Although she was a Catholic, very few of her stories and neither of her novels deal with Catholicism per se. She wrote:

> The problem of the novelist who wishes to write about [the God of orthodox belief] is how he shall make the experience--which is both natural and supernatural--understandable and credible, to his reader. In any age this would be a problem, but in our own, it is a well-nigh insurmountable one. Today's audience is one in which religious feeling has become, if not atrophied, at least vaporous and sentimental (Mystery and Manners, hereafter MM 161).

She made this experience "understandable and credible" by focusing on the anagogical manifestations of grace and mystery instead of cataloging sin or thinly veiling dogma. She saw fiction writing as "a matter of getting across the reality of grace," (Habit of Being hereafter HB 290) and

believed that it is "the moment of grace that makes a story work" (HB 465). Grace can come in O'Connor's fiction in any number of guises: it is at work when The Misfit shoots the grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and when Mr. Head and Nelson encounter the battered statue in "The Artificial Nigger," and it manifests itself in Tarwater's rape in The Violent Bear it Away. For O'Connor, grace operates in an atmosphere of "mystery," or that which we cannot know. She thought that if she could engage her readers in that mystery, she could make them not only accept the manifestations of grace, but acknowledge and perhaps explore the anagogical level in her fiction--and perhaps elsewhere.

Because she was acutely aware of the chasm that her beliefs placed between her and the majority of her readers, O'Connor was perhaps more concerned than most writers with the concept of audience:

> When I write a novel in which the central action is a baptism, I am very well aware that for a majority of my readers, baptism is a meaningless rite and so in my novel I have to see that this baptism carries enough awe and mystery to jar the reader into some kind of emotional [my emphasis] recognition of its significance. To this end I have to bend the whole novel--its language, its structure, its action. I have to make the reader feel, in his bones if nowhere else, that something is going on here that counts" (MM 162).

In using all of the tools at her disposal, O'Connor was extremely conscious of language. She knew she could not "tell" her readers anything; they would not listen. What

she could do was "show" her readers--not with the exalted actions of enlightened characters or visions of happiness and contentment that stem from some form of faith--rather, subliminally by exacting a visceral reaction from them. And she knew that she could do this with the subtleties of language--what she called "words moving secretly toward some goal of their own" (qtd. in Kessler, 19).

This use of language took several forms: the convincing dialect that she employed in her dialogue, description so vivid as to create images both comic and terrifying, shifts in tone that move the reader from comedy to seriousness and sometimes to reverence, and the frequent and pointed rhetorical use of metaphor.

It is precisely this use of metaphor--considered under its broader definition and therefore intended to include simile--with which we are concerned here, for metaphor was O'Connor's primary means of reaching her reluctant audience. It was the rhetorical device that she used in her fiction to bring Georgia dirt farmers, backwoods prophets, and self-possessed old women together with the supernatural and spiritual, those concepts which so concerned her and which were so central to her writings.

The Key to Mystery: O'Connor's Rhetorical Use of the "As if"

> The fiction writer is looking for one image that will connect or combine two points; one is a point not visible to the naked eye, but believed in by him firmly, just as real to him, really, as the one that everybody sees" (MM 42).

Any competent writer of fiction uses metaphor not merely in order to decorate but in order to increase and enhance the reader's experience with a given text. Lakoff and Johnson write:

> Metaphors are basically devices for understanding and have little to do with objective reality, if there is such a thing. The fact that our conceptual system is inherently metaphorical, the fact that we understand the world, think and function in metaphorical terms, and the fact that metaphors cannot merely be understood but can be meaningful and true as well--these facts all suggest that an adequate account of meaning and truth can only be based on understanding (184).

Writers of fiction use metaphor to communicate the "meaning and truth" of their works to their readers. However, because meaning and truth are subjective and individual, the author can only hope to impress his or her own meaning and truth upon readers whose meaning and truth will almost certainly be different. In O'Connor's case, meaning and truth were fixed in religious belief. Metaphor became the most effective rhetorical device O'Connor used to persuade her readers to consider those beliefs. Because of its importance to the concept of "showing" rather than

"telling," metaphor is essential to the rhetoric of fiction; the reader resists being "told" that her own ideas might be somehow insufficient. In her use of metaphor, particularly the "as if," O'Connor could persuade readers to consider, accept and perhaps believe actions and events that they would not consider if they were given the same information in declarative statements.

Metaphor is not only useful to the author as one of many available persuasive devices, it is also useful to the reader--it is "one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices and spiritual awareness" (Lakoff 193). Thus, if O'Connor could not meet her readers on spiritual or religious grounds, she could meet them on metaphorical grounds--required both by the author as an implement of communication and as a rhetorical device and accepted by the reader as a means by which to interpret and understand. This brings us to O'Connor's most frequent and overt rhetorical use of metaphor, the "as if" construction.

During the mid 1980's, KCBS news in Los Angeles employed as their motto, "We still treat news as if it mattered." The station's intended implication was clearly that, at other stations in Los Angeles, "news" had become secondary to sports, weather, entertainment, and various other banal pursuits with which local news tends to fill its

air time. But, at KCBS, "news" was still the most important element of their broadcast. What many people understood, however, was that news did not matter anymore but, in order to uphold some journalistic responsibility, KCBS would pretend that it did. Why was the message implied not the message inferred? At what point did the rhetorical breakdown occur? It took place with the introduction of the "if." KCBS did not say, "As news matters, we will treat it that way" or "We will treat news as we treat other things that matter." Instead, they added a conditional and proposed to treat news only "as if" it were important, the implication obviously being that it is not.

What is the "as if" and how can it carry such rhetorical weight? Hans Vaihinger writes:

> ...what is implied by the combination of particles, 'as if,' 'als ob,' 'wie wenn,' etc? First, clearly a comparison. Thus the curved line, to take the special case, is treated 'as' a series of infinitesimals; here we have the first comparative apperception, the curved line being apperceived by means of the conceptual concept of the infinitesimal. But this comparison is then modified by the 'wenn' and the 'ob.' It is, of course, not a simple comparison, not a mere trope, and yet it is not a real analogy; in other words, between a rhetorical comparison and actual equivalence (91-92).

While KCBS meant to suggest an "actual equivalence" they also included the element of "rhetorical comparison" with something they intended to be understood as factual. The result was that their motto not only lost its effectiveness, but its message components were subverted and the opposite

of the intended message achieved.

Understanding how the use of "as if" can confuse the relationship between implication and inference makes it seem an unlikely stylistic and rhetorical device for a writer intent on imparting a message to her readers. One must, however, remember that the content of O'Connor's message is the presence of mystery and the workings of divine grace within that presence and not some objective sacramental vision. Precisely because her intent was to engage her readers in mystery, to go beyond the literal to deeper and, she hoped, anagogical levels of meaning, the "as if" suited her needs precisely.

Vaihinger writes that "Between the 'as' and 'if'...a whole sentence lies implied" (93). For O'Connor the "as" and the direct analogy that it implies represent an approximation of some earthly reality. Everything concrete that we come in contact with in our day-to-day existence can be described in terms of something else: "His hands were as cold as ice"; "I have a splitting headache"; "The sunset was an explosion of color." For O'Connor, this level of being is not only concrete, but also understandable and explainable. On the other extreme, the "if" represents the divine order of being--conditional not because there is a question about its existence, but because we do not know and we are unable to know how it works, exactly what it is and how it manifests itself. This inability to know is what

comes between what "is," meaning what is understandable (the "as"), and that which we cannot know (the "if"). This is O'Connor's mystery, what she defined as "What is left after everything else has been explained" (qtd. in Walters, 2).

Her strategy then becomes to subject the reader to that mystery, to make the reader accept, if only in terms of the story, that it exists, that there are things we cannot know and that those things have to do with a higher order of being. The "as if" subjugates the reader by "breaking his spirit, severing his ties with others, and sending him into temporary exile" (Kessler 112). Without the "as if" O'Connor's fiction would be regional, or perhaps she would be considered merely a "Catholic writer," or "local colorist." The "as if" adds the universal to her stories. They transcend regional and religious boundaries in that we are all subject to mystery because it is what none of us can know. This construction opens her writing to interpretation by creating the kind of compaction of language found in poetry. This compaction broadens not only the possible interpretations of that language, but also expands and deepens the possibilities of meaning in the fiction itself.

O'Connor creates a scaffolding which reinforces the "as if" by using an omniscient narrator. Subjective narrative suggests that the narrator's perspective may somehow alter actual events before they reach the reader; it suggests that we are vulnerable to the rhetoric of that narrator.

Omniscient narration suggests an objective accounting of events because the narrator has access to all available information and, being uninvolved, has no interest in coloring our perception of those events one way or another. Therefore, when the narrator subjects us to the varying ambiguities of the "as if," we realize that the narrator either does not know the truth or will not reveal it.

This narrative ambiguity provides the atmosphere in which the reader confronts O'Connor's varying uses of the "as if." These uses include both individual metaphors which affect the reader in different ways and the placement of the construction--sometimes clustered, sometimes omitted--within a given work. These different applications of the "as if" represent O'Connor's strategies for dislodging her readers and relocating them within the mystery of her fiction.

O'Connor uses the "as if" at the level of individual metaphor in four basic ways:

DESCRIPTION: The "as if" is used in order to help the reader, usually by introducing some pointed image or referring to some commonly shared experience or emotion, generalize and "understand" what is taking place in the work: "Hiram pulled Bailey up by the arm **as if** he were assisting an old man" (Complete Stories, hereafter CS, 128); "Whenever she counted her blessings she felt as buoyant **as if** she weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds instead of one hundred and eighty" (CS 497); "Being there ten years,

the Pittses had got to feel **as if** they owned the place" (CS 236). We can easily picture or understand these things because they are things that we have seen or felt.

Descriptive clauses are also sometimes used to comic effect: "She entered with a little smile **as if** she was going into a drawing room where everyone had been waiting for her" (CS 410); "Mr. Head demonstrated the ice water cooler **as if** he had invented it" (CS 256); "He had an expression of serious modesty on his face **as if** he had just raised the dead" (CS 151). In these passages the "as if" connects a standard description with a comic one in order for us to see the given character in a humorous light.

O'Connor also uses the descriptive "as if" to reinforce the preconceived notions a reader may have about characters and situations in her works, in fact to set the reader up by helping to assure his or her response so that the intended effect is achieved when she later undermines the reader's assumptions: "The boy made a face **as if** he could handle a nigger" (CS 252). We have already seen "the boy," Nelson, to be tough-talking, and prone to exaggeration of his experiences in the city and his knowledge about blacks in an effort to "out do" his grandfather. The "as if" in this description leads the reader to believe initially that Nelson probably could "handle a nigger." However, the "as if" also opens up onto doubt. Somewhere in the reader's conscious is entered the fact that O'Connor did not say

"because," making his ability a fact, or "like," which introduces the comparison that follows as, if not a one-to-one correlation, at least a possibility. Again, a simple description derails the reader's sense of what is and what is not in the story.

A second description, "He looked at the six of them huddled together in front of him and he seemed to be embarrassed **as if** he couldn't think of anything to say" (CS 127), also performs different functions. First, it reinforces our image of The Misfit, a notorious killer, as a bit reluctant in his role, strangely polite, and perhaps possessing a sense of mercy which will be activated at some point in the story. Second, we automatically know the look of individuals who are embarrassed because they have nothing to say. There is, conceivably, a shuffling of the feet, a shrugging of the shoulders or an aversion of the eyes. We have seen people in this situation and we have been in this situation ourselves. The metaphor has helped us visualize the scene. However, because it was set up with the "as if," we must also ask, why? Why "**as if** he couldn't think of anything to say"? Does this mean that he knows what to say and refuses? Or, does he "seem" (we are not even sure of this) embarrassed for some other reason? We are not given enough concrete information to understand the situation fully; we are lost in its mystery.

In "Revelation," we read, "The girl raised her head and

directed her scowl at Mrs. Turpin **as if** she did not like her looks" (CS 490). Our initial impression of a girl previously described as "fat," "scowling," and reading a book entitled Human Development has been reinforced. It seems natural that such a person might scowl at Mrs. Turpin simply because she does not "like her looks." Yet, we are left to wonder whether she has a nasty disposition or whether she scowls for another reason. As a result of the doubt that the "as if" plants in our minds, we are not surprised but rather feel that a just and somehow necessary action has occurred when the girl ends up throwing her book at Mrs. Turpin and yelling, "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog" (CS 500). Moreover, because we can accept this action as just, we are better prepared to accept the moment of grace and self-realization to which it leads.

While ostensibly revealing a situation or an image to the reader, using descriptions that sometimes approach cliche in their universal application, O'Connor is, in actuality, obscuring what is taking place. We see that there is no cliche here and that the experiences she describes are not necessarily universal. We expect the omniscient narrator to describe objectively, but the use of "as if," even in such a standard way as to introduce a description, shows us that we are at the narrator's mercy. We must submit to her for illumination as to what is actually taking place within a specific piece of fiction--as

to what is "true."

Foreshadowing: With these comparisons, O'Connor plants in the reader's mind a feeling, as opposed to an idea, of what is to come within the story. The more familiar one becomes with O'Connor's work, the more easily discernable these "as if" clauses are as devices of foreshadowing. However, even first-time readers should "sense" that they are being prepared for some eventuality.

Some of these "as if's" work subtly as precursors of eventual turns of plot, like the description in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" of the black woman on the bus who will eventually pummel Julian's mother with her purse: "She carried a mammoth pocketbook that bulged throughout **as if** it were stuffed with rocks" (CS 415). We do not actually suspect that the purse is full of rocks, but this description lodges it in our minds as being somehow "weapon-like." The same kind of foreshadowing is also used in "A View of the Woods" to describe the reactions of the grandfather as he becomes progressively alienated from his granddaughter: "His heart, whenever he knew the child had been beaten, felt **as if** it were slightly too large for the space that was supposed to hold it" (CS 344); "His heart felt **as if** it were the size of the car and it were racing forward" (CS 353); and finally, "his heart expanded once more with a convulsive motion. It expanded so fast that the old man felt **as if** he were running as fast as he could with

the ugly pines toward the lake" (CS 356). Clearly, we are meant to see from the beginning of the grandfather's troubles that he will die of a heart attack, and O'Connor has used "as if" to plant this idea in our minds.

Other "as if" clauses foreshadow less subtly, as does this description of Mrs. May in "Greenleaf," well before she is gored by a lunging bull: "she felt **as if** some violent force had broken out of the ground and was charging toward her" (CS 316). Once more, we are not necessarily tempted to take this description as a literal one, but neither can we completely forget it. Vaihinger writes:

> In the conditional clause something unreal or impossible is stated, and yet from this "unreality" or "impossibility" inferences are drawn. In spite of its unreality or impossibility the assumption is still maintained. It is regarded as an apperceptive construct under which something can be subsumed and from which deductions can be made.
> (Vaihinger 92-93)

Because of the "as if" construction, we are encouraged to hold onto these images, to allow them to ferment in the backs of our minds and to intoxicate our expectations of what is to come.

O'Connor also uses the "as if" to foreshadow the spiritual revolutions which her characters will undergo when they are confronted with their moments of grace. Before Asbury's powerful experience with the descending Holy Ghost, we learn that "He felt **as if** he were a shell that had to be filled with something but he did not know what" (CS 377-78).

By asking us to view Asbury as an empty shell, O'Connor encourages us to wonder what it may be that will fill him up. Whether or not we guess that this action will be completed by the Holy Ghost is unimportant. What is important is that we have asked the question and we now await O'Connor's answer rather than insisting on providing our own.

In "The Artificial Nigger," Mr. Head and Nelson encounter the statue at the height of their alienation from one another: "They stood gazing at the artificial Negro **as if** they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat" (CS 269). We learn, shortly, that they <u>were</u> faced with a great mystery, a mystery that leads to a moment of grace in which Nelson forgives his grandfather and Mr. Head accepts his own responsibility for original sin. We have been readied for this by the "as if" which allows us to consider the possibility of the "great mystery" and the encouragement it gives us to open up to more anagogical interpretations than we normally would.

CONTRARY-TO-EXPECTATION: The third category of "as if" persuades us to consider something that is contrary to our expectations of what is "real" or believable in a story. It is another way in which O'Connor derails the reader from reaching conclusions based on preconceived notions,prodding her no to take the action of the book only at a literal

level but also to acknowledge and perhaps explore its anagogical levels.

As Asbury in "The Enduring Chill" lies prostrate in his bed, having just discovered that he has contracted undulant fever and will not die, his mother and doctor stand by his bed: "'He must have drunk some unpasteurized milk up there,' his mother said softly and then the two of them tiptoed out **as if** they thought he was about to go to sleep" (CS 381-82). Why "as if"? It seems perfectly natural that they would expect him to sleep, considering that he has been barely conscious for several days. Do they not expect him to go to sleep? What do they expect him to do? This is not foreshadowing; Asbury's doctor and his mother have no way of knowing that he will have a religious experience when they leave, and there is no reason that this "as if" clause might lead the reader to that conclusion either. What it does is stop us--distance us from our expectation. We expect Asbury to go to sleep, we expect that his attendants expect him to go to sleep, yet we cannot accept this as what actually has or will take place. Even though an "as if" example as simple as this one might not lead us directly to any anagogical aspects of the texts, it is one of the many small steps along the way to our disorientation and it is this disorientation which makes us vulnerable to the possibilities of mystery. We are separated, caught once again between the "as" and the "if."

In "A Circle in the Fire," Sally Virginia repeatedly tells her mother how she would handle the three boys that have taken over their farm: "'If I had that big boy down I'd beat the daylight out of him'" (CS 185), and, responding to the direct question of what she would do to these boys, "The child gripped both hands together and made a contorted face **as if** she were strangling someone" (CS 187). We retain these images in our memories when, after an argument with her mother, "[Sally Virginia] stalked off to the woods **as if** she were stalking out an enemy" (CS 190-91). We are certain she is going into the woods because it is the most likely place to find the boys; she is stalking an enemy. Again, we are stopped by the "as if" which, by leading us to question our own certainties about minor details, makes us more willing to question our certainties about other issues closer to the heart of O'Connor's purpose.

We see this effect also in "The Artificial Nigger" after Nelson, frantically looking for his grandfather, has knocked over a grocery-laden woman who, supported by other women, has demanded reimbursement. Coming upon this scene, Nelson's grandfather denies him and, "The women dropped back, staring at him in horror, **as if** they were so repulsed by a man who would deny his own image and likeness that they could not bear to lay hands on him" (CS 265). To the reader, this is obviously the case and O'Connor could just as easily have written that the women were "staring at him

in horror, so repulsed by a man who would deny his own image..," but she did not. She has purposely included the "as if" in order to trip us, to force us to consider the viability of our own expectations and conclusions.

The most striking example of this technique comes at the climax of "Greenleaf" when Mrs. May sees the bull charging across the pasture toward her: "She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her **as if** she had no sense of distance, **as if** she could not decide at once what his intention was..." (CS 333). It will be a matter of course for most readers that one does not stand in front of a charging bull unless he or she has no sense of distance and unless there is some question as to the charging beast's intention. What the inclusion of "as if" leads us to consider is that Mrs. May does know the proximity of the bull and she does know its intention and she chooses not to move. The passage concludes with "and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed" (CS 333). The "As if" has led us to consider the possibility that Mrs. May has embraced this event and to perhaps see its occurrence as the offering of grace which Mrs. May accepts by refusing to move, even though she is aware of the impending danger. The ending prepares us to admit that "something is going on here that counts" even though we may not acknowledge that "something" outside the fictional context.

Coercing the reader to consider new possibilities is fundamental to the final category of O'Connor's use of the "as if" construction.

ANAGOGICAL: O'Connor's rhetorical use of "as if" works continually to coax the reader into accepting and exploring the anagogical levels of her fiction, into exploring its "mystery"; however, some uses are more blatant than others. In these constructions, she makes a direct spiritual or biblical allusion, encouraging the reader, usually for the first time in the individual work, to see a particular character in the new anagogical light. In "Greenleaf," after a violent argument between her sons, Mrs. May responds to a knock at the door: "All her resources returned in full strength **as if** she had only needed to be challenged by the devil himself to regain them" (CS 328). We know, and Mrs. May knows, that it is Mr. Greenleaf at the door. As her hired hand, he has given her trouble throughout the story, and it is his sons' bull that has trespassed onto her land and become a threat to "ruin" her herd. However, the reader has observed from reading the story through to this incident that Mr. Greenleaf has an acute understanding of Mrs. May, a healthy sense of his own priorities, and a strong emotional bond to his family, of which he is quite proud. This encourages the reader to view Mr. Greenleaf as, if not a wholly sympathetic character, at least a neutral one; he is certainly not the devil, but the use of the "as if" has made

it impossible to view the comparison as mere analogy--this is how Mrs May would respond if the devil were to knock on her door. As a result, we are urged to consider that in this knock at the door, Mrs. May is being challenged by the devil. The reader is unlikely to view Mr. Greenleaf as that devil--either literally or figuratively. Therefore, the reader has no choice but to view the challenge to Mrs. May as a direct spiritual one, and that challenge in some way hinges upon Mrs. May's reaction, not only to Mr. Greenleaf, but also to the entire situation in which she finds herself. Indeed, immediately after this passage, she lies to Mr. Greenleaf about the reason for the mess her sons' fight has created and she spitefully informs him that, come the next morning, he must shoot his sons' bull in order to relieve her of the problem its presence has caused. This is the first time in the story we are encouraged to see the possibility that Mrs. May might be "wrong." By asking us to speculate about her relationship to the devil at this point in the story, O'Connor forces us to see everything Mrs. May has done until she answers the door, and everything she does thereafter, through a different filter, a filter of culpability. She also forces us to see why someone whose "goodness" seemed so obvious might need to be "saved."

In "Parker's Back," O.E. Parker goes to the pool hall to drink after just having had a Byzantine Christ tattooed on his back in order to please his fundamentalist wife. The

other men in the hall lift his shirt to see the tatoo and their reaction is, literally, to throw him out the door: "Then a calm descended on the pool hall as nerve shattering **as if** the long barnlike room were the ship from which Jonah had been cast into the sea" (CS 527). Parker's relationship to religion so far in the story has been a purely negative one. He joined the army in order to avoid his mother's plans to save his soul and he has been angered constantly by his wife's beliefs and her frequent articulation of them. Yet, in this passage, the "as if" compels the reader to compare Parker to the biblical Jonah and, consequently, Parker's ambiguous role with Jonah's role as reluctant prophet. This comparison transforms the reader's interpretation of Parker's past actions (he has been increasingly possessed with what the reader has been led to believe is a growing dissatisfaction with his existing tatoos) and places what is to come in a new context. We are forced to consider the possibility that, Parker, too, is a reluctant prophet. The dissatisfaction that he feels is probably some way related to the denial of his religious calling. This simple use of "as if" lends a complexity to the narrative and encourages reconsideration of it as a story about a man with an unusual wife and many tatoos to that of one in which anagogical consideration becomes not only possible but necessary.

O'Connor uses this rhetorical device in a similar way

at the conclusion of "A Circle in the Fire." After a brief occupation by three troublesome boys, the Cope farm is threatened by a fire set in the surrounding woods. As mother and daughter stand in the field watching the fire and the farm hands' futile attempt to extinguish it, "[Sally Virginia] stood taut, listening, and could just catch in the distance a few wild high shrieks of joy **as if** the prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace, in the circle the angel had cleared for them" (CS 193). There is no doubt that it is the boys' shrieks she hears and there is no doubt that it is they who have set the fire. For this reason, the comparison that describes their cries is extremely disturbing. The story has presented Mrs. Cope as a hard working, God fearing, grateful woman. She has been besieged by these boys who have threatened the farm which is so important to her and to which she has dedicated so much of her energy. As a result, when we read "**as if** the prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace," we are shocked by the idea that these hoodlums could be compared to prophets. In forcing us to consider this comparison, and why it catches our attention in this way, O'Connor introduces us to the story's anagogical quality.

Early in the story, this scene takes place: "'Think of all we have, Lord,' she said and sighed, 'we have everything,' and she looked around at her rich pastures and hills heavy with timber and shook her head **as if** it might

all be a burden she was trying to shake off" (CS 177). The ending of the story introduces us to the idea that this has been a burden of which she is now being relieved. The farm has been a burden because it has stood between Mrs. Cope and the God which she so regularly and innocently and arrogantly thanks for it. The boys act as prophets in that they are bringing her a message from God; they are the agents of His offering of grace. This final "as if" clause in the story not makes not only the possibility that the farm was a burden seem a liklihood, it makes the fire a blessing. The story's powerful climax thus turns hopeful rather than sinister and tragic. In this one small phrase, this subtle, frustrating, and revealing "as if," lies the power and the meaning of the story.

In addition to her rhetorical use at the level of individual metaphor, O'Connor utilizes "as if" by clustering the expression, especially at the beginnings or endings of her stories--in order to create an atmosphere of mystery and to enhance the reader's sense of that mystery. In describing the scene and its inhabitants, O'Connor includes the following metaphors at the beginning of "The Artificial Nigger":

> He sat up and stared at the floor boards--the color of silver--and then at the ticking on his pillow, which might have been brocade, and after a second, he saw half of the moon five feet away in his shaving mirror, paused **as if** it were waiting for his permission to enter. The straight chair against the wall stiff and attentive **as if** it awaiting an

order..(CS 249).

> [Mr. Head's] eyes were alert but quiet, and in the miraculous moonlight they had a look of composure and an ancient wisdom **as if** they belonged to one of the great guides of men (CS 249-50).

Because the reader automatically hesitates at each "as if," unable to know exactly what is taking place, O'Connor is able to introduce an atmosphere of mystery. Another early use of the metaphor occurs in the opening paragraphs of "Greenleaf":

> Mrs. May's bedroom window was low and faced on the east and the bull, silvered in the moonlight, stood under it, his head raised **as if** he listened--like some patient god come to woo her... (CS 311).

> Bars of light slid across [the bull] as the venetian blind was slit. He took a step backwards and lowered his head **as if** to show the wreath across his horns (CS 311).

> For almost a minute there was no sound from inside, then as he raised his crowned head again, a woman's voice, guttural **as if** addressed to a dog, said, 'Get away from here, Sir!' (CS 311).

> She had been conscious in her sleep of a steady rhythmic chewing **as if** something were eating one wall of the house. She had been aware that whatever it was had been eating as long as she had had the place and...would continue through the house, eating her and the boys, and then on, eating everything but the Greenleafs...(CS 311-12).

Four "as if's" in such a short space dislodge the reader at the story's outset. The construction suggests an "unnatural" presence that enables the mystery to develop and its repetition indicates that nothing in the scene is certain, that no detail can be taken for granted.

Adding to the unsettling nature of the page is the fact that three of the four metaphors are of the foreshadowing variety. The bull has come for Mrs. May--he will eventually become the agent of her death and, depending on how one interprets the end of the story, he will also be the agent of her salvation. He probably is listening for her and it is likely he does want to show her what is later referred to as his "prickly crown" (CS 312), for an association with Christ and his crown of thorns is obviously intended. Finally, in the last "as if" clause, we are readied for the realization that Mrs. May and her entire way of life are being consumed by a force which will not stop until it has what it wants. Ideally, O'Connor would have her readers conclude that this "something" is Mrs. May's soul. Whether or not this is the conclusion that they reach, they will have been forced to entertain possibilities a less metaphoric use of language would not have encouraged.

It is possible to read this page and overlook its religious connotations, but the sense of mystery is undeniable. The reader realizes that a larger force is at work than just a scrub bull eating a hedge. This mystery is both unleashed and reinforced by the "as if." It is unleashed by its repetition; when the scene is not described in concrete terms we cannot be sure exactly what is taking place. This sense of mystery is reinforced by comparisons which foreshadow the story's climax and conclusion. We sense

viscerally what is to come without having enough evidence to understand why we feel this way.

A third instance of O'Connor's technique of repeating the "as if" in order to enhance the sense of mystery appears on the final page of "Everything That Rises Must Converge." While mostly descriptive, these metaphors still trap the reader in a confused state between the "as" and the "if." The following examples come from the story's climax. Julian is struggling with his mother who is having a stroke: "She continued to go on **as if** she had not heard him" (CS 420), "Stunned, he let her go and she lurched forward again, walking **as if** one leg were shorter than the other" (CS 420), "One eye, large and staring, moved slightly to the left **as if** it had become unmoored" (CS 420), and, "The lights drifted farther away the faster he ran and his feet moved numbly **as if** they carried him nowhere" (CS 420).

As we read the final paragraphs, our questions build instead of diminish, spurred by the ambiguity caused by "as if." The final metaphor leaves us especially puzzled. The reader is led to believe through the entire story that Julian is figuratively going nowhere. He knows it and we know it. Yet the story ends with his feet moving "humbly **as if** they carried him nowhere." Are they carrying him to a literal or a figurative nowhere, or, because the metaphor has been introduced with "as if," is it possible that Julian is being carried "somewhere"? Is this somewhere literal or

figurative? The "as if" leaves open the possibility that Julian will be changed by this experience and that the change may be for the better; it allows this scene to be viewed not only as a jolting loss, but also as an offering of grace.

Once again, O'Connor's use of "as if" has opened our minds to possibilities to such an extent that, when we are finished, we are not exactly sure what has happened in the story. More importantly, we are made to examine ideas which might not otherwise have occurred to us if the rhetorical use of the "as if" construction had not been employed.

Because of the effect of its presence on the reader, this device can also be conspicuous by its absence. While the opening of "The Artificial Nigger" is riddled with the "as if," there is only one on its final two pages. Already cited, it is when, just after Mr. Head had disowned his grandson Nelson in a time of need and the two are wandering through the suburbs in search of the train station, they come upon a statue: "They stood gazing at the artificial Negro **as if** they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat" (CS 269). As we read further, this riddle of the "as if" is solved for us. The statue is a great mystery and its appearance causes a spiritual rebirth in Mr. Head. There is no "as if" here. We are told that:

> Mr. Head stood very still and felt the action

> of mercy touch him again but this time he knew that there were no words to describe it. He understood that it grew out of agony....He understood it was all a man could carry into death to give his Maker....He stood appalled, judging himself with the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed him....He realized that he was forgiven for sins from the beginning of time...(CS 269-70).

Many criticisms[1] of this ending charge O'Connor with failing to trust the reader, as she usually does, to successfully interpret it. They charge that, by describing exactly what has happened rather that leaving the reader to discover it intellectually or experience it viscerally, she undercuts the impact of the story. It is the conspicuous absence of "as if" constructions that leads to this perceived display of "telling" rather than "showing" and to the solving of mystery rather than the heightening of it. Yet, these criticisms overlook the fact that O'Connor has made Mr. Head's and Nelson's adventure in the city mysterious. The atmosphere she has created prepares the reader for the more declarative prose of the story's ending. Because the reader has been engaged by the mystery, the end of the story comes not as the shock of "telling," but, rather, as its fitting conclusion. Taken in isolation, this passage may seem decidedly unsubtle; taken as part of the whole of "The Artificial Nigger," and as an element of O'Connor's overall strategy of persuasion, it couldn't have been written any

---

[1]For examples see Kessler 15-17 and Hawkins 38-39.

other way.

The end of "The Enduring Chill" might also have suffered the same criticisms except that instead of mitigating the mystery with bare explanation, O'Connor sets it up with the "as if" in order to enhance the impact of the story's closing lines. Earlier in the story, Asbury has found out that his illness is undulant fever and will not be fatal as he had hoped:

> [His eyes] looked shocked clean **as if** they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him. He shuddered and turned his head quickly the other way and stared out the window. A blinding red-gold sun moved serenely from under a purple cloud. Below it the treeline was black against the crimson sky. It formed a brittle wall, standing **as if** it were the frail defense he had set up in his mind to protect him from what was coming....The fierce bird [a bird-shaped water stain on his ceiling] 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 whirlwind from his eyes. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend (CS 382).

In this passage, we are first trapped in the mystery by ambiguity. Asbury's eyes look only "**as if** they had been prepared" and the trees stand "**as if** they were a frail defense." It is thus in the atmosphere of mystery the "as if" has helped to create that we are given the action that follows. Asbury's illusion is torn away; the "as if" merely describes the manner in which it is removed. The Holy Ghost is definitely "emblazoned in ice" and it does descend.

There is no "as if" about it. This scene takes on frightening proportions largely because of the way for which it has been prepared. Because we sense the mystery, because our sense of the possible has been dislodged by the "as if," the story's end is extremely effective. Even the reader who does not share O'Connor's beliefs will feel the story's power if only because its language has made it palpable for even the most calloused reader.

O'Connor also withholds the "as if" when she wants to establish the mundaneness in a story before she chooses to unveil the mystery. During the first seven pages of "Everything that Rises Must Converge," there are only two "as if" clauses. Instead, we are given a rather flat, if amusing, rendition of Julian's life with his mother--his complaints, her illusions, the bickering that obviously goes on night and day between them. There is nothing extraordinary in their lives and this drabness and futility is reinforced by the lack of mystery as represented in the "as if" at the outset of the story. However, on the story's eighth page, we have the "as if" that looses the rest. Julian and his mother are riding the bus to her weekly weight-reduction class. Julian sits next to a black man, knowing full well the extent to which this will upset his mother. We learn that, "He felt **as if** he had openly declared war on her" (CS 412). It soon becomes apparent that, for all intents and purposes, he has, for hereafter he

goads and belittles her until, at the story's end, she dies of a stroke. This "open declaration" takes the situation beyond what apparently has been its usual limits and plunges it into a realm where the reader's surrender to mystery is required. The "as if" clause first unleashes mystery and then heightens and brings the story to its climax by the "as ifs" that follow.

A similar situation exists in "The Enduring Chill" which contains no "as if" clauses in its first five pages. Again, we are asked to accept the scene at face value; Asbury has come home to die, and he will be forced for his remaining days to deal with a mother who in no way understands him or the "tragedy" of his situation. The first "as if" comes as a major piece of foreshadowing: "Asbury turned his head abruptly in the opposite direction, but there a small, walleyed Guernsey was watching him steadily **as if** she sensed some bond between them" (CS 362). As Dr. Block will later explain to Asbury after giving him the diagnosis of his illness, "You ain't going to die....Undulant fever ain't so bad....It's the same as Bang's in a cow" (CS 381). This explains why the cow looks "as if" she senses "some bond between them." There is a bond; they are both susceptible to the same disease. This "as if" construction works to foreshadow a major development in the story and begin the unraveling of the story's "mystery" by signalling an end of language used primarily to

establish characters and situation.

O'Connor's most successful withholding of the "as if" is in "A Good Man is Hard to Find." During the first five pages we encounter the description of a family on vacation. There is a tightly-strung husband, his passive wife, two obnoxious children and their domineering and manipulative grandmother. They are going to Florida (Tennessee if the grandmother has her way). The scene is comic, if essentially common, until the stop at "The Tower" for barbecued sandwiches. During this scene the "as if" construction is introduced, changing completely the story's tone. What has been a comic description becomes dark and ominous as conversation turns to a notorious killer named "The Misfit," and how "It isn't a soul in this green world of God's that you can trust" (CS 122). We are being dislodged by the language and prepared by the now steady repetition of the "as if," to assimilate the family's eventual murder and the moment of grace the grandmother will be offered before she is shot to death on an isolated dirt road. Particularly prevalent here are those "as if" constructions that foreshadow and those that thwart the reader's expectation.

After lunch at "the Tower," the grandmother bullies the family into looking for an old plantation that she believes mistakenly to be on a remote dirt road. Placed on its own line, a brief description between two bits of dialogue,

reads, "The road looked **as if** no one had traveled on it in months" (CS 124). Immediately, the reader becomes entangled in this comment. If it only looks "as if" it has not been travelled, then that must mean it has been travelled. Our awareness is heightened immediately as to what might be about to take place. The family then has an accident; their car rolls over and into a ditch. As they recover themselves, they see "a car some distance away on the top of a hill, coming slowly **as if** the occupants were watching them" (CS 125). Our heightened awareness confirms for us that the family is being watched. The "as if" has made us consider something that we might not have otherwise; we cannot, at this stage of the action, abandon the metaphor as mere description--we know it means more.

When the car stops and its occupants get out, the grandmother recognizes one of the men: "His face was as familiar to her **as if** she had known him all her life but she could not recall who he was" (CS 126). In this case, the "as if" connects the reader to the mystery and the irony of the comparison that follows. The man is The Misfit, and he is recognized by the grandmother who has seen his picture in the paper. She may feel that she "has known him all her life," but his importance to her will be as the instrument of her death and of her salvation. By once again giving a "visceral foreshadowing," O'Connor is conjuring the mystery that will envelope the story's ending:

> "[The grandmother] saw [The Misfit's] face twisted close to her own **as if** he were going to cry and she murmured, 'Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children.' She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back **as if** a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest" (CS 132).

These final "as if's" shift the focus not to the grandmother and her moment of grace but to The Misfit. First he looks "as if" he is going to cry. This comes as a surprise. We suspect that the grandmother, in her previous conversation about Jesus with The Misfit might in fact be having an influence, be activating that sense of mercy we have been led to suspect all along that he might have. The "as if" clause confirms our suspicion even though The Misfit never actually cries. When the grandmother accepts him as one of her "babies" and reaches out to him in an obvious gesture of love, he is afraid and reacts "as if" bitten by a snake, thus showing that, while he cannot accept her gesture, he does recognize and fear its power. This unexpected shift mitigates our negative view of The Misfit making him more acceptable as the instrument of the grandmother's salvation.

"A Good Man is Hard to Find" is the perfect example of the way in which O'Connor uses both the placement of the "as if" and its isolated comparisons in order to heighten the reader's awareness, make what should be safe assumptions questionable ones, and to dislocate the reader's sense of "truth," making concepts such as mystery and grace plausable

when they might not be otherwise.

This section has focused on O'Connor's approach to her writing and her reader--how and why she creates a cpercove relationship with the the reader. Equally important is that reader and his or her response to the rhetorical strategies that O'Connor employs. These responses become particularly telling when viewed over the expanse of a more extensive work like O'Connor's Wise Blood. A reader-based analysis of such a work, while revealing many of the same themes as a literary analysis, is valuable because it shows how those themes are revealed and because it reveals what O'Connor's fiction does, rather than what it says.

Shared Strategies: A Reader-Response Approach to Wise Blood

> [Wise Blood] was written with zest and, if possible, should be read that way (O'Connor's introduction to Wise Blood, hereafter WB).

Fredrick Asals describes Wise Blood as refracting the modern world "into symbolic modes of expression rather than being observed, delineated, analyzed in all its diverse and sometimes bewildering abundance" (160). This effect is achieved, in part, by the book's "poetical conception" and "condensation," linguistic strategies concentrated in the "as if" construction which O'Connor uses to undermine what Stanley Fish calls the reader's sense of the "ordinary," or "that which appears to be there independently of anything we might say or think about it" (271). O'Connor relies on her reader's response to her use of language to make the extraordinary landscape of Wise Blood a viable one.

This relationship between O'Connor and her readers is made possible by the fact that, while she does not share their religious beliefs, O'Connor does inhabit the same "interpretive community" as her readers. This community shares interpretive strategies "not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (171). As a result, even though her "world view" might differ considerably from that of her readers', she shares with them

common knowledge and use of linguistic strategies which allow her to generate certain responses in them. According to Fish, "An author hazards his projection not because of something 'in' the marks, but because of something he assumes to be in his reader" (173). Thus O'Connor uses metaphor, particularly the "as if" construction, not because it has inherent meaning with which she wishes to imbue her readers, but because she is confident of the response it will elicit from them.

Important to the concept of language's ability to affect readers, especially in a novel-length work like Wise Blood, are the "developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time" (Fish 26). Our perceptions of characters and events evolve from each bit of data we consume, process and apply to our ever-changing feelings about the text. The text itself does not contain meaning, rather its meaning lies in the reader's developing response to it. In Wise Blood, O'Connor gives her readers, in Fish's words, "the opportunity to make meanings and texts by inviting them to put into execution a set of strategies" (172). From the outset of the novel, O'Connor's strategies revolve around her use of the "as if" construction to manipulate her reader's developing response, to acknowledge the viability of her grotesque landscape, and to become entangled in its mystery.

Wise Blood begins with the following passage:

> Hazel Motes sat at a forward angle on the green plush train seat, looking one minute at the window **as if** he might want to jump out of it, and the next down the aisle at the other end of the car (Wise Blood hereafter WB 9).

In order to understand this passage's impact on the reader, we must first ask Fish's question, "What does it do?" rather than the standard question of literary analysis, "What does it say?" What this passage "does" centers upon its "as if" construction. While it initially seems only a descriptive use of the "as if," the look of someone wishing to jump from a train is not a familiar image most readers can draw on to visualize both the character and the scene being described. Immediately the reader is unsure of Haze's state of mind. Perhaps the reader expects to be able to use the simile as a means of understanding both the character and the situation. However, rather than illuminating its subject, the "as if" obscures it, causing uncertainty in the reader about what is taking place. Furthermore, the parallel construction of the sentence anticipates another "as if" clause which is not included. Reading that Haze looked "one minute at the window as if . . ." and "the next [minute] down the aisle . . ." the reader expects to be told "how" Haze looked down the aisle. Not finding any such clause compounds the reader's sense of uncertainty and displacement.

Other uses of "as if" in the opening chapter of Wise Blood are more descriptive: "He looked **as if** he were held by a rope caught in the middle of his back and attached to the

train ceiling" (12); "His hair looked **as if** it had been permanently flattened by his hat" (11). However, these clauses only give clues to Haze's physical appearance, and not to his emotional state, placed in doubt by the book's very first sentence.

This doubt deepens when we read of Haze's conversation with a fellow passenger: "'Do you think I believe in Jesus?' he said, leaning toward her and speaking almost **as if** he were breathless" (16). Not only is the reader's search for Haze's character thwarted by the absence of any tangible description after the "as if" clause, but also by the preceding adverb "almost." The reader cannot be sure how Haze is speaking (although she is asking the question because of the "as if") and so no inferences about Haze's relationship to his statement can be drawn. There is no way we can know if he asks earnestly or sarcastically. For the moment, we do not know whether or not he believes in Jesus. Metaphor, normally a reader's tool for understanding, instead has added to the reader's uncertainty about the novel.

This uncertainty is compounded as the story proceeds. Haze gets off the train and we read, "He walked the length of the station and then he walked back **as if** he might be going to get on the train again. His face was stern and determined under the heavy hat" (29). That Haze walks back "**as if** he might" be getting on the train again suggests to

the reader a certain amount of indecision, or perhaps bewilderment on Haze's part. Yet, in daring to apply this knowledge in some way to the picture of Haze's character the reader is trying to develop, the statement that his face "was stern and determined" must be assimilated. Because this statement is written in a declarative form, it is accepted by the reader as fact, and yet it contradicts the inference that Haze is confused already drawn from the preceding "as if" clause. Thus the conclusions the reader reaches from the "as if" clause and the declarative statement oppose one another. The reader, still unable to make any coherent or conclusive determinations about Haze's character, is having difficulty divining his motives or developing any understanding of his actions.

While not as intensely ambiguous as those of Hazel Motes, the descriptions of the novel's secondary characters further displace the reader of Wise Blood while progressing through the book. The lady next to Haze on the train observes his clothes: "The suit had cost him $11.98. She felt that placed him and looked at his face again **as if** she were fortified against it" (10). The reader cannot determine what the woman's attitude toward Haze is because of the phrase "**as if** she were." Does her disdain for his clothes and the conclusion she draws about him from them actually "fortify" her? Does she only pretend to be fortified? The "as if" leaves the reader uncertain of what

the woman's attitude actually is. This uncertainty occurs again when we read that the prostitute Haze visits on his first night in Taulkinham "seemed just as glad to see him **as if** he had been an old friend but she didn't say anything" (33). The reader wonders both why she is "glad" and why she does not speak. When Haze gives Sabbath Hawks the potato peeler, "She grinned suddenly and then quickly drew her expression back together **as if** she smelled something bad" (49); the boy at the car lot sits "huddled up **as if** he were freezing but his face had a sour composed look" (71); and Enoch Emery races through the zoo, but "At the last of the monkey cages, he stopped **as if** he couldn't help himself" (94). The reader is unable to make concrete judgments about any of the book's characters and can set no standard of normal behavior against which Hazel Motes can be measured. For the reader, the world of Wise Blood is one of unsure footing, unrealized expectation, shifting values and distorted perceptions.

Such a large part of the reader's experience is filtered through the "as if" that when a strict metaphorical construction is used instead of the simile, the reader is tempted to accept the statement as fact. For example, at the beginning, middle and end of the section when Haze is out driving in the country listening to Sabbath Hawks talk about her childhood and her father, and looking for a place to take advantage of her, the reader encounters three

separate descriptions of the sky:

> The sky was just a little lighter blue than his suit, clear and even, with only one cloud in it a large blinding white one with curls and a beard (117).
>
> The blinding white cloud was a little ahead of them, moving to the left (120).
>
> The blinding white cloud had turned into a bird with long thin wings and was disappearing in the opposite direction (127).

By this point in the novel, the reader has become accustomed to the "as if" and the questions it elicits. As a result, the absence of this construction makes the description seem unquestionable and therefore "real." The incarnations of the cloud, "with curls and a beard" and as a bird, are likely to suggest the Father and Son of the Trinity to the reader. The addition of the adjective "blinding," because of its biblical connotations of revelation, compounds the image's religious implications. This single figure in the sky, watching omnipotently over events below becomes fixed in the reader's mind and, because it has not been introduced with "as if," acquires for the reader a stable quality that does not exist for most of the other images in the novel.

Readers are similarly affected by stabilizing statements made elsewhere in the book, as when Asa Hawks' face is described as being "thoughtful and evil" (109) or the following passage when Solace Layfield is out preaching just before Haze murders him with his car:

> The second night out he failed to observe a

> high rat-colored car parked about a half-block away and a white face inside it, watching him with the kind of intensity that means something is going to happen no matter what is done to keep it from happening (201).

Because the sentence reads "the kind of intensity that means something is going to happen," rather than "a kind of intensity, **as if** something were going to happen," the reader does not doubt the "truth" of the passage. What results is that aspects of a novel that a reader would like to consider "knowable" such as the physical descriptions, personalities and motivations of characters become, in fact, vague and unreachable. The concrete and the real then rely upon the reader's interpretation of strict uses of metaphor or any description in which she does not have to confront the uncertainty that the "as if" inspires. Thus, God can appear in a cloud, a face can be evil and events can be predetermined. By obscuring what the reader would like to perceive as reality, the "as if" presents itself as the only viable alternative frame of reference. As a result, the mystery used to obscure "reality" becomes, ultimately, the world of the novel.

As with the short stories, the reader's anticipation of events to follow is triggered by certain encounters with the "as if" in Wise Blood. This anticipation becomes particularly acute regarding Haze's impending spiritual transformation. Passages like the following alert the reader to the possibility that internal turmoil and pressure

have distorted Haze's personality:

> His black hat sat on his head with a careful, placed expression and his face had a fragile look **as if** it might have been broken and stuck together again or like a gun no one knows is loaded (68).
>
> His face behind the windshield was sour and frog-like, it looked **as if** it had a shout closed up in it; it looked like one of those closet doors in gangster pictures where someone is tied to a chair behind it with a towel in his mouth (86).
>
> Haze was lying on his cot with a washrag over his eyes; the exposed part of his face was ashen and set in a grimace, **as if** he were in some permanent pain (182).
>
> Earlier that morning, when [Haze] had waked up for the first time, he had been caught by a complete consumption in his chest; it had seemed to be growing hollow all night long and yawning underneath him, and he had kept hearing his coughs **as if** they came from a distance (186).

In each of these passages the reader is alerted to Haze's deteriorating condition. The knowledge that Haze is a spiritual being, even if his dedication is to the "Church Without Christ," leads the reader to respond to those descriptions tied to the "as if" by anticipating that Haze will have a wrenching spiritual experience. Having found most of Haze's character unascertainable, however, the reader cannot speculate as to the nature or the outcome of that experience. This uncertainty must be cleared away before the reader can develop any solid opinions about the events of the novel.

While the reader's response may involve both a sense of

mystery and confusion from continual confrontation with the "as if," it is the absence of this construction, or rather a change in its effects, to which the reader responds during Haze's spiritual transformation. The first step in Haze's displacement from the "Church Without Christ" comes when he confronts his double, Solace Layfield. He begins by ordering Solace to take off his shiny blue suit, identical to Haze's, and Solace begins "grabbing for his feet **as if** he would take off his shoes too, but before he could get to them, the Essex knocked him flat and ran over him" (204). The "as if" refers to Solace and is a descriptive device the reader uses to visualize the man grabbing for his feet as he is run over. This quote is followed by: "The Essex stood half over the other Prophet **as if** it were pleased to guard what it had finally brought down" (204). In this sentence, the reader's attention turns to the Essex. The verb "stood," and the "as if" clause combine in the reader's mind to make the car the active party in the assault. Because the initial quote also attributes the attack to the car, Haze becomes less culpable in the incident and is understood to be an instrument rather than an instigator. In the final "as if" construction of the passage, the reader's attention is shifted back to Solace who "was motionless all but for one finger that moved up and down in front of his face **as if** he were marking time with it" (204). The reader can visualize Solace's last tenuous movements because of the

description the "as if" clause introduces. The "as if" also becomes ironic: Solace is marking time; he is lying on the ground waiting to die.

During this incident, the reader's impressions of Haze begin to solidify. No "as if's" appear in the section detailing Solace's murder to describe Haze; rather, the reader perceives him through declarative statements. The result is that his actions and his character become more comprehensible to the reader. As Solace lies dying on the ground, we read "'Two things I can't stand,' Haze said, '--a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is. You shouldn't ever have tampered with me if you didn't want what you got'" (204). The reader senses a critical moment in the story and, because Haze's thoughts and actions have not been modified or obscured by the "as if," the reader believes Haze's statement as a sincere utterance, and one that can be applied to help focus the nebulous character he has become in the reader's mind.

Concluding the chapter that the above incident begins, is the second decisive event in the reader's perception of Haze's spiritual transformation--the demolition of his car. No "as if" constructions appear in this episode. Instead, the reader experiences a progression of declarative statements describing the action taking place: "He drove to the top of the hill, with the patrol car following close behind him" (208); "Haze turned [the car] facing the

embankment" (208); "The patrolman got behind the Essex and pushed it over the embankment" (209). Only after we read the description of the car's impact and the patrolman's declaration, "Them that don't have a car, don't need a license" (209), do we read a description that reveals any clues as to Haze's reaction: "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" (209). Because this description is not introduced with "as if," the reader does not wonder how Haze feels or whether or not he will finally come "unhinged." Rather, the reader interprets the description of Haze as a reflection of his soul, assuming that Haze's confrontation with Solace and the loss of his car have set in motion the spiritual upheaval foreshadowed by "as if" clauses throughout the novel.

The reader understands Haze's next actions as "literal" ones because they are described in language which leaves no room for speculation:

> After a while Haze got up and started walking back to town. It took him three hours to get inside the city again. He stopped at a supply store and bought a tin bucket and a sack of quicklime and then he went on to where he lived, carrying these. 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. Then he went to a hot water spigot by the front steps and filled up the rest of the bucket with water and started up the steps. His landlady was sitting on the porch, rocking a cat. 'What you going to do with

> that, Mr. Motes?' she asked.
> 'Blind myself,' he said and went into the house (210).

The narration and description of the passage is a precursor of Haze's unceremonious declaration of his intent, leaving the reader with no doubt about what is taking place. The shift in language from the uncertainty of the "as if" based descriptions of Haze to the declarative reporting of his actions signals to the reader the end of Haze's confused effort to abandon a religion that has continually haunted him.

Haze's blunt declaration at this moment in the novel is important for more than its dramatic impact. It is critical because it is the closest the reader will come to Haze. A dichotomy occurs at this point in the novel, because, as Haze's character finally becomes intelligible to the reader, he is removed as her focus of attention. In the paragraph immediately following Haze's declaration, the point of view shifts to Mrs. Flood:

> The landlady sat there for a while longer. She was not a woman who felt more violence in one word than in another; she took every word at its face value but all the faces were the same. Still, instead of blinding herself, if she had felt that bad, she would have killed herself and wondered why anyone wouldn't do that. She would simply have put her head in an oven or maybe have given herself too many painless sleeping pills and that would have been that. Perhaps Mr. Motes was only being ugly, for what possible reason could a person have for wanting to destroy their sight? (WB 211).

This point of view shift places the reader in a difficult

and frustrating position: Mrs. Flood's questions are answerable--Haze was not just "being ugly," rather, he was making what he considered to be the ultimate sacrifice in acknowledging God's presence. When preaching the gospel of the "Church Without Christ," he had asked a crowd of people: "Don't I know what exists and what don't?...Don't I have eyes in my head? Am I a blind man?" (WB 55) and he later tells a service station attendant that it was "not right to believe in anything you couldn't see..." (WB 206). In giving up his sight, Haze gives up his only means of independently verifying the truth; self-blinding thus becomes Haze's personal demonstration of supreme faith. The reader understands this act while Mrs. Flood does not.

The result of Mrs. Flood's interference in the reader's new understanding of Haze is not that she keeps the reader from knowing him, but rather from knowing what he knows and from sharing and understanding what he is experiencing. His sacrifice and his commitment have given him a vision that neither Mrs. Flood nor the reader can assume; the reader's only advantage is in her ability to recognize that Haze does, indeed, have a vision--a fact that Mrs. Flood never quite comprehends.

What does Haze's "vision" involve? It is a religious one and, as such, it is part and parcel of O'Connor's mystery. It is where the reader's nagging uncertainty throughout the novel has led, the uncertainty constantly and

unfailingly encouraged by the "as if." In the sense that he now has a clear vision of the "as if," Haze becomes a part of it. Those "knowable" aspects of Haze's character for which the reader has been desperately searching throughout the novel have finally materialized. The shift in language to the concrete has made Haze's physical appearance, his actions, even his purpose, intelligible and concrete. Yet, Haze, himself, is gone. He has become a part of something in which the reader is not allowed to take part, something only to be viewed from Mrs. Flood's narrow, uncomprehending perspective.

Likewise, the "as if" constructions in the final chapter provide little insight into Haze's vision. They are mainly of the variety the reader uses to picture better the action being described:

> If [Mrs. Flood] didn't keep her mind going on something else when she was near him, she would find herself leaning forward, staring into his face **as if** she expected to see something she hadn't seen before (213).
>
> She picked [Haze's shoes] up and looked into them **as if** she thought she might find something hidden there (221).
>
> He didn't seem to know she was there, except occasionally when he would slap at his face **as if** her voice bothered him, like the singing of a mosquito (223).

Through the "as if" clauses the reader is able to picture Mrs. Flood's countenance as she stares into Haze's eyes and his shoes (in fact these two images are much the same) and

Haze's demeanor as he swats at the annoying buzzing of Mrs. Flood's voice. The "as if" has become a means of understanding for the reader rather than a cause of uncertainty. Physical details, motivations, things previously obscured frustratingly now become ascertainable. Yet, in Haze's "absence," these things no longer matter. The reader is beginning to comprehend that Haze's experience lies beyond mere description and the details that are now discernable are of very value.

The fact that the reader, however, developes more insight into Haze's character than does Mrs. Flood, is reinforced in four "as if" clauses in the final chapter. The first describes Haze from Mrs. Flood's perspective: "To her, the blind man had the look of seeing something. His face had a peculiar pushing look, **as if** it were going forward after something it could just distinguish in the distance" (214). For the reader, two levels of meaning immediately present themselves. The first--a descriptive one--is shared by Mrs. Flood; we can easily picture someone's face "going forward after something it could just distinguish." Yet, because the reader has inextricably linked Haze's character to his religious search, his "pushing look," for the reader alone, mirrors that search.

The reader has much the same experience when reading two other related "as if" constructions: "'I don't have time,' he said, and got up and walked off the porch **as if**

[Mrs Flood] had reminded him of some urgent business. He walked **as if** his feet hurt him but he had to go on'" (221). The "as if" clauses function to both describe and represent. Haze does have urgent business--atonement---and his feet do hurt, because part of that atonement is to walk through the neighborhood each day in shoes filled with rocks and broken glass. While the reader is opened up to Haze's experience by the "as if," Mrs. Flood does not have that opportunity; for her, the "as if" might just as well be "because."

The final instance of "as if" in this cluster reads, "He would eat what [Mrs. Flood] brought immediately, with a wry face, and hand back the plate without thanking her, **as if** all his attention were directed elsewhere and this was an interruption he had to suffer (223). The reader knows exactly where his attention is directed, a knowledge that Mrs. Flood does not share. The wedding of descriptive metaphor with substance allows the reader to view Haze's religious experience from a distance, understanding both his actions and his motivations, but unable to take part in them.

The reader does not have the same opportunity for dual readings, however, at the close of Wise Blood. When Haze dies in the back of a police car, his body is brought back to Mrs. Flood's boarding house. Once again we see the juxtaposition of the "as if" construction with descriptions that, while they might be metaphors, are not interpreted as

such by the reader because they are expressed in concrete terms. The reader has come to feel that if this statement contains no "as if" clause, then it must be true. The final paragraph concludes:

> [Mrs. Flood] leaned closer and closer to his face, looking deep into [his eyes], trying to see how she had been cheated or what had cheated her, but she couldn't see anything. 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 gotten 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 (232).

The two "as if" clauses in this passage refer to Mrs. Flood and her current emotional state. It is "as if" she is "blocked" and "as if" she had "gotten to the beginning of something." The reader assumes that this "something" should somehow relate to the type of religious experience that Haze has had. The reader is made to consider for the first time that Mrs. Flood might be vulnerable to or looking for such an experience. Yet this possibility in no way connects her or the reader to Haze and what he is experiencing. Once again, Mrs. Flood is made to stand between the reader and Haze. Thus, the reader assumes that the "pinpoint of light" is somehow a sign of Haze's redemption, a sign that he has finally found that for which he has been searching. Mrs. Flood's presence, however, prevents the reader from sharing in or understanding that experience in any meaningful way.

Throughout the novel, the reader has been searching for some sense of Haze's character, just as Haze has been searching for himself. When Haze does indeed come to understand himself and his purpose, the reader also understands him. But then Haze commits himself to God, sacrificing his sight and his health in order to demonstrate his committment, denying himself to the point of self-torture. These radical actions leave the reader behind, and only a superficial understanding of Haze's character remain. The reader senses that Haze has become a part of something much larger, something she is prevented from assuming by the presence of Mrs. Flood as an unenlightened intermediary. Thus, Haze's end is a solitary one and so is the reader's final experience of the novel. Not having shared Haze's revelation or redemption, the reader is left with a nagging sense of frustration at having been able, finally, to "figure him out," only to learn that dissection of his character was not the point. The reader wants ultimately to take part in Haze's spiritual experience--to know what he knows and feel what he feels, but that is precisely what she has not been permitted to do.

The reader who analyzes her own reaction will probably be surprised; to want to share someone's religious conversion is not the usual cumulative effect of a novel. Yet, for her, this desire is likely to find the novel's value: Wise Blood has provided the reader with a

demanding, new reading experience, requiring a different kind of participation and different strategies than the more traditional text, leaving her with a dimension of self-awareness which may have been previously unexplored.

Both the familiar and the unfamiliar strategies the reader employs in reading Wise Blood are strategies shared and anticipated by O'Connor. When Haze's character and his religion are initially described in terms that create uncertainty within the reader, she is unable to make "concrete" determinations about the novel; when that terminology becomes less uncertain, the reader interprets Haze as more intelligible. When the language revolving around Haze finally concrete, so too does the reader's perception of him. The language, the style that manipulates it into rhetoric, and the reader's continuing response to that manipulation, therefore become the meaning of the book.

Both the "meaning" and the experience of reading Wise Blood center upon the uncertainty that the presence of the "as if" creates and its absence denies. One expected stylistic discussion of this uncertainty could be anchored on the terms "literal" and "figurative." However, Fish's reader-response theory disputes the traditional definitions of these terms:

> It may seem confusing or even contradictory to assert that a text may have more than one literal reading, but that is because we usually reserve 'literal' for the single meaning a text

> will always (or should always) have, while I am using 'literal' to refer to the different single meanings a text will have in a succession of different situations (276).

This distinction is important to the reading of Wise Blood or any of O'Connor's fiction. The temptation is to relegate the anagogical element of her works to a "figurative" level. And, because this "figurative" level of fiction is somehow considered secondary to the "reality" of the action within the text--the "literal" in the ordinary sense of the word--that makes the anagogical secondary also. In O'Connor's fiction this is not the case. Reader-response theory gives credence to those readings of O'Connor which include the anagogical. Indeed, the fact that the approach focuses on the reader's experience to "label" meaning within a work makes an interpretation that does not include O'Connor's mystery somehow suspect for it is extremely difficult to overlook or ignore.

Because it is of such over-riding importance, the "mystery" of O'Connor's fiction must be recognized by readers and critics alike as only another "literal" meaning for her work rather than misplaced religious zeal on her part, to be commented upon by critics and ignored by readers. The reader-response approach reveals how O'Connor's readers are affected by her prose--what it "does" to them. It also legitimizes that response.

*

Leaving behind reader-response techniques and the effect of the "as if" upon the reader and focusing once again on O'Connor's rhetorical strategies, one must ask the proverbial question "What's in it for her?"; or, what does the use of the "as if" allow her to do that she might otherwise not be able to achieve? Why sacrifice clarity to a verbal strategy?

To answer these questions we must look back to O'Connor's motivations as a writer. She had a message to impart and she had to do it to an audience that she knew did not want to listen. She wrote:

> Fiction may deal with faith implicitly but explicitly it deals only with faith-in-a-person, or persons. What must be unquestionable is what is implicitly implied as the author's attitude, and to do this the writer has to succeed in making the divinity of Christ seem constant with the structure of all reality. This has to be got across implicitly in spite of a world that doesn't feel it, in spite of characters who don't live it (HB 290).

The sense of mystery created by the "as if" is O'Connor's primary means of implication. She must imply grace, imply religion and create mystery in her fiction in order to prevent offending her disbelieving audience. To take the reader too far into that mystery would betray her intent and, as a result, would render her ineffective.

We see O'Connor's strategy at work most pointedly in

the final chapter of Wise Blood. Once Hazel experiences his religious epiphany, the reader can no longer follow him, for to follow him would be too explicit a representation of his religious experience. By writing the final chapter from Mrs. Flood's point of view, O'Connor better achieves her own ends. She places Mrs. Flood between the reader and the "as if" as it is represented by Haze's religious experience, making impossible any real understanding of it. She also provides a "modern sensibility" against which the reader can compare herself and her perceptions of Haze. Reading about Mrs. Flood's character and outlook before reading the remainder of the novel, she might seem quite ordinary--sensible even. However, after the reader has followed Haze through the book, and has been continually opened up to his search by the "as if," Mrs. Flood seems not only uninformed about Haze and his experience, but myopic about the world in general. She stands between the reader and Haze not as someone sympathetic to the reader, asking the same questions and making the same observations as the reader, but rather as a hinderance to any further understanding on the reader's part. The reader is well aware that Haze is experiencing a religious conversion but, because of the strategies that O'Connor has used, is not repelled by this knowledge, but eager to learn more.

Preeminently the "as if," but, in fact, all of O'Connor's rhetorical devices contribute to her fiction's

effect upon the reader. O'Connor's goal was to stretch the reader, to encourage her to leave behind a point of view and a system of belief that do not encompass "belief and...grace and death and the devil" (Jubilee 35). O'Connor is not always as successful as she is in Wise Blood; some stories may be too subtle and some not subtle enough. Indeed, there are those readers convinced that O'Connor wrote either depressing or funny stories about unhappy Southerners. This, too, is a testament to what she attempted and achieved. Her stories can be enjoyed, with no consideration of mystery or grace, rhetoric or strategy. But, for the careful reader, looking for something more substantial than entertainment from the reading experience, or for the writer interested in the successful immersion of self in fiction, O'Connor's position of distinction in American letters is undeniable.

APPENDIX

O'Connor seems never to have conceptualized the reasons for her use of the "as if" construction. She wrote about being "blissfully unaware" of them until she read the page proofs for The Violent Bear it Away (HB 356). At Carolyn Gordon's suggestion she removed many, leaving the most important and effective. "It was like getting ticks off a dog," she complained (HB 356). Possibly, she became aware unconsciously of the impact of the "as if" as a reader, for several of her favorite authors use this device regularly. It is well documented that O'Connor was a reader and admirer of Nathaniel Hawthorne about whom she wrote, "he was a very great writer indeed" (HB 70). She also frequently read Henry James, "thinking this may affect my writing for the better without my knowing how. A touching faith and I have others" (HB 68). This faith may not have not been merely "touching" but well founded, because it appears that her fondness for James and Hawthorne did affect her style in terms of her use of the "as if" construction.

In The Turn of the Screw, James uses "as if" primarily as a descriptive device, but he also uses it frequently to foreshadow. As we are learning of the children's communion with the ghosts of their former keepers, we read "The wretched child had spoken exactly **as if** she had got from some outside source, each of her stabbing little words" (Great Short Novels of Henry James, hereafter GSN 725) and,

before little Miles dies, "Once more, as he had done before, he looked up at the dim day **as if**, of what had hitherto sustained him, nothing was left but an unspeakable anxiety" (GSN 746). James also frequently uses the "as if" construction to introduce something we expect and thus, by discussing it metaphorically, turns it into an untruth: "[Mrs. Grose] took my hand **as if** to fortify me against the increase of alarm from this disclosure" (GSN 670). Are we being led, for some strange reason, to believe that Mrs. Grose has no desire to "fortify" the nanny? We do not know and this lack of knowledge works to confuse us and, as it does in O'Connor's fiction, encourage us not to take any of the details of the story literally but rather to constantly consider them as "clues," leading us to an answer that is somehow larger than the mere narrative level of the story would allow.

We find James again using the contrary-to-expectation "as if" in Daisy Miller. When Winterbourne sees Daisy in the Coliseum with Giovanelli at midnight: "It was **as if** a sudden illumination had been flashed upon the ambiguity of Daisy's behavior, and the riddle had become easy to read" (GSN 140). Rather than telling the reader in no uncertain terms that Winterbourne has become disillusioned with Daisy, James encourages the uncertainty by the inclusion of "as if" in the sentence. This addition leads the reader to wonder just how much of Winterbourne's feelings for Daisy remain

and, when she dies, just how much he is affected by her death. The "as if" in this instance also encourages ambivalence in the reader's own reaction to Daisy. Are we, too, now supposed to see through Daisy?; is her "riddle" supposed to become easy for us to read? The "as if" creates for the reader the option to choose or to remain in doubt as to the true nature of Daisy's character. The "as if" leaves Daisy, and consequently the novel, open to interpretation.

Hawthorne uses the "as if" even more frequently than James and he uses it in much the same way as O'Connor, that is, to create an atmosphere of mystery in which the strange workings of his fictional world can be more admissible to his readers.

Hawthorne often uses the "as if" to introduce comparisons which become foreshadowing. In "Rappaccini's Daughter," we are led constantly to speculate about the poisonous threat Rappaccini and his daughter Beatrice pose to the smitten Giovanni. First, Giovanni is afraid to look around the garden "**as if** something ugly and monstrous would have blasted his eyesight had he been betrayed into a glance" (Hawthorne's Short Stories, hereafter HSS 190). Later he is viewed by Dr. Rappaccini "**as if** [he was] taking merely a speculative, not a human, interest in the young man" (HSS 191) and, finally, the opinion of a friend of his father's regarding Beatrice seems "**as if** it were not in accordance with his own original conception" (HSS 203).

These "as if's" alert us to the danger in Giovanni's love for Beatrice and to the role her father will play in turning Giovanni into a human poison.

We are given this same type of signal at the outset of "Young Goodman Brown" when Brown says goodbye to his wife Faith before going off into the woods for a secret meeting with the devil. He reflects, "Me thought as she spoke there was a trouble in her face, **as if** a dream had warned her that work is to be done tonight" (HSS 166). Indeed, much to Young Goodman Brown's dismay, he does encounter Faith at the meeting later that night.

In the second scaffold scene of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne uses the "as if" to disorient the reader by introducing a comparison contrary to the reader's expectation. When the light that "gleamed far and wide over all the muffled sky" (The Scarlet Letter, hereafter, TSL 174) appears, Dimsdale, Hester Prynne, and Pearl stand "in the noon of that strange and solemn splendor, **as if** it were the light that is to reveal all secrets" (TSL 175) our initial inclination is to believe that this vision, a scarlet "A," is somehow a message to Dimsdale and will force him to confess. This is reinforced by the metaphor; we believe it is the "light to reveal all secrets." However, we hesitate, unable to go on and integrate this information into our reading because it has been introduced with "as if." Does this "as if" negate the reality of what follows

only because it is a metaphor or does it negate the understanding the metaphor is supposed to impart? The reader's doubt is later confirmed when Dimsdale denies to the sexton that he has seen the vision, making the reader much less certain than before that Dimsdale will chose to confess and acknowledge Pearl as his daughter. The use of the rhetorical "as if" has caused the reader to question basic assumptions and to stumble further into the novel's mystery.

It is likely that O'Connor as a writer was in some way influenced by James and Hawthorne and their use of the "as if" because of her experience with them as a reader. However, O'Connor took this fundamental but not much studied aspect of their work and turned it into her own "poetic signature" (Kessler 150). She focused her frequent and pointed use of "as if" on her reader and, by using style and language as much as any other element of fiction--plot or scene or character--she dislodges the preconceived notions, subjects to the atmosphere of mystery, and introduces to the anagogical level of her fiction the ever reluctant, ever skeptical, ever evasive reader.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Asals, Fredrick. Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity. Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1982.

Black, Edwin. Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978.

Booth, Wayne C. A Rhetoric of Irony. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1974.

Fish, Stanley. Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980.

Gray, Richard. Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.

Grimshaw, James. The Flannery O'Connor Companion. Westport: Greenwood P, 1981.

Hawkins, Peter. The Language of Grace: Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Iris Murdoch. Cambridge: Cowley, 1983.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Scarlet Letter. New York: Modern Library, 1950.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Hawthorne's Short Stories. Ed. Newton Arvin. New York: Vintage, 1946.

James, Henry. The Great Short Novels of Henry James. Ed. Philip Rahv. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1944.

Kessler, Edward. Flannery O'Connor and the Language of Apocalypse. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.

Kinneavy, James. "The Basic Aims of Discourse." The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook. Ed. Tate, Gary and Corbett, Edward. New York: Oxford UP, 1981.

Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark. Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

Mayer, David R. "'Like Getting Ticks Off a Dog': Flannery O'Connor's "As if." Christianity and Literature 33 (1984): 17-34.

Mullins, C. Ross. "Flannery O' Connor, An Interview." Jubilee 11 (1963): 35-39.

O'Connor, Flannery. The Complete Stories. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971.

---. The Habit of Being. Ed. Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.

---. Mystery and Manners. Ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985.

---. Wise Blood. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962.

Snow, Ollye Tine. "The Functional Gothic of Flannery O' Connor." Southwesy 50 (1965): 286-299.

Underhill, Evelyn. Mysticism. Cleveland: Meridian, 1965.

Vaihinger, Hans. The Philosophy of 'As if'. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1924.

Walters, Dorothy. Flannery O'Connor. New York: Twayne, 1973.

Welty, Eudora. The Eye of the Story. New York: Vintage, 1979.

Wisley, Paul W. "The Prison of the Self: Isolation in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction." Studies in Short Fiction (1980) 49-54.