

Two Types of Wise Blood: Enoch and Hazel in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*

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Abstract

This literary analysis examines Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952) as an indirect critique of man's relation to eternity through the natural (material) depicted in the protagonist Hazel Motes and his doppelganger Enoch Emory. The interpretative essay focuses on the development of these two characters and the significance behind their "wise blood," keeping in perspective important philosophical as well as theological frameworks that provide essential concepts to interpret both character's final transformation. As a major conclusion, man's blood mirrors the interior man: Enoch's inner being reflects the animal, while Hazel's reflects enlightenment.

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Introduction

Wise Blood (1952), Flannery O'Connor's first novel, holds a prominent place in the American literary canon of the twentieth century. The novel narrates the story of Hazel Motes, a twenty-two-year-old war veteran who fights against his fate in the quest to possess "wise blood." His Christ-haunted mind drives him into a state of mental and emotional distress rooted in his bifurcated identity, controlled by both his desire for religious truth and his unbridled impulses. Hazel moves from his once fiery religious home in Eastrod, Tennessee, to the fictional city of Taulkinham, where he inaugurates his Church Without Christ and meets Enoch Emery, his doppelgänger. His journey is filled with images of southern violence and grotesqueness.

While the novel is set in the 1930s and 40s, the images in *Wise Blood* are a fictional representation of a region still suffering from the effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s, a historical event that revived the crisis caused by the Civil War. In *Wise Blood*, the depiction of neglected children, poverty, degenerate social class systems, and decayed communities in the hands of freaks and crooks echoes the reality of the South during this period. Although O'Connor was considered a critical spokeswoman of current social problems, the social problems of the South are not the focus of the novel. She was more concerned with denouncing spiritual mediocrity, especially in Christianity. For her, many of the social sufferings of the South were in fact a consequence of what Nietzsche (1822) claimed as God's divine decomposition, his death in society (Wood, 2004).

Hence, O'Connor explores themes of morality and exposes hypocritical religious practices. She depicts greedy false prophets and children who grow up in rigid protestant homes but show psychological abuse. Hazel is one of these children, caught up in a polarity that harbors dark human impulses. Yet O'Connor's fiction also contains unexpected moments of redemption. She often presents a believer who rebels against God, endures a painful crisis of faith, and ultimately experiences a moment of grace.

This common sequence is far from the "soggy, formless, and sentimental literature" (O'Connor, 1957, p. 31) O'Connor disliked. Instead, she sought to combine the writer's moral sense with a powerful

dramatic sense. She sharpened her fiction writing by reading authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, and Nathanael West. In addition to Southern grotesque writers, she looked for inspiration in French philosophers and Catholic theologians. Her fiction sprang from her extensive studies in philosophy, theology and art (Spivey, 1997).

This analysis focuses on Enoch and Hazel's blood transformation, exploring how their blood guides their actions and their reasoning, manifesting opposite spiritual conditions. Enoch's acceptance of his wise blood ironically turns him into a gorilla, while Hazel's embrace of this blood gives him the potential to transform his thinking and surrender to divine knowledge. To analyze both characters and identify important aspects of the novel, this essay relies on three critical approaches: the moral-philosophical, the theological-anagogical, and the biographical.

The first section of the essay focuses on the early tension between Hazel's legalistic religious views and his decision to flee to Taulkinham in an attempt to embrace atheism. Arriving at this animalistic setting, he meets his foil, Enoch Emery, who is emblematic of the citizenry. Here the two types of blood begin to manifest themselves. The second section examines the duality within each character and how they represent complementary extremes, one pulling away the other and moving closer to possessing wise blood. The third section centers on the creation and failure of Hazel's Church Without Christ. The fourth section, involving Enoch's transformation into a gorilla and Hazel's Oedipus moment, explores how Enoch and Hazel either embrace or reject wise blood.

Biography of Flannery O'Connor

In an interview with Regina O'Connor, Flannery O'Connor's mother, Joseph Hendin (1970) highlights a proud mother quoting her daughter: "'If you know who you are, you can go anywhere.' Flannery said that" (p. 6). Indeed, the Southern writer knew who she was: she viewed herself as a serious writer, a Southern woman and a devout Catholic. She was born in Savannah, Georgia to Edward Francis and Regine Cline O'Connor on March 25, 1925. As a young child she grew up between her family gatherings in a simple three-story house and her Catholic school, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Whitt, 1995, p. 6).

In 1938, the Great Depression forced the O'Connor family to move to Milledgeville, Georgia, the place where Flannery spent most of her life and grew up to be, as the Milledgeville *Union-Recorder* (1964) dubbed her, "One of [the] state's ornaments." Three years later, Flannery lost her father to systemic lupus erythematosus. That same year, 1941, her high school newspaper *The Peabody Palladium* (1941) published an article about her strange hobbies. The article, entitled, "Peabodite reveals strange hobby," describes O'Connor's interest in collecting publisher's rejection slips, apparently connected to her early start as a writer and cartoonist. The article mentions that she began writing at the age of six and had already written three books, all of them about a goose. After graduating from Peabody High School in 1942, she enrolled in Georgia State College for Women and graduated in 1945 with a major in social science and, in 1947, she completed a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing at the University of Iowa's Workshop.

Although she enjoyed the freedom at Milledgeville to write and raise animals at the same time, especially peacocks, her favorite bird, she sought to explore the intellectual atmosphere of the North. After graduating from the University of Iowa, O'Connor moved to New York. Spivey

(1997) mentions that this change marked her “mild liberal protest” (p. 54). In fact, at the time O’Connor opposed the rigid Southern system and supported Martin Luther King Jr.’s Civil Rights Movement.

While in New York, she began writing *Wise Blood* but before long she decided to leave the city and move in with the Fitzgerald family, a couple engaged with her literature, who lived in an isolated Connecticut farm (Hendin, 1970, p. 8). The Fitzgeralds maintained a strong friendship with O’Connor, describing her as a “shy, glum girl” who maintained friendships through letters. On the Connecticut farm, she devoted herself to her writings and conversations with the family. It was here that she also began to emerge as a woman of letters.

By 1951 O’Connor was obliged to return home because of her health, and she was soon diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus, her father’s terminal illness. In one of her letters to Maryat Lee, she described her return home: “This is a Return I have faced and when I faced it I was roped and tied and resigned the way it is necessary to be resigned to death, and largely because I thought it would be the end of any creation, any writing, any WORK from me. And as I told you by the fence, it was only the beginning” (O’Connor, 1979, p. 224). O’Connor’s chronic illness made her feel isolated: “In a sense, sickness is a place . . . and it’s always a place where there’s no company, where nobody can follow” (O’Connor, 1979, p. 163). Yet her mother Regina supported her for the rest of her life.

For the next thirteen years her mother would stay by her side. Interestingly, Whitt (1995) notes that this mother-daughter dependence “figures prominently in many of her stories.” In stories like “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” “A Circle in the Fire,” and “Good Country People” all of them she argues, “feature a single mother with a single daughter who has either a physical or attitudinal affliction that makes it necessary to depend on the mother who does not

understand her” (p. 7) And although in each story the daughter tries to separate herself from the mother, the mother persists in being sympathetic.

Back home, O’Connor continues to stay in touch with her friends and readers by correspondence. Regina and Flannery later move to their farm home in Andalusia, a place some miles away from Milledgeville. On the farm, Flannery wrote in the mornings; the rest of the day, she read, chatted with friends and visitors, wrote letters and accompanied her mother to town where they would usually have lunch at the Sanford House (Whitt, 1995, p. 7). In 1952 she published *Wise Blood*, a novel she mostly wrote during her time in New York. She continued to stay at home until her death on August 3, 1964.

In her short life as an artist, O’Connor’s goal was to become a serious writer. From 1955 until her death, she completed her second novel *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960) and published two collections of short stories, *A Good Man is Hard to Find, and Other Stories* (1955) and *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (1965), a title inspired by one of her favorite French philosophers, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *Mystery and Manners*, a collection of occasional prose pieces edited by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald was published in 1969. Other collections of her letters, prayers and book reviews appeared after 1979. *The Complete Stories* (1971), a book containing some stories not previously published in book form, won a National Book Award in 1972.

Although Flannery O’Connor’s life was marked by turbulent times in the South, by the death of her father, and by her isolation and pain from lupus, she did not consider her tragedies a loss but, from her Christian point of view, a potent reminder of God’s grace. This is the message she wanted to get across in her stories. Her fiction mirrors her embrace of grace. She once said, “all human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful,”

(O'Connor, 1979, p. 307). In the end she accepted the pain, and her art, as Wood (2004) says, "is an act of imaginative creation rather than a sermonic preachment" (p.8). She was so talented that her early death is "an American literary tragedy" (Spivey, p. 29).

Antecedents

Flannery O'Connor's major in social science at the Georgia State College for Women, her exposure to Southern authors at the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, and her time in New York where she wrote most of *Wise Blood* exposed her to a wide-range of artists and gave her a solid education in literary studies. Her immersion in philosophy and theology along with her Southern background greatly informed her fiction and shaped her into a visionary writer. Ted Spivey (1997) considers her a "figure second only to William Faulkner" (p. 1).

It is precisely William Faulkner (1897-1962), also a Southern writer, from Oxford, Mississippi, who O'Connor turned for inspiration early in her career. In fact, the first time she met her friends and the future editors of her letters, Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, she urged them to read Faulkner as well as Nathanael West (1903-1940). O'Connor drew from Faulkner's work *As I Lay Dying* (1930), a portrayal of the absurd and the regional concern for the history of the South that she personally wanted to show in *Wise Blood* (Spivey, 1997, p. 87). Although she admired Faulkner's creativity, she found his style to be very complex. She preferred the simplicity of style of Nathanael West, from whom she personally borrowed many elements for her own work. Orvell (1991) describes how O'Connor's *Wise Blood* resembles some of West's fiction; his strong influence on the writer is seen in her use of literary devices, character personification and distortion of the setting equally found in West's *Miss Lonely Hearts* (1933), *A Cold Million* (1934) and *A Day of the Locust* (1939).

Her affinity for Southern writers can be found in one of her letters addressed to "A" in 1953 where she states, "I have read the best Southern writers like Faulkner and the Tates, K. A. Porter, Eudora Welty, and Peter Taylor" (O'Connor, 1979, p. 98). From this list, short story writers Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980) and Eudora Welty (1909-2001) were important to her

awareness of the south. They spoke of historical problems like poverty, racial segregation, the failure of Southern leaders and the overall decadence of the culture. The critique of a declining South as well as the loss of morality in society were also the main concerns of Walker Percy (1916-1990), O'Connor's fellow Catholic and writer. Like O'Connor, Percy saw the failure of the white Christian Southerner who for him was "calamitous and unremarkable" (Wood, 2004, p. 103). His posture also influenced O'Connor's religious views manifested in her novels through degraded personifications of man and society.

Another important group of writers that strongly influenced O'Connor's writing was the Southern Agrarians also known as the Vanderbilt Agrarians. O'Connor shared many of their convictions published in their manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930). This group, like O'Connor, believed in the importance of Southern culture and education, the concern for Western civilization and its contributions to the literary tradition, and the embrace of European classics. Also, like the Agrarians, she mentored younger writers and sought to give advice to older ones (Spivey, p. 38). Though her relationship with the Southern Agrarians, she received valuable tutelage from Allan Tate (1899–1979) and his wife Caroline Gordon (1895- 1981). Gordon, a novelist and literary critic, helped her extensively in the process of writing her stories. According to Spivey (1997), Gordon gave O'Connor "a critical viewpoint that took into account the value of her work in terms of the literary currents of the postwar period" (p. 40). However, in terms of *Wise Blood*, critic Marshall Bruce Gentry (1986) disagrees with the suggestion that Gordon encouraged O'Connor to juxtapose the lyrical with the character's sordid actions. O'Connor does insert this imagery in some chapters to make the contrast, as in the scenes where she details the sky and the stars, yet Gentry finds them "ridiculous" (p.122) as they are misleading.

In addition to the vibrant Southern culture O'Connor found among the Agrarians, the South gave her vast material for her work. She observed much of her region, including its sense of community, past and present suffering, and the current efforts to rebuild what was lost after the Great Depression. She also observed how the South tried to catch up to western civilization by transforming the rural into a metropolis. However, O'Connor went beyond her perception of the South and expanded her intellect through theological and philosophical studies.

For O'Connor, the most influential Catholic novelists were the French writers Georges Bernanos (1888-1948) and Francois Mauriac (1885-1970). Bernanos, author of *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1936) and *Under Satan's Sun* (1926), depicts in his novels the spiritual battle between good and evil through religious characters like priests who suffer for the eternal fate of his own parishioners. Mauriac, who won the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1952, also portrayed the sense of evil over good. Spivey (1997) mentions that along with Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), who also influenced her writing, these authors "sum up O'Connor's desire to depict grace as well as demonism in her fiction" (p. 75).

Another important author for O'Connor was the literary figure James Joyce (1882-1941). In addition to sharing O'Connor's Irish roots, Joyce's art inspired the Southern writer to depict in her stories what Walker Percy calls "the darker regions of the soul" (Percy, 1979, p. 118). O'Connor's desire to portray the degradation of man caused by his own preference for evil also originates from her studies of Nietzsche (1844-1900), Jung (1875-1961), and Yeats (1865-1939), one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century. These three authors "formed the basis for a large part of her philosophical viewpoint as it related to the modern world" (Spivey, 1997, p. 22), as well as the modernist apocalyptic viewpoint that shaped her writing.

In literature, the modern apocalyptic viewpoint is defined as “the passing of one age and the beginning of another” (Percy, 1979, p. 114) and is achieved through images of exaggerated and dark realities. O’Connor understood how to incorporate this view into her writing by analyzing the works of Max Picard (1888-1965), the Swiss Catholic author and psychologist known for his book, *The Flight from God* (1934). In his book, Picard describes the story of how modern man flees to a “great city” but finds himself in a senseless order, a vacuous world where “people sit in the cafes and appear to do nothing but read newspapers and gossip” (Picard, 1951, p. 177).

Thus, O’Connor’s intellect combined with her religious and southern background shaped her literary imagination. Her works were often classified as Southern grotesque, a genre whose main precursors were Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) and William Faulkner. Authors as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) also contributed to the grotesque elements in O’Connor’s fiction.

In *Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction* (1960), O’Connor explains that the writer labeled as “grotesque” has a realist approach to writing fiction. He brings to life ordinary experiences people often ignore in everyday life. Regarding to characters, she explains that they “have an inner coherence, if not always a coherence to their social framework. Their fictional qualities lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected” (p. 2). O’Connor argues that mystery is essential in this kind of writing and that the writer must “always be pushing its own limits outward toward the limits of mystery,” be interested in the unknown and in creating characters “who are forced out to meet evil and grace and who act on a trust beyond themselves” (p. 3).

Finally, O'Connor explains that the writer of grotesque fiction must connect two points: "One is a point in the concrete, and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye but believed in by him firmly...as the one that everybody sees" (p. 3). The combination of these points will result in fiction described as wild, violent and comic, "because of the discrepancies that it seeks to combine" (p. 3).

Theoretical Framework

The critical approach for the literary interpretation of *Wise Blood* relies on various theoretical bases. In order to have what critic Suzanne Paulson (1988) calls “a more balanced approach than the strictly theological one that dominates most criticism on O’Connor’s today” (p. 9). The combination of three approaches frame the essay: the moral-philosophical, the theological-analogical and the biographical approach.

The moral-philosophical approach originates from the classical Greek and Roman critics such as Plato and Horace who emphasized the value of literature based on its moral and ethical influences over the reader. The objective of this approach is to stress how a literary work teaches morality and explores philosophical issues. This approach is useful when considering the themes of *Wise Blood* regarding man’s denial of sin, his own destruction caused by his distorted thoughts, and the implications of existential nihilism in man and society. Implicitly, *Wise Blood* shows the effects of nihilism on the human soul, which can potentially lead to a purposeless existence and the acceptance of evil.

Moreover, this approach is central to understanding the characters’ changing worldviews and their influence on their actions throughout the novel. For example, Haze is constantly changing his way of thinking: he turns from religious legalism to blasphemy, then to existentialism, and finally to nihilism. To analyze these contrasting philosophical concepts it is necessary to study their respective definitions developed by authors such as Albert Camus (1913-1960), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and Frederic Nietzsche (1844-1900), three authors from the area of philosophy and literature.

The use of philosophical intertext in *Wise Blood* shapes Hazel’s intellect as well as his conception of sin, eternity and the possibility of a divine source of knowledge, which radically

changes as he reaches the end of the novel. The correlation between Hazel's intellect and his religious conceptions play an important role in his final choice. The transformation of his physical sight also follows this pattern: Hazel initially relies only on what he observes with his eyes (empirical evidence), but later realizes that his empiricism falls short of what he is looking for; the shrunken mummy provides an explicit example of this. Ironically, he gains vision by destroying his eyes. All of his original convictions, including empiricism, existentialism and nihilism, fail him and force him to meet the mysterious beyond reason – not a skepticism toward reason – but an understanding of the mysterious, which is linked to faith.

Most O'Connor scholars have implemented a theological approach to interpret the religious vision that transcends her writings. Ralph C. Wood (2004), a devoted researcher of O'Connor's works, suggests that the reader should analyze her works from a Christian point of view; that is, through the lens of an anagogical framework. To read *Wise Blood* from this approach means to search for possible religious meanings in her novels rooted in Judeo-Christian motifs that simultaneously expose the exaggerated grotesque with the supernatural. This approach also pinpoints the Southern religious background O'Connor turned to for inspiration to develop her themes and settings and her characters' main features. The religious fundamentalism found in her stories springs from the South's fiery religious culture characterized by a daring proclamation of the gospel but with few true followers, what Wood (2004) describes as a "Christ-haunted South," as opposed to a Christ-centered South. Here the theological approach merges with the historical, which takes into consideration the religious practices of the South in the mid-nineteenth century.

Some critics have completely divorced the theological aspects from the interpretation of her works and have explored dissenting viewpoints. The best examples are found in gender

studies, rhetorical theory, dialogism, and psychoanalysis, among others. Although these approaches can lead to other interesting interpretations, they often lack the foundation for understanding the characters' relation to the metaphysical and as a result, limit the theological interpretation to the theme of good versus evil. A combination of the philosophical and theological approach can lead to a deeper interpretation by clarifying the difference between two commonly confused worldviews: the Manichean versus the Judeo-Christian.

According to Webster's Dictionary (1828) and the Catholic Encyclopedia (1910), the term Manichean is related to a sect in Persia dated close to the fourth century which argued that "There are two supreme principles, the one good, the other evil, which produce all the happiness and calamities of the world. The first principle, or light, [is] the author of all good; the second, or darkness, the author of all evil" (Webster, 1828). This view has been classified as a form of religious dualism, similar to the Platonic and ancient Greek conception of the soul as a nonphysical substance separated from the body; thus, matter is separated from spirit. In this sense, the body and soul of a human being moves in two dimensions: the pure and enlightened one which belongs to the nonmaterial, and the corrupt and evil one dominated by the flesh. As a consequence, "God" can be reached through the negation of the flesh, in other terms, the control of the bodily appetites (Ladd, p. 40). As a final step for salvation, "the soul must escape from the wheel of bodily existence to return to the divine world where it really belongs" (Ladd, p. 40).

Contrary to the belief that there is a constant battle between good and evil, the Hebrew or Old Testament perspective on the nature of man does not point to a dualistic creature divided between these two realms, but to a creature that portrays the extension of his creator. At the core of this doctrine, man is God's image bearer in four parts: the body, soul, heart and spirit (Stanley, 2014). However, under this conception, man lives an existential crisis because he has decided to

run away from his original purpose, thus becoming a fallen creature in duality with his maker. In sum, “The Greek view is that ‘God’ can be known only by the flight of the soul from the world and history; the Hebrew view is that God can be known because he invades history to meet men in historical experience” (Ladd, p. 40).

In this critical analysis the Hebrew view supports the interpretation of Hazel and Enoch’s transformation. These characters either accept or reject God’s invasion in their “historical experience.” Their transformation involve all their essence: their flesh (blood) to their incorporeal being (soul, heart and spirit). Hazel’s struggle, which resolves in his penance, does not symbolize a Manichean road to salvation; it is a symbol of his surrendered spirit. In his essay, “Jesus, Stab Me in the Heart!: *Wise Blood*, Wounding and Sacramental Aesthetics,” critic Robert Brinkmeyer (1995) explains that O’Connor’s use of flagellation in her character does not point “toward a Manichean split between matter and spirit; rather, in shattering the-character’s Cartesian worship of consciousness, they return the characters violently to their bodies into which the divine has somehow penetrated” (p. 84). O’Connor’s exaggerated and violent images of the body show man’s positive or negative disfiguration, an evidence that the body is a manifestation of man’s inner being and that the physical reality is connected to the soul and spirit.

Lastly, biographical criticism is a branch of the historical approach which connects the author’s life and thoughts with his or her literature. When reading *Wise Blood* most modern critics of Flannery O’Connor would agree that the motivation behind her writings originated from her theology (Cofer, 2014). Her intellect and religious vision transcends much of her work. Her theological knowledge combined with her devoted devotion to Christ strengthened her spiritual and scriptural knowledge prominently in the extensive use of biblical allusions in her

short fiction and novels. In addition, some critics even argue that the depiction of disfigured and dismembered bodies in her stories such as in “Good Country People” (1955), about the story of Hulga a woman forced to live with an artificial leg, mirrors the disfiguration and pain she suffered as a lupus patient.

Two Types of Wise Blood: Enoch and Hazel in *Wise Blood*

When O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, was published in 1952, she startled her readers with her fiction now classified as grotesque. The editor of the *Flannery O'Connor Review*, Margaret Whitt (1995, p.1), mentions that, from the start, O'Connor's art had a "puzzling and disturbing effect" in her readers, as her stories were considered to be abrupt and violent, an unexpected approach to fiction coming from a devout Catholic. In fact, contemporary reviewers were not sure how to analyze her work. Whitt remarks that one reviewer saw her as a writer who used "brutal irony, a slam-bang humor, and a style of writing as balefully direct as a death sentence" (p. 1). Yet, even some critics were unaware of the theological meanings embodied in all the Jesus-cursing characters.

Apart from the strong religious discourse in O'Connor's writings, there are two other fundamental aspects of her fiction. One is the description of Southern manners contextualized in the mid-1900s, which she carefully observed and considered essential. She argued that manners were so vital to the novelist that "any kind will do. Bad manners are better than no manners at all" ((Fitzgerald & Fitzgerald, 1957). And through the close observation of Southern culture, another message emerged in her writing: the element of grace. She left a trace of this in most of her main characters, allowing their religious discourse to be "effortlessly woven into a densely stratified puzzle of Southern culture" (Day, 2001).

In this context, *Wise Blood* can be analyzed as a novel with strong religious themes; however, the already exhaustive criticism on the novel's typical theme of redemption will not be the focus of this essay as it will not focus solely on Hazel's transformation but on other elements that have not been explored, without discarding what Gentry (1986), drawing on the work of Caroline Gordon, refers as the "theological framework" (p. 119) of O'Connor's writings.

This essay will focus on the issue of blood and how it functions. In the novel, the word “heart” becomes highly significant and consists of three components: the mind, will, and emotions. The heart in *Wise Blood* not only denotes the muscular organ that pumps blood through the body but also the link between the transferred blood and the spiritual nature of man, characterized by being wise or unwise. Put another way, the physical, in the novel referred to blood, is the result of the interior man or spirit. Enoch’s embrace of his “wise blood” ironically turns him into an animal, whereas Hazel’s rejection of wisdom inversely drives his blood to finally surrender to spiritual knowledge, which is connected in the novel to a spiritual entity.

Hazel Motes, the stubborn protagonist who portrays the image of a fanatical “elderly country preacher” (p. 4) from Eastrod, Tennessee, initially desires “to be a preacher of the gospel” (p. 17) following the steps of his fiery grandfather, a sold-out circuit preacher who proclaimed that Haze, even as a little boy, had been redeemed and would be endlessly chased by Jesus “over the waters of sin!” (p. 16). However, as Haze ages, he finds the persecution unbearable and the message of Christianity becomes foreign to him; Christ becomes “a wild ragged figure” in his mind (p. 16). The thought of being confronted by this figure brings him uncertainty and the fear of being punished; thus, his spiritual journey is curtailed early in adulthood. For him, this doctrine is no longer sustained by the traditional preaching and guilt-ridden faith of his hometown. Now, as a grown-up, Hazel “is trying to come to terms with his own theology—a theology he does not believe,” Jordan Cofer (2014, p. 26) observes. Indeed, this fracture in his own theology shows two paradoxical visions he first develops in his childhood and later in the army, two visions that will dictate how his blood will be regarded throughout the novel.

The first vision he develops in his childhood results from his own religious legalism. Growing up, Haze struggles to reconcile the guilt imposed by his religious family through corporal punishment. He walks in his shoes filled “with stones and small rocks,” to pay a sort of penance great enough “to satisfy Him” (p. 59), only to be left with lacerated feet and with the false conception that his blood serves as some sort of payment for his errors. Such behavior implies that as a child his conception of spirituality begins with a dualistic perspective between self-righteous legalism and the knowledge of God. In other words, Hazel’s ignorant blood manifests itself in the physical realm by blindly attempting to access to divine wisdom through corporal punishment; a consequence of his irrational thinking which drives his will to carry out actions to satisfy his overwhelming feelings of shame and guilt. Not yet able to reach divine wisdom, Haze’s interaction with the real world mirrors his blood’s misguided impulses fueled by a fractured and confused heart, a heart far from pumping wise blood.

After leaving for the army, and tired of carrying the same guilt, his already distorted view takes another extreme stance: the complete negation of his soul. Even though he fights to not “have his soul damned by the government or any foreign place...” (p. 18), soon he accepts the atheistic views of his friends believing he has “no soul” (p. 18). Hazel no longer worries about committing sin, for, as Cofer notes, “once Hazel leaves for the army, he tries to adopt the atheistic sensibilities of his peers who tell him “nobody was interested in his goddam soul unless it was the priest” (p.18). The corporal punishment he used to practice is no longer relevant, now the negation of his soul is what temporarily soothes his inner struggle. Again, Cofer points to the new position Hazel adopts in the army: “Motes tells himself that he no longer has to avoid sin because he does not have a soul and sin cannot exist” (p. 26).

In *Wise Blood*, the soul permits Hazel, as well as the rest of the characters, to have thoughts and feelings and to make choices. In other words, the soul is a manifestation of the three elements found in the heart, which are the mind, the emotions, and will (Stanley, 2014). Since the soul is located between the body and this nonphysical heart, being the inner layer of the body and the outer layer of the heart, how it manifests itself in these three areas in characters like Hazel and his doppelgänger, Enoch, will testify in the novel a heart connected or disconnected from wisdom. When Hazel assures himself that his soul “was not there” (p. 18), he disconnects his blood (flesh) from his nonphysical heart, leaving a hole between the body and the nonphysical heart, since the soul that glues them together is denied. More importantly, Haze gradually shuns his spirit, the deepest inner being of a person that is in constant communication with the heart, the place where he can attain spiritual knowledge. Because God as an entity can appeal to the heart, Hazel’s position adopted after coming home from the Army begins to shut off any possibility to hear from Him. As Stanley (2014) explains, under a theological framework, “It is not the soul that believes, but it is the heart (Rom 10.9). Because the heart is deeper than the soul, yet not as deep as the spirit, the heart functions as the link between the soul and the spirit” (“The Heart is the Gatekeeper to the Spirit,” para 2) Thus, by doing this, he is ultimately choosing to deny the concept of eternity or spirituality in his blood. However, by taking this route, Haze will reinforce O’Connor’s prevalent use of ironic reversals: his obstinate position will serve in the novel as an open door for him to obtain the spiritual wisdom he is running away from. As his soul tries to detach from a redemptive truth, he will get closer to it.

Further, the denial of his soul implies a turning point for this character. His affirmation calls into question how this worldview would govern his actions now as an adult. Even though he literally assumes this position, figuratively he incarnates a fractured identity, since his denial

doesn't eliminate the turmoil he has inside. Instead, from the time he sets his foot in Taulkinham, his negation will begin to show incoherencies that throw him on the edge of pure absurdity, as when he runs over the Prophet's body with his Essex bursting his head to the point that "a lot of blood was coming out of him and forming a puddle around his head" (p. 206).

Upon his arrival from the Army and with this new adopted conviction, Haze decides to leave behind his "skeleton of a house" (p. 20), as well as the fanatic religiosity of his family to pursue a more naturalistic view of life by rejecting any form of immaterial or divine belief. Thus what awaits him is a two-dimensional plane, a grotesque reality O'Connor often throws her characters into. As Gary Ciuba (1989) explains, "Her characters often live on this two-dimensional plane, far removed from their divine origins, she renders their faces in the most superficial terms" (p. 73). Fastened on this superficiality, Haze boards a train to the city of Taulkinham with his mind still attached to fading images of Eastrod, for it "filled his head and then went out beyond and filled the space that stretched from the train across the empty darkening fields" (p. 6). Yet he is determined to arrive in this new city.

In the train, Haze meets one of the first caricaturesque characters in the novel, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, a "fat woman with pink collars and cuffs and pear-shaped legs that slanted off the train seat and didn't reach the floor" (p. 3). Like almost every other character in the novel, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, represents one of the "comic caricatures" that "take the world at its face value and never really see the value in faces" (Ciuba, 1989). She foreshadows characters later in the novel that will label Haze by his outer appearance or an attempt to profit, such as Onnie Jay Holy or the greedy Mrs. Flood. All of them portray grotesque images of their blood, a capricious blood that allows the "essentials of the soul to be seen in the distorted outlines of the body" (Ciuba, 1989). As Mrs. Hitchcock sits in front of Hazel, she judges him only by what she

sees: the price tag of his suit. “She felt irked and wrenched her attention loose and squinted at the price tag. The suit had cost him \$11.98. She felt that that placed him...” (p. 4). O’Connor’s superficial dimension slowly merges as Hazel gets closer to Taulkinham. By the time he gets there, his repeated argument to the passengers that he would not believe in Jesus “even if He existed,” it is somehow confirmed by the porter who says, “in a sour triumphant voice” that “Jesus been a long time gone” (p. 21).

This is where the story will take place; a city where the animal, the body and the divine will overlap to “interplay” and show, as Shinn (1968) notes, the devil personified. Taulkinham, he maintains, is a “personification of Miss O'Connor's Devil-in-it, can be found all the creations of man which stand between him and salvation” (p. 68-69). The “creations of man” Shinn refers to can be interpreted as exaggerated manifestations of their decayed blood, exteriorized in forms of lust, greed, hatred, murders, envy, and extreme negative behaviors incarnated in men and women to such an extent they closely resemble caged animals in a zoo more than civilized humans.

These characters personify the most distasteful and grotesque states of humanity, reinforced by the hostility of the city. The first thing Hazel sees as he steps off the train are bizarre signs that “moved up and down or blinked frantically” (p. 25), denoting an elevated and erratic atmosphere. In the heaviness of the streets, Haze “walks very slowly, carrying his duffel bag by the neck,” which suggests that he might want to get back on the train as he has “no place to go” (p. 26). But once he reassures himself of his decision to stay, “his face was stern and determined under the heavy hat” (p. 25-26). He soon encounters bickering and fighting in the street between a potato peeler salesman and a blind preacher; a prevalent scenario in the novel that often “gives an impression not of civilization but of a jungle in which everybody fights for a

place in the pecking order” (Gokcen, 2008). This torment and ceaseless fighting between the citizens is an image of the “animal mankind” Dostoevsky conceptualizes in one of his letters in which he argues that once the spiritual is removed, man “exists for bread alone, a truth that can only apply to an animal mankind” (Dostoyevsky, Lowe, & Meyer, 1988). Thus, in Taulkinham, the citizens no longer struggle with the existential crisis of the soul; instead, they are more concerned about their daily bread. Unlike Haze, who continues to struggle with this question, they have adopted an entirely naturalistic view.

In this city, blood functions as a determinant of action, evidenced in the characters’ compulsive and animalistic behaviors, leaving no room for reason and moral responsibility, only instinct. They are immediately presented as exhibiting instinctive behaviors: Sabbath Hawks, a young woman guilty of strangling her baby child with a silk stocking and hanging her up in a chimney; Asa Hawks, the tall, cadaverous “blind” preacher, faking his blindness to cheat people; Hoover Shoats, the corrupt radio preacher also profiting from his preaching; Mrs. Flood, the insatiable old woman afraid of giving up even a penny to the government; and the most carnal character, Enoch Emery, the guard at the gate of the city zoo, whose impulses are led by the “communication with his blood” (p. 83). Enoch is “animalistic in his instinctive nature and even works as a guard in the zoo, reinforcing his primal connection” (Cofer, 2014, p.48). He had followed his blood to “the city and –with a knowing in his blood – he had established himself at the heart of it” (p. 76).

The zoo, described as “the heart of the city,” is a metaphor that underscores the animal element in humans, the core and essence of the citizens’ beliefs. William Rodney Allen, (1986) in his essay, “The Cage of Matter: The Zoo in Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*,” makes reference to the zoo-like features in the city as well as in the bodies that inhabit it. Allen argues

that in Taulkinham there is no place for the human body and often the characters symbolize animals in a caged zoo. He maintains that the bodies are often confined in coffins or hidden places. Throughout the novel, for example, O'Connor creates images that allude to this analogy. The best examples can be found in various moments when Hazel crams himself in his Essex, or the mummified man is shown shriveled in a coffin. A similar image is suggested when moving in and out of limited spaces, as when Enoch crawls into and hides in the bushes, adopting the posture of a dog to peek at women in bathing suits: "Well, I'll be a dog. He began crawling out of the bushes immediately, his heart moving so fast...In a second he appeared on all fours at the end of the abelia and looked across the pool" (p. 79).

This association between the body and the zoo-like setting reaffirms the idea that blood is what drives the characters' actions, particularly, Enoch's. For him, what counts is what he knows in his blood as he ironically thinks he has "wise blood like his daddy" (p. 44). Yet he is submerged in a place of pure banality where the divine has no importance. No divine qualities are discernable in their bodies, and even less so in their blood. O'Connor's approach in portrayal of their degraded nature illustrates what, to her, is the repulsiveness of a body separated from the divine, existing in a grotesque and morbid reality. On this subject, Gocken (2008) notes that "the loss of the human as the bearer of the divine spirit results in the loss of the divine and its replacement by horrible images" (p. 137). Evidently, the city is a place filled with horrible images where a character like Haze enters to engage in "the most abominable forms of carnal experiences." To quote Gocken, Haze must "experience extremes of fallenness" (p.135) to test his new adopted worldview, a man living only in his flesh (blood). At once, Hazel begins to imitate their behavior, which involves submitting to his impulses. C.S Lewis (1944) also elaborates this idea in *The Abolition of Man*, where he argues that the "only course left open" to

a man who lacks any moral reference is suicide or obedience to “impulse (and therefore, in the long run, to mere ‘nature’)” (p. 27). In fact, Lewis discusses the same idea Fyodor Dostoevsky explores in the letter quoted above, where he opens the discussion about man’s state without God; “If, moreover, there is no spiritual life, the ideal of Beauty, man will begin to languish, die, go mad, kill himself, or let himself in for pagan fantasies” (p. 285). This conflict within Ivan, explored in *The Brothers Karamazov*, parallels Hazel’s as he also struggles with disbelief and the prospect of renouncing his life to egotism and permissiveness.

In contrast to Hazel Motes, who chooses to stay in Taulkinham as a result of the conflict he faces, Enoch comes to the city to embrace what he has sensed in his blood. As previously mentioned, Hazel’s rejection of his soul correlates to his rejection of divine wisdom, which poses a “threat to his empirical perception of truth” (Marken, 2008). In other words, to him, divine wisdom defies his knowledge. Without knowledge it is impossible for him to live by truth; thus, he must rely on self-deceit, a deceit fueled by his blood, his body and his senses. In turn, he becomes a reflection of Enoch’s empiricism. Ironically, when he arrives in the city, the first thing Enoch Emery tells him is that he acts as if he had wiser blood than anyone else (p. 55). Enoch, Hazel’s doppelganger and without a drop of wise blood in his body, foreshadows Hazel’s transformation later in the novel. However, at this point, Haze desires to stay in a place that feels right to him for he is afraid of the Jesus who beckons him “to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown” (p. 16). The combination of his limited knowledge with the possibility of trusting or having faith beyond his footing is something he is afraid of. Marken contends that Haze is afraid of forsaking his current way of knowing if he follows this call, for “Faith, he believes, cannot coexist with his current understanding of the world. If he were to

accept faith and then “suddenly know it”—by focusing on what he perceives through his senses or reason—he would drown” (p. 24).

Hazel would drown because his worldview leaves little room for faith – that is, not trusting his current worldview to God in order to embrace wisdom, nor reason, the complement of faith and the path, O’Connor considered, to discern truth. Motes, therefore, needs both of these, reason and faith: two interwoven concepts necessary to transform his blood and lead him out of his self-centeredness. As Kreeft and Tacelli (1994) argue, reason is important in the pursuit of truth. However, when reason is ignored or abused, it can distort truth. In the novel, Hazel misuses reason in different ways; one of the earliest distortions he develops as a child is when he chooses to read with his mother’s glasses, figuratively showing an early disregard for learning. Marken (2008) explains that even as a young child, Haze approaches reason from a distorted view; he goes to school where he learns to read and write but thinks “it was wiser not to” (p. 17). Learning becomes even more difficult as he chooses to read his Bible wearing his mother’s glasses, though “they tired his eyes so that after a short time he was always obliged to stop” (p. 17). As learning tired him, he kept his knowledge limited to the familiar, which meant whole reliance on the tactile to feel the reality of his surroundings, for “he wanted to stay with his two eyes open, and his hands always handling the familiar thing” (p. 16).

This is why the familiar feels very comfortable to Haze. To him it symbolizes an overconfidence in what he already knows: his senses, which have fossilized and distorted his knowledge. Hazel’s first disturbing sensory experience is with a local prostitute, Leora Watts, to whom he loses his virginity. Before he arrives at her place, he spots her address written in a men’s toilet. He had been sitting for a while when he spotted the inscription over the toilet paper, the hand writing coming from a “drunken-looking hand” (p. 26). From the start, there is a

grotesque link between excrement and sex, and once Hazel arrives at her place the scene is far from romantic: Mrs. Watts is lying in bed “cutting her toenails with a large pair of scissors” (p. 29). She is pictured as a “very big woman” who barely fitted in her pink nightgown.” And whose teeth were “small and pointed and speckled with green and there was a wide space between each one” (p. 30). At this sight, Hazel’s senses are “stirred to the limit” (p. 29), yet he doesn’t enjoy the act of sex. The next day, he remembers “he was like something washed ashore on her, and she had made obscene comments about him” (p. 55). His first attempt to prove that Jesus or the concept of spiritual sin doesn’t exist completely fails because the conviction he is trying to live by begins to turn into dissatisfaction and anxiety. When he tries to be with her again, “his throat got dryer and his heart began to grip him like a little ape clutching the bars of its cage” (p. 56). It is interesting to note that O’Connor temporarily designates the same animalistic features she gives to Enoch to Hazel every time he attempts to deny wisdom.

Unlike Enoch, Haze is conscious of every perturbing act, as evidenced by the anxious irritated state he is often enduring. Throughout the novel, he yells and fights, gives angry looks, and, like most of the characters, is very unlikable. Notwithstanding Enoch Emery, who seems to be friendly and almost ignorant of what goes around him, creating another example, as Cofer notes, of “O’Connor’s technique of ironic reversals” (Cofer, 2014, p. 103). In fact, Enoch tells Motes that he, Enoch, is the one with wise blood: “I’m the one has it. Not you. Me” (p. 55). His attitudes contrast with Hazel’s. For example, having sex with prostitutes is something he just does by habit: “he visited a whore when he felt like it” (p. 76). Again, looking closely at Hazel’s reaction to being with Leora Watts, he never enjoyed their sexual encounter; rather, he is left more disappointed and dissatisfied in his pursuit. In fact, in light of the animalistic setting, sex is

stripped of any beauty. There is no passion, no wisdom, only a poisonous behavior connected to his blood and troubled spirit.

The relationship which begins between Enoch and Hazel will serve to highlight their inclinations toward a true or false wise blood. After meeting Leora Watts, Motes personally encounters Enoch, comically introduced as “a friendly hound dog with a light mane” (p. 40). Originally born and raised in Taulkinham, Enoch grows up in a detrimental environment. His father neglects his childhood by engaging him in a form of child labor: “Me and my daddy we moved around with a sawmill where we worked” (p. 42). Later he is “traded” to a welfare woman who sent him to a Bible Academy. Instead of being “some relief” for him as he thought it would be, he ended up hating the place and, like Hazel, became repulsive to the “religious folk” because he thought he “was going to be sanctified crazy” (p. 40). Hazel relives the time his mother discovered that he had seen a naked woman at the home carnival. As a child he thought “it was a skinned animal and then he saw it as a woman” (p. 58). After this impactful event, he began to walk with his shoes filled with rocks until he bled to compensate for the “nameless unplaced guilt” his mother had laid on him. From there on, Hazel is, as Whitt (1995, p. 16) remarks, “racked” by his blood.

Those explicit memories of mental and physical distress reveal part of Hazel and Enoch’s motivation to flee to Taulkinham. The pernicious effects of their degraded childhood force them to escape a past filled with negative religious experiences. Hedin (1970) points out that both characters are trying to escape chaos; a disorder marked by “disease, decay, and death” (p. 45). Yet, Hazel’s attempt to escape fails; he still carries blood haunted by a distorted religion. In wanting to detach himself from this reality, he ends up creating another blurred landscape. In fact, Hedin contends that Hazel’s escape from his roots -a similar scenario lived in the army- will

serve to magnify his conflict with sin, the existence of his soul, and the possibility of a greater source of wisdom. In Taulkinham, his magnified conflict turns into an anti-religious fury, a blasphemy against Judeo-Christian motifs. He goes around in his Essex proclaiming his religious creed, ironically replicating his grandfathers' preaching style. Although Hendin identifies Hazel's persistent struggle, she does not mention that one of the possible reasons why it amplifies is because of the condition of his blood; a blood that remains unbridled until its transformation at the end of the book.

On the other hand, Enoch Emery who shares a similar traumatic past, finds an easier way to adapt to the city. He is settling back in his "ol' home town" (p. 42) in an attempt to embrace and "justify his daddy's blood" (p. 129). In some sort of way, Enoch returns back home. In the city he is a zookeeper; he is enthusiastic about making new friends and spends part of his day performing childish antics. The facileness with which Enoch settles in Taulkinham contrasts with Hazel's transcendental fight against wisdom. While Hazel's obstinate blood struggles to submit to divine wisdom, Enoch fixates on having gorilla-like strength like Gongga, the circus's superstar, to the point where he fervently desires to meet the ape and touch it. An explicit example of this is when Enoch seeks to touch the gorilla; immediately after Gongga starts shaking people's hands, Enoch sees the moment of physical contact as "the supreme moment he had expected" (p. 175).

Although Enoch and Hazel's inner conflicts are extremely different, this allows them to be complementary extremes. The relationship between them highlights the duality within their blood. The portrayal of these extreme inclinations is a technique often used by O'Connor (Cofer, 2016, p. 46). In fact, she makes further use of this technique to demonstrate the duality within

both characters: Enoch is subject to his false intuition of having “wise blood” while Hazel is the stubborn protagonist predestined to have it: “malgré lui.”

The duality within Enoch’s character is not easy to recognize. Despite all the analyses written about his role in *Wise Blood*, most commentators still find him an enigma (Michaels, 2013). Yet a point of reference for understanding the duality within Enoch’s blood originates in the meaning of his name. It can be traced back to two possible meanings: either an allusion to Enoch of the Sethite line in the Bible, a prophet who “was in such close communion with God that he ascended into Heaven without dying a natural death” or Enoch, the son of Cain, who committed the first murder in the Bible (Cofer, 2014, p. 46). Enoch’s struggle within his blood starts with his name, as Michaels (2013, p. 19) points out: “Enoch and his biblical namesake seem to move in opposite directions, the one toward God and the other toward his animal nature...” His duality progressively chooses the animal, suggesting an inclination toward ‘Enoch, the son of Cain’ and giving a possible explanation of his constant choice for the physical in the novel, as well as his tendency to act grotesquely like the rest of the people in Taulkinham.

In fact, his blood’s compelling relationship with the animal/physical confirms that he is a burlesque figure of wisdom. Marken (2008, p. 40) argues that Enoch’s blood disregards reason entirely, making him act foolishly: “Enoch acts rashly because he refuses to temper his impulses with reason.” His blood reinforces his bestial instinct at the same time it deepens his conviction in the unknown since, for him, knowledge is not important. In his life, “what he didn’t know was what mattered” (p. 131). Ironically, his bond with the animal does not lean him toward a pure materialistic perspective about life; instead, it mixes with a worldview partly fueled by mysticism; his trust in a “mystery beyond his understanding” (p. 131) speaks more of his reliance on blind faith connected to a lack of logical consistency in his behaviors. This absurd but

comical association between Enoch and his lack of wisdom can be captured in scenes when he is left at the mercy of his impulses at the same time he displays his belief in empty symbols. After he delivers the mummy to Hazel, he believes it is a miracle totem that would do something special for him. He couldn't "get over the expectation that the new Jesus was going to do something for him. In return for his services" (p. 93), he was so excited that the frenzied scene made his blood beat like drum noises (p. 85).

Moreover, Enoch's disregard for knowledge alters even more his capacity to discern the right use of it. Marken (2008, p. 40) notes that when Enoch abstains from using his reason and trusts solely in his "wise blood," the result is his failure to "pursue truth properly," making him unaware of his unreasonableness. This condition is also explained by the anatomy of his brain, described as being divided into two parts: the one in communication with his blood and the other which contained words and phrases. The first part of his brain confirms once again that his actions are at the mercy of his "communication with his blood"; the other part, cluttered with words and phrases, materializes in trivial thoughts marked by his stupidity. Upon seeing Hazel's car for the first time, his shallow response is "Where'd you git thisyer fine car? You ought to paint you some signs on the outside it, like 'Step-in, baby'..." (p. 83-84).

Enoch's communication with his instinctive blood also defines his meaningless rituals which typify his obsession with the bestial. According to Cofer (2014), Enoch often engages in activities reminiscent of his animalistic character: "Enoch constantly associates himself with the bestial, frequenting animal cages, the museum, and movies about Gonga the ape" (p. 48). Another critic, Whitt (1995, p. 20), also describes Enoch as having an "obsessive compulsive attachment to meaningless ritual acts." The procession of his day consists of hiding in the bushes to look at women in the swimming pool, then going to the Frosty Bottle, where the waitress

repels his sexual remarks by saying he is a son of a bitch, “Ever’ day that son of a bitch comes in here,” she says (p. 86). Later, he stops at the zoo to make obscene comments to the animals. “He leaned closer and spit into the cage, hitting one of the wolves on the leg” (p. 89-90). To climax his day, his blood leads him to the “MVSEVM” (p. 92) where he gazes at the mummy with amazement but without understanding.

The dichotomy of Enoch’s name comes to a resolution when he comically adopts the image of a gorilla, suggesting what Michaels (2013) describes as the transformation of this character: “Most would agree that he is moving toward his ‘true end,’ not away from it. He is too becoming what he always was, and what he is meant to be” (p. 26). His blood is haunted by its own impulsivity due to its lack of wise judgment. Hence his conviction of having “wise blood like his daddy” (p. 75) is a false premise he lives by, embedding a character whose puerile compulsions prevent his way to the truth and confine him in his self-proclaimed intuition of having wise blood. Ultimately, Enoch is disqualified to reach knowledge. Even his attempt to create a temple for the mummy, the new crucifix, turns into an absurd parody of religious worship, a practice that fails to connect him with a divine source of knowledge. Instead, it becomes a meaningless ritual, little different from his hookups with prostitutes. As Claire Kahane, drawing on the work of Gentry (1986) reiterates, “Enoch ‘carries the burden of the negative exemplum’” because he is “locked into the physical” (p. 136).

One of the main differences between Enoch and Hazel’s blood manifests in Hazel’s awareness of his blood being pulled toward wisdom. Hazel knows that his rejection of wisdom combined with his denial of sin as well as the denial of his soul does not distance him from divine knowledge but magnifies his attitude of active rebellion against it. In fact, his blood constantly convicts him of his degraded state. Marken (2008) points out that Hazel’s blood, “[...]”

serves as a reminder that, despite his best efforts, he cannot ignore his soul” (p. 40). Hazel cannot ignore his essence, his soul as a symbolic open door for the conversion of his blood. Unlike Enoch, who ignores his thinking and consequent actions, Hazel progressively recognizes how his denial of the knowledge of God (in the novel, wisdom represents the right application of knowledge, particularly the knowledge of God) heightens his foolishness and throws him into disastrous situations. In his rejection he becomes the ideal, as O’Connor (1962) labels him, the “Christian malgré lui,” (“Author’s Note to the Second Edition,” para. 1) the protagonist that despite his past encounters divine wisdom.

Hazel’s separation from wisdom can be traced back to his childhood and later his time in the army when he adopts extreme paradoxical views: first religious legalism, then complete heresy. Growing up, he discovers that his legalistic practice of self-flagellation is logically inconsistent. By the time he is drafted into the army, he is susceptible to his peers’ atheistic beliefs. In turn, Hazel transforms his atheism into a heretical ministry, but then, once settled in Taulkinham, he starts to perceive that his current worldview, manifested in his anti-religious fury, also shows some logical fallacies. If he wanted before to purge himself of sin through blame and self-punishment, now he engages in all forms of it to deny its existence. His duality intensifies as he engages in extreme forms of evil, Gentry (1986) asserts that by the time he settles in the city, Hazel is “on a quest for sin, and at this point he is clearly beginning to participate in the positive, bodily, communal grotesque” (p. 128). In Hazel, sin literally manifests itself in his grotesqueries, but figuratively it typifies a distorted way of thinking which is product of his unbridled blood opposing wisdom. His behaviors constantly clash with the Jesus he is resisting, “the wild ragged figure” in the back of his mind. Ironically, in his resistance he no longer strives to avoid sin as he had initially tried as a child, for he had thought that “the way to

avoid Jesus was to avoid sin” (p. 16). Yet his irritable state leads him toward this figure. In a sense, his sin is the main directing force the narrator uses for Hazel’s redemptive experience.

This argument is also elaborated by Gentry (1986) in *The Religion of the Grotesque*, in which he discusses how the banality, cruelty and grotesqueness through which O’Connor’s characters emerge to serve as the motivating force for redemption: “The protagonist can . . . transform that grotesquerie into a force for redemption” (p. 15). Gentry further explains that the moment of redemption for O’Connor’s characters comes when their “oppression by degraded ideas” (p. 5) is no longer felt. In *Wise Blood* the degraded ideas represent a distortion of religious truths, particularly Judeo-Christian concepts, which need to be restored for Hazel to find freedom. Interestingly, Hazel will perceive that moment as a “physical annihilation,” a transformation later described in the novel when he decides to get rid of his flesh at the same time he consciously admits his blood’s conversion into wise blood.

Before Hazel undergoes any transformation, he must reconcile the contradictions within himself to the point that his current worldview shows no logical inconsistencies. In Taulkinham he begins to realize that neither his heretical position nor his legalism is relevant. The cracks created by this conflict become more apparent as his dissatisfaction in his endeavors grows. One of them is his relationship with the prostitute, Leora Watts. At one point, Motes no longer wants to visit the whorehouse: He begins to feel unsettled in his quest to prove that sin doesn’t exist, and his argument that he wanted to have a woman “not for the sake of the pleasure in her, but to prove that he didn’t believe in sin since he practiced what was called it” (p. 106) begins to collapse in his mind. Consequently, he reacts with fury and resorts to his atheistic preaching, impersonating pure blasphemy. He decides to launch his self-invented “Church Without Christ.” On the roof of his Essex he belts out:

Well, I preach the Church Without Christ. I'm member and preacher to that church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way. Ask me about that church and I'll tell you it's the church that the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption [...] "Listen, you people, I'm going to take the truth with me wherever I go," Haze called. "I am going to preach it to whoever'll listen at whatever place. I'm going to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there wasn't the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar. (O'Connor, 2007, p. 101)

In his church "the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption." The opposite of what the blood of Jesus means to the Christian doctrine, figuratively illustrating the redemptive way for sinful men. However, in Hazel's church, Christ's blood has no redemptive value and "what's dead stays that way." In the novel, Hazel's disregard for this type of blood symbolically means his rejection of any possible change within his own blood. As Ralph Wood comments (2004, p. 168), Hazel "resorts to blasphemy, denying all promise of transcendent transformation." Yet the doctrine of his church testifies more about Hazel's stubbornness than his actual conviction or preference for atheism. His argument against Jesus suggests that his disturbance does not rise from his desire to adhere to a certain belief; rather it proves the exasperating annoyance of his blood.

Furthermore, Hazel's preaching stems from his antagonistic relationship with the fraudulent preacher, Asa Hawks, a man he mistakenly sees as a preacher of the truth. Hawks uses his "blindness" for his avaricious business, spends more time begging for money than preaching, and walks the streets of Taulkinham with his daughter, Sabbath Lily, begging for money: "Help a blind preacher. If you won't repent, give up a nickel [...] help a blind unemployed preacher. Wouldn't you rather have me beg than preach?" (p. 36) Hawks' pathetic message catches

Hazel's attention and long before he starts his Church Without Christ, he is ironically confronted by Hawks to repent and renounce his sins (p. 49). Trying to resist him, Hazel tells Hawks: "I don't believe in sin. Take your hand off me" (p. 49). But Hawks' provocation continues, as he mockingly tells him that Jesus loves him. Hazel replies with fury by saying that "Nothing matters but that Jesus don't exist" (p. 50).

Hazel's assertion that "Jesus don't exist" demands from him a new theological creed to replace the Jesus he wants to evict from his mind. His self-proclaimed truth is the answer: "Listen here, I'm a preacher myself and I preach the truth" (p. 51). Besides exposing Hazel's fluctuant moral rectitude and veracity, his self-proclaimed truth also serves as a potent reminder that there are logical inconsistencies in his preaching. By the end of chapter six, the breakdown of his car emerges as an extended metaphor of his nonsense message: Hazel assumes that his junk car is in perfect condition. When one mechanic tells him that his car cannot be repaired, Hazel denies it. "This is a good car," he replies, and drives off to another garage where the mechanic promises he can "put the car in the best shape overnight, because it was such a good car to begin with..." (p. 111). This is just what Hazel desires to hear, as Witt (1995) remarks, "Haze listens to what he wants to hear, not truth" (p. 24). He obstinately continues to deny the true condition of his car. Similar contradictions arise when Sabbath Lily confesses to him that she is a bastard, supposedly to seduce him:

My name is Sabbath,' she said. 'Sabbath Lily Hawks. My mother named me that just after I was born because I was born on the Sabbath and then she turned over in her bed and died and I never seen her.' [...] 'Him and her wasn't married,' she continued, 'and that makes me a bastard, but I can't help it. It was what he done to me and not what I done to myself.' (O'Connor, 2007, p. 116)

Sabbath's confession stuns Haze. The innocent homely child he believed she was changes into a disturbing image. Slowly Hazel starts to see the inconsistencies in his thinking. He says he doesn't believe in sin, the foundation for his Church Without Christ because, according to him, "there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there wasn't the first two" (p. 101), yet it bothers him to think that Sabbath is a bastard and was conceived in sin. It shocks him to learn that a preacher who blinded himself for Jesus has a bastard: "'A bastard?' he murmured. He couldn't see how a preacher who had blinded himself for Jesus could have a bastard" (p. 116). He repeats six times that her daddy blinded himself and that it could not be so, "'You couldn't be a bastard,' Haze said, getting very pale. 'You must be mixed up. Your daddy blinded himself'" (p. 117). Marken (2008) reiterates that by this point Hazel "begins to recognize problems with his epistemology" (p. 27) because he is confronted at face value with exaggerated and crude realities like those of Sabbath Lily that oblige him to question his views.

This contradiction intensifies when Sabbath questions him whether or not she can be saved in his Church Without Christ. Hazel immediately responds that there's no such thing as bastard in it (p. 120), affirming that she is not different from anyone else: sinless. However, it irritates him to think that he can accept a bastard in his church: "He looked at her irritably, for something in his mind was already contradicting him and saying that a bastard couldn't" (p. 120). This is a turning point for Hazel because the inconsistencies of his ideas about truth are more apparent. Hazel realizes that "truth didn't contradict itself and that a bastard couldn't be saved in the Church Without Christ" (p. 120). He questions his belief that "Jesus is a liar" because he verbally agrees Sabbath can be saved in his Church Without Christ but consciously

denies it. He decides he will try to forget about it, that it was not important (p. 120). This response is reminiscent of his refusal to recognize the true condition of his car.

As shown in this episode, Haze begins to realize that his heretical position is unconceivable and that his basic assumptions about what is real depend on the frailty of his own version of the truth; furthermore, his understanding is at the mercy of his obstinate blood, a blood still incapable of wisdom, regardless of how hard he tries to see through the lenses of wisdom. His distorted version of the truth clouds his ability to see the complete picture of what is real, as it also partially distorts the portion that he sees. Here is where vision emerges as a central theme in the novel, with vision directly connected to wisdom.

This theme also highlights O'Connor's use of ironic reversals and juxtapositions. That is, the pairing of opposites to reverse the reader's expectations. One of the best examples is Asa's failure to blind himself for Christ as opposed to Hazel's successful blinding at the end of the novel: self-affliction that will turn his blindness into a symbolic sight. However, at this point, Asa paradoxically mocks Hazel's limited perception: "'I can see more than you!' the blind man yelled, laughing. 'You got eyes and see not, ears and hear not, but you'll have to see some time'" (p. 50). Hawks' bitter remark is filled with irony since he failed to imitate the apostle Paul, a biblical character who was struck blind, later to receive sight and encounter God. Instead, Asa's moment of fanaticism fails him and his attempt to "justify his belief that Christ had redeemed him" (p. 108) leaves him with a scarred face. Yet his comment serves as an important biblical allusion that foreshadows Hazel's redemptive moment and echoes the words prophesied by Hazel's grandfather, who asserted that his grandson was predestined to be in God's grip: "Jesus would have him in the end!" (p. 16). Motes will acquire wisdom in the end, he will "have to see some time."

In this vein, Professor Amy Hungerford (2008) explains that the trope of sight is an important element when analyzing the novel, especially as it pertains to Hazel. She introduces the perplexity of Hazel's sight by quoting Sabbath Lily as she tells her father, Asa Hawks, that she wants him, "I like his eyes. They don't look like they see what he's looking at, but they keep on looking" (p. 105). There is something about his eyes that catches Sabbath's attention just like they intrigue Mrs. Flood, the landlady, who looks deep into them trying to decipher something (p. 235). Nonetheless, Hazel's vision is still distorted. According to Hungerford (2008), Hazel Motes is on his way to revelation, to remove the "mote" from his eyes. This is a biblical reference to those who are blind because of the mote in their eyes: "And why behold you the mote that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?" (Matthew 7.3 American King James Version).

The blurriness in Hazel's sight keeps him from properly seeing, and therein missing many opportunities for redemption. The scene where Hazel encounters Sabbath offers a subtle example. As he talks to her, he misses the presence of a large blinding cloud with the shape of curls and a beard (p. 115), perhaps suggesting an image of God or a spiritual entity. Critic Timothy Caron (2000) makes an anagogical connection between the cloud and the bible narrative when God uses a pillar of cloud as a symbolic element to guide Moses and the Israelite nation out of the Egyptian bondage to lead their way through the desert, but he explains that Hazel is too busy with Sabbath to notice God's signs. He is so distracted by Sabbath's question of whether or not she can be saved in his church that even when the cloud is directly in front of them he fails to see it. By the end of their conversation, Hazel cares more about his "grand auto," the Essex, and drives the opposite direction of the cloud now transformed into a bird, "with long thin wings, disappearing in opposite directions" (p. 125).

Despite being the only follower of his church, Hazel continues belting out his message to “whoever’ll listen at whatever place” (p. 101). Yet he fails to catch people’s attention even as he screams climbed up on the nose of his car. Cofer (2014) notes that his church is a complete failure: “Much to his dismay, Hazel’s message falls on barren ground. Even the few that listen to his message completely misinterpret it” (p. 28). The reaction from the public is complete indifference. They dismiss him as another preacher and rabble rouser: ““Rabble rouser,” the little man said. ‘One thing I can’t stand it’s a rabble rouser.’ ‘He’s a preacher,’ one of the women said. ‘Let’s go’” (p. 100, 101). While he preaches the crowd moves fast and disappears. “It was like a large spread raveling and the separate threads disappeared down the dark streets” (p. 51). Interestingly, Michaels (2013) comments that Hazel is preaching to a crowd who apparently shares his own nihilistic beliefs but is unsuccessful because his message is unconvincing (p. 17). While the people in Taulkinham are largely detached by his atheistic preaching, Haze seems to be proving the opposite: he is obsessed with Jesus. Gentry (1986) notes that the people in Taulkinham all intuit that Hazel wants religion (p. 129). Most of the characters Hazel interacts with perceive his Jesus craze. The taxi driver, intrigued by Hazel’s visit to Mrs. Watts, tells him, “She don’t usually have no preachers for company” (p. 27) and after Hazel denies it twice, the driver insists “It’s a look in your face somewheres.” In one of his encounters with the prostitute, she refers to his “Jesus-seeing hat” (p. 56). Even Enoch Emery tells him, “I knew when I first seen you you didn’t have nobody nor nothing but Jesus” (p. 54), and Asa Hawks remarks, “I can hear the urge for Jesus in his voice” (p. 46). As Asals (1982) puts it, “they see no real difference between this founder of the Church Without Christ and a conventional Christian evangelist. Haze can shout blasphemies from the nose of the Essex, but his listeners draw no subtle distinctions” (p. 40).

This dichotomy points to the turmoil within his blood: he blasphemes but is attracted to the religious figure he attacks. His solution, although not aware of it yet, is the conversion of his blood into wise blood. His unreason will have to be balanced out or transformed by a divine figure that will convert his blood. This is one of the reasons why he is paradoxically drawn to Hawks. Even though Hawks, like the rest of the citizens in Taulkinham, does not possess wise blood, Hazel mistakenly believes he does. Up until now Motes thinks he is a genuine religious preacher concerned about the salvation of his soul. Thus, Hazel's blood, in contrast to Enoch's, continues to be inclined toward the spiritual, for the first thing he does after seeing Asa preaching in the street is to follow him, wanting him "to save him from his mortality by converting him to Christ" (Hendin, p. 52). Although he momentarily agrees with Enoch in that he also rejects the spiritual, his blood proves the opposite. After noticing Hazel was "follerin' them hicks" (p. 40), Enoch asks him, "You go in for a lot of Jesus business?" to which he replies, "No."

His compulsion to be close to Hawks is so strong that, in a fit of anger, he hits Enoch with a rock for not knowing the blind preacher's address (p. 95). After finding Hawks and the child again, he rents the room at the same boarding house. Once he knocks at their door, he pretends he desires to see Sabbath Lily: "I thought if your girl wanted to give me so much eye, I might return her some of it" (p. 104). However, he intends to use Sabbath to get closer to Hawks. While some of the characters are intrigued by Hazel's gaze, he instead fixes his eyes on the fake preacher's face: "He wasn't looking at the girl; he was staring at the black glasses and the curious scars..." (p. 104). In fact, Hazel is expecting from Hawks a secret welcome, some sort of urgency in the preacher to save his soul, but when he says, "You can't let me alone, can you? . . . I didn't ask you to come here and I ain't asking you to hang around." Hazel, perplexed and

angry, retaliates, “What kind of a preacher are you, not to see if you can save my soul?” (p. 104). Shortly afterwards, Hazel’s contradiction arises again when he tells Hawks that “No one with good car needs to be justified” (p. 109). Once again denying the truth about his condition and suggesting the opposite: he is the one in need of justification.

Despite all the evidence of his inward blindness, Hazel insists on preaching his defiant message but with little success. Yet it is Enoch who shows interest in Hazel’s preaching, not because he is driven to be part of the Church Without Christ but because his blood’s persistent demand to “justify his daddy’s blood” (p. 135) correlates with Hazel’s search for the “new jesus.” Enoch feels obligated by his blood to physically provide the new jesus Haze demands. As Enoch comes out of a dark movie house, he hears Hazel screaming, “The Church Without Christ don’t have a Jesus but it needs one! It needs one that’s all man, without blood to waste...Give me such a jesus, you people” (p. 140-141). By asking for this new figure, Hazel unknowingly affirms Enoch’s brainless devotion after the mummy, who unlike Hazel, materializes his senseless religion in trivial rituals. Indeed, earlier that week Enoch senses that “his life would never be the same again, because the thing that was going to happen to him had started to happen” (p. 129). Even though he did not understand what was going to happen, his blood kept nagging him to do something: transform his room into a temple to receive the new jesus and keep it until “Hazel was ready to take it” (p. 142). Hence, he cleans up every object in his room, primarily his washstand, which was to become the center piece and holy temple to welcome his sacred visitor, built with tabernacle-like pieces and with wooden carved images allusive to the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant. Asals (1982) explains that this furniture is a parody of the Ark of the Covenant and that “his formal cleanup is the purification of the tabernacle preparatory to the entrance of his god” (p. 45). Yet Enoch’s acute preparation cannot erase the purpose of this

furniture, that is, to hold human excrement (Caron, 2000, p. 41). Still he is convinced his furniture has a holy purpose, it is here where he dreams of performing “certain rites and mysteries that he had a very vague idea about” (p. 134). As a symbolic way to prove himself worthy of his daddy’s call and of his own blood, he seeks to be the mediator between the mummy and Hazel, a recognizable and honorable task according to him, as (Caron, 2000) puts it, “Enoch thinks he is rendering a great service to his deity by uniting the mummy with Hazel whom he supposes to be a great prophet of his secular god, a sort of John the Baptist whose lone voice in the wilderness of Taulkinham is preparing the way for this physical, unregenerate god” (p. 45).

Before he delivers the mummy to Hazel he is often reluctant to continue with this important task. As he tries to evade the situation he feels like “Jonah” (p. 138), resembling the reluctant prophet who originally flees God’s call to preach in the city of Nineveh. In the same manner, Enoch is called to preach the truth to Hazel and reveal the fallacy of his message, serving as a “criticism of Haze’s vacuous message” (Presley, 2009). Although Enoch is unaware of his assigned role, he serves as one of the catalysts for Hazel’s paradigm shift in the novel: Hazel’s assertion that once he has a new Jesus people will “see the truth” will dramatically change once he is confronted with the image of the mummy. This shriveled man without blood to waste is an unpleasant sight that questions Hazel’s claim that everyone would be saved “by the sight of him!” (p. 141).

Besides Enoch’s genuine interest in taking the new Jesus to Haze, no one else in Taulkinham is interested in his Church. Hazel had wanted to have a large number of followers to impress Hawks but nothing worked the way he had expected to. Indeed, the “membership of the Church Without Christ was still only one person: himself” (p. 146). His rebarbative effect on his

audience calls the attention of another false preacher, Hoover Shoats, with the pseudo name “Onnie Jay Holy,” a former radio preacher with the intention of turning Hazel’s church into a profitable business. As Hazel preaches again on the top of his Essex, Shoats joins him, giving a melodramatic testimony about his inspiring change after hearing Hazel preach. In the midst of his exaggerated performance he invites people to join the church for just one dollar, “It’ll cost you each a dollar but what is a dollar? A few dimes!” (p. 153) Hazel, aware of his outrageous phoniness, immediately contradicts him, “It don’t cost you any money to know the truth!” (p. 153). Yet Shoats continues with his idea of making business, “You ought to listen to me because I’m not just an amateur... You got good idears but what you need is an artist-type to work with you” (p. 157). Shoats’ idea to “promote” the Church Without Christ infuriates Hazel partly because Shoats fully embraces his practices. His lucrative business goes hand in hand with the “sweet” religion he preaches, wickedly showing no repentance for his acts. In some sort of way, Shoats confidence in his message simultaneously exposes and mocks Hazel’s own hypocrisy, for he preaches blasphemy but desires Jesus. In sum: Hazel “fails to see that this confidence man’s saccharine language does not in essence falsify his own creed” (Asals, 1982), instead it exposes the duality of Hazel’s own blood which utterly disturbs him.

Hazel’s objection confuses Shoats as he thinks his fellow preacher would join him in his business plan and he does not understand that behind Hazel’s concern is the aspect of truth. When Hazel tells Shoats that he is not true, he replies “I’m a real preacher, friend” (p. 156). His feigned role upsets Haze because he knows that he is not a real messenger of the religious truth he is longing for. Ironically, Hazel’s reaction contradicts his own claims since he tells Shoats that “blasphemy is the way to the truth,” even though Shoats does not verbally divulge blasphemy, his elaborate scam meant for his own profit is another form of profanity masked by his “artist-

type” religion. Hazel’s conflict arises again when he disagrees with Shoats’ greedy practices. An evidence that his blood is beginning to lean toward wisdom by progressively denouncing distorted versions of the truth. Indeed, as Hazel gets closer to his redemptive moment, his blood prices what it has originally been looking for: wisdom.

After the strong dispute with Shoats, Motes drives back to his house curious to see behind Asa’s black glasses. He sneaks into his room, squats down by his bed and discovers Asa’s secret: the feigned blindness. When the two sets of eyes meet, Haze’s expression seems to “open onto deeper blankness and reflect something and then close again” (p. 162). This moment reintroduces the trope of sight exposing the contradiction of Hawk’s vision and revealing Hazel’s ability to “examine the world around him and...discover the invisible” (Marken, 2008). Hawks physically pretends blindness to flaunt enlightenment, but his feigning mirrors, in reverse, his own inward blindness. O’Connor parodies the man who thinks he can see yet is blind by his own sight, perhaps she makes an allusion to the verse in Matthew 6. 22 which makes reference to spiritual blindness, “if your eye is bad, your whole body is darkness.” As Marken (2008) writes, “Hawk’s denial of his vision leads him away from, not toward, truth” (p. 26). The man chosen to pinpoint Hazel’s way to redemption and who represented, as Asals (1982) notes, “the apparent embodiment of that desire for total commitment to Jesus that he has denied in himself” (p. 145) has more things in common with Hoover Shoats than with the shepherd-like figure he had imagined. The discovery shatters Hazel’s hope of finding one person in Taulkinham real to his commitment to Jesus, further suggesting that all the characters in *Wise Blood* embody masked figures in utter blindness. This means Hazel’s conflict is enacted in a city that “will not provide the battle he implicitly demands” (Asals, 1982, p. 40) and will have to resolve his conflict alone.

Unlike Hawks who distances himself from truth, Hazel progressively moves toward truth. His blood is the essential part of him that persists in his search for it. As Marken (2008) writes, Hazel's "wise blood does not permit him to escape truth permanently, even when he wills to the contrary. His wise blood necessitates his search for truth" (p. 26). This need for truth, however, leads him into despair, evident in his inconsistent message: he turns from preaching blasphemy, "Blasphemy is the way to truth," (p. 152) to subjective relativism implying there are multiple truths, "I preach there are all kinds of truth, your truth and somebody else's" (p. 165), then blindly to nihilism, "...but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's no truth" (p. 165). At this point, Hazel walks in complete turmoil since he is partially aware of his incoherence but is still unable to reach truth and his ability to apply wisdom is confined by his contradictions. Because his previous methods of seeking truth through legalism and heresy have failed him, he finally resorts to Sartrean nihilism, also known as existential nihilism—that is, there is no purpose in life and no absolute truth. In his preaching he echoes the new creed: "where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to was never there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it. Where is there a place for you to be? No place" (p. 165). Hazel expects affirmation from his audience but he gets no response.

Hazel's existential nihilism exasperates his inner duality. The more he denies truth, the more his mind splits between his desire for religious truth and his vacuous message. According to Yanitelli (1949), in the existentialist mind, man is divided between "two poles of existential thought. On the one hand he is drawn by the polarity of the Absolute whose focus is God; on the other, by the polarity of Nothingness whose focus is the Absurd" (p. 495). This concept, he explains, emerges from the writings of philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who argued that man is often on "the brink of nothingness, the null, the absurd..." (As cited in Asals, 1982, p. 30), a

state of anguish that allows man to encounter God when he finally takes a “leap of faith,” and accepts faith beyond reason. Like Kierkegaard, O’Connor believed in faith beyond the intellect, she argued that reason was a God given gift that “can lead us toward knowledge of him, through analogy...To believe all this I don’t take any leap into the absurd. I find it reasonable to believe, even if those beliefs are beyond reason” (O’Connor, 1979, p. 479). Although she did not disregard reason, she admitted that the “virtues of faith . . . reach beyond the limitations of the intellect” (O’Connor, 1957, p. 158). At this point, Hazel’s intellect is on the edge of its limitations. The negations he has fervently preached leave him in the pit of anguish because in trying to find meaning in them he is confronted by the absurdity of his reality — the people in Taulkinham are deaf to his preaching and the object of his negations, which was to find truth, confuse him and leave him empty. By thinking that he has freed himself from the Jesus he has been escaping from, his repression leaves him in a state of panic often manifested in Hazel’s fear of being buried alive or images of his body in confined coffins, demonstrating Hazel’s overwhelming fear of dying trapped in his meaningless world. As Wood (2004) notes, “Gradually Hazel comes to see that all denials are parasitic, that his bitter negations are only in relation to positive truth, that he must espouse a gospel of nothingness in his own self-invented ‘Church Without Christ’” (p. 168).

As Wood remarks, Hazel’s negations lead him to “positive truth,” that is, Hazel’s final recognition of divine truth. As Hazel realizes the futility of his existence, he must grab on to what existentialists call a meaning framework, in this case a spirituality framework. Not that this framework negates reason, but instead answers Hazel’s necessity for truth beyond his intellect, the “virtue of faith” that awaits his ending. Before he reaches this point, Hazel goes through three

events which will lead to his final fate: Hazel destroys the new Jesus, murders his mocking replica, Solace Layfield, and the patrolman pushes the Essex over the embankment.

After Enoch steals the mummy from the MVSEVM, the dead emblem, described as a “dead shriveled-up part-nigger dwarf” (p.176), awaits its reunion with Hazel. As a form of worship, Enoch rests the figure in his gilded cabinet, but two days later, the mummy is partly destroyed, “one side of his face had been partly mashed in and on the other side, his eyelid had split and a pale dust was seeping out of it” (p. 184). Enoch’s sudden appearance outside Hazel’s apartment moves Hazel on the inside, “early that morning he had claimed to have a terrible pain in his chest” (p. 184). Hazel had previously planned to scape to another city to continue with his Church Without Christ as a way to evade his nagging conscious and keep it from destroying his own church, instead he would “make a new start with nothing on his mind” (p. 186).

Enoch’s arrival jolts Hazel awake, but it is Sabbath who receives the package and examines the mummy first. Although she had never seen anyone who looked like the mummy, “there was something in him of everyone she had ever known, as if they had all been rolled into one person and killed and shrunk and dried” (p. 185). Through Sabbath’s interpretation, man’s fate is defined—his mortality ends in dried blood and dust. It is this mummified man that Sabbath embraces as a real child and rocks like a baby, giving the allusion of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus. At the sight of this, Hazel, now wearing his mom’s pair of glasses that gave him “a look of deflected sharpness,” (p.187) violently snatches the mummy from Sabbath’s arm and throws it against the wall bursting its head into a cloud of dust. Whitt (1995) explains that when Hazel sees the mummy through his mother’s glasses, “he realizes that his own literal words preached on the street are an exact description of his call for a “new Jesus” Motes understands that what he has called for is not what his church needs, and not what he needs or believes” (p. 23).

Resentful, Sabbath yells at him, “I seen you wouldn’t never have no fun or let anybody else because you didn’t want nothing but Jesus!” (p. 188). In response, Hazel declares, “I don’t want nothing but the truth!” and immediately throws his mom’s glasses out of the window. By throwing away both objects out of the window, Hazel finally renounces his family’s and his own legalistic religious past, as well as his current worldview personified in the shrunken man. Sabbath’s affirmation is true, he only wants Jesus, Hazel’s truth symbol. Whitt (1995) describes that the empty mummy figuratively serves as mirror of Hazel’s empty and unreasonable preaching, a turning point for his personal understanding of the religious truth he seeks after: she explains, “When he throws his mother's glasses out the door behind the mummy, he repudiates her brand of religion...He banishes her view, discerning that he must come to his religious perspective through his own vision, unadorned with her spectacles” (p. 23). By the end of the chapter, Hazel is too weak to leave the room, his mental exhaustion ails his physical body and his claims to leave the city are stopped by his debilitating cough.

Another turning point for Hazel is when he encounters his mocking replica, Solace Layfield. When Hoover Shoats threatens Hazel to run him out of business, he hires the look-alike preacher to replace him. The “True prophet,” as Shoats introduces him, preaches for his new established business, the “Holy Church of Christ Without Christ.” A copy of Hazel’s Church Without Christ and part of Shoats’ plan to compete against Hazel by replicating the message about the “new Jesus.” When Hazel begins to recognize Solace’s hypocrisy, he begins to understand that he is exactly like his impostor. They even physically resemble each other: “Him and you twins?” (p. 168), a woman next to him asks. Their similarity allows Hazel again to acknowledge the limitations of his preaching when he sees himself in the face of the prophet

(Marken, 2008). His immediate response is to “hunt it down and kill it,” (p. 166) to eliminate the mockery of his image and silence his own disturbing identity.

Hazel choses to hunt and then kill Solace. As he violently chases after him in his Essex, he demands: “what do you get up on top of a car and say you don’t believe in what you believe in for?” Paradoxically, the question is for Hazel himself and his motivation to kill the false preacher issues from his own self-rejection: ““Two things I can’t stand,’ Haze said, ‘—a man that ain’t true and one that mocks what is”” (p. 206). Whitt (1995) argues that through Solace, Hazel understands he is also guilty of preaching against what he believes and that once Hazel decides to kill Solace, he “symbolically kills his own Church Without Christ” (p. 23). Outraged, Hazel repeats Solace “ain’t true,” strips him off his clothes and heartlessly runs over his body with his car:

The Prophet began to run in earnest. He tore off his shirt and unbuckled his belt and ran out of his trousers. He began grabbing for his feet as if he would take off his shoes too, but before he could get at them, the Essex knocked him flat and ran over him. Haze drove about twenty feet and stopped the car and then began to back it. He backed it over the body and then stopped and got out. The Essex stood half over the other Prophet as if it were pleased to guard what it had finally brought down. The man didn't look so much like Haze, lying on the ground on his face without his hat or suit on. A lot of blood was coming out of him and forming a puddle around his head (p. 206).

Motionless and wheezing Solace manages to confess his sins to Hazel, “Give my mother a lot of trouble...Stole theter car. Never told the truth to my daddy...” (p. 206) and ask Jesus for help, “Jesus hep me.” Ciuba (1989) describes Layfield’s violent conversion: “Lying on the ground, bloody but at last wise, Layfield gasps out, ‘Jesus.’ He . . . says the prayer in faith as a sign that at last he has gone beyond hollowed words to find true solace in the Word itself” (p. 74-

75). It is Solace who most illustrates the elements necessary for Hazel's conversion: the acceptance of his irrational claims and acts and his surrender to his blood's urgency for Jesus. Marken (2006) affirms that "his double finally gains wisdom when he is covered in blood. Reason shows him the inconsistency of his claims and then his blood shows him his need to confess" (p.32). Here the relationship between blood and the intellect comes into play given that both rationality and blood are necessary for Hazel's conversion to Wise Blood.

Moreover, the destruction of his Essex, the main platform from which he exposes his ideas, will lead to Hazel's final collapse. Up to this point, Hazel's car has served as his residence, pulpit and murdering tool against Solace. The Essex remains Hazel's faulty intellectual idol, a mobile pulpit he carefully protects for his purposes of continuing his Church Without Christ. Wood (2004) says that his car represents his "one true love" and serves as, "the single sacrament of his nihilistic religion, the true viaticum for escaping everything that would lay claim on him" (p. 169). The autonomy he has gained from his car gives him an illusory sense of freedom that propels him to start anew his church in a different city. As he gets ready to leave Taulkinham, he tells the boy at the filling station that "it was not right to believe anything you couldn't see or hold in your hands or test with your teeth" (p. 208) to follow with curses "in a quiet intense way" against Jesus. Once again, his curses against the figure he can't see contradict his claims. He persists in his contradictions the same way he insists to the boy at the filling station that his "car is just beginning its life. A lightning bolt couldn't stop it!" (p. 209) to what the boy answers that his car was no use for more than twenty miles at a slow pace. Ironically, once he drives out onto the highway and advances five miles, he has the sense that "the road was really slipping back under him" (p. 209). The Essex's fate comes to an end when a patrolman stops him and throws his car over the embankment. Hazel's reaction is of complete surrender:

Haze stood for a few minutes, looking over at the scene. 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. His knees bent under him and he sat down on the edge of the embankment with his feet hanging over (p. 211).

As he beholds the abyss, his face seems to cover the entire distance reaching what seems to be infinity, a “sky that went on, depth after depth, into space.” Hazel realizes that he is not physically going anywhere anymore, the patrol man asks him, “Was you going anywheres?” Hazel resignedly replies “No.” As (Allen, 1986) puts it, “Haze's car, the symbol of rational design, cannot take him where he wants to go” (p. 268). At last, his surrender means the potential to see beyond the nothingness he had been grabbing onto and experience the possibility of eternity. That is, he goes from his limited empiricist view to an expansion of his gaze into immaterial space. Losing his car forces him to face what he has avoided since he arrived in Taulkinham. Wood (2004) summarizes Hazel's moment: “Motes comes to the truth by means of silence and vision. With his Essex gone, he can at last see that there is a more habitable place than the suffocating confines of his sinful ego” (p. 169). The detachment from his sinful ego allows him to look beyond the mote in his eye and explore the truth he has been longing for. After the Essex is destroyed, his irrationality is too. He can no longer preach his Church Without Christ and he is left with his blood's necessity for wisdom.

As for Enoch and the mummy, after he delivers the mummy to Hazel he still waits for the “new jesus” to reward him for his services. He expects the shriveled man to transform him into “something” better. Even though he does not understand what his desire of bettering “his condition until it was the best” (p. 193) means, he has a vague idea about his ambitions: “he wanted to be THE young man of the future, like the ones in the insurance ads” (p. 193). He also wanted the affirmation and praise of people as a way to undo the humiliation he received days

before when Gongga had told him to “go to hell” (p. 182). This time his aspiration is no longer to meet the gorilla but to become the “Giant Jungle Monarch” himself. Inspired by a comic strip he reads at a restaurant, he proceeds to act out an animated suspense as he slips noiselessly into the star’s truck, wrestles with him and steals the ape suit. In his devotion he limps “hurriedly off toward the woods” with his body burning with a sense of intense triumph. Then he becomes the gorilla himself by burying his clothes and putting on the suit. The narrator clarifies that burying his clothes did not mean “burying his former self; he only knew he wouldn’t need them anymore” (p. 198). Hence, Enoch does not bury his former identity, rather by wearing the gorilla suit he accentuates his true identity. By the end of the scene, Enoch’s achievement overwhelms him with glorious moments of joy, no gorilla, the narrator says “was happier at the moment than this one” (p. 200). His god finally rewards him, yet he misses the affection he has longed for. When Enoch extends a friendly hand to a couple admiring a view of the city, they flee in fear. As Allen (1986) puts it, “yet while he in a sense may be correct in believing that the way to succeed in the modern world is to act like an animal, Enoch as Gongga fails to win the friendship for which he has been searching so desperately” (p. 268). In a sign of defeat, with his arms now at his sides, Enoch stares at a “black uneven wall against the lighter sky” (p. 200). Embracing his wise blood has ironically confined him to the boundaries of the material, the wall that rises against the sky serves as a cage that does not permit him, unlike Hazel, explore beyond the matter that makes up the city and stretches into the sky. As Asals (1982) describes Enoch’s caged end, the wall is “both the silhouette of Taulkinham and the cage of man caught in matter” (p. 47).

Enoch’s story ends there, unlike Hazel’s, who after looking at the abyss, gets up, walks back to town and decides to blind himself by pouring quicklime on his face. His Oedipus

blinding moment is essential for Hazel to finally gain sight, as Wood (2004) notes, Hazel “learns to see everything by seeing nothing” (p. 169). He comes to the truth through blinding. A witness of Hazel’s transformation is his landlady, Mrs. Flood, who ironically considers herself “clear-sighted,” (p. 213) and judges Hazel’s blindness as being parallel to eternal death. Indeed, for Mrs. Flood, Hazel’s destruction of his sight was for demented people, who were, as she claims, “a little bit off their heads” (p. 213). Her limited perception hinders her capacity to see beyond Hazel’s blindness and her greedy thirst for everything valuable around her makes her feel like Hazel cheats her “in some secret way” (p. 217); in fact, from this point forward, Hazel abandons the materialistic milieu of the city and begins to move toward enlightenment: “His face had a peculiar pushing look, as if it were going forward after something it could distinguish in the distance” (p. 218). Having eliminated the distractions from his sight, his blindness sharpens his reason and with the help of his wise blood he embraces the mystery he had resisted this whole time—his conscious is now free to internally meet the Jesus in the back of his mind. Although Hazel again begins to walk on rocks “to pay” and wrap wire around his chest, these acts do not suggest the same futile guilt he felt as a little child when he was overridden with fear and shame, instead it symbolizes, as some religious critics of O’Connor argue, Hazel’s participation in the sufferings of Christ (Michaels, 2013). Wood (2004) goes further to explain that Hazel’s mortification of his flesh embodies an act of gratitude: “these drastic acts of asceticism are not self-justifying sacrifices meant to earn Motes’ salvation; they are deeds of radical penance offered in gratitude for the salvation that has already been won for him” (p. 169). Mrs. Floods disturbed by Hazel’s behavior remarks that “it’s not normal. It’s like one of them gory stories, it’s something that people have quit doing—like boiling in oil or being a saint or walling up cats” (p. 228). Yet what she fails to see is that Hazel’s gory transformation progressively turns him into a “pin point

of light” (p. 222). She even admits she imagines Hazel “going backwards to Bethlehem” and turning into “some kind of star, like the ones of Christmas cards” (p. 223).

As Hazel’s spiritual vision intensifies, his body debilitates. The negation of his flesh does not imply a Manichean separation of the body and spirit, instead the narrator chooses to exaggerate this split to focus on Hazel’s acute vision, a testimony of his conversion. Michaels (2013) further explains: “Hazel Motes tortures his body not because the body is evil or because it is something that can be dispensed with, but precisely because the body matters. Haze’s repentance must be not only “spiritual,” written in his heart, but physical, inscribed on his very flesh” (p. 23). His death arrives when he catches influenza and his body is found lying in a drainage ditch. He declares his last words in front of two young policemen, “I want to go on where I’m going,” he says. Without a car to take him anywhere and with his eyes fixed on an internal journey, he is ready to part. His face was “stern and tranquil” (p. 235), the “outline of his skull was plain under his skin and the deep burned eye sockets seemed to lead into the dark tunnel where he had disappeared” (p. 235). The final description of Hazel’s eyes serves to highlight, as Caron (2000) remarks, “his hyperacute organ of spiritual sight” (p. 65).

Hazel’s conversion of his blood into wise blood does not come by preached doctrines but by a sequence of dramatic grotesque actions that turn him into a “pin point of light.” Mrs. Flood tries to join him in his journey as she tries to imagine becoming blind herself, yet she is stuck at the “beginning of something she couldn’t begin” (p. 236). As Enoch, perhaps she is also deprived of wise blood, while Hazel reaches wisdom and the mystery of faith, he “moves farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light” (p. 236).

Conclusion

The ending of *Wise Blood* reveals how man embraces divine wisdom in violent and disturbing ways, as represented in Hazel Mote's final decision to blind himself. His Oedipus moment forces him to face his own limited rationality and acknowledge in his blood the need for the mysterious beyond empirical reason. Enoch Emory, Hazel's foil and ironic opposite, inversely mirrors Hazel's transformation by becoming a burlesque figure of wisdom.

In identifying the differences between Enoch and Hazel's blood, the first element that emerges is Enoch's predestined preference for his blood's animalistic desires and his failure to acknowledge his senseless rituals. Hazel is constantly aware of his futile actions as a consequence of his irrational thinking and rejection of wisdom. Even though Enoch is the only friendly character in the novel, O'Connor chooses redemption for the least expected character, the murderous and hateful Hazel Motes.

For Hazel to gain wise blood means acquiring a divine perspective of truth. This truth enlightens his raging spirit engulfed in confusing doctrines that never fully satisfied him, leading him to the ultimate failure of his Church Without Christ. Once he acts according to his wise blood, he rejects his nihilistic views and embraces what he had finally longed for, and in doing this he becomes a pinpoint of light and a testimony to his landlady, Mrs. Flood.

The mystery or faith Hazel attains as a result of accepting his wise blood does not contradict reason, nor reject the use of it. Rather it shows the possibility for man to expand his reason beyond the material. It also demonstrates how reason can become irrational when man stubbornly wants to follow his own sinful ways. Hazel's final transformation does not limit his freedom of thought, but rather sheds what obstructed his thinking throughout the novel, the mote in his eye. On the other hand, Enoch ends trapped in his choice to become the man of the future,

reflected in his new animal suit and limitation to see beyond the walls of the city, perhaps a depiction of O'Connor's strong criticism against modern man.

Though this analysis has tried to combine different approaches to interpret the novel, O'Connor's remarkable art leaves room for extensive analysis in other areas, from her brilliant use of humor and the sardonic language predominant in her works to more complex sociological studies of Southern culture, historical approaches and even psychological studies of the characters.

This analysis builds on previous literary analyses that have highlighted the religious themes in *Wise Blood*. However, critics often separate the body from the soul, only focusing on the soul's transformation. This essay tries to show that the flesh or blood is connected with the nonmaterial (mind, soul, spirit) and that it mirrors the condition of man's inner life. Enoch and Hazel clearly embody two characters whose dramatic physical changes echo their final inner conditions: one deprived of wise blood and the other who finds wisdom in his veins.

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