

## PROFANING THE AMERICAN RELIGION: FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S *WISE BLOOD*

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Did you see the picture of Roy Roger's [*sic*] horse attending a church service in Pasadena? I forget whether his name was Tex or Trigger but he was dressed fit to kill and looked like he was having a good time. He doubled the usual attendance.

—Flannery O'Connor, in a 1952 letter

“This is not an age of great Catholic theology,” Flannery O'Connor wrote in 1958. “We have very few thinkers to equal Barth and Tillich, perhaps none” (*Collected Works* 1082). This is a notable admission, coming as it does from a devoutly Catholic novelist, and it suggests a great deal about her theological as well as her artistic values. For these Protestant theologians were relentless in their opposition to modern materialism and to the “almost unequivocally demonic” ideologies of capitalism (Barth, *Church* 531). O'Connor was no political radical, of course, but she had as little patience for her country's deifications of capital and consumption as for its essentially secular commodifications of Christianity. She must not, then, have had such Protestants as Barth and Tillich in mind when she spoke of directing the satire of her first novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), “against this Protestant world or against the society that reads the Bible and the Sears Roebuck catalogue wrong” (*Collected Works* 921). At any rate, the stubbornly materialist world depicted in *Wise Blood* looks not a little like the bleak modern world-picture Barth was fond of invoking in his sermons, with at its center “modern capitalism, King Mammon, enveloping us in his claws and making us his sad and beleaguered servants” (Barth, *Early* 17). *Wise*

*Blood's* world is replete with the icons, idols, and sacraments of Mammon, as well as with many examples of his "beleaguered servants" who revere, with a typically American piety, the dogmas of consumption and the profit motive. One character, however, the protagonist Hazel Motes—and with him, the novel as a whole—adopts a far less reverent stance, in fact profaning these dogmas and sacraments at every turn.

As Jon Lance Bacon rightly observes, in *Wise Blood* "American religion [has] been appropriated by the 'salesman's world.' In the world of the novel, faith itself becomes a commodity" (39). Bacon and other scholars have ably demonstrated *Wise Blood's* pointed satire of consumer culture. Our concern here will be with O'Connor's framing of that social indictment—indeed her very construction of that indictment—in the often explicit registers of *profanation*: in the language and thematics of blasphemy, and in the material desecrations of sacrilege. For her indictments of capitalism and modern materialism, in other words, O'Connor drew on the language and traditions of irreverence in which she was well versed as a pious Catholic, turning them against the false religion she discovered all around her. "Blasphemy is the only way to the truth," Hazel proclaims, and, far from the wholly unauthorized statement it may at first seem, in an oblique way it articulates the novel's own program of blaspheming modernity's capitalist gods (148). Even when Hazel and the novel both repudiate blasphemy (208), they emphatically do not reject profanation itself but rather turn away from blasphemy's inherently circumscribed discursive terrain—as we shall see—to the more violent and vital recourses of material desecration. Having taken pains in *Wise Blood* to portray the sacral and even pseudo-Christian character of commodity capitalism, O'Connor proceeds to profane that capitalist faith at length, drawing on all the extreme and unsettling novelistic measures at her disposal.

To read *Wise Blood* as profanation affords a third way between the practically Manichean positions that have characterized much O'Connor criticism to date: on one hand an often overtly conservative criticism that attends piously to the author's own theological aims, and on the other a revisionist, steadfastly secular strain that in stressing the more mischievous aspects of her fiction tends to undervalue or elide its religious investments. O'Connor herself famously maintained that her stories rely for their literary effects on "the Dogmas of the Church"—claiming even that dogma gives her stories "any permanent quality they may have" (*Collected Works* 1034). So we can hardly dismiss religion's influence altogether and decide, as some have, that O'Connor "is having too much nasty fun in these stories to need any theological explanations of what she is up to....O'Connor's affiliation with the Catholic Church may be considered more of a private matter than as an informing source for her fiction" (Dunne 164). One can only imagine with what horror the author herself would have recoiled from this suggestion. More to the point, the very idea that religion can be dispensed with as "a private matter" is

one of *Wise Blood's* prime targets in its critique of modern American culture. Yet at the same time, we surely risk missing the full spirit of O'Connor's work if we attend exclusively to that other Spirit that moves it (see Yaeger 104).<sup>1</sup> We do well, I think, to strike a middle course, respecting the theological core of her art without prostrating ourselves before it. The concept of profanation enables such a course, providing a nuanced approach to O'Connor's fiction that allows us to respect the deeply subversive potential of the author's own Christianity.

*Wise Blood* develops that subversive potential by construing consumer capitalism as the preeminent American religion, then proceeding with great deliberateness to defile it along with the subsidiary religious structures that the marketplace both reflects and creates. For it is not capitalism alone that has supplanted earlier and, for O'Connor, truer versions of the sacrosanct; *Wise Blood*, rather, indicts a whole complex of degraded American religiosity, of which capitalism is a core component and exponent, a cause and an effect. This complex, the contours of which O'Connor limns with such skill and sardonic humor, has more recently been called, by William E. Connolly, America's "evangelical-capitalist resonance machine" (39-67). It is a machinery that *Wise Blood* makes manifest in its characters' adherence to none but the most shallow and unthinking Christianity, its worship of a sacralized commodity culture, and its general conformity to a spiritually empty, materially overfull nationalist ethos. The sway of that ethos is not mitigated by its status as false theology; icons of such a faith might well include Roy Rogers's horse, and if the presence of such a figure at an actual church were to double attendance for the day—or if, as a character in *Wise Blood* suggests, a blind preacher were to attract crowds with a seeing-eye dog, since "People'll always go to see a dog"—well, that is a happy convergence of two seemingly incongruous but wholly compatible manifestations of the national faith (225).

O'Connor's politically critical, dogmatically Catholic, and decidedly unsunny theology makes her as heretical from the perspective of such a faith as she is pious from that of Rome's. To read this author as a literary profaner of the American sacred is to understand how it is that "O'Connor is most 'diabolic' precisely when she is being most militantly Catholic"—as Frederick Crews observes, noting a paradox generally overlooked by the "diabolic" school of O'Connor criticism (156). This is the tradition inaugurated by one of *Wise Blood's* contemporary reviewers, Melwyn Breen—who pronounced the novel "a diabolic satire" that comes dangerously "close to blasphemy"—and articulated most influentially by John Hawkes's 1962 essay "Flannery O'Connor's Devil," which located the author squarely "on the devil's side" (Scott and Streight 18, Hawkes 401). I would argue that O'Connor's devil is also her critical angel, her Catholic muse—a maturation, perhaps, of the self-diagnosed "anti-angel aggression" of her childhood, now turned against the increasingly secular gods of postwar America (*Collected Works* 983). Time and again her fictions reiterate the insight, as she wrote in a letter to Hawkes, that

“the devil teaches most of the lessons that lead to self-knowledge” (1150). In *Wise Blood*, this devil’s vocation is to profane the American faith in currency, in “a good car,” and in a diluted Protestant deity devoid of trial, mystery, sacrament, and doubt (*WB* 109).

### “The Bible and the Sears Roebuck Catalogue”

Like many familiar critiques of capitalism, from Weber to Bloch, Benjamin to Žižek—and like those of Barth, Tillich, and other Christian theologians who viewed resistance to the capitalist order as a kind of holy war pitting Christ against Mammon—*Wise Blood*’s biting social satire portrays capitalism as essentially theological, thus also an existential threat to the forms of religious faith O’Connor endorsed.<sup>2</sup> Excepting Hazel’s enigmatic spiritual compulsions, in the world of this novel one finds precious little evidence of Christian faith. Here, instead, commodity and capital are held sacred while Christianity and its God are relentlessly commodified and exploited. On one street corner, potential buyers gather to witness a miraculous potato-peeling machine at a huckster’s “altar”; on another corner, faux preachers and prophets compete for their share of religion’s robust profitability (34). As for spirituality, a blithe nihilism holds sway; one character voices its lax dogma, appropriately enough, in the trite language of advertising and of platitude: “I believe that what’s right today is wrong tomorrow and that the time to enjoy yourself is now so long as you let others do the same. I’m as good...not believing in Jesus as a many a one that does” (225). Of course, such unbelief is integral to a pervasive and putatively secular commodity culture whose sacred character *Wise Blood* both highlights and lampoons; another character reads the comic strips every night, “like an office” (195).

In her letters O’Connor lamented modernity’s increasing proliferation of “religious substitutes for religion,” and *Wise Blood* scrupulously documents such religious substitutes—from Enoch Emory’s beloved funnies to the potato-peeler “altar” that Hazel Motes encounters early in the novel (*Collected Works* 1077). The pseudo-priest behind this altar is a salesman, the altar itself a pyramidal stack of cardboard boxes, each containing a brand-new peeling machine: put a potato in one end, and it emerges from the other, miraculously shed of its skin (34). Behold a cheapened twentieth-century version of turning water to wine, or of converting God’s blood and body into wine and wafer; the forms of theological mystery so central to O’Connor’s own Catholicism are here replaced by the mystery of a box peeling a potato. The pitchman, meanwhile, touts his cause like a revivalist preacher promoting baptism. “You’ll thank the day you ever stopped here....you’ll never forget it. Ever’ one of you people purchasing one theseyer machines’ll never forget it!” (36). The pitch is interrupted, however, by the intrusion of a supposedly blind preacher, Asa Hawks, who moves about the conveniently gathered audience to beg their small change. Cohabiting the same commercial space, Hawks and the

pitchman incarnate the twin problems of a sanctified commerce and a debased, desacralized peddling of the Word.

The potato-peeler scene thus condenses *Wise Blood's* converging preoccupations with the commercial and the sacral, concerns that are evident from its opening pages. Our first sighting of Hazel Motes tellingly combines the dimensions of prophet and merchandise: "he had a stiff black broad-brimmed hat on his lap, a hat that an elderly country preacher would wear. His suit was a glaring blue and the price tag was still stapled on the sleeve of it" (4). Subject here to the watchful eye of his fellow-train passenger, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, Hazel seems an odd assemblage of profound Puritan and depthless commodity. The "fierce black hat" and deep-set eyes highlight by contrast his more general appearance of a garish blue preacher-for-purchase (8). It is as though his interlocutor might buy him for \$11.98, the price on the tag attached to his arm. Indeed, she scrutinizes his appearance the way a customer might inspect a department-store mannequin, "squint[ing] at the price tag" and then leaning in for a closer look. On examination, she encounters an intriguing depth, the seeming infinity of Hazel's gaze, that resists the commodification her own gaze has tried to effect: "his eyes were what held her attention longest. Their settings were so deep that they seemed, to her, almost like passages leading somewhere and she leaned halfway across the space that separated the two seats, trying to see into them" (4-5).

Aside from O'Connor's "Author's Note" to the novel, which has us on the lookout for a "Christian *malgré lui*," this is our first indication that Hazel harbors an uncommon depth in a world of surfaces—a world in which he tries to participate pleasurably but cannot. The potential commodification as preacher-for-sale that his price tag suggests is precisely what will later attract and inspire Onnie Jay Holy, and which Hazel will refuse as intractably as his eyes, in this first scene, refuse to conform to the simple commodification that Mrs. Hitchcock wants to impose. The seemingly endless tunnels boring inward from his eyes hint that he harbors what O'Connor called "anagogical vision"; his gaze, it seems, is ever fixed on an eschatological horizon.<sup>3</sup> Later Sabbath Lily will observe that his eyes "don't look like they see what he's looking at but they keep on looking" (105). Like Mrs. Hitchcock, however, Sabbath will do her best to delimit that vision, to render Hazel something to be first appraised and then acquired: "I can get him easy. I want him...I never seen a boy that I liked the looks of any better"; "that's what I got to have, just give me some of him!" (105-06, 169). Hazel's own dreams corroborate this sense of himself as a salable object, when he imagines being watched by three women as though he were "something—a piece of fish—they might buy" (160). It is a crucial component of Hazel's integrity that he steadfastly refuses his own ready commodification, even to the rather unfortunate extent of murdering his profitable double, "the True Prophet" of the Holy Church of Christ Without

Christ: a man whom we earlier find yelling, “Help yourself to salvation” (167), as though offering a slice of apple pie—or a magically peeled potato.

If our first vision of Hazel is of a bizarre human commodity with price tags still attached, in our first sighting of Taulkinham we encounter a less ambiguous array of goods and services to buy—“PEANUTS, WESTERN UNION, AJAX, TAXI, HOTEL, CANDY”—and Hazel’s first Taulkinham encounter is “for the usual business” with a body for sale, that of Mrs. Leora Watts (25, 30). That tryst would seem to evidence Hazel’s ability to traffic in material exchanges, in defiance of the faith he will not admit. He demonstrates less consumerist acuity on his second night in town, however, strolling “down town close to the store fronts *but not looking in them*” (33, emphasis added). A *flâneur* he is not. Yet despite his seeming repulsion by commodity culture, for much of the novel Hazel doggedly pursues commodity replacements for God, as though trying to patch spiritual holes with material goods. Or perhaps it is more accurate to read this overzealous “patching” as self-delusion: it obscures the fact that Hazel has not the spiritual void to fill that he wants to think he has. “What do I need with Jesus?” he asks early on, adding lamely, “I got Leora Watts” (52). Later he finds an only somewhat more satisfactory answer in his rat-colored Essex: “Nobody with a good car needs to be justified” (109). Ralph Wood notes that Hazel’s personal belief in justification-by-jalopy “announces the new American gospel with consummate complacency” (15). Susan Edmunds adds that Hazel’s Essex “collapses the postwar ideals of car ownership and homeownership into one another,” combining the promise of mobility with that of stability (191). From a materialist, secular standpoint, this car is all he needs. But it is not difficult to see in this a broader indictment of American society’s lust for mobility and its material stand-ins for a notion of home—all of which can be read anagogically as evidence of the nation’s spiritual homelessness.

### “This Protestant World”

Hazel’s Essex, his mobile “home,” is as much a constricting coffin as the other provisional homes he tries on for size throughout the novel. The car thus participates in *Wise Blood*’s thematics of confinement and incarceration: this is a landscape of cages, peopled by caged beings, from the animals at the zoo and in a cage at a roadside store to the penned chickens in the back of a pickup truck (122-23, 71). Hazel’s heart is compared to a caged ape, Mrs. Flood’s to a bird cage; and then there is Sabbath’s tale of a child “locked up in a chicken crate” (56, 231, 120). Given the novel’s interrelated critiques of American religiosity and of capitalist culture, it is not too much to say that this pervasive imagery evokes the “iron cage” of capitalism as well as its origins—if Max Weber is to be believed—in Protestantism. As O’Connor herself notes, *Wise Blood* “reduces Protestantism to the twin ultimate absurdities of The Church Without Christ or The Holy Church of Christ Without Christ” (*Collected Works* 923). When a woman asks Hazel whether his church is Protestant or “something

foreign," he assures her it is the former (102). And indeed his blasphemous creed might be described as an extreme form of Protestantism—certainly in the sense of protest, which is what his preaching really amounts to, but also in the more precise sense of relocating religious authority inward, vesting it in the individual.

Onnie Jay Holy is himself a send-up of Protestantism in this sense. Exploiting the focus on individualism that is endemic to Protestantism and to the American imaginary, Holy promises a religion that grows un-dogmatically out of "your own personal interpretation" (153). A "preacher and a radio star," he knows how to market religion for mass consumption, and he is evidently keen to carve for himself a profitable niche in his country's evangelical-capitalist machinery (156). He offers "real religious experiences to the whole family," stroking his listeners' egos and promising "to unlock that little rose of sweetness inside" them—a potential that he assures us is all our own, just waiting for the right motivation to emerge (155, 153). Holy moves effortlessly from the rhetoric of cozy complacency—"And when you talk about Jesus you need a little music, don't you, friends?"—to the quintessentially American assurance that whatever one "knows" is knowledge enough: "You don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it, it ain't true, and that's all there is to it" (149, 152). For as Harold Bloom has observed, it is a key feature of "the American Religion" that it "does not believe or trust, it *knows*" (31). Onnie Jay Holy proves enormously adept as a functionary of this national faith, delivering the "perpetual shock of the individual discovering yet again what she and he always have known, which is that God loves her and him on an absolutely personal and intimate basis" (17).

Taught by a culture of ubiquitous advertising, the successful street-preacher knows not to violate any American's sense of her God-given individualism, her self-reliance. He invokes the virtues of sentimentality as easily as he does that of the cutting edge: "This church is up-to-date! When you're in this church you can know that there's nothing or nobody ahead of you, nobody knows nothing you don't know....It'll cost you each a dollar but what is a dollar? A few dimes! Not too much to pay to unlock that little rose of sweetness inside you!" (149, 153). Holy's "spiritual" message reduces to the barest of economic exchanges. As Susan Edmunds puts it, "Since this sweetness already inheres in their nature, what they buy for a dollar is a formula for making it appear, and this formula is nothing more than the dollar they pay" (195). Americans are more than comfortable making such a transaction; it is the kind of "payment" Hazel offers in the novel's final pages that makes them nervous. In short, as Holy puts it: "If you want to get anywhere in religion, you got to keep it sweet" (157).

When Hazel refuses to partner with him, Holy responds by channeling the free-market ethos: "I can get Prophets for peanuts....What you need is

a little competition!” (159). On the same page Holy reveals his true name as Hoover Shoats, and this change—from a lexicon of the holy to that of a vacuum cleaner—signals a chiasmic revision of the novel’s previous treatment of religion and commodity culture. Earlier, in her portrayal of the potato-peeler salesman behind an “altar” of cardboard boxes, O’Connor showed us a sacralized commerce; with Hoover Shoats she presents us with a commercialized sacred. In Taulkinham and, it is suggested, in the nation at large, these two choices are the closest most citizens get to any genuine sense of the divine, torn as they are between misreadings of “the Bible and the Sears Roebuck catalogue.” Accordingly, the first word in the name of Holy/Shoats’s updated “church,” the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ, functions not as an adjective but as the brand of his own phony surname (151). Representing a radical desacralization of the very category *holy*, the word here operates less like it does in “Holy Ghost” than like the *Sears* in Sears, Roebuck.

Whatever else one might say of Hazel Motes, we may at least applaud his refusal to participate in Shoats’s brand of spiritual exploitation. “It won’t cost you nothing to join my church,” Hazel promises (51). Later, horrified by Holy’s interruption of his own preaching, Hazel tries to shout him down: “It don’t cost you any money to know the truth! You can’t know it for money!” (154). His proselytizing has little to do with salesmanship, for he has nothing *to* sell. Or, to put it somewhat differently, nothing is what he is selling. And nothing is, reasonably, what he is charging. His is an entirely negative atheology—“Nothing matters but that Jesus doesn’t exist,” “there’s only one truth and that is that there’s no truth”—and his refusal to sell is congruent with his refusal of positive religious content: “I preach the Church Without Christ...where the blind don’t see and the lame don’t walk...the church that the blood of Jesus don’t foul with redemption....I’m going to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn’t the first two” (50, 165, 101).

The congruence between his rejections of profits and of prophets befits a milieu where commodities and spiritual goods are inexorably bound together. The one positive thing Hazel has to offer his crowds—and the “idear” that Shoats finds so compelling, since he can see “how a new one would be more up-to-date”—is “the new jesus,” and this he demands his listeners give to *him*, in a clear example of poor salesmanship: “Give me this new jesus, somebody, so we’ll all be saved by the sight of him” (158, 141). Luckily, an eavesdropping Enoch Emory is standing by and ready to provide it (“Listenhere, I got him! I mean I can get him!”)—though Hazel will react even more intensely against Enoch’s gift than against Holy’s marketing of the new jesus for one dollar per convert (141). Although O’Connor clearly intends us to question Hazel’s atheology, I think we are also meant to recognize its integrity in refusing all the polluted varieties of religious experience to which Hazel has been exposed.

O'Connor has created Hazel in her own image, and if at this stage of the novel he cannot be a Catholic, he can at least be a crusading anti-materialist.

Summarizing O'Connor's beef with secularized religion, Shoats's "True Prophet" explains that in the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ, "The unredeemed are redeeming themselves" (167). This is essentially Hazel's confusion as well; both Hazel's and Shoats's gospels promise that one can find peace or salvation *on one's own*. The American Religion preaches a doctrine that Hazel at first wants so urgently to be able to believe: "freedom from mere conscience; reliance upon experiential perception; a sense of power; the presence of the God within; the innocence 'of one's redeemed flesh and blood'" (Bloom 42). Hazel's progression through the novel makes him accept the futility of these tenets. He cannot free himself from conscience (which in any case, from O'Connor's vantage, is no freedom at all); he abandons the experiential perception of sight for a purely anagogical vision; he is made to recognize his utter powerlessness beside the presence of God without; and he is brought to a profound and painful acceptance of guilt, a debt that he alone cannot pay. Like so many of O'Connor's protagonists, Hazel has to learn the futility of staking any claim to independence from God; his redemption can come only from the Redemption. When the True Prophet promises Shoats's crowds otherwise, he highlights the market's efforts to replace the person of religious faith with a self-sufficient, self-determining subject—one who places his or her faith in the self, or rather in an idea of the self as constructed by advertising and by consumerist ideology more generally.

### **Mystery and Mummies**

O'Connor's critique of the American Religion in its various forms extends beyond her satirical swipes at Protestantism, however. Witness the sixteen-year-old "Lapsed Catholic"—the capital L suggesting that this is an American denomination all its own—who remains tepidly convinced of sin and judgment yet is eager to return with Hazel to a brothel for another round of carnal indulgence (147). In refusing Hazel's offer to make him "an apostle" of the Church Without Christ, the boy betrays his lack of commitment either to God or to atheism (146). The Lapsed Catholic thus represents one of two poles of American Catholicism that O'Connor found "repulsive," the other being the "Jansenist-Mechanical Catholic" who replaces faith with "a kind of false certainty" (*Collected Works* 930, 1037). What O'Connor disliked was the notion of unthinking religious acceptance, regardless of denomination: "remember that these things are mysteries and that if they were such that we could understand them, they wouldn't be worth understanding. A God you understood would be less than yourself" (1110-11).

For O'Connor, the central dynamic of Christianity, as well as the element she finds lacking in modern religious observance and in society generally, is *mystery*. Time and again she strikes this chord in her letters and lectures, where

she insists that the Christian writer's faith is not a limitation but a source of that mystery requisite to a profound fictional exploration of the world. This sense of mystery cannot be found, O'Connor suggests, in religions conditioned by an increasingly materialist consumer culture. A spiritually committed art must seek to reinstate it, for like Christianity art "is something that one experiences alone and for the purpose of realizing in a fresh way, through the senses, the mystery of existence....Fiction is the concrete expression of mystery—mystery that is lived" (*Collected Works* 988). That is why the writer's task is not to understand experience but to understand "that he doesn't understand it" (1007)—and why mystery, as O'Connor writes in *Wise Blood's* prefatory note, is something any novel "can only be asked to deepen" (ix).

The most striking sign and source of mystery in *Wise Blood* itself is surely the miniature mummified man that Enoch Emery steals from the museum to satisfy his own and, he thinks, Hazel's desire for a "new jesus." This mummy serves a double function in support of the novel's religious and anti-materialist critiques. As a positive emblem of mystery, a strangely sacramental relic ("It was a mystery, although it was right there in a glass case for everybody to see"), it serves as a modern, oblique sign of the mystery that O'Connor locates at the center of Christian theology (77). But this mummy also serves to support the novel's excoriation of consumer culture. In short, *Wise Blood* intimates that although this new jesus is useful as an enigmatic sign, it becomes altogether unholy when it attains the status of a commodity or an idol, as when it is treated this way by Enoch and, later, by Sabbath Hawks. As long as the mummy merely points toward mystery—and thus, for O'Connor, inevitably toward the Crucifixion—its existence is salutary. But once it has been made, through the mechanism of idolatry or of commodification, to *stand in for* that mystery, it demeans and obviates spiritual experience. For O'Connor, the only adequate response to such a materialist perversion of mystery—as we shall see—is to defile and destroy it.

Enoch finds the new jesus "a mystery beyond his understanding," knowing only that it requires "something awful" of him, something for which he begins to ready the "tabernacle-like cabinet" in his attic apartment (129, 131). That cabinet, Enoch has often felt, is "the center where the meaning was," the relic that "most connected him with what he didn't know"; he dreams of performing "certain rites and mysteries" inside it (132). His wise blood leads him to locate a potential source of spiritual meaning in the "Muvseevum" that houses the mummy. Accordingly, the word *Muvseevum* itself affects him as an incantation or holy word—Enoch's version, even, of the unutterable Tetragrammaton: "The strange word made him shiver....Enoch was afraid to pronounce the word again" (92). As he leads Hazel into the museum to see his treasure, Enoch treads carefully, as if on sacred ground, speaking reverently "in a church whisper." In the presence of the new jesus he even offers a prayer: "Oh Jesus Jesus, he prayed, let him hurry up and do whatever he's going to do!" (94). Yet

the very moments that Hazel and Enoch spend gazing into the glass case of the new jesus seem as suffused with the commercial as with the spiritual. The two men stare down as if at a jewelry-counter display, their faces reflected in the glass, and indeed Enoch will shortly identify the new jesus as not only an icon to be venerated but also, and more urgently, an item he must acquire.

To interpret the mummified new jesus as a resonant symbol of religious mystery may thus seem misleading, given its ready commodification by a museum, by Enoch, and later by Sabbath Hawks. But in the imagined world of the novel it is no stranger a signpost to O'Connor's Christian faith than is *Wise Blood* in the real world. Enoch errs in assuming, as dictated by the logic of the marketplace, that Hazel's "new jesus" must be an actual object, obtainable by purchase or theft. As a result Enoch steals the mummy and readies his "tabernacle," his "ark," for its safekeeping (175-76). The new jesus fails to satisfy, however; its only real effect on Enoch being to make him sneeze. When Enoch subsequently decides that "one jesus was as bad as another," he speaks, it is safe to say, for the author; since neither the one true Christ nor his redemptive value are fungible, one lower-case jesus is indeed as bad as another—especially if it is mistakenly interpreted as salvific in itself rather than as merely an index to truer theological mystery (176).

It should not surprise us that the new jesus fails to operate in the holy or ritual way that Enoch confusedly expects, nor that Enoch would attempt to strip the mummy of whatever mystery it holds by means of stealing and possessing it. Saturated as he is with consumer culture, he brings the same expectations to a sacred relic that consumers regularly bring to the commodities that promise to make them smarter, more attractive, and more valuable in the eyes of themselves and others. As Jon Lance Bacon has observed, Enoch makes an excellent candidate for the condition Marshall McLuhan called "public helplessness"; he is an automaton unable to resist the all-consuming tides of advertising and commerce (30). (Just imagine Enoch in a twenty-first century theme park or shopping mall—or Las Vegas—those consumer-pilgrimage destinations that George Ritzer has called "cathedrals of consumption," apt repositories for consumerism's "sacred, religious character" [7].) No wonder Enoch cannot recognize the worth of a redeemer that would transcend a commodity exchange. Indeed, he prepares the altar for his new jesus with the same "helplessness" that characterizes his reactions to advertising; against his will he spends all of his money on curtains, a paint brush, and a bottle of gilt, items which prove "a disappointment to him because he had hoped that the money would be for some new clothes for him, and here he saw it going into a new set of drapes" (134).

Sabbath, too, cannot conceive of a new jesus beyond the limitations of commercial exchange. When Enoch hands the bundle off to her, she is immediately puzzled, before even seeing the mummy, by its resistance to the expected tactile properties of consumer goods: "There was no telling from

the outside what was in it; it was too hard to be clothes and too soft to be a machine” (183-84). Sabbath’s error, replicating Enoch’s, is to strip this new Jesus of its mystery, to reduce its complex signifying value to something simpler even than metaphor, to an icon devoid of reverence, to the status of a doll. After initially responding with wonder to the enigmatic figure—“She had never known anyone who looked like him before, but 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”—she proceeds too readily to dismiss what is mysterious and embrace what is functional, rocking it in her arms like the little baby that she and Hazel can care for as its “momma and daddy” (184-85). Her attitude is comparable to Hoover Shoats’s impulse to reify the new Jesus as a commodity plain and simple, when Hazel has intended it only as a signifier for something more expansive and mysterious: “It wasn’t nothing but a way to say a thing” (158-59). When Sabbath presents Hazel with her newly adopted “baby,” he flings it against the wall with enough violence to pop its head open and release its contents “in a little cloud of dust”; then, because this was not enough, he gathers what he can of the remains and hurls them out the window into the rain (188).

Let me suggest that Hazel’s shattering of this new Jesus is a pointed act of iconoclasm, a sacrilege perpetrated against a vacuously sacralized religion of commodity worship and playacting, a religion divorced from ultimate reality and thus condemned to act out false versions of it. He refuses to play the father to this doll-like Jesus, to play the Joseph to Sabbath’s Mary, to revere anything like the lower-case “god” that blesses Enoch with a gorilla costume (200). As Sabbath rightly observes, Hazel wants “nothing but Jesus”—with a capital J (188). This Jesus will not be found in a museum, of course. What one *will* find in a museum, according to Giorgio Agamben, is the very hypostatization of the capitalist religion’s aspirations to unprofanability:

[I]n the Museum the analogy between capitalism and religion becomes clear. The Museum occupies the space and function once reserved for the Temple as the place of sacrifice. To the faithful in the Temple—the pilgrims who would travel across the earth from temple to temple, from sanctuary to sanctuary—correspond today the tourists who restlessly travel in a world that has been abstracted into a Museum....Wherever they go, they find pushed to the extreme the same impossibility of dwelling that they knew in their houses and their cities, the same inability to use that they experienced in supermarkets, in malls, and on television shows. For this reason, insofar as it represents the cult and central altar of the capitalist religion, tourism is the primary industry in the world. (84-85)

O’Connor would, I think, have found much to agree with in this analysis. *Wise Blood* after all features a restlessly wandering, secularized “pilgrim” in the form of Enoch Emory, whose public helplessness propels him from one

worthless sanctuary to another: supermarkets, potato-peeler altars, movie theaters, soda fountains—and, as Agamben would find very fitting, an actual museum. It is further appropriate that Enoch's mind conceives the museum with a mystified and somewhat mystical spelling—"Muvseevum"—that sets it as far apart from the world of his lived experience as it is from the possibility of use. Of course Enoch finds his "new jesus" in the middle of this very Muvseevum, and he thinks to convert the mummified man to a realm of use by treating it like a fungible commodity. He steals it, takes it home to his readymade "tabernacle," and sets in to worship it— this idol of the capitalist religion's museified culture—only to discover, what else, the impossibility of "using" it. Hazel Motes, the novel's "Protestant saint" (*Collected Works* 919), knows exactly what to do with an object like that. He destroys it without a second thought.

This and other violent disavowals of an all-consuming capitalist religion have as much to do with O'Connor's valorization of Hazel as does his inexorable religious faith. Even his blasphemous condemnations and disavowals of Jesus can be read as part and parcel of the heroic role O'Conner envisions for him, as long as we remember that the only "Jesus" he has ever known is not the object of mystery that O'Connor worships, but rather an always already debased version of Christ as promulgated by various forms of Protestantism—all of which are subsumed and undermined by the capitalist religion that reigns in "this Protestant world." His blasphemies thus constitute yet another instance of an attempt to profane not Christianity but the pseudo-Christianities marketed by the American evangelical-capitalism resonance machine. Blasphemy *per se*, however, proves finally insufficient in this novel as a means of profanation. To understand why this is the case, we need briefly to consider what blasphemy is, and what it is not.

### From Blasphemy to Sacrilege

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

—Revelation 3:16

T. S. Eliot, whom O'Connor read "very closely and sympathetically," shared her sense that modern Western culture had deified capital and sacralized consumption, lamenting in 1934 that "economic determinism" had become "a god before whom we fall down and worship with all kinds of music" (Gooch 137-38; Eliot, *After* 18). Equally relevant to *Wise Blood*, moreover, are Eliot's thoughts on blasphemy's place in a modernity conceived as essentially post-Christian: like Eliot, O'Connor thought Christianity had been largely "bred out" of contemporary society, leaving behind "a generation of wingless chickens" (*Collected Works* 1077, 942). Given this atmosphere of nihilism—

which, O'Connor felt, "we breathe in with the air of the times" (*Collected Works* 1107)—any remaining trace of "genuine blasphemy" can be "a way of affirming belief," "a symptom that the soul is still alive" (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 337; *After* 56). Thus, for example, Baudelaire, who cannot be said to believe in Christ, can nonetheless be said to believe in Christianity, and for Eliot this is no small or unworthy feat: "His business was not to practise Christianity, but—what was much more important for his time—to assert its necessity" (*Selected Prose* 231). One might well say the same thing for Hazel Motes, he whose "integrity," as *Wise Blood's* prefatory note informs us, "lies in his not being able" to exorcise the specter of Christ. Hazel can be neither a conventional believer nor the confident disbeliever that he longs to be. He is doomed to the extremities of faith and despair which, for all their repugnance, may well prevent his being spewed from the Redeemer's mouth along with the rest of the lukewarm.

O'Connor's own faith ran so "hot" that, if anything, her convictions more closely resemble the ice-cold than the merely warm: "at some point in my life I realized that not only was I a Catholic but that this was all I was, that I was a Catholic not like someone else would be a Baptist or a Methodist but like someone else would be an atheist" (*Collected Works* 930). Hazel, too, is unable to inhabit lukewarm territory in his struggle to escape his spiritual compulsions. It is thus not at all surprising, from an Eliotic perspective, that blasphemy is Hazel's professed religion. "Blasphemy," he preaches, "is the way to the truth" (152). Yet Hazel later dispenses with blasphemy as a viable way to such truth, explaining to a gas station attendant that "he had only a few days ago believed in blasphemy as the way to salvation, but that you couldn't even believe in that because then you were believing in something to blaspheme" (148, 208). One might add that in his discourse of "salvation" and in his self-identification as "preacher," as much as in the pure oppositionality of his blasphemous gospel, Hazel remains locked in the semiotics he continues to denounce. He makes that point very clearly in spite of himself, as his subsequent actions almost immediately contradict his rejection of blasphemy: "He began to curse and blaspheme Jesus in a quiet intense way but with such conviction that the boy paused his work to listen" (208-09). This is the "conviction" that marks the genuine blasphemer as, of necessity, a genuine believer.

Nonetheless, in terms of *Wise Blood's* profanations of the American religion, there is an important sense in which the novel here repudiates blasphemy along with Hazel. In the latter part of the narrative, that is, Hazel metamorphoses from *Wise Blood's* resident *blasphemer* into its agent of *sacrilege*—a semantic distinction that says much about the novel's engagement with materialism. For as its suffix suggests, blasphemy is a discursive crime—a matter of rhetoric, form, and expression—while sacrilege denotes physical desecration.<sup>4</sup> If the realm of the former is discourse or text, the realm of the latter is physicality, embodiment. Blasphemy thus lends itself as the more obvious

term for religious irreverence that exists in or as literature, but ultimately it is sacrilege that O'Connor's novel and its protagonist direct against the American church of capital and consumption. Words, even the most blasphemous words, will not suffice to defile the things he wants or needs to defile; the materialist religion that Hazel combats requires the material profanations of sacrilege and iconoclasm—as in his violent desecration of the “new jesus” that has been made to iconize Enoch's and Sabbath's thralldom to consumer culture. Hazel's first such sacrilege, though, comes when he shoves a “Holy” man—Onnie Jay Holy, preacher and radio star—out of a car and into the roadway, then smashes Holy's thumb in the car's door jamb (156-59). He replicates this scene of automotive violence later, to more destructive effect, when he runs over and kills his commodified double, “the True Prophet,” another preacher of the consumerist faith (206, 167). Hazel's ultimate sacrilege, however, is yet to come.

Having witnessed her boarder exhibit such worrisome behavior as blinding himself with quicklime, Hazel's landlady is not finally convinced that he is “a mad man and that he ought to be under the control of a sensible person” until she finds four dollars and change in his trashcan (223-24). Here is Hazel's culminating profanation. From the standpoint of modern American dogma—whether conceived as the American Way of Life, the Protestant work ethic, the “American Religion,” or the overriding dogma of capitalism—such willful disposal of legal tender is a capital crime in more ways than one, a virtually inexplicable sacrilege against capital itself. Against, that is, the most holy sacrament of the economic system that rests upon it—what Karl Barth called “a sinister and heartless and perpetually ambiguous idol” (*Church* 532). Indeed, in many respects Hazel's turning of cash into trash is a less forgivable transgression, at least in principle, than his murder of the True Prophet. Such lives are cheap compared to the sanctity of capital, and in the eyes at least of his normally unflappable landlady—an adherent of the American Religion if there ever was one—Hazel's action is as dismaying as any sacrilege in the eyes of the Lord.

O'Connor had a habit of privileging the material in spiritual matters. Hence, for example, her nearly obsessive reverence for the ceremony of the Eucharist, and her well-known insistence on the literal ingestion of Christ's flesh and blood. (If transubstantiation were merely figurative, she said, “to hell with it” [*Collected Works* 977].) So it is no surprise that she finally favors the materiality of sacrilege as *Wise Blood's* profanatory mode, especially when that which she profanes is itself relentlessly materialist. Her Catholic opposition to modern consumer culture takes the form, in *Wise Blood*, of dueling materialisms, and dueling economies of cost and payment—all of which becomes clearest in the novel's final chapter, where O'Connor opposes

to the economics of sacralized capitalism an anagogical and wholly alien economy of debt, consumption, payment, and redemption.

### **Alternative Forms of Payment**

In a 1957 essay, O'Connor posited an "ugly correlation between our unparalleled prosperity and the stridency of these demands"—by, for instance, a recent issue of *Life* magazine—"for a literature that shows us the joys of life" (*Collected Works* 803). She then questioned whether "these screams for joy would be quite so piercing if joy were really so abundant in our prosperous society" (803). From O'Connor's vantage the fallen world lives not in prosperity but in massive debt, and *Wise Blood* accordingly links America's economic prosperity with its spiritual poverty. One way, it seems, for an individual to begin to rectify this imbalance is—as Hazel responds when his landlady asks why he mortifies himself—"To pay" (206). When pressed on the matter of what he pays for, Hazel maintains, "It don't make any difference for what...I'm paying" (206). This unelaborated compulsion to pay has struck some readers as a vulgar and spiritually bankrupt form of economic transaction. Susan Srigley reads it this way, arguing that "there is no indication in the story that Hazel Motes has any deeper experience of spiritual reality other than a loose notion of 'payment' ...Even subtle and compelling interpretations of Hazel's transformation through his blinding leave the reader with serious doubts about his attainment of vision or insight" (84). Such a pessimistic reading is attractive in its contrarianism, its refusal to place too much faith in a strictly anagogical interpretation. It undervalues, however, the centrality of such stark economics of cost and payment to the theological understanding of Redemption, which has historically been discussed and theologized in the naked economic terms that animate Hazel's mortifications.

In all its denominations, Christianity insists that human beings cannot, on their own, ever hope to pay down their debts to the Creator. In Saint Anselm's words, the "price paid to God for the sin of man [must] be something greater than all the universe besides God": hence the necessary sacrifice of Christ, "the God-man," who alone can make the payment that "none but God can make and none but man ought to make" (244-45). As Peter Stallybrass reminds us, the modern reticence to read Christianity in such bald terms stems from Protestantism's diligent separation, after the fact, of spiritual from financial value: "Christianity's critics from the Enlightenment on will find that in the supposedly pure place of the spiritual there lurks the *discreditable* truth of the economic. It's as if they discover, as a dirty secret, what the Catholic Church had openly proclaimed: the economics of belief" (280-81, emphasis added). We have only recently learned to be squeamish about reducing Christ's mission to one of paying off old debts and creating new ones, and O'Connor's faith was anything but squeamish. She numbered herself among those "who have to pay for our faith every step of the way" (*Collected Works* 1107). Her criticism of

the Beat writers, whom she saw as sharing her own anti-materialist stance, rests on their neglect of this necessity: "They call themselves holy but holiness costs and so far as I can see they pay nothing" (1098). Those who would pay Onnie Jay Holy a dollar for a made-to-order faith commit a comparable error, believing that salvation can be bought on the cheap.

"What people don't realize," O'Connor wrote, "is how much religion costs" (*Collected Works* 1110). It is not the dollar that Holy charges, nor any of the costs of "religious substitutes" that the novel so scrupulously catalogues (potato peeler \$1.50, rat-colored Essex \$40, chocolate malt \$.15, Lime-Cherry Surprise \$.10). Hazel himself has had to learn that spiritual cost is unquantifiable, unlimited; as a child, he paid for his "nameless unplaced guilt" by walking exactly one mile with rocks in his shoes, thinking, "that ought to satisfy Him" (59). This expectation will not characterize his penance at novel's end. For one thing, the very aspiration to "satisfy" God is misplaced according to the economics of Redemption; the wording recalls, rather conspicuously, Catholic theology's "Satisfaction Theory" of the Atonement (elaborated by Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo*), which maintains that only the priceless body of Christ can "satisfy" the Creator to whom we are all in infinite debt. Hazel's later mortifications are unbounded, committed with no expectation that such payment will suffice to satisfy anything at all—any more than those four dollars in his trashcan will.

Hazel introduces the question of religious cost and payment in *Wise Blood* when he announces he will "preach a new church" that "won't cost you nothing to join" (51). The church he ultimately finds for himself, of course, will cost him a great deal—not of money, which he irreverently tosses away, but of sight and body. His landlady has "always been impressed with the ability to pay," and O'Connor wants us to be equally impressed, not by his ability to pay in cash but by his willingness to pay spiritually through pain and privation (218). His is an economy of barbed wire and broken glass, an economy that makes little sense to the money-minded Mrs. Flood: "Well, it's not normal....it's something that people have quit doing—like boiling in oil or being a saint or walling up cats....There's no reason for it" (228). The novel's conclusion hints at the superior senselessness of more mundane, secular rites of payment: the policeman who finds Hazel on the roadside reminds him sternly of his debts ("You got to pay your rent....Ever' bit of it!"), then calmly ends the debtor's life with a billy club (235).

Along the lines of Mrs. Flood's more conventional interest in matters of payment and value, O'Connor informs us that "what provoked her most was the thought that there might be something valuable hidden near her, something she couldn't see" (218). That something is suggested by Hazel's ruined eyes—the eyes, "without any bottom in them," that both repulse and obsess her (233). She sees in those eyes something clearly akin to what Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock saw there: a refutation of the world of surfaces to which she

belongs, and an implied repudiation of her whole system of values. This is especially the case now that Hazel has become “an honest-to-Jesus blind man,” as Sabbath says in words more apt than she realizes (219). For as Mrs. Flood observes in words more apt than *she* realizes, Hazel has “destroyed his eyes and saved himself” (220). She perceives dimly that Hazel’s temporal sense has withdrawn from history into sacred time: while he generally seems “out of connection” with “the real world,” his head seems to contain “the whole black world...the sky and planets and whatever was or had been or would be. How would he know if time was going backwards or forwards or if he was going with it? She imagined it was like you were walking in a tunnel and all you could see was a pin point of light” (223, 222). He has emigrated, in a word, from *chronos* to *kairos*, which for Mrs. Flood is here a laughing matter—“She saw him going backwards to Bethlehem and she had to laugh”—and, later, an occasion to lecture: “time goes forward, it don’t go backward” (223, 232). Finally it provides a source of mystery that for now eludes her but that, given O’Connor’s worldview, may yet offer the action of grace that could save her: “She shut her eyes and saw the pin point of light but so far away that she could not hold it steady in her mind. She felt as if she were blocked at the entrance to something...[S]he felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn’t begin” (235-36).

One could read this, along with Hazel’s asceticism, as a wholly disembodied escape from the world, a Manichean rejection of matter. I read *Wise Blood* instead as offering, in O’Connor’s typically jarring fashion, an unfamiliar version of materialism that stands opposed to the American commercialized variety. For as Robert Brinkmeyer has shrewdly argued, *Wise Blood*’s apparent valorization of asceticism makes for a counterintuitive affirmation of the body: “in its overwhelming emphasis on the body, ascetic self-denial excludes what [Elaine] Scarry calls ‘the middle term,’ or the world,...in part because of pain’s power to contract the boundaries of the universe entirely to that of the suffering body. By in effect canceling the world, asceticism thus highlights the direct relationship between the body and the sacred” (80-81). Substituting a sacredly embodied materialism for that of the American market, this sacramentality, rooted in the body, is one way—Hazel’s sacrileges are another—that *Wise Blood* combats the other materialism, that of the American religion. In sum, O’Connor opposes Hazel’s dimly theological, painfully embodied conception of debt to the versions that mark most adherents to the American religion in its various forms.

Yet for all that, one wishes O’Connor’s blasphemous critiques of that religion extended further than they do—to social and political matters even more urgent than the seemingly unstoppable spread of consumer capitalism as an all-embracing way of life. As Susan Edmunds soberly reminds us, “nothing in her writings acknowledges that the traditional southern ‘code of

manners,' praised for its power 'to preserve each race from small intrusions upon the other,' was the same code of manners that lynch mobs routinely roused themselves to enforce" (205). Certainly O'Connor was not without her racial insensitivities, as Brad Gooch's recent biography makes clear.<sup>5</sup> At a more basic level, O'Connor's much-touted "anagogical vision" can blind her to the divisions whose apprehension forms a necessary basis for any politically efficacious social consciousness. Her adoption of an anagogical viewpoint perhaps inevitably involves blurring or dismissing the otherwise pressing distinctions that divide the literal world: "Everybody, as far as I am concerned, is The Poor" (*Collected Works* 955). While O'Connor's theological bird's-eye view provides her a unique vantage from which to critique prevailing ideologies, it also allows her to form opinions that reinforce them.

Such a perspective can all too easily devalue the here-and-now, and O'Connor's quietism on matters of race and class will surprise no one who is cognizant of the deplorable uses to which Christianity has historically been put. What may be surprising, to those who would instinctively condemn Christianity for its repressive ideological effects, are the critical, often subversive uses to which O'Connor puts her own religious convictions. The Catholic angel on her shoulder emerges in her fiction, as John Hawkes pointed out decades ago, as a pugnacious devil eager to take its shots at the pitfalls of O'Connor's contemporary situation. In this way the author transforms her own piety into something more closely resembling rank heresy in her 1950s American context. Hence the novel's confused initial reception, and hence, perhaps, its lasting capacity to shock and unsettle. For *Wise Blood's* irreverent critique of consumer culture, and of its abetting nationalist dogmas, retains its rhetorical bite—and will, so long as its targets remain as relevant, and as sacrosanct, as they were half a century ago.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Yaeger has written aptly of the enervating impact that the "hyperallegorical code" can have on O'Connor criticism. When scholars adhere too credulously to what the author called her "anagogical vision," they help to consolidate a hermeneutic orthodoxy according to which O'Connor's "wounds cease to terrify because they're designed to remind us of the fallen world"; we come to accept on faith that "her characters sin violently in order to snap the reader into spiritual self-knowledge and frightened contrition" (104).

<sup>2</sup> Echoing Barth's sentiments, Bloch insisted that industrial modernity was governed by "a new 'religion': that of capitalism as religion and the church of Mammon" (143). (The translation is Hamacher's; see Hamacher 88 n 5.) Benjamin held a similar though more emphatic view, having no use for the scare-quotes with which Bloch frames this "new 'religion'"; he instead writes of capitalism being more "purely" religious than the "so-called" religions it had superseded (259). For Benjamin, as Fletcher notes, capitalism became "*the modern religion par excellence*" (156). (Both Bloch and Benjamin, following Weber, located the roots of this new religion in the

Protestant Reformation.) As for Žižek, as Stephens has observed, “the theological dimension of Capital is the fundamental determinant of Žižek’s work, the inert mass around which his entire conceptual apparatus orbits” (3). And in a recent reflection, Bauman argues that consumerism in particular—the “Church of Consumers”—has acquired “a fully and truly eschatological dimension” (n.p.).

<sup>3</sup> O’Connor insisted that writers of fiction must harbor “anagogical vision,” must see and depict “different levels of reality,” “the Divine life and our participation in it,” to give readers an “enlarged view of the human scene” (*Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* 72-73).

<sup>4</sup> Blasphemy is inherently “textual,” “a linguistic act” (Lawton 5, 17); a “verbal crime,” “a crime of utterance” (Levy 10).

<sup>5</sup> An enthusiastic purveyor of “tasteless” racial jokes, O’Connor was known for her casual use of the word *nigger* and for her “patronizing” attitude toward African Americans (Gooch 132, 334-35, 351). (In refusing a visit from James Baldwin, she cited the necessity of observing Southern “traditions” [*Collected Works* 1094-95].) On the question of race in *Wise Blood* specifically, see Cobb’s *Racial Blasphemies*; pointing to what he considers Hazel’s racial indeterminacy, Cobb avers that “O’Connor critiques and exploits the way whiteness operates as a racial category” (35). While not wholly convincing, this interpretation of the novel bears on our discussion here because it views blasphemy and other forms of religious rhetoric—“tricky, religious rhetorical moves”—as the primary vehicles for *Wise Blood*’s deconstructions of race (62).

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