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A reading of "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "A Curtain of Green": The influence of parable on Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty

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A Reading of
A Good Man is Hard to Find and A Curtain of Green:
The Influence of Parable
on Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty

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Abstract

A Good Man is Hard to Find by Flannery O'Connor and A Curtain of Green by Eudora Welty are short story cycles harmonized by their marked imitation of the style and structure of parable. O'Connor added stories after initially sending the collection to the publisher and then rearranged them accordingly; her work represents a completed cycle. Welty's collection, published in an order different from their individual publications and their original placement in an early typescript, is an arranged cycle.

Moreover, parabolic style and structure unify each cycle. A parable typically is a brief story told in the past tense, usually through a third person narrator; uses specific, historically accurate settings and incorporates themes having universal application; introduces a character who engages another in unavoidable conflict; refutes one or more of the basic assumptions (myths) by which a class of people or nationality reconciles and orders its
environment; and concludes ambiguously, requiring the reader to determine the ending.

Also, both cycles logically reflect the assumptions of Hebrew myth rather than those in the more commonly recognized Greco-Roman tradition. The Judaic and Southern cultures share agrarian economies, a theocentric understanding of history, feelings of persecution and guilt, subjugation through military defeat, and perpetuation of ritual. O'Connor's collection joins sacramental imagery and the themes of original sin, goodness, and grace to create parables of Southern religion and morality. Welty's parables subvert cultural myths dealing with place, caste systems, charity, aristocracy and the past.

The collections also have internal thematic unity. In A Good Man is Hard to Find, adult characters seem unworthy either to offer or receive grace, view life as immediate, material and uni-dimensional, and wrestle with pride, usually unsuccessfully; children typically misunderstand the truths they encounter because their guardians have neglected to prepare them adequately. In A Curtain of Green, isolation and its consequences are repeatedly explored, as are dimensions of charity or pity. Other recurring elements include travellers whose specific goal is either directly stated or implied, the pivotal appearance of a significant stranger or of an object, and
types of handicap. Welty's cycle is divided into two halves bridged by "A Memory." The first half emphasizes possibility by raising the question "what if?" The second half stresses characters who act deliberately to find catharsis. In both collections, each successive story builds upon foundations laid in previous stories. Thus, appreciation of the overall cycle requires that the stories be read consecutively.
Critics generally have found Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green* to be more or less casually organized short story collections. Close inspection, however, reveals otherwise. Each collection is unified in two ways: the individual stories reflect the style and structure of New Testament parable, and each story incorporates themes set forth in the one before it. *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and *A Curtain of Green* are more than collections; they are short story cycles.

The short story cycle, or "sequence," is a comparatively new form of fiction. According to Robert Luscher, a unified short story sequence differs from a random collection of stories in that combining "internal consistency and coherence," "interplay among characters, motifs, and ideas," it "gradually constructs patterns of action and thematic unity." In Representative Short Story

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1Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg describe the short story genre as "a cross between a biological and a dialectical process, in which different species sometimes combine to produce new hybrids, which can in turn combine with other old or new forms." See The Nature of the Narrative (New York: Oxford UP, 1966) 11.

2Robert Luscher, Unpublished Dissertation (Duke University 1984) 4. Luscher finds that these characteristics "engage many of the same literary
Cycles of the Twentieth Century, Forrest L. Ingram declares that authorial intent establishes three categories of short story cycle. The "composed collection" is originally conceived as an ordered series, and the author writes the stories accordingly. Eudora Welty's The Wide Net is an example of a composed collection because she began the work with the specific intention of writing a group of stories about the Natchez Trace. In a "completed collection," the author sees a pattern of similarity and writes additional stories specifically to finish that pattern. Finally, an "arranged collection" results when the author takes independent stories having similar characters, themes, or locations and places them in a systematic order which may or may not follow the chronological order of their composition or publication. As the subsequent chapters will show, A Good Man is Hard to Find seems to be a completed collection, while A Curtain of Green meets the criteria of the arranged category. Moreover, both A Good Man is Hard to Find and A Curtain of Green in their overall unity reflect the influence of New Testament parable format. Deriving its history and design from the Judaic culture, the New Testament parable provides a conveniences--establishing symbolic equivalences, comparing characters, building theme . . . without the secure narrative" found in a novel.

logical frame for Southern short fiction. Lewis P. Simpson refers to the South as a "spiritual nation." As Flannery O'Connor remarked, "the South is not the Bible Belt for nothing."

The average reader often assumes that the parable form both began and ended with the body of divinely inspired stories of veiled meaning represented by the New Testament parables of Jesus. But according to the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, the parable form occurs in Greek, Judaic, Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian writings. All of these sources indicate that parables originally served didactic purposes and circulated orally. Western culture equates the term parable with either the Hebrew verb mashal, which means "to be similar" or "comparable to," or with the Greek verb paraballesthai, which means "to place along side."

Parable, allegory, metaphor, simile, similitude, and exemplum are often treated as if they were synonymous terms. C. H. Dodd explains that, for the first few hundred years, the Catholic Church considered the New Testament parables to be identical to "allegories, in which each term

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stood as a cryptogram for an idea, so that the whole had to be de-coded term by term." Adolph Julicher, among the first scholars to recognize a distinction between parable and allegory, asserts that a true parable has but one point of comparison and only one purpose to which all points of action lead. Julicher concluded that the parable differs from the allegory because "the parable can explain, but it cannot itself be explained." Jan Lambrecht interprets Julicher's assessment to mean that a parable cannot be decoded "as one could explain . . . a similitude or an allegory." Relating a general or universal truth, parable is "the natural expression of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures rather than conceives it in abstractions." Joachim Jeremias cites additional contrasts between parable and allegory. He believes the historically accurate settings of the parable indicate


9Lambrecht 4.

10Dodd believes that it was not unusual for the early church leaders to try to explain the parable in terms of allegory because the Hellenistic world allegorically interpreted myths and used them to express esoteric doctrine. Since that practice was widespread, Christian teachers would look for something similar. 4-5.
specific rather than general applications. Finally, Dan Otto Via finds that parable and allegory differ because the parable is always rooted in historically accurate and realistic detail while the allegory may involve fantasy.

Parable also has other distinguishing characteristics. It always has a narrative structure, uses sequential action (which the metaphor lacks), avoids the formulaic introduction of the simile and similitude ("the Kingdom of God is like"), and by nature poses a question (whereas the exemplum answers a specific question). Via lists additional differences between the parable and the similitude. In The Parables, he writes:

A similitude presents a typical, familiar, recurring, everyday scene with more than one verb, usually in the present tense. For example, it is typical that a woman with little money, who lost one of her ten coins, would make every effort to find it and would rejoice when she succeeded (The Lost Coin). In parable we have, not the relating of a typical, recurring incident, but a freely invented story told with a series of verbs in the past tense. The parable . . . narrates a particular thing in which some person or persons were once involved. The similitude . . . appeal[s] to what is universally acknowledged.

Although both the parable and the similitude emphasize familiar elements, Via insists that the parable uses them

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12Via 19.

13Via 11.
in a new or unfamiliar way. The parable application is not limited either to historical context or to immediate associations with the forms used by Jesus,\textsuperscript{14} but the clarity of a parable's meaning often depends upon how receptive the audience is to a new perception. When this disruptive trait appears in O'Connor's and Welty's works, the public often considers the characters "grotesque."

Furthermore, Via says that while the parable usually makes one central point, it frequently includes allusions to other stories or events among its "familiar" elements. These allusions, although open to allegorical interpretation, make sense in the story apart from allusion and allegory. For example, Jesus' parables often referred to the prophetic books of the Old Testament, but the audience unfamiliar with Talmudic knowledge could still understand the parable. If such knowledge had been prerequisite, the entire later effort of enlightening the Gentiles would have been pointless. Via also asserts that the parable may be analogous to "but not identical with a situation or world of thought outside the story."\textsuperscript{15} He finds the parable's place of origin informs its meaning; the people who actually live and work in the parable's

\textsuperscript{14}Via 19.

\textsuperscript{15}Via 24.
setting best understand the parable. Thus, an accurate interpretation considers the story's historical context. Via also elaborates upon Archibald Hunter's understanding of the narrative quality of the parable. According to Via, the parable may be either comic or tragic, may involve dialogue, and may be more concerned with plot than with character development.

Although students of parable can agree on what the parable form is not, they have conflicting opinions about what the parable is. In Hunter's opinion, a true parable unfolds in the past tense and has an ambiguous ending that requires the audience to interpret the conclusion of the parable. Familiar incidents or situations, he goes on to show, provide the basis of all the New Testament parables. Dodd, on the other hand, compares the parable to an argument, which "entices the hearer to a judgment upon the situation depicted." The ending must challenge the hearer, he says, "directly or by implication, to apply that judgment to the matter at hand." In other words, each reader must decide for himself which incidents in the story

16 In this respect, Via equates both the parable and the allegory audiences; since both understand the story according to specialized knowledge, they are both "closed" audiences.


18 Dodd 11.
are central to the parable's hidden meaning and which are included for historical accuracy.

Salle TeSelle finds that parables center in a typical plot: an ordinary person encounters obstacles, meets someone or something which should remove those obstacles so that the story seems to turn for the better, but ultimately finds that a solution is not, after all, possible. She also concludes that the vernacular of the story's characters and audience, rather than the events of the story, gives the parable its realism. Finally, TeSelle asserts that the audience does not actually interpret the parable; rather the parable interprets the reader. In other words, the parable's ambiguous ending forces the audience member to use previously unconscious attitudes and determine how the story resolves.19

Like TeSelle, Mary Ann Tolbert sees the parable form as metaphorical, but in Perspectives on the Parables she identifies levels of language as the basic problem in understanding parables.20 Tolbert observes that an audience understands parable only when there is a match between "the parabolic signs and the meaning system of the interpreter." Although parables may have more than one


correct interpretation, she insists that "limits of congruity" may make "some readings" incorrect. Although a parable may be as short as a proverbial saying or as long as a novella, the reader's interpretation of the parable must apply to all elements of the story. Tolbert demonstrates that a parable's central aim determines the nature of the judicial, economic, social, or moral system supporting the action of the story.

In his highly original study *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*, John Dominic Crossan identifies myth as a significant component of the New Testament parable form. Myth defines life as a series of cyclical events, the outcome of which is essentially pre-determined. That is, myth employs a static pattern in much the same way modern romance writers reuse plots in

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21 Tolbert 39.


23 In 1964, Herbert Weisinger aptly wrote: "Words, no less than clothes, are subject to the whims of fashion, and the fashionable word today is myth"; his observation continues to hold true. Myth functions in differing ways in such diverse fields as literary criticism, anthropology, psychoanalysis, sociology, and criminology. Weisinger gives three characteristics of myth. It embodies 1) "an articulated structure of symbol or narrative [or] a vision of reality," 2) "politico-religious history," or 3) "mistaken explanations of phenomena, whether of human life or of an external nature." Myth "should not be restricted to ritual, since more than ritual may give rise to speculation concerning cause," and it never records "historical acts of people." Herbert Weisinger, *The Agony and The Triumph: Papers on the Use and Abuse of Myth* (Detroit: Michigan State UP, 1964) 198-204.
their stories, changing only the locations and names of the characters. Recurrence and predictability offer us comfort. Myth in its broadest sense, Crossan says, reconciles the tension which results when a seemingly irreconcilable situation occurs. Crossan demonstrates that parable, on the other hand, is in direct opposition to myth. By using a situation not unlike myth, parable leads the reader to expect reconciliation, and then subverts that expectation by denying the possibility of reconciliation.

In contrast to myth, as Crossan points out, the parable evokes an intrinsically negative effect. It uses the framework of myth to separate man from rather than reconcile him to his world, to other men, and to God. In a highly specialized definition, myth indicates a societal convention or stereotype; parable shows that the myth no longer explains or imposes order upon a given society. Thus, the parable form results when myth no longer reconciles, when its solution no longer seems to work.

An informed discussion of parable and parabolic characteristics necessitates a further discussion of myth, especially of its origins and purposes. Scholars like Mircea Eliade, find that "myth narrates sacred history," and shows "how a reality came into existence."24

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"Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries," Eliade traces the development of myth from its sacred beginnings to its use in explaining social conventions. According to Eliade, "myth always narrates something as having really happened, as an event that took place, in the plain sense of the term" and addresses virtually anything—"the creation of the world, . . . the most insignificant animal or vegetable species, or . . . an institution."25 Elaborating upon Eliade's definition of myth, Edward Shirley explains myth as a story which, while telling of the origin of culture, reveals the "individual's own destiny" and "represents the moral code of society as inviolable by identifying it with the underlying pattern of the universe."26 Myths, Shirley argues, provide the means by which the community teaches the individual the aims and ideals of his society. Thus, Shirley reiterates Nietzsche, who noted that within the mythic vision lies a set of values; in order to change these values, one must change the myth.27

The mythology influencing western culture, as Robert Graves and Raphael Patai note in Hebrew Myths, is not solely derived from Greco-Roman tradition. Hebrew mythology also provides an influence. It, like the


27Shirley 140.
classical mythologies, creates a "charter either authorizing the continuance of ancient institutions, customs, rites and beliefs in the area where they are current, or approving alterations."\(^{28}\) But Hebrew mythology differs from classical in that its heroes are "profoundly influenced by the deeds, words and thoughts" of their forefathers, yet they also know that their actions "profoundly influence" posterity. Hebrew myths are "democratic," "mainly national charters," and "have a sense of destiny." Graves concludes that, more than its classical counterpart, "Hebrew myth firmly established the ethical principles of Western life."\(^{29}\)

This study is not concerned with allusions to specific elements of classical mythology. Of importance are elements of Hebrew mythology which have been incorporated into what Joseph Campbell terms the "secular mythology of men and women living for this world . . . pursuing earthly, human, and humane . . . purposes, and supported in their spiritual tasks . . . by the natural grace of individual endowment and the worldly virtue of loyalty in love."\(^{30}\) In this form, it "support[s] the current social order" and creates "various national, racial, religious, or class


\(^{29}\)Graves and Patai 17-19.

mythologies," which by a "system of sentiments" unites every member of a group.31 In "In the Protestant South," O'Connor alludes to the Hebrew mythology and its relationship to the South. She writes, "It takes a story of mythic dimensions . . . one in which everybody is able to recognize the hand of God and its descent. In the protestant South, the Scriptures fill this role. The Hebrew genius for making the absolute concrete has conditioned the Southerner's way of looking at things."32

The definitions of mythology given by Campbell and Graves apply to the Southern literary imagination. Shirley Lowery perceives that apprehending mythic "patterns of personal behavior" assists the audience in dealing with "childhood, maturity, old age" and in "moving gracefully from one stage to the next." The perpetuation of racial and ethnic prejudices held by "deeply religious American Southerners," Lowery says, provides an instance of how "myths still perform social functions."33 She writes:

In the nation chosen by God to lead the rest of the world toward justice and liberty, in the paradise where every adult male was equal before the law, thousands of slaves toiled. . . . The embarrassment eased when it became clear that the Bible itself ratified slavery. . . . After that myth was discredited . . . again a myth was found to ratify the discrepancy. Black people were

31Campbell 478.


a primitive race, not fully enough developed to cope with responsibility, knowledge, and power; therefore, it would be unkind to them and to others to give them these things.\textsuperscript{34}

Lowery equates man's overall attempt to find cosmic order with "an immigrant's mythic vision [which] helps to orient him in a foreign place," by allowing him "to get his bearings," "to put" himself "in the proper relation" with his "surroundings, to become familiar" with "facts" or with "circumstances."\textsuperscript{35}

Lowery's assessments of the Southern white attitude toward blacks and of the immigrant's mythic vision inform both \textit{A Good Man is Hard to Find} and \textit{A Curtain of Green}. Simply put, in both O'Connor's and Welty's collections, myths delineate the institutions and conventions of Southern society. Moreover as I hope to demonstrate, because the stories in these collections are all parables, they result in the eventual subversion of those myths.

Finally, if theological critics cannot agree upon the structural organization of the parable, they generally concur about its purpose. The parables of the Christian canon provide instruction concerning certain aspects of man's relation to God, to earthly and heavenly kingdoms, to family, to justice and mercy, to the worth of the individual in terms of society and heaven. As with life,

\textsuperscript{34}Lowery 6.

\textsuperscript{35}Lowery 10.
one can interpret a parable only through the accumulation of experience which one brings to it. In a sense, a parable is like an "inside joke." "Parable is always an unnerving experience," Crossan says. "You can usually recognize a parable because your immediate reading will be self-contrasting."³⁶ To be fully effective, then, the parable must be tailored for a specific audience. The New Testament parables contain no extra-terrestrial settings, no supernatural beings, and no speaking thistles or answering cedar trees. The Gospel parables incorporate familiar settings, characters, and events common to the New Testament era and audience. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-38), one of the least disputed by theologians and best known to the general public, illustrates this use of historical possibility within the previously defined characteristics of parable structure.³⁷

³⁶Crossan 56.

³⁷So familiar is it, in fact, that at least one state (Florida) has passed "The Good Samaritan Act," a law which removes liability from those who render assistance in emergency situations.
Jewish loathing, gives aid by taking the victim to a nearby inn, securing a physician's services for this stranger, and paying the bills in advance. The Gospel concludes the story with the admonition that Jesus gave to those who heard him tell the story: the Samaritan who offered "practical sympathy" was the true neighbor, and the hearer should go and follow the example of the Samaritan. The Phillips translation of the parable subtitles the passage "Jesus shows the relevance of the Law to actual living." This relevance occurs because the parable, using historically accurate details, presents conflict and possible resolution. Road travel between Jerusalem and Jericho was hazardous, particularly along traditional merchant routes where beatings and robbery often occurred. Priests and levites were acknowledged officers of the Jewish clergy. The concluding command of Jesus, that the hearer go and do likewise, further underscores the historical possibility of the story. The biblical narrative ends, however, without indicating whether the hearer followed Jesus' instruction.

The parable encourages the use of mythic stereotype by referring to anonymous participants--a man, a levite, a priest, an innkeeper. The emphasis, therefore, shifts from the particular to the generic, because the reader comes to think of the individual participants as types whose actions indicate the whole class that they represent. Furthermore,
since the victim is referred to only as "a man," any hearer could identify with the beaten traveller. The brief parable has sparse scenic detail because the audience recognized the familiar setting of the story. The narrator recounts the story, but does not himself participate in it. Most significantly, the story reverses the stereotype of the contemptible Samaritan. Originating in Hebraic oral literature, the story of the Good Samaritan was later incorporated into Luke's narrative as an illustration of Jesus' teaching about concern for one's fellow man.

Although theologians agree on the importance of the biblical parable, most critics ignore the significance of parable in secular literature.38 Obviously, sacred parables and secular parables have several differences. The former function to illuminate man's relationship to God and his consciousness of faith, whereas the latter primarily concentrate upon man's relationship to man and his awareness of the context of life in a socio-political world. To complicate the matter of differences, John Paul Pritchard asserts that Old Testament parables reassured a bereaved and anguished Jewish nation after several military defeats: "Parables offered the grief-stricken Jewish

38One reason for this omission could be that few secular authors have deliberately claimed to use the genre. In American literature, Nathaniel Hawthorne stands virtually alone in his deliberate use of the form, titling one of his tales "The Minister's Black Veil: A Parable." Franz Kafka and Luis Borges have each used the term to describe some of their writings.
reader, still mourning the shattered Jewish nation, a new, powerful . . . life-giving substitute."39 Yet, while "Jewish nation" represents a religious affiliation, it is also a socio-political entity. Even the New Testament parables serve as both sacred didactic teachings and expressions of motifs, ideas, patterns of action, and themes particular to the region in which Jesus lived. Pritchard's observation about the relationship between parable and defeat, however, seems particularly apposite to the place of parable in the literary history of the defeated South. Hugh Holman, for instance, asserts that the sense of "tragic dilemma" present in Judaic writing is also "inherent in Southern literature" and shapes the particular qualities of Southern writing, a view that C. Vann Woodward shares.40 According to Holman, "every agrarian culture" exhibits "a strong sense of family solidarity" which respects "kinship"; the "family Bibles with their records of births and deaths . . . are the repositories in miniature of the history of a place, of a region and of the world."41 Southern writers, Holman believes, "preoccupied with both Southern sin and Southern


mission," need to discern "a divine plan of Southern history and God's providence in the working of Southern affairs."42 Southern desire finds expression in the form of the New Testament parable.43

Southerners generally believe history reveals, Holman notes, "the objective working out" of the intentional will of God.44 In turn, "Bible Belt"45 Southerners identify with the audience of the New Testament parables: they see themselves as a persecuted remnant, desiring recognition and a sense of place, of belonging. O'Connor, for example, describes the South as being "Christ haunted" because the Southern theocratic society resembles that of New Testament Israel.46 Fred Hobson cites Sheldon Hackney, who also sees a similar pattern of experience in the Southern self-concept: "Being Southern inevitably involves a feeling of

42 Holman, The Immoderate Past, 5. For the Southern author, writing ultimately becomes a "religious act," but instead of recording the sacraments, it reveals the sense of guilt associated with the "eternal past of ritual." 96-97.

43 Lewis Simpson, also finding a connection between sacred writings and Southern experience, interprets Southern literature and experience in terms of sacramental acts, visions and myths. The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1975).

44 Holman 4.

45 Holman 10.

persecution at times and a sense of being a passive, insignificant object of alien or impersonal sources."47

Holman's observations suggest a strong connection between the parable, religious writing, and Southern regional literature. Religion places upon a scapegoat the sins of a group; the group then atones for those sins by sacrificing the scapegoat. Holman states that "the southern writer" becomes "a scapegoat for his fellow Americans." By conferring "guilt upon himself and dramatizing . . . the bitter paradoxes of his world," the southern author "can speak as brother and friend to his troubled nation."48 The Southern writer, like the Judaic teller of parables, shapes his tragedies and stories around "common people, sometimes contemptible people, characters lacking in the social or economic status that would give them significance"49 after defeat in war. For the South, however, losing the Civil War also resulted in social, economic, and familial defeat.

These cultural defeats signaled the beginning of the deterioration and replacement of the myths which had informed the Southern way of living. For the Southern writer of short fiction, dispelling the myths by which

48 Holman 15.
49 Holman, *The Roots of Southern Writing* 12.
outsiders measure and evaluate the region's weaknesses and by which Southerners prevent themselves from recovering from the wounds of war have seemed to be the central literary task. The most economical means of achieving this goal seemed to be the parable form.

In the following study of *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and *A Curtain of Green*, I have been guided by the following restricted assumptions concerning parable and myth. The parable 1) is a type of short story usually told in the past tense through a third person narrator, 2) uses day to day events and characters, 3) has a central point upon which all elements of the story focus, 4) refutes one or more of the basic assumptions (i.e. myths) which a particular people or class of people use to reconcile and order their environment, 5) indicates tension rather than resolution at the story's end, so that the audience determines the outcome of the story. The myths which these parables dispel move beyond stories about gods and goddesses; they may include, among others, communal misconceptions about caste systems, religion, economics, social order, justice, and goodness.

The New Testament parable form explains the design of the two collections by O'Connor and Welty. The first, Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, combines the parable form with sacramental imagery and themes of goodness and grace and creates parables confronting the
religious and moral conventions in the South. The second collection, Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green*, uses the New Testament parable form to confront cultural myths concerning place, caste systems, the past, charity, and aristocracy in the South. In the case of each collection of stories, the parable mode transforms a collection of stories into a unified, sophisticated short story cycle.
Chapter 2: Parable as the Unifying Principle in

A Good Man is Hard to Find

I.

Following the original publication (1955) of Flannery O'Connor's collection *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, several critics raised the question of the volume's unity. Although Frances Neel Cheney found the ten stories to be examples of O'Connor's finest writing, Frances Cawthon, for example, said the collection contains "pearls" that "need . . . to be strung together." Ten years later, in 1965, Melvin Friedman said that, while the book has its moments, the collection itself "lacks the essential unity and organization of another book [Winesburg, Ohio] which it occasionally resembles." More recent students of the

50 Flannery O'Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1955). All references to the short stories in this collection will appear as internal citations within the body of this paper.


52 Frances Cawthon quoted by Flannery O'Connor in letter 23, Monday [October 1955], *Correspondence with Flannery O'Connor and the Brainard Cheneys*, 25.

collection, most notably John R. May in *The Pruning Word*, perceives a stylistic unity based upon the New Testament parables.

But the basic unity of *A Good Man is Hard to Find* lies in the fact that it is a book which, incorporating the stylistic and structural conventions of parable in stories about original sin and the sacramental quality of life, constitutes a cycle of stories. Recognizing the cyclic nature of *A Good Man is Hard to Find* requires an understanding of the sacred myth (or myths) that appear, and how in questioning or subverting these myths in each story the volume is built on elements of parable.

The stories included in the collection and the order in which they appear indicate purposeful arrangement. In a letter to Robert Giroux (29 March 1954), O'Connor writes

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55 In the Catholic tradition, the seven sacraments include baptism (initiation through an intermediary into the fellowship of the universal church), confirmation (acknowledgement that one is a responsible witness and accountable for his actions), reconciliation (confession of sins), communion (partaking in the elements of bread and wine which by transubstantiation become the body and blood of Christ), holy orders (embracing a full-time sacramental ministry through celibacy and obedience to the bishop), matrimony (marriage, performed within the church, which acknowledges within that marriage obedience to the laws of God), and anointing of the sick (anointment of the seriously ill, with absolution for sins).
that she has eleven stories to include in her collection. A subsequent letter (15 November 1954) reveals that she has "rearranged the table of contents, putting the long story last" (HB, 72). By December 11, O'Connor is offering to cut two stories, "An Afternoon in the Woods" and "A Stroke of Good Fortune." Then she remarks, "If it must be one or the other, I think I would prefer leaving in "A Stroke of Good Fortune" because it seems more tied in with the others thematically" (HB, 73). Having finished her revisions, O'Connor declared on December 26 that she had completed "nine stories about original sin" (HB, 74). Yet as late as February 1955, O'Connor informed Giroux that she had "just written a story called 'Good Country People.' . . . It is really a story that would set the collection on its feet" (HB, 75). All of the ten stories included in A Good Man is Hard to Find were originally published separately in periodicals. The order in the published collection,  

56 Flannery O'Connor, The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1979) 71. All subsequent references to this work within the body of this paper will appear by abbreviation (HB) and page number.  

57 The stories in A Good Man is Hard to Find originally appeared as follows: "A Good Man is Hard to Find," Modern Writing (1953); "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," Harper's Bazaar (September 1953); "The Life You Save May be Your Own," Kenyon Review (Spring 1953); "The River," Sewanee Review (Summer 1953); "A Stroke of Good Fortune," Shenandoah (Spring 1953); "A Circle in the Fire," Kenyon Review (Spring 1954); "The Displaced Person," Sewanee Review (October 1954); "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," Harper's Bazaar (May 1954); "The Artificial Nigger," Kenyon Review (Spring 1955); and "Good Country People,"
however, follows neither the chronological order in which O'Connor wrote the stories, or the sequence of their first publications.  

These discrepancies indicate that O'Connor—if not altogether by conscious intention—created a unifying thematic pattern larger than any single story. The result is an arranged collection.

This unifying pattern is continued in that the stories in her collection mirror the New Testament parables, each one creating a tension between the literal and anagogical levels of storytelling. O'Connor's stories, like the New Testament parables, abound in common, contemptible characters; these literalists see life only in immediate, material terms. They cannot understand how the relationship between word and event signals multiple levels of simultaneous existence; their world is non-metaphoric.

Louise Y. Gossett calls the characters in A Good Man Is Hard to Find "parable figures" who "perversely struggle against grace and mercy" in stories which "begin in local facts [but] continue into situations and revelations that are parabolic or anagogical." Thus, the essential tension in the characters' lives occurs because they do not


For example, O'Connor wrote "Good Country People" last, yet it appears before the end.

recognize that acts may signify something greater than the moment's physical process, and that the law's spirit is the source of the law's letter.

The title story of *A Good Man is Hard to Find* alludes to the New Testament parable of the rich young ruler (Luke 18: 18-30). In this parable, a wealthy monarch addresses Jesus as "Good Teacher" and then asks him how to attain eternal life, a question which implies the ruler thinks eternal life represents a commodity that can be bought. Before answering the monarch's question, Jesus poses his own: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God." The monarch's silence indicates he cannot see beyond the literal to the metaphorical. When Jesus lists the commandments "do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother," the ruler further indicates his blindness by responding that he had kept these rules from his youth. When Jesus explains that the ruler must then sell everything, "distribute it to the poor," and "come, follow me," the ruler realizes he cannot disburse the material possessions of his birthright and thereby embrace real charity.

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60The same parable in Matthew 19: 16-30 adds the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This commandment is alluded to when Jesus commands the ruler to sell all that he has and take care of the poor.
The parable of the rich young ruler significantly informs *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. Both the ruler and O'Connor's misguided characters think goodness is the by-product of significant action when in actuality goodness inspires significant acts. Furthermore, both the ruler and the characters face contractual notions of spirituality. The ruler learns that a good man performs deeds which the ruler's own spiritual immaturity renders him unable to do. O'Connor's characters act according to religious cliches that have lost their effectiveness: their lives are without true sacrifice. Salvation for the rich young ruler exacts an enormous price; he must renounce his social class and life of privilege, leave the security of all that he knows, and find an identity apart from the controlling myth by which he has lived—the myth that salvation lies in material wealth. For O'Connor's characters, salvation from myth is equally expensive.

Melvin J. Friedman finds O'Connor's "grotesque characters" and "bizarre plots" indicate "the working out of a mythical situation in modern terms." Friedman, however, believes O'Connor avoided using the term *myth* because she was "no believer in mythic parallels." Betsy Fancher notes O'Connor's preoccupation with freaks shocks a twentieth-century audience whose minds "reel. . . from the

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61 Friedman 13.

62 Friedman 13.
myths of Madison Avenue."63 O'Connor claimed that she avoided writing "in terms of fable or myth,"64 but by asserting that serious writers should remind their audience of "known but ignored truths" so they might "see through the many levels of life,"65 she expressed the relationship of parable to myth.

One myth undercut throughout A Good Man is Hard to Find is that "seeing is believing." O'Connor's stories imply that what one actually sees encompasses far less than all.66 The myths in O'Connor's stories reflect incomplete tenets, either cultural (for example, the American success/Horatio Alger story which purports any poor man may become rich) or moral (goodness is immediately recognizable), by which the reader evaluates life.


64Flannery O'Connor, in "A Symposium on the Short Story," Conversations with Flannery O'Connor, 29. O'Connor reiterates this opinion, saying that if the characters "are people who deal with life on more fundamental, even more violent, terms than most of us, this doesn't make them mythical." "A Collection of Statements," The Added Dimension, 13. In an interview with Margaret Turner, however, O'Connor explains that Southern writers "were closer to the land and to the legends and myths which spring from it." Margaret Turner, "Visit to Flannery O'Connor Proves a Novel Experience," (1960) Conversations with Flannery O'Connor 41.

65Rosemary Magee, Introduction, Conversations with Flannery O'Connor x.

66As she wrote to her friend "A": "the visible universe is but a reflection of the invisible universe" (HB 128).
O'Connor explains that the Christian influence upon the Southern region provides the mythic elements inherent in her stories. "Bible Belt" Southerners see "in however attenuated a form, a vision of Moses' face as he pulverized our idols."\(^{67}\) In O'Connor's stories, "idols" become the South's deeply-rooted myths of honor, chivalry, pride, gender, caste systems, family hierarchies, economics, and traditions which governed the South and which the Union forces pulverized during the Civil War. These similarities between the New Testament era society and the South form "a sacred heroic background to which we [the Southerners] can compare and refer our actions."\(^{68}\)

The South, like the New Testament Judaic society, found that the "old manners" were "obsolete" and that "new manners will have to be based on what was best in the old ones--in their real basis of charity and necessity."\(^{69}\) Radically changing Southern manners requires overcoming difficulties similar to those encountered by New Testament era Jews. The Southerner's everyday life, like the Jew's life, depends upon ritual for continuity. In *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, the parable format, (myth, subversion of


\(^{68}\)Flannery O'Connor, "Southern Writers are Stuck with the South," *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*, 110.

myth, and ambiguous ending), is introduced in the title story, progresses through the successive stories and climaxes in "The Displaced Person." A reader ignorant of Southern cultural myths cannot fully appreciate the relationship of these myths to the context of the parable structure of the entire collection.

Finally, O'Connor recognized A Good Man is Hard to Find derives organizational unity from a theme repeated in each story. As she told Sally Fitzgerald, "stories about original sin" (HB 74) comprise the collection. The Old Testament story of the Garden of Eden records that pride is the original sin.70 As John Burt explains, pride results when mankind attempts to "sit in judgement of God," or "set conditions for him, even when . . . asking him to be as good as his word."71 Pride limits these characters to a literal and material vision of life by preventing them from recognizing either their dependence upon one another or life's sacramental qualities.

Drawing upon her Southern Catholicism and her belief in the sacramental quality of life,72 O'Connor uses the

70Eve demonstrated pride by judging God's motivations for restricting access to the trees of knowledge and life. Adam displayed pride by willfully disobeying God's authority and obeying the created (Eve).

71Burt 125.

72In a letter to John Hawkes, O'Connor explains the sacramental vision which illuminates the methodology behind her novel Wise Blood, a methodology which also informs the characters in A Good Man is Hard to Find: "Wise blood has
seven sacraments to examine how pride affects the relational community. As Carter Martin explains,

The sacramental view is, of course, more than the transformation of an object into a sign of the mystery that resides in the created universe; . . . It is a vision of reality focused through the seven sacraments which constitute the means of recognizing and accepting divine grace. The sacramental view thus provides for man's discovery of his place in the divine scheme of salvation—the recognition and acceptance of grace.

Each sacrament both signifies the covenant relationship between God and humanity and serves as a reminder of God's love and life in humanity. In each story, pride causes the downfall of those characters who "demand that God prove himself," or self-servingly elevate themselves above their peers. Using seemingly inappropriate characters to proffer and/or receive sacramental grace, O'Connor to be their means of grace because they have no sacraments. The religion of the South is a do-it-yourself religion, something which I as a Catholic find painful and touching and grimly comic" (HB 350).


undercuts the reader's expectations, a trait which also reflects back on the parable form.

II.

The title story of *A Good Man is Hard to Find* depicts a typical vacationing Southern family who are atypically murdered by The Misfit and his fellow escaped convicts. As he tells the Grandmother, "I call myself The Misfit because I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment" (28). Unable to reconcile the literal and the anagogical, The Misfit cannot understand that regardless of circumstances, punishment is useless unless it effects a behavior-altering atonement. Because The Misfit thinks that punishment and crime are unrelated, he finds no discrepancy between the grandmother's "crime" of recognition that he is the escaped criminal and his death verdict.

The Misfit's several parallels to Jesus further underscore the story's parabolic qualities. As John Crossan explains, parable "can oppose a structure of expectation by word and also by deed."76 Both The Misfit and Jesus, for example, replace their given names with

epithets: Jesus calls himself "The Way, the Truth, and the Life," and the criminal calls himself "The Misfit." Both assume an identity belying their true conditions: as a carpenter, Jesus does not look like a mighty ruler. Disguised in Bailey's clothes, The Misfit does not look like an escaped convict. Their contemporary societies, perceiving that the men undermine the law, demand the death penalty. Both travel with a small group of male followers. Both draw in the dirt while judging the nature of a woman whose life hangs in peril. As The Misfit concludes, "It was the same case with Him [Jesus] as with me" (27).

Although The Misfit is not the modern equivalent of Jesus, he acts as the redemptive catalyst in the story by effecting change, but remaining unaffected. In the story, The Misfit never achieves epiphany, yet he imparts grace to the grandmother whose series of actions caused her family's demise. As Jefferson Humphries writes, "for the instant before she dies, the sacred takes hold of this old lady . . . for perhaps the first time in her life."77 As with all parables, the ending is ambiguous. The Misfit's encounter with the grandmother ends in apparent tragedy since innocent people lose their lives, but the grandmother's religious epiphany hints of a positive ending. Obviously, her spiritual awakening requires a shockingly violent

price. The grandmother tells the escapee that prayer will make everything all right (130). Despite her "churchified" exhortations, the grandmother does not comprehend that the nature of Christ's mission was not to make everything on earth all right because this is not our ultimate home. The Christian religion is often violent, using a sword to bring about peace (Matthew 10:34).

These subtle parallels between Jesus and The Misfit shock Christian readers who often forget that Jesus' contemporaries were divided in their opinions of him. John 7:12 records that "while some said, 'He [Jesus] is a good man,' others said, 'no, he [Jesus] is leading the people astray.'" The readers of O'Connor's story are of similarly divided opinion. They witness the grandmother declaring that even though good men are hard to find, she knows a good man when she sees one. She then declares The Misfit to be a good man, that she is a lady, that a good man wouldn't shoot a lady, and that he "could be honest, too, if [he] would try" (24). Her statements set up what Crossan terms "a series of very disturbing questions." Why are good men shooting ladies? Does this mean that the grandmother is not a lady? Does this mean that the grandmother does not know what goodness really is? Are good men not necessarily honest?

78Crossan 90.
By judging goodness in terms of actions, race, or economic status, the grandmother proves she also does not understand the difference between the literal and the metaphorical. She dresses for their trip so "anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady" (118). She also decides the black child is naked because "little niggers in the country don't have things like we do" (119). She decrees "Europe was entirely to blame" for the current "difficult times" (122). The grandmother remarks she can tell by observation the criminal is "a good man at heart" (23) despite any wrong he may have done. The Misfit concurs he "never was a bad boy" (25).

O'Connor's parable, however, denies the myth of man's innate goodness; the grandmother's encounter with The Misfit invalidates her criteria. Her own son's economic status and race do not cause his nakedness in the country. Even though others could have refused her wish to change plans, ultimately she bears the greatest responsibility for her family's difficult times. Finally, calling The Misfit "one of my babies," "one of my own children" (132), the grandmother realizes their shared bond transcends personal misfortune, circumstance, culpability or sin. Her ultimate pity, forgiveness, and acceptance of the person causing her death displaces the myths of separateness by which she had previously evaluated others.
Although predisposing the average reader against them, the convict and the meddlesome grandmother are intrinsic to the story's parabolic form. In a letter to Cecil Dawkins (21 May 1959), O'Connor writes that Jesse Stuart criticized her, saying that since the reader "identified with the grandmother" O'Connor "should have kept it [the story] going until the cops got there and saved the grandmother" (HB, 333). The readers associating with the grandmother also relate to myths in which the good guy always wins, seeming good triumphs over evil, the "cavalry saves the day in the nick of time," and everyone lives "happily ever after." Martha Stephens, in The Question of Flannery O'Connor, also finds that the ending of the story is "highly unsatisfactory" because the "final scene," like "the story," is a "failure." On the contrary, the parabolic nature of the story requires that the audience identify with the grandmother and find the ending unsatisfactory.

Furthermore, The Misfit's abundance of pride signals his isolationism. When the grandmother urges him to pray, he replies he will not pray because he does all right by himself: he doesn't need any help beyond his own resources (26). He also demonstrates his literal nature and his dependence upon experience. Because he did not see it, The

Misfit doubts that Jesus raised the dead (132). The Misfit, however, succinctly expresses Christ's purpose, though he rejects it. He declares, "Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead . . . and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance" (132). The Misfit's dissatisfaction directly results from his inability to understand the covenant relationship between God and mankind: God's grace and mankind's faith. Given the human perspective of right and wrong, God should not have spared the guilty. Ironically, The Misfit's literal and closed mind changes the truth from a blessing to a curse; he takes murder lightly. According to his curious circular logic, if Jesus raises the dead, then The Misfit committed no crime because the grandmother and her family will not remain dead.

Perhaps the greatest irony lies in The Misfit's declaration that the grandmother "would have been a good woman . . . if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (133). He suggests a literal rather than metaphorical possibility. The Christian believer dies to sin, gains immunity to the penalty of sin, not on a long-term basis, but on a daily basis. Matthew 6:34 admonishes the Christian, "Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day." Josephine Hendin believes that "the only crucifixion that is real to O'Connor is the one a
freak lives out daily for a lifetime." Thus, the grandmother would have been a good woman if The Misfit had been there both to convict her of her sin and impart grace every day of her life.

The sacrament of baptism corresponds to the manifestation of grace closing the story. After the grandmother achieves her self-recognition, she attempts to express her revelation to The Misfit. She reaches out and touches him on the shoulder, but he refuses to become a disciple,

The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. The grandmother half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed (29).

In this passage, the grandmother is compared to a snake, the metaphor of sin; her three wounds, the crossed position, and the blood baptism provide obvious allusions to the gospel stories of the crucifixion and call attention to the sacramental quality of the grandmother's death.

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81 For example, two phrases used in the Southern Baptist ritual for the ordinance of baptism by immersion is "buried with Him in baptism" during which the candidate for baptism is placed underwater, and "raised to walk in newness of life" as the candidate is brought out of the water. Admittedly, the treatment of life as sacramental is highly ironic in other scenes in this story, for the family members die without benefit either of absolution or of burial in consecrated ground.
O'Connor's next parable in the collection, "The River," also uses isolationism, baptism, mistaken identity, faith, and experience. Adults, evaluating goodness in quantifiable terms, surround five-year-old Harry Ashfield. Mrs. Ashfield decides Harry should not leave with his babysitter, Mrs. Connin, because "he ain't fixed right." Mr. Ashfield's response, "Then for Christ's sake, fix him," (30) makes Harry believe he may be bad. Mrs. Connin's comments about his actions reinforce his impression: "That ain't nice," (32) and "Be a good boy and don't" (33). Such statements continue the myth which equates goodness with actions and appearances. Harry initially senses beyond literal associations; he asks Mrs. Connin about being healed, yet cannot specify his pre-baptismal inadequacy (33). However, he eventually succumbs to literal-minded interpretations of the healing ceremony.

All Harry knows of Christianity comes from platitude-filled religious tales. In the beginning of "The River," Harry accepts hearsay information. From books, he presumes that pictures of pretty, clean pigs are consistently accurate (36) and that a simple carpenter named Jesus made him and resides in a world of love (38). The preacher carrying out the baptism by immersion says Harry now counts in the world (45). Harry discovers first hand, however, that things are not always as he is told. Pigs can also be filthy and frightening (36-7), and he cannot literally find
that carpenter residing in the realm under the water (52). He also learns that his new name and status have no bearing on his particular role at home. Thus, Harry finds that the kingdom of Christ represented by myths of objectivity and beauty is also an earthly kingdom, the often filthy and frightening world after the Fall. As Ben Griffith points out, Harry is one of those "children who meet theological truths beyond their understanding" (HB 89). His experience, therefore, subverts the stories he has heard and provides a parabolic reversal of his expectations. This misunderstanding culminates in Harry's post-baptismal experiences.

Harry perceives that his baptism is somehow ineffectual. Had he received a proper baptism, other people would count him as a significant person. Obviously, Harry misunderstands the terminology. Because he inhabits a uni-dimensional world, he thinks count means to have literal value rather than to be responsible or to keep score, as in an action counting for him or against him. Harry's assumption represents the myth, the misunderstanding, which the parable overturns. The Christian experience does not automatically better one's societal role.

Since Mr. and Mrs. Ashfield treat him no differently after his baptism, Harry resolves, "not to fool with preachers anymore"; instead he will return to the river,
"baptize himself and keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river" (51). Harry, like the grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," continues the emphasis on a sacramental baptism. As O'Connor explains to "A," "There are three kinds [of baptism], of water, blood and desire" (HB, 131). The grandmother's baptism occurs in a puddle of blood; Harry's, through his desires and his permanent immersion in the blood red waters of a Georgia river.

Like that of the Misfit before him, Harry's inability to distinguish between literal and metaphorical meanings clouds his awareness of the sacramental purpose of baptism. Because Harry wishes to be more, not less, than he is, and because he expects an immediately visible transformation, his baptism becomes an egoistic act rather than what O'Connor terms a self-abnegating "purification that God gives irrespective of our efforts or worthiness" (HB, 387). Harry's childishly impatient rebaptism remains results from a literal-minded interpretation of the admonition that one must "lose his life to save it."82 His actions, then, mirror those of any man who as a child of God, proudly unneedful of God's assistance, takes matters into his own hands.

82At worst his act takes on the monumental consequences of suicide, an act O'Connor interprets as the "tragedy [of not knowing] what to do with . . . suffering" (HB 287).
The real error in Harry's desire to be re-baptized lies with those adults who, by providing inadequate religious training for the boy, circumvent his understanding of the rite. When Harry explains his mother's hangover, the preacher appears "angry and startled"; he believes that Harry ridicules the power of healing. Mrs. Connin, and not the boy, first asked for the mother's healing, but she addresses the symptoms rather than the cause of a hangover. Neither character, however, notices what effect their tension and disapproval have on Harry, who perceives his mother's hangover as part of normal, everyday life. In their zeal to baptize, these adults lose sight of the intended focus: the condition of the young child's soul.

The adults' neglect climaxes when they prejudice Harry against Mr. Paradise, the only character who could prevent the child's serious mistake of rebaptism. Mrs. Connin likens Mr. Paradise to one of her hogs standing "outside the screen door, looking in with his head lowered sullenly. He was long-legged and humpbacked and part of one of his ears had been bitten off" (37). She tells the boy Mr. Paradise always attends the healing services to show his ear cancer had not been healed. Before they leave for the healing service at the river, she tells Harry the story of "the carpenter driving a crowd of pigs out of a man. They were real pigs, gray and sour looking, and Mrs. Connin said
Jesus had driven them all out of this one man" (38). When they reach the river, Harry fears Mr. Paradise because he resembles the man in Mrs. Connin's Bible story. Mr. Paradise looks like "a huge old man," sitting "like a humped stone," and has a "huge purple bulge on his left temple" (42). As Harry tells the preacher that Mrs. Ashfield remains in bed because she has a hangover, Mr. Paradise sarcastically hollers, "Haw! Cure the afflicted woman with the hangover!" and beats "his knee with his fist" (45).

Some critics believe that Harry is correct to fear Mr. Paradise. Sister M. Bernetta Quinn bluntly states, "Mr. Paradise . . . is a Satan-figure." Mr. Paradise's outburst at the baptismal service may be in poor taste, but it is well founded. Simply removing the hangover, as Mrs. Connin requests, provides a strictly symptomatic cure and would allow Mrs. Ashfield to drink with impunity. Eliminating physical manifestations of a deeply rooted problem overlooks its origin and breaks the physical laws of cause and effect. Although Mr. Paradise's cynical amusement initially condemns him as a heretic, his later actions refute that evaluation.

Mr. Paradise has cancer, and he sits "almost every day, holding an unbaited fishline in the water while he

83Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, OSF, "Flannery O'Connor, A Realist of Differences," The Added Dimension 172.
stare[s] at the river passing in front of him" (51). Since fish seldom bite unbaited hooks, Mr. Paradise has virtually no hope of a catch and engages in vain enterprise. These passive activities seem incompatible with violent aggression. Moreover, apart from Mrs. Connin's interpretation and the preacher's incitement, Mr. Paradise's reactions vindicate him. Mr. Paradise notices Harry walking alone. Even he realizes that a young child, unfamiliar with the area, needs supervision. Hoping to gain the boy's attention, Mr. Paradise obtains a large thick peppermint stick and follows. When Mr. Paradise sees the boy literally drowning in the river, he rushes into the water, and without regard for personal safety, makes several attempts to reach and save the boy.

Harry, having gleaned negative impressions from Mrs. Connin and the preacher, sees only the personification of "a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting" (52). Dorothy Walters concludes that Mr. Paradise is "the most sinister of the child's attackers . . . who pursues the boy with a depraved intention."84

However, only Mr. Paradise exhibits a sense of responsibility for the child's total well-being. The most unlikely adult's demonstration of concern underscores the story's overall parabolic nature.

84Walters 75.
Furthermore, Mr. Paradise's actions on behalf of the child raise disturbing questions common to the parable form. If a man who is considered "bad" selflessly renders aid and risks his life, what does this say about a good man? About preachers who judge the man to be bad? About Christians who fail to act responsibly? Jefferson Humphries concludes that Mr. Paradise's "failure to understand [the] significance" of "Harry-Bevel's death . . . strikes a discordantly comical note in this hauntingly severe vignette."\(^85\) Unless Humphries uses "comical" to mean "positive" rather than "providing laughter," his assessment seems unfair. Mr. Paradise fails to save Harry from drowning, but by jumping into the river and risking his own life, he renounces his passive and hopeless existence and affirms the value of life.

By voluntarily immersing himself in the river, Mr. Paradise performs a self-baptism, but his is on both a spiritual and a physical level. As O'Connor explained to "A," "All voluntary baptisms are a miracle" (HB, 132). Thus, the child who so egoistically drowns himself becomes the instrument of grace. In turn, the terminally-ill adult carries out in practice the Christian admonitions that the greatest love lays down its life for another (John 15:13) and that to save one's life one must first be willing to

\(^{85}\)Humphries 120.
lose it (Matthew 10:39). The title of the next story alludes to these scripture passages.

Through the marriage of convenience between Mr. Shiflet, a man who ironically believes that he possesses "moral intelligence" (59), and Lucynell Crater, a half-witted woman living with her mother, "The Life You Save May be Your Own" depicts lay persons pursuing myths of acquisition and performing sacramental acts without understanding the deeper significance those acts represent. Although one critic finds the plot "inconsequential,\textsuperscript{86} the interactions and attitudes of the groom and his mother-in-law, who is also named Lucynell, provide the parable. Through Mr. Shiflet and Mrs. Crater, O'Connor concentrates upon the conflict between the literal and metaphoric concepts of life, continues the exploration of man's goodness, and uses the sacrament of marriage to strengthen the unity of the collection.

Upon arriving on the Crater property, Mr. Shiflet takes inventory "over everything in the yard," including mother and daughter, and assesses the value both in physical and monetary terms (55). Mrs. Crater, like the grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," judges a person's goodness and character by observable data and quickly evaluates the transient appearing on her property.

\textsuperscript{86}Hendin 63.
Even before the stranger can speak, Mrs. Crater visually summizes that he is a "tramp and no one to be afraid of" (53), and that he can work (55). Mr. Shiflet's volunteered information about his past, his morals, and his philosophy of life fortify her opinion (54-7). "Ravenous for a son-in-law," she asks Mr. Shiflet the ultimate question: "Are you married or single?" (58-9). Avoiding a direct answer to Mrs. Crater's question, he instead poses an ambiguous question: "Where would I find an innocent woman today?" (58).

Mr. Shiflet's evasion allows Mrs. Crater's own desires and attitudes to answer for him. Mrs. Crater, assuming his qualification "today" means in the immediate present rather than the current era, and hearing what her hunger wishes, decides he will make a good son-in-law. His reply, and his opening remark, "I'd give a fortune to live where I could see me a sun do that every evening" (54), lead Mrs. Crater to call his bluff and show him exactly how he can meet both goals.

Having calculated Mr. Shiflet's matrimonial candidacy, Mrs. Crater reduces her daughter's worth to observable, quantifiable terms and, by enumerating them for Mr. Shiflet, demonstrates that she would make a good wife. Her list, a corollary to the question of goodness posed by the first story in the collection, parodies those qualities listed in the Old Testament:
Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good ... worketh willingly with her hands ... giveth meat to her household ... she planteth. (Proverbs 31:10-16)

In addition to being "sweet and kind," the daughter can "sweep the floor, cook, wash, feed the chickens, and hoe" (58). Although looking fifteen or sixteen, Lucynell's age lies closer to "thirty but because of her innocence it was impossible to guess" (61). In Mrs. Crater's estimation, Lucynell's seeming youth and her adequate domestic ability will make her a good wife.

Should Mr. Shiflet have any doubt, however, Mrs. Crater offers to pay for the couple's honeymoon, and then tempts him by promising a dowry. She offers things for their new life which require that the couple stay with her in order to use them: she will provide a "permanent house," that "is always warm in winter," a well that "never goes dry," and property "with no mortgage" (63). Then she "thrown" in an automobile which, until Mr. Shiflet fixed it and began using it as a home, hadn't run in fifteen years. To these gifts, Mrs. Crater attaches a stipulation. Although Mrs. Crater would not give up Lucynell for the proverbial "casket of jewels" (58), she offers Mr. Shiflet connubial bliss with her daughter provided he stays on the farm. Finally, in case she cannot tempt Mr. Shiflet with domesticity and material possessions, she intimidates him
saying, "there ain't any place in the world for a poor disabled friendless drifting man" (62).

Mrs. Crater's medieval concept of marriage for property acquisition or social status is ironic in a story containing references to modern conveniences and medical breakthroughs. The proposed marriage represents what mammon rather than God has joined together. Placing the ceremony in "the Ordinary's office" rather than in the sanctity of a church (63), O'Connor further undercuts the sacramental quality of the rite. Mr. Shiflet remarks the civil service didn't satisfy him, but Mrs. Crater sharply reminds him, "It satisfied the law" (64). The misunderstanding between the metaphorical and the spiritual as well as the literal and the physical law continues when he further vents dissatisfaction with the marriage ceremony.87

As Mr. Shiflet earlier told Mrs. Crater, a physician who "cut the human heart ... out of a man's chest and held it in his hand" wouldn't "know anything about it" (55). Similarly, to him the civil marriage ceremony was "nothing but paper work and blood tests. What do they know about my blood? If they was to take my heart and cut it out ... they wouldn't know a thing about me" (64).

87Actually, the two Lucynell characters foreshadow the relationship. Together they represent a whole person. As separate entities, the mother illustrates the carnal mind; the daughter exemplifies the innocent spirit.
Obviously, the civil marriage cannot completely satisfy Mr. Shiflet because it does not account for the sacramental action of grace overruling law. Mr. Shiflet, like The Misfit before him, overlooks the exemption grace brings. Thus, Mr. Shiflet's comments about the physical heart and body are true on the literal level: observing either one provides little more than quantifiable data. Mr. Shiflet's discussion of what a man is or how he is known, though, fails because he considers only the physical properties and disregards the spiritual ones.

For centuries, writers have made the human heart and blood metaphors for the soul and conscience of man. The myth, then, is that a man is known by what is in his heart. In scripture, heart indicates "the center of life and strength; therefore, it means mind, soul, spirit, or entire emotional nature or understanding." It is where man hides the Word of God (Psalm 119:11) and where Jesus who, as the Great Physician dwelling in the hearts of men, sees all secrets. The earthly physician who literally cuts out a man's heart deposes that myth. If the heart reveals nothing about a man, where else can one seek the criteria by which to judge? Where then does Christ dwell? Mr. Shiflet's claim of "moral intelligence" (59) could indicate the mind.

88 Alexander Cruden, Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968) 290. This concordance cites over 700 uses of heart.
As Crossan points out, "God may not always approve our moral judgments" which reflect social, not religious, conventions. Apparently, as happened with the Grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," many readers identified with Mr. Shiflet; when adapting the story for television broadcast, the writers had Mr. Shiflet return for Lucynell so that they could "live happily ever after" (HB, 174). For many people, the term moral is either synonymous with or a by-product of goodness, and, therefore, the incongruity between Mr. Shiflet's assertions and his actions creates another dilemma. What kind of morality would allow a husband to abandon his wife? If readers consider themselves moral people, is their morality of the same caliber as Mr. Shiflet's?

Meanwhile, although both Mr. Shiflet and Mrs. Crater debate the quality of satisfaction they have derived from the marriage ceremony, neither treats marriage as a sacrament. By thrusting Lucynell into a sacramental act beyond her comprehension, Mrs. Crater is like the familial adults in "The River." In return for Mr. Shiflet's manual labor about the farm, Mrs. Crater sanctions a socially-acceptable sexual relationship with Lucynell, a woman having neither the intellectual understanding nor the emotional maturity necessary to benefit from the partnership. She also lacks the intelligence needed for

89Crossan 93.
nurturing any resulting progeny. Mrs. Crater's vision of marriage is, in reality, a sort of prostitution.

Although Mr. Shiflet espouses lofty ideals, his actions fail his rhetoric, as abandoning his bride in the wayside cafe proves. The busboy in The Hot Spot thinks Lucynell resembles "an angel of Gawd" (66). In an act foreshadowing a "The Artificial Nigger," a later story in the collection, Mr. Shiflet ignores both the compliment and the comparison and, referring to Lucynell as a hitch-hiker, denies any significant relationship (66). Although he proudly believes "a man with a car had a responsibility to others and he kept his eye out for a hitch-hiker," he nevertheless leaves "hitch-hiker" Lucynell without transportation or means of communicating her condition to her mother (66). He shows more kindness to strangers than to his own wife.

Solitary traveling often made him "more depressed than ever"; during those times when he "preferred not to be alone" (66), he procured a captive audience. In a gesture of false charity, he stops for a hitch-hiker, but his concern is more for his own personal need. The boy soon tires of Mr. Shiflet and, hurling invectives, jumps from the car. The boy's rude response to his "kindness" shocks Mr. Shiflet. Like The Misfit, Harry, and Mr. Paradise before him, Mr. Shiflet joins the ranks of those who cannot differentiate between the physical and spiritual. He
proudly separates himself from those around him and crying out, "Oh, Lord! Break forth and wash the slime from this earth" (67), and demands retribution in the form of rain.

Although Mr. Shiflet directs his curse toward the rude boy, several passages indicate Mr. Shiflet abruptly realizes that he, too, desecrates kindness. After ruminating on his mother who "taught him his first prayers," "give him love when no other would," "told him what was right and what wasn't," "and seen that he did the right thing," he declares, "I never rued a day in my life like the one when I left that old mother of mine" (67). Then, using the same phrase as the busboy in the cafe, he proclaims his mother "an angel of Gawd" and "his eyes ... were instantly clouded over with a mist of tears" (67). John May concludes that Shiflet's comment "giv[es] a typically insincere instruction in filial piety,"90 yet Shiflet's evaluation, like so many of his others, is parabolically ambiguous. Most people generally accept his metaphor as a positive assessment of his mother. On the other hand, the devil's fallen state renders him no less an angel of God.

Mr. Shiflet feels "that the rottenness of the world was about to engulf him." In a gesture recalling the actions of the publican who, in the parable from Luke 18:10-14, beats his breast and cries for God to be merciful

90May 70.
to him, a sinner, Mr. Shiflet "raised his arm and let it fall again to his breast" (67). Finding himself trapped between two rain clouds and trying to outrun the storm, Mr. Shiflet forfeits the benefits of grace symbolized in the baptism-like cleansing of the rain. The physical/literal storm, however, signifies but a larger-scale version of the inner storm that Mr. Shiflet's "clouded over" and tear-misted eyes manifest.

Many critics point out that his past actions and attitudes make Mr. Shiflet an unlikely recipient of grace. May acknowledges that possibility for grace exists when Mr. Shiflet becomes aware "of the hypocrisy that had laced his sermon as it had his life," but concludes that "even if his prayer for the purification of the earth does include himself in the 'slime' that needs to be washed away, Mr. Shiflet is obviously not ready to be cleansed."91 On the other hand, in a letter to "A," O'Connor maintains that "God is as present in the idiot . . . as in the genius" (HB 99). In keeping with the parable structure, the ending is, therefore, ambiguous.

Mrs. Crater's allusion to the scripture in Proverbs about the qualities of a good wife foreshadows Ruby Hill, the central character in "A Stroke of Good Fortune." Ruby's character parallels the Old Testament passage, most

91May 40.
obviously in her name: "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies." Making the "long walk from the grocery store" (69), she "brings her food from afar." Looking forward to moving to the suburbs and having her own house, she "considers a field" and hopes to "buy it." However, Ruby, like "beauty," is also "vain." Through Ruby, O'Connor examines the sacramental responsibilities of marriage and, using the concept of virtue, continues exploring the question of goodness.

Ruby is overwhelmingly preoccupied with looking youthful, but she goes beyond the basic cosmetic artistry of "touching up" (97) "mulberry colored hair" (95) and applying rouge. Remembering that when her mother was Ruby's present age, she "had looked like a puckered-up old yellow apple" (97), Ruby decides that carrying and raising eight children "were what did her mother in" (95). In order to postpone aging, Ruby avoids childbirth and proudly congratulates herself because she "would have had five children right now if he hadn't been careful" (74). Her vanity has restricted her marriage to a purposely fruitless union, which O'Connor terms a "rejection of life at its source" (HB 85). By practicing what she believes to be dependable birth control, Ruby subverts the Catholic purpose of marriage: the continuation of life through the careful nurturing of progeny. Thus, by attributing her swollen ankles, breathlessness, and stomach pains, to
"heart trouble" (82) or "cancer" (83), she adheres to the cultural myth that pregnancy is a disease. Dorothy Walters says that "Ruby's abhorrence of motherhood reflects an attitude pervasive in the modern world." 92 This attitude is reflected in another cultural myth, that motherhood is abhorrent because it renders the woman less important than the child. These are myths of feminism which the parable dispels. The reader is predisposed to believe that Ruby is virtuous, a term often synonymous with "goodness," but do virtuous women, particularly those who are Catholic, openly embrace birth control? Does a virtuous woman abandon what many would consider her highest calling, motherhood? Can a virtuous woman hate children?

Ironically, by circumventing childbirth, ignoring symptoms, avoiding proper pre-natal care, and self-diagnosing her condition, Ruby potentially shortens her life. Instead of submitting to a thorough and professional medical examination and enhancing her chances of longevity, Ruby visits a palmist. Ruby's efforts indicate her ignorance: the aging which Ruby singularly blames on pregnancy actually comes from fully experiencing human suffering. Ruby's mother experiences agonizing physical pain during childbirth, but the emotional pain caused by the death of four children, "two born dead, one died the

92 Walters 84.
first year, one crushed under a mowing machine" (72), makes
labor pain seem shallow. 93

If, on a literal level, Ruby's assessment that each pregnancy physically rendered her mother "deader with every one of them" (72) errs, on a spiritual level her assessment is substantially correct. Her mother does become "deader" with each birth because each new life shifts the mother's priority from her own welfare to that of the child. The mother "dies to self"; that is, she sacrifices her own well-being. Because Ruby does not understand that in the physical world one can live forever only through one's progeny, she remains blind to the metaphorical implications of eternal youth and eternal life. If she remains physically young forever, she will never reach heaven.

Ruby's conversation with Mr. Jerger, an intrusive history teacher, establishes this point. While recounting Ponce de Leon's search for the fountain of youth, Mr. Jerger reminds Ruby that the explorer discovered Florida on Easter Sunday, the day upon which Jesus made eternal life possible through his resurrection. When Ruby asks him if the Spaniard found the fountain, the professor raises issues which the reader must resolve. He replies,

93Also, if Ruby's theory explains why her mother looks old, it falls short when applied to Ruby's baby brother. Rufus also looks older than his years. Instead of experiencing labor, he has witnessed the horrors of human butchery in war.
"Do you think he found it? Do you think he found it? Do you think nobody else would have got to it if he had found it? Do you think there would be one person living on this earth who hadn't drunk it?" (76)

The teacher then explains that the secret to eternal youth lies within the heart where the human spirit remains always young. Several gospel hymns, in particular "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood," describe the heart's fountain as containing "blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins."94 Ironically, although available to everyone, not all have drunk from the "fountain." Drinking is a voluntary act. Ruby, oblivious to the implications of his comparison, dismisses his explanations as the ranting of a tired and confused old man.

Mr. Jerger's discussion of the metaphoric heart informs the subsequent conversation between Ruby and her neighbor Laverne. Ruby confesses that she suspects she has heart trouble. In fact, Ruby wants "it to be heart trouble" because doctors "couldn't very well remove your heart" (74). Laverne urges Ruby to go to a doctor, but Ruby proudly responds with an ironic double negative, "'I don't need no doctor.'" She also informs Laverne that she will not heed the uninformed suppositions and opinions from an unmarried person. Like The Misfit, Harry Ashfield, and

Mr. Shiflet before her, she concludes, "'I can take care of myself'" (79).

In a letter to Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, O'Connor remarked that "A Stroke of Good Fortune" did not "appeal" to her because it was "too much a farce to bear the weight" of the theme of "rejection of life at its source" (HB 85). Ruby's actions, however, successfully depict her marriage as a farce which cannot bear the responsibility that the sacrament requires. Until Ruby recognizes the differences between the literal and the metaphoric, her spiritual heart will never get better. Moreover, by elevating pride in her physical appearance above the intended purpose of marriage, she defiles both her body and the covenant relationship of marriage. She risks the ultimate finality of corporal death by refusing a qualified physician's consultation. As O'Connor remarked in a letter to "A," "It would never have entered the human consciousness to conceive of purity if we were not to look forward to a resurrection of the body which will be the flesh and spirit united in peace" (HB 100). Ruby's own birth represents a marriage of spirit and flesh, but she recognizes neither the significance of that covenant relationship nor her part in it.

The first half of the collection closes with "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," a complicated selection which builds upon key characterizations and issues found in the
preceding stories. The main character is an unnamed child. She, like the grandmother, Mr. Shiflet, Harry, and Ruby before her, pridefully segregates herself from family and friends. Like those before her, she encounters situations that explore the relational complexities between contrasting pairs and that test her pride. A typically egocentric child in the initial stages of adolescence understands life only in terms of being "either-or": the world is either smart or stupid, good or bad, protestant or Catholic, normal or freakish. As with the other characters, her obnoxious attitudes and her age make her an unlikely recipient of grace. She arrogantly believes her intelligence and religious beliefs are without peer.

The child in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" encounters the myth of purity. According to O'Connor, purity is "an acceptance of what God wills for us, [and] an acceptance of our individual circumstances" is "an acceptance of the Crucifixion, Christ's and our own" (HB 124). O'Connor's characters equate the term with virginity and freedom from guilt. First alluded to in "A Stroke of Good Fortune," this myth questions the propriety of carnal knowledge outside marriage, a topic Ruby raises when, after Laverne accuses Bill Hill of "slipping up" with the contraceptive, she declares: "I don't reckon you know anything about it, you ain't even married. . . . I don't know how you think you know so much single as you are" (81). Ruby thinks
post-marital experience provides the only sex education. Unmarried, Laverne should not know more about pregnancy than Ruby. Ruby has experience, but her knowledge is flawed because she thinks purity and sexual knowledge are mutually exclusive.

This myth continues in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." When her two older female cousins visit for the weekend, the child deliberately segregates herself and "watch[es] them suspiciously from a distance" as they "put on lipstick and their Sunday shoes and walked around in the high heels . . . always passing the long mirror in the hall slowly to get a look at their legs" (85). She concludes after observing them a few hours [that] they were practically morons and she was glad to think that they were only second cousins, and she couldn't have inherited any of their stupidity. . . . Neither of them could say an intelligent thing (85).

The child becomes increasingly hostile toward her cousins because she envies their sexual awareness. Their prepubescent attempts at seduction and their ridicule of the child's ignorance increase her sense of isolation.

Her retaliation at dinner shows more clearly the myth of purity that mistakenly separates the covenant relationship between body and spirit. In the Southern tradition, any topics relating to sex, religion, and politics are inappropriate for polite dinner conversation. The child breaks the first taboo by deliberately proposing inappropriate escorts for the cousins; those whose physical
characteristics render them unsuitable. One potential beau, an obese man, has poor personal hygiene; the other, an elderly farmer, transports blacks to and from town on the weekends (87-8). The child deflates her cousins' enthusiasm for the dating venture.

This discussion provides another example of adults who neglect their responsibility by discussing consequential matters in terms that confuse rather than educate their children. The child's mother tries changing the topic, but her attempt merely continues the underlying topic, sex, and introduces the second banned subject: religion. When she asks the cousins why they call themselves "Temple One" and "Temple Two," the girls explain that a nun told them that if any boy behaved "in an ungentlemanly manner with them in the back of an automobile . . . they were to say, 'Stop, sir! I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!' and that should put an end to it" (88). The child's mother then remarks that she thinks the "girls are pretty silly. . . . After all, that's what you are, Temples of the Holy Ghost" (88).  

95Carter Martin, finding confirmation the central sacrament in this story, thinks that the two cousins behave blasphemously, but he does not point out that the child acts in no better manner than they (37). Actually the cousins justifiably find humor in the nun's admonition. Later in the story they prove that they know nothing about the "facts of life." Since they do not understand the methods of procreation, they cannot understand the implications of the nun's unspoken concern. For them to use the imperative command to stop, after they have already placed themselves in a compromising position, would indeed seem ludicrous. The girls seem to be laughing at the entire scenario and not simply at the metaphor of the body
The conversation illustrates an exercise in miscommunication between the child, her mother, the nun, and the two cousins. The child's mother believes the cousins belittle the old-fashioned, unspoken mores concerning premarital sex. The nun assumes admonition and guilt alone will prevent teen-aged girls from loose moral behavior. The cousins superciliously believe the nun and their aunt form part of the old-fashioned establishment. The child finds both the cousins' humor and the adults' concern bewildering.

Although the mother fears the cousins' disdain, she invites two brothers to eat dinner with the visiting girls. She considers them "safe" because they are working on their grandmother's farm and studying to become Church of God preachers. The child points out that, ministerial study aside, they wear pants, they are sixteen, they drive a car (89), and they represent the same potential danger as any other teen-aged males. The child, however, does not yet understand exactly what danger the boys represent. Her subsequent lie to the cousins about how rabbits give birth proves her ignorance (97-8).

At the dinner, the myth of separation expands to include the divisions of Christianity. The two Catholic cousins engage two young Church of God men in singing as a living temple for the personhood of the Holy Ghost.
hymns. Laughing at the boys' simple Protestant song, the girls assert their intellectual superiority by singing the convent school's very complicated Latin benediction. Unaccustomed to Catholic tradition, Wendell accuses them of "Jew singing" (92). The scene's irony lies in the very text each group sings. The boys offer a song of praise, the girls offer a song of blessing, but neither recognizes any common subject for their singing. They negate the meaning of either set of lyrics by emphasizing differences rather than similarities.

Their systematic rejections of one another and of their differing Christian backgrounds, though, seem mild compared to the eavesdropping child's rejection. She casts judgment upon Wendell, calling him a "big dumb Church of God ox" (92). Later, when the cook warns that "God could strike [the child] deaf, dumb, and blind and then [she] wouldn't be as smart" (93), she egoistically interprets "smart" to mean "intelligent" rather than "sassy." The child's reply, that she would "still be smarter than some" (93), indicates that such humiliating retribution would be lost on her.

Inexperience and pride preclude the child from comprehending the full impact of her statements, yet she exhibits more self-awareness of her shortcomings than do any previous characters. Even though she finds fault with
others, she experiences moments of honest self-evaluation, and she enumerates her own failings:

She did not steal or murder but she was a born liar and slothful and she sassed her mother and was deliberately ugly to almost everyone. She was also eaten up with the sin of Pride, the worst one. She made fun of the Baptist preacher who came to the school at commencement to give the devotional. She would pull her mouth down and hold her forehead as if she were in agony and groan, 'Fawther, we thank Thee,' exactly the way he did and she had been told many times not to do it. (94)

The confession could have been a means to receive grace. While saying her prayers, however, the child remembers Wendell and Cory. In a gesture recalling the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), she thanks God she is not in the Church of God. By literally referring to a specific denomination, she overlooks the larger implications of the designation: "Church of God" could mean the universal or catholic church which includes every Christian. Her religious bigotry, then, separates her from communion with God as much as from her peers.

O'Connor's story clearly subverts this myth of spiritual separation through the hermaphrodite at the carnival who tells the crowd:

"God made me thisaway and if you laugh, God may strike you the same way. This is the way He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way. I'm showing you because I got to make the best of it. I expect you to act like ladies and gentlemen. I never done it to myself nor had anything to do with it but I'm making the best of it. I don't dispute hit" (97).
The freak's statement vividly shatters this myth of spiritual exclusivity and provides the parable format. The hermaphrodite, who publicly exposes genitalia (93) as part of an "adults only" tent show that area preachers and police close on presumably moral grounds (100-1), seems an unlikely character to reveal grace. If the show is so bad that both the religious and the civic authorities ban it, how can it inspire the child's most significant self-vision? How can the secular carnival participants teach the child essential spiritual truths about human shortcoming and grace? How can area preachers call the carnival obscene and force the participants away if the hermaphrodite opens the child's spiritual understanding?

O'Connor allows the creature to represent the human condition in toto by giving the hermaphrodite no name, no race, no place of origin.96 In short, the story's events indicate that God provides the sacred within the secular, that his voice often sounds loudest when freed from pious rhetoric such as the Baptist preacher uses, and that intellectually questioning the unanswerable provides less satisfaction than simple acceptance. Like the freak, admitting, "I don't dispute hit. This is the way He wanted

96On the other hand, Martha Stephens asserts that the creature is a "wretched Negro" who speaks a "lowly patois." On the basis of language, however, the hermaphrodite does not seem to be a black, for it does not match the speech patterns used by those characters who are specifically identified as black in other stories. Stephens 162.
me to be" becomes the child's only recourse.  

Through the freak, the child also learns how man's imperfection taints any organization in which he participates; through Alonzo, an overweight taxi driver, she recognizes that includes institutionalized religion. The child thinks Alonzo will smell better on Sunday, the day most people dress in their best clothes and present themselves in church, but she discovers that his personal hygiene remains unchanged. In essence Alonzo, like the hermaphrodite, lives without pretense. Without camouflaging his real nature, Alonzo enters church and feels accepted. Such knowledge constitutes real revelation to the child who, like many of O'Connor's readers, heretofore thinks church-related activities and properly certified sources are the only means of teaching the godly life. As the ride with Alonzo clearly emphasizes, organized religion alone cannot completely sanctify man.

The hermaphrodite also shows how dichotomous mankind must constantly reconcile conflicts between spiritual and carnal urges; God the perfect dwells in imperfect temples. Unlike Ruby, in "A Stroke of Good Fortune," the child learns that separation either from human characteristics or

97Josephine Hendin disagrees with this assessment. She concludes that the hermaphrodite represents "the fallen man [who] shifts the responsibility for his nature to God and then exploits his fallen condition without feeling guilt." Hendin 22. This may be true, but he still presents a lesson to us, however unintentional it may be.
the consequences they bring is impossible. Even though the child cannot rationally understand how a creature can be "a man and a woman without [having] two heads" (97), she subconsciously reconciles the riddle. Remembering the cousins' explanation about their bodies being temples of the Holy Ghost, she transforms the freak's tent show into a revival meeting. During this half-vision, she hears the freak tell the congregation to

"raise yourself up. A temple of the Holy Ghost. . . . God's Spirit has been dwelling in you, don't you know? . . . If anybody desecrates the temple of God, God will bring him to ruin and if you laugh, He may strike you thisaway. A temple of God is a holy thing. . . . I am a temple of the Holy Ghost" (98).

Her paraphrase of the hermaphrodite's speech and her later sacramental vision of sun as "a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood" (101) suggest she realizes that nothing in the world is beyond God's purpose. All nature participates in a universal communion providing continuity between both the quick and the dead, both the "saint" and the "sinner."

Following the traditional parable form, "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" ends ambiguously. Jefferson Humphries finds "no reconciliation between self and other" because "one of the protagonist's last perceptions, typical of her detached and 'mean' intelligence, is a dry notation of the
pig-like obesity of another character."98 Carter Martin believes that the story's ending simply states "that man's condition is normally corrupt and he is better off in accepting it."99 John May seems more correct in his observation that "the child comes--as each of us must--to realize what her limitations are but, more importantly, what she can accomplish despite them."100 The last image of the story is the Eucharist, not a pig.

This story, therefore, departs radically from the others in the collection. For the first time, a character struggling with the concepts of goodness and grace experiences some self-recognition of shortcomings, exhibits remorse, and has opportunity to act on that enlightened experience. Furthermore, these revelations bridge the character's pride-induced social isolationism. Becoming aware of the sacred and the sacred-within-the-secular initiates the character's participation in the fellowship of communion, first with nature, then with God, and ultimately with her fellow men.

Consequently, "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," marks the turning point of the collection. Each of the first five stories uses characteristics often considered synonymous with goodness: honesty, innocence, morality, sacrifice,

98Humphries 109.
99Martin 178.
100May 76.
virtue, purity. Using sacramental imagery and parabolic structure, the stories take these terms, subvert their often hackneyed meaning, and require the reader to redefine goodness. "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" also addresses goodness, but then by shifting the emphasis from questions of goodness to questions of grace and how it is imparted through the hermaphrodite, introduces the theme of the remainder of the collection.

III.

The surface plot of "The Artificial Nigger" concerns Mr. Head, his grandson Nelson, and their adventure in Atlanta. As the story begins, Mr. Head, has age-provided intellectual benefits and "calm understanding" which make him "a suitable guide for the young": his "physical reactions, like his moral ones, were guided by his will and strong character, [and] could be seen plainly in his features" (102-3). He seems a positive role model for his grandson. Furthermore, the magical ambience of "the miraculous moonlight" gives his eyes a "look of composure and of ancient wisdom as if they belonged to the great guides of men" (103). Such description lulls the reader into favorably evaluating Mr. Head.

The reader's opinion quickly deteriorates as Mr. Head's actions belie his propitious introduction. His
intellectual benefits become prideful self-perception, his will and strong character constitute inconsiderate behavior, and his calm understanding masks his true insecurity. He considers every trying circumstance a personal affront. For example, even though Mr. Head makes "special arrangements with the ticket agent for this train to stop" (106) so they can board, he nevertheless "secretly" fears the train would merely slow down as it passes them by so that it could make him look like "an even bigger idiot" (106-7). Belittling his grandson's dependence upon him and holding all blacks in extreme contempt prove his self-doubt rather than his authority. Mr. Head easily takes credit for all his knowledge, but he quickly denies responsibility for any error. He provides no literal guidance because he and Nelson lose their way; his eyes become "glazed with fear and caution" (123) after Nelson knocks over the woman on the sidewalk.

Mr. Head's inconsiderate behavior as he and Nelson board the train proves Mr. Head cares little for the comfort and concerns of others. Oblivious of the early hour and sleeping passengers, garrulous Mr. Head insensitively speaks in a normal voice, reads aloud "everything that was printed on [his ticket]" (108), and conducts one-sided conversations with obviously uninterested strangers (109). Although each of these instances is enough for the reader to lose confidence in
and turn against Mr. Head, the most damning evidence centers upon his moral reactions. Mr. Head's racial intolerance is the catalyst which brings about the old man's epiphany and gives the story its parable characteristics.

The old man's road to grace begins at the train depot where, despite their precautions, he and Nelson leave their sack lunch on the train and so must go hungry in the city. Then, when they wish to return, Mr. Head mistakenly believes that walking toward the station dome will lead them to the depot. Like the wounded man abandoned by the side roadside in the New Testament parable, Mr. Head depends upon his enemy for help; he asks a black woman for directions, but then refuses to humble himself and follow them. Pridefully relying on his intellectual prowess, Mr. Head insists they walk along the tracks rather than riding a streetcar back to the train depot; they walk, however, in the wrong direction.

Finally, by deciding to teach Nelson an unforgettable lesson, Mr. Head learns a lesson himself. To prove to Nelson that being born in the city gives "no cause for pride" (104), Mr. Head tricks Nelson into believing his grandfather has abandoned him. Like the hitchhiker whose sudden departure left Mr. Shiflet in turmoil, Mr. Head denies his responsibility for Nelson's reaction to the "lesson" and tells the crowd he does not know Nelson.
Furthermore, Mr. Head finds his judgment deceives him: he "senses the approach of the policeman from behind" when actually "there [is] no policeman in sight" (124).

Mr. Head's own lesson continues as he realizes he is thirsty. At a spigot, he drinks water and thinks that Nelson "would be thirsty and they would both drink and be brought together" (125) in a layman's communion. Like the prophet who calls, "Ho everyone who is thirsty in spirit" (Isaiah 55:1), Mr. Head summons Nelson to drink also, but Nelson refuses. Rejecting communion makes both characters suffer from a hunger and thirst beyond physical assuaging.

Nelson's refusal to drink after him, like a white refusing to drink after a black, ironically completes Mr. Head's humiliation and disgrace. Pride and knowledge no longer hold foremost value, and he at last accurately recognizes his situation. In the sacrament of confession he calls desperately to a stranger: "I'm lost and can't find my way and me and this boy have got to catch this train and I can't find the station. Oh Gawd I'm lost! Oh hep me Gawd I'm lost!" (126). Ironically, although he refers to his physical condition, he unknowingly speaks his spiritual condition as well.

The momentary self-awareness makes Mr. Head entirely helpless and renders him speechless until he sees a negro "statuary" sitting on a brick fence. He calls Nelson's attention to the "artificial nigger." Although they have
seen a real black man, the figure fascinates them. They cannot tell "if the artificial Negro were meant to be young or old" because it "looked too miserable to be either" (127). The figure's ageless appearance allows it to represent either Nelson or Mr. Head. O'Connor says "The Artificial Nigger" centers upon "an apparent action of grace" offered by the statue (HB 160). Acting as the catalyst, the figure reconciles the boy to his grandfather in the sacrament of confirmation. Their combined acknowledgement of the statue brings a redemptive quality to their suffering and shows Mr. Head the working of mercy in his life. As mercy like a fire consumes both Mr. Head's shame and pride, he undergoes a purification that O'Connor describes as "the kind . . . which we bring on ourselves--as in Purgatory. It is our evil nature which is naturally burnt away when it comes anywhere near God" (HB 387). In turn, Mr. Head offers the reader an apparent action of grace.

Despite their unworthy attitudes and actions, Mr. Head and Nelson each give and receive grace without recognizing their own extension of it. That each understands he receives grace indicates the discovery of humility, which O'Connor terms "the first product of self-knowledge" (HB 125). Their individual shame, the discovery of humility, and the beginning of compassion, initiate them into the universal family of man.
Although some critics believe the "story is unambiguously rendered" and that "nothing is left hidden,"\(^{101}\) the story's conclusion seems to follow the traditional open ending of a parable: Mr. Head and Nelson reconcile their immediate differences, but the audience must decide if the truce lasts and how Mr. Head and Nelson finally return home. Less obvious are the reader's identification with Mr. Head and subsequent participation in the parabolic tenor of the story. At first, the reader responds positively toward Mr. Head and his seemingly desirable traits, but then as the story reveals more of Mr. Head's true nature, the reader rejects him. This embrace and subsequent denial of Mr. Head is as revealing of the reader's nature as is Mr. Head's treatment of Nelson on the crowded street.

The second half of \textit{A Good Man is Hard to Find} uses a structure symmetrical to the first. "The Artificial Nigger" dispels myths concerning youth and age. The first half opens with a domineering grandmother whose poor sense of direction ultimately costs her family their lives. The second half introduces Mr. Head, a dominating grandfather whose false pride also results in a loss of direction for him and his grandson. But since he finds age a "choice blessing" (102) and believes "the city is not a great

\(^{101}\)Carol Schloss, "Epiphany," \textit{Flannery O'Connor} Bloom 80.
place" (104), Mr. Head proves the antithesis of Ruby in "A Stroke of Good Fortune."

Further unifying the collection is his grandson, Nelson, who also resembles several previous characters. He, like Harry, seems older than his age; although Nelson sleeps in a fetal position (103), his face looks "ancient, as if he knew everything already and would be pleased to forget it" (105). Furthermore, he arises before his grandfather, cooks fatback and cornpone, drinks cold coffee from a can, and wears clothes too big for him, descriptions belying his physical age (104-5). Like the child in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," Nelson alienates those around him by perceiving himself smarter than he really is, and by constantly asserting his intelligence. Like The Misfit, Nelson views life with the eyes of the Apostle Thomas; he also needs to see to understand, in this case a "nigger."

The conversation between Nelson and Mr. Head recalls Mr. Shiflet's soliloquy concerning the nature of man. As a "coffee-colored man" passes them in the train, Mr. Head complements Mr. Shiflet's spiritual question "what is a man?" by asking Nelson, "What was that?" In replying, "a man," "a fat man," and "an old man" (110), Nelson resembles those characters who judge according to external characteristics. After his grandfather ridicules him for asking directions from a black woman, Nelson tells his grandfather, "I never said I was anything but born here."
I never said I would or wouldn't like it. I only said I was born here and I never had nothing to do with that" (120). Nelson also echoes the freak in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" who did not dispute his condition, resigning himself to God's will.

Finally, Mr. Head's denial when Nelson needs help parallels Mr. Shiflet's abandonment of Lucynell in the Hot Spot Grill. Although Mr. Shiflet's action proves unredeemable because he never comes to terms with the significance of his deed, Mr. Head's redemption, according to O'Connor, "is all laid out inside the story" (HB 350). Mr. Head's encounter with the "artificial nigger" leads him to the sacrament of confirmation and, as O'Connor creates a parable denouncing the myths of intolerance and segregation, she enlarges upon the theme of universal communion.

The figurative misery of the negro statuary and the fire of emotional shame purging Mr. Head take literal form for Mrs. Cope in "A Circle in the Fire." Critics have noted that the title alludes to the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nago, prophets surviving in the middle of a fiery furnace. According to O'Connor, the fire in her story creates an effect similar to that experienced by those "entirely helpless . . . very like the souls in
"purgatory" (HB 118). The story also closely follows the events recorded in Isaiah 40:22-25

It is [God] who sits upon the circle of the earth [to whom] the inhabitants are as grasshoppers. . . who brings princes to naught and makes the dignitaries of the earth look like nothing. Scarcely are such potentates planted, scarcely sown, their stock has hardly struck root in the ground, when He breathes upon them and they wither and the wind carries them away like stubble.

Mrs. Cope, whose pride in her farm blinds her to the needs of those around her, suddenly finds her holdings reduced to ashes.

The overall emphasis of "A Circle in the Fire" seems three-fold. The first, improper stewardship, leads to the second, the difference between hearing and listening. Deafness of both heart and ear leads to the third point and, overturning the myth that charity without sacrifice is acceptable, provides the parable format. James 2:17 indicates that faith without works is dead. In this story O'Connor reminds the reader of the converse: good works without faith is hypocrisy (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Mrs. Cope is another character who cannot distinguish between the literal and the metaphorical. Obsessively fearing fire in the dried-out woods surrounding her farm, she protects her property through incessant observation, regulated use, and prayer. Ironically, although she fears fire, she finds great beauty in a "gorgeous" sunset (131) which constitutes controlled fire, a point her daughter makes.
Mrs. Cope, like Mr. Head, reacts to ordinary events with a certain paranoia. In "The Artificial Nigger," Mr. Head believes his daughter died in order to burden him with raising her child, takes exception to the presence of blacks, and believes the train will make a fool of him. Thoroughly absorbed in his own problems, Mr. Head indiscriminately imposes his judgments upon other passengers. Expressing a similar attitude, Mrs. Cope pulls the weeds in her yard with a vengeance "as if they were an evil sent directly by the devil to destroy the place," and she believes "her Negroes [are] as destructive as the nut grass" (130-2). Furthermore, like Mr. Head, she denies kinship with her child. When Sally Virginia dresses for outside play, her horrified mother, watching her with "a tragic look," remarks

"Why do you have to look like an idiot? . . . Suppose company were to come? When are you going to grow up? What's going to become of you? I look at you and I want to cry! Sometimes you look like you might belong to Mrs. Pritchard!" (150)

Mrs. Cope's excessive anxiety about the appearance of her property and her attitude toward Mrs. Pritchard, a farm worker, so preoccupy her that she ignores Mrs. Pritchard's National Enquirer-type stories. Instead of moving her to pity, those "calamitous stories" wear "her to a frazzle" (131). In fact, "Mrs. Cope prided herself on the way she handled the type of mind that Mrs. Pritchard
Furthermore, when Mrs. Cope and Mrs. Pritchard do speak, they simultaneously talk about two unrelated subjects, resulting in worthless monologues.

Sally Virginia also inherits her mother's pseudo-deafness. She impatiently ignores her mother's invocations for divine protection upon the forest; Sally finds "answer[ing] at all" useless "because she hear[s] it so often" (131). Even the farm workers learn from her example. When Mrs. Pritchard hollers at Culver, "he pretend[s] not to hear" (132). The characters' collective deafness bears a direct influence upon Mrs. Cope's capacity for charity and compassion.

Furthermore, Mrs. Cope's preoccupation leaves her no time for showing concern for others, a point her experience with the unexpected visitors best illustrates. When the boys suddenly arrive at the farm, Mrs. Cope talks to them, without understanding what they tell her. Believing she sees hunger and thirst in their faces and thinking herself charitable, she offers them sandwiches and drinks, the elements of a meal, but she refuses to share in that meal with them. When the boys do not act as she wishes, she uncharitably tells them she has "put up with this as long as [she] can," she has "fed them twice"; if they remain there after she goes into town, she will "call the sheriff" (148). By insisting the boys fit her concept of proper behavior, Mrs. Cope expects too much. As O'Connor remarks
in a letter to Cecil Dawkins, "To expect too much is to have a sentimental view of life and this is a softness that ends in bitterness. Charity is hard and endures" (HB 308). By comparison, Mrs. Cope's pseudo-charity is conditional. She feels distant compassion for the Europeans in boxcars and for pregnant women in iron lungs, but she cannot act on that sympathy. Like Judas at the last supper, she finds those unfortunate nearer home are the omnipresent poor; lacking any true sentiment, her gestures become perfunctory expressions.

As Dorothy Walters notes, in Mrs. Cope's "press for possessions, she has lost sight of charity" (69). Believing she recognizes physical hunger in their faces and voices, Mrs. Cope thinks she charitably offers them a meal, but her charity falls short when she deems herself too good to share in it and takes offense when they do not eat (140-1). Mrs. Cope fails to recognize the boys' intangible hungers. Clearly, they want to stay on her farm and seek her permission. As one boy explains, Powell says that her farm "was everything. Said it was horses here. Said it was the best time of his entire life right here on this here place. Talks about it all the time" (136). They even tell Mrs. Cope that when Powell dies, "he want[s] to come here" (137).

Mrs. Cope clearly has the opportunity to make good on all her pious rhetoric and impart grace to the three boys.
Instead, she makes excuses about why they cannot stay with her. When the boys agree to honor each stipulation, she reneges. She cannot fathom the boys' need because she is too worried "that someone would get hurt and sue her for everything she had" (136), and she tells them they must leave the next day. Her attitude reflects that of the unfaithful steward in the New Testament parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Her overriding fear that something would happen not only impedes her full enjoyment of the possessions she has, but it also prevents her from sharing that enjoyment with others. She, like her scriptural counterpart, has no option but to lose what she has.

Instead of leaving the property, the boys camp out and play in the woods. Their antics in the trough gives them a sudden partial vision of the difference between essence and representation. The small boy wishes he could always live on the farm. The large boy rejoices, glad that he does not. Powell reconciles the two desires by concluding that if the farm did not exist they "would never have to think of it again" (152). Once free from physical locus, the special woods would be everywhere the boys would be, existing in their inner vision, and the boys would no longer yearn for that which they cannot physically keep. The trough also provides the first sacramental image. Although the boys experience baptism, they do not know what
to do once the baptismal water dries, other than to jump from the trough and run through the field. Thus, as with the children in previous stories, the boys experience mysteries which their immaturity misunderstands.

Moreover, Mrs. Cope, working diligently to preserve everything on her farm, overlooks the duality of existence represented in the second sacramental image. This other baptism, the one by fire, takes only seconds for the boys to ignite. As the flames consume the woods, they purge Mrs. Cope of two things: first, the material barriers which she places between herself and those suffering calamity. Instead of viewing life with the Pharisee's thankfulness because they have not had to "live in a development," be "Negroes," be "in iron lungs," or be "Europeans ridden in box cars like cattle" (149-50), Mrs. Cope faces genuine loss and suffering. Mrs. Cope's ever-gnawing fear of a woods fire creates the second barrier. The fire releases her from fear, removing her need to perpetuate an empty shrine. Herein lies the parable. The boys have been both destructive and productive in the same act. Losing what she values most, Mrs. Cope gains something of greater value. That loss, in turn, eliminates her separation. The daughter who heretofore ignored others suddenly listens beyond her mother's verbal demands and hears the misery embedded in those tones. The fire and subsequent property loss may seem unfair, but as a burnt offering, a real
sacrifice, the situation offers grace. The reader must decide whether or not Mrs. Cope can accept that grace or continue to be thankful, indeed, for everything (142).

"A Late Encounter with the Enemy," unifies the collection by shifting the emphasis from those who worship physical possessions to those who venerate such ideals as "dignity," "courage," and "honor." Replacing the old timber forest, dry beyond use, is George Poker "General Tennessee Flintoack" Sash; significantly, Flintoack is used for starting fires. The General is an ancient man "bundled up and lent to the Capitol City Museum where he was displayed . . . in a musty room with old photographs, old uniforms, old artillery and historic documents" (139). Joining him is his granddaughter, Sally Poker Sash. These two characters continue attitudes of pride and separation which cause contempt for law and authority and obscure awareness of the differences between essence and representation. In "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," these aspects ultimately result in a painful initiation into the collective population, but only after the characters overcome myths of tradition and history.

The General perceives history in linear rather than cyclical terms; in his unilateral "mind, history [is] connected with processions" which "he never expect[s] to meet . . . again" (157). Ironically, his words prove true
after a movie producer, altering the General's biography to
fit a romantic ideal, changes the grandfather's name from
George Poker Sash to Tennessee Flintrock Sash, promotes him
from major to general, and gives him a dress uniform finer
than any worn in real military service (159). He credits
the General with having "fought and bled in the battles"
that the movie "daringly re-act[s] on the screen" (160).
The General, unable to remember where, when, or why he
fought, unquestioningly accepts the cinematic alteration.

Sally is another dissatisfied character. Like Mr.
Head and Mrs. Cope, she also believes life personally
thwarts her. Having her grandfather live to see her
graduate from college becomes her greatest hope; her
greatest fear is being "cheated out of her triumph because
she so often was" (156). Sally, like Mr. Shiflet, receives
no satisfaction from the law and willfully circumvents its
spirit if not its letter. Like The Misfit, Sally believes
"all the upstarts . . . turned the world on its head and
unsettled the ways of decent living" (156). Sally also
shares the attitudes of the grandmother in "A Good Man is
Hard to Find." She thinks the past better than the present
and disdains the new ways which sacrifice for progress the
"old traditions" of "dignity," "honor," and "courage"
(156), which she believes her grandfather represents.

These attitudes inform much of Sally's academic
experiences. Because state law requires college trained
teachers, she must go to summer school. Upon returning to her own classroom, however, Sally "always taught in the exact way she had been taught not to teach," but even "this was a mild revenge that didn't satisfy her sense of justice" (156). Sally believes in tradition for its own sake; despite exposure to methods and equipment which might make her classroom performance easier or more proficient, she closes her mind to change. She also accepts the myth of social inheritance which confuses representation and reality. The Southern aristocracy believe paternal or ancestral accomplishment provides social acceptance for subsequent generations. Always in her grandfather's shadow, Sally presents him as an honored guest at her college graduation, hoping his presence transfers respect for the glorious past to her present situation.

Her respect for the past is based upon her pride in her grandfather, but his "dignity," "honor," and "courage" reflect more fabrication and myth than historical reality. The community also perpetuates the General's image by asking him to appear at such historical festivities as pilgrimage and Confederate Day (139). Public declaration elevates this ordinary man and, heaping upon him their vision of the past, the masses transform him into a cultural anti-scapegoat which perpetuates "what Stark Young, one of the perpetrators of this myth, was fond of
calling the art of living."\textsuperscript{102} Obviously, they all have confused essence and reality.

Sally fosters the misrepresentation by arranging for her nephew, John Wesley, to wear his Boy Scout uniform and to guide onto the stage her now wheelchair-bound grandfather in his dress uniform movie costume. She imagines "the old General in his courageous gray and the young boy in his clean khaki" will be "impressive to behold" as they wait for her behind the stage (163). The perceived ideal, however, goes unrealized. Sally's reverie is destroyed when she sees her nephew sloppily dressed and slouching beside a soft-drink machine while her grandfather sits unprotected in the sweltering heat. The boy, like his great-grandfather, does not in reality live up to the ideals, image, and myths his uniform represents.

Furthermore, even though John Wesley does not share her values, Sally entrusts him with the personification of all she holds sacred. The consequences of her delegation of duty allude to those listed in the parable of the incompatibility of old and new wineskin (Matthew 9:16-17). Taking no precaution with his charge, the nephew unceremoniously "wheel[s] him rapidly down a walk and up a ramp and into a building and bump[s] him over the stage entrance and into position" (164). The boy ignores both his great-grandfather's comfort and the seriousness of the

\textsuperscript{102}Muller 42.
occasion. The General's age, his exposure to the extreme heat, and the boy's rough handling prove more than a 104-year-old body can bear.

Moreover, while Sally and her other relatives sit on a shady bench, waiting for the nephew to bring the General out of the auditorium, the nephew jostles the General "out the back way," "roll[s] him at high speed down a flagstone path," and "wait[s] . . . with the corpse in the long line at the Coca-Cola machine" (168). Despite the audience's show of respect to the General and to the graduates during commencement, the nephew respects neither the General, alive or dead, nor the waiting adults. He thinks only in terms of the immediate self-gratification that a cold soft drink offers.

The nephew's behavior culminates the story's parabolic events. The boy's uniform, like his grandfather's, is a physical representation of an organization's ideals. Anyone wearing a uniform usually holds an allegiance to its represented standards. Gilbert Muller thinks the central myth of the story, "the southern myth of magnolias and moonlight," is deposed by the nephew, who represents the "ultimate enemy to which the title of the story alludes . . . for the parable of historical glory is grotesquely undercut by . . . new cultural symbols." 103 Dorothy

103 Gilbert H. Muller Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque (Athens: U Georgia P, 1972) 42. Muller, however, does not explain what he means
Walters finds that the nephew represents the "later generation" in whose "consciousness . . . the literal facts of history have likewise dimmed."\(^{104}\) However, designating the boy scout as the single enemy in the story seems unfair.

Since none of the characters attired in symbolic garb fulfill the assumptions that clothing provides, the more logical assessment is that the enemy is not an individual character, but the pretension each character's garment represents. The nephew eliminates those familiar civic depictions of respectful boy scouts safely navigating the aged and infirm through traffic. The General's military regalia perpetuates a false history. Moreover, Sally lacks the qualifications represented by her graduation gown: she is no scholar. Receiving a diploma, signifying she has gone through the motions of learning even though she may not put that learning into practice, makes Sally no less hypocritical than either her grandfather or her nephew. She receives a publicly recognized symbol, but she is unable to live up to the standards accompanying it.

The General, meanwhile, meets history's cyclic nature, and provides the sacramental imagery of the story. While watching the graduation procession, he sees the past as that which "had been dogging him all his days." As he by the term parable.\(^{104}\)

\(^{104}\)Walters 88.
tries to see "what comes after the past . . . his hand clenched the sword until the blade touched bone" (167). The General's accident seems a symbolic, two-fold baptism. A blade touching bone must first sever blood vessels. For the General personally, his bloodshed restores him to the community from which age, senility, and physical deterioration have separated him. His perspiration in the hot sun, combined with the sword-drawn blood, could imply ointments for extreme unction which transform him from a symbol. He regains his mortal status, and the living can get on with the business of the present, as the nephew illustrates. John Wesley, then, is the only character who responds to the General's true condition: an empty shell. The reader must resolve the dilemmas of whether or not the nephew is the sole adversary in the story. Should he be praised for acting admirably or should he be reprimanded for withholding respect, however hypocritical that may be, from the aged or from a fellow human being regardless of the General's Confederate past? Should a person be respected simply for age or social position?

The General, meanwhile, appears to defeat Sally's purpose for having him present. By dying before the ceremony gets fully underway, he both shifts others' focus from Sally's academic achievement and eliminates what she, as a typical Southern aristocrat, thinks is her strongest claim to social recognition. By stripping her of false
pride, his death becomes the incident which provides her
with grace. The esteem Sally tries to gain she loses; yet
her loss, like Mrs. Cope's, provides freedom to achieve
something far greater. Sally receives merit on the basis
of her own personhood, not on her lineage or her family's
prestige, and she freely discerns for herself the truth
life offers. As the last living relic of a bygone era, The
General, in death, frees the community from the necessity
of perpetuating a false shrine. They can begin reconciling
the discrepancies between representation and reality.

"Good Country People" elaborates upon the theme of
differences between representation and reality, overturns
the myth of occupational stereotyping introduced by the
Sash family, and continues the misadventures of those
characters whose immoderate pride is burned away. Joy is
an overweight, grumpy, proud, leg amputee, who professes
atheism. Jobless, husbandless, and over thirty, she has
only a Ph.D. to show for her age. A self-proclaimed cynic
"whose constant outrage . . . obliterate[s] every
expression from her face" as if she "achieved blindness by
an act of will and mean[t] to keep it" (171), Joy displays
unwarranted intellectual pride. Without regard for her
mother's subsequent displeasure, Joy petitions the civil
court and renames herself "Hulga." Mrs. Hopewell feels the
name is "the ugliest . . . in any language" (173). Joy,
however, asserts that the change represents "her highest creative act" and that it reminds her of "the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace" (174). "Hulga," symbolic of the shame constantly burning within, allows Joy to hide her true nature behind intellect and education: Joy pretends she has no need to believe in anything.

Despite her age, Joy bears many similarities to the collection's children. Both she and Lucynell Crater are only children in fatherless families, still live at home, and interact with men who seduce them and then leave them helpless. Both Joy and Sally Poker Sash receive college educations, but neither really learns anything important to them. Sally resists the methods taught in her teacher education courses; Joy wants to be a college teacher, but stays at home because of a heart condition. Joy, the Misfit, Bevel, and General Sash take new names. Nelson and Joy share the shame of betrayal. Joy also recalls the child in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" and Ruby in "A Stroke of Good Fortune": thinking themselves better than either their relatives or peers, they pridefully distance themselves from their country environments at the earliest opportunity. Joy, perhaps, bears a subtle relationship to Sally's nephew, John Wesley, and carries on the tradition his name implies. The historical John Wesley founded Methodism, a denomination often considered to be among the
more intellectual and scientific-minded of the Protestant groups.

Joy's mother, Mrs. Hopewell, is a "woman of great patience" (172) who speaks in redundant platitudes as if "no one held them but her" (171). Thinking she has "no bad qualities," she "use[s] other people's in such a constructive way that she never felt the lack" (171). Mrs. Hopewell's talents, however, are lost on her own family, for she "divorced her husband long ago" (172), and she thinks her daughter "brilliant" but without "a grain of sense," "bloated, rude and squint-eyed" (175). Both Mrs. Hopewell and the grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" are obsessed with defining proper ladylike behavior. The grandmother insists that her dress alone would convince others she is a lady; Mrs. Hopewell depends upon manners. Following the examples of Mrs. Cope and Mrs. Crater, she concentrates more upon what other people will think of her child than upon her child's self-image. "Ravenous" Mrs. Crater cares little about her son-in-law's suitability, disposition or character. Mrs. Cope is shamed by her daughter's wild dress. Mrs. Hopewell wishes Joy would be normal and "like dogs or cats or nature or nice young men," or become a "schoolteacher," a "nurse," or "a chemical engineer" instead of a "philosopher" (176). Also, neither she nor Mrs. Cope hear with understanding, and they speak in cliches: Mrs. Cope "always change[s] the subject to
something cheerful" (175) and finds reasons for thankfulness; Mrs. Hopewell's favorite phrases include "good country people," "the salt of the earth," "that's life," "well, other people have their opinions, too," "nothing is perfect," and "it takes all types."

O'Connor adds to this household an equally prideful hired couple who help around the farm. Mrs. Freeman serves as a foil to the Hopewells. She visits without invitation and conveys the attitude that "nothing had been arrived at by anyone that had not first been arrived at by her" (171). Whereas Mrs. Hopewell sees the positive in any situation, Mrs. Freeman displays "a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, [and] assaults upon children" (174). Joy's artificial leg fascinates Mrs. Freeman, who ingratiatingly calls Joy "Hulga." Although irritated by this invasion of privacy, Joy "tolerates" Mrs. Freeman, who saves her from talking to and "from taking longs walks with" her mother (173). Mrs. Freeman's incessant chatter about her daughters Glynese, "an eighteen-year-old [with] many admirers," and Carramae, who at fifteen is "already married and pregnant," constantly reminds Mrs. Hopewell of Joy's bizarre behavior (170). Mrs. Freeman thereby irritates Mrs. Hopewell as well.

The male characters also have counterparts in previous stories. Manley Pointer's character continues that of Mr. Shiflet; their clothes, physical appearance, and manner
seem guileless, yet both men adroitly manipulate those around them. Pointer catches Mrs. Hopewell off guard by using humor and making her think she outsmarts him. He calls her "Mrs. Cedars," the name on the mailbox. When she tells him her name, he makes a pun saying, "I hope you are well" (177). Also like Mr. Shiflet, he moves quickly from topic to topic, all the while glancing around the room. Mrs. Hopewell proudly thinks her furnishings impress Pointer and believes he has never before "been in a room as elegant as this" (178).

Through these characters and their similarity to others in the collection, the story addresses the aspects of goodness previously discussed in other stories. Her belief that she can assess a person's goodness provides the clearest manifestation of Mrs. Hopewell's moral pride.

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105Goodness and its affiliated terms appear over 23 times in this story. Mr. and Mrs. Freeman are "good country people"; an employment reference characterizes Mr. Freeman as a "good farmer," one she "can stand real good" (171). Mrs. Hopewell calls Mrs. Freeman a "lady" and identifies the Freeman daughters as "two of the finest girls she [knows]" (170). Joy who "never had any normal good times" (173). Mrs. Hopewell wants Joy to go to school "to have a good time" (175). Joy wants to get far away from "these . . . good country people" whom she finds intellectually inferior (175). Manley Pointer calls "good morning," says he "appreciate[s] honesty," and tells Mrs. Hopewell she is a "good woman" and a "Christián" (177-78). Mrs. Hopewell calls Pointer "good country people," "genuine," "sincere" and "the salt of the earth." She tells Mrs. Freeman she thinks it "very good we aren't all alike" (184). When Joy questions Pointer's affiliation with "good country people," he replies he is "as good as [she is] any day"; then he insists they begin "to have a good time" because they have not had a chance "to know one another good yet" (194).
Like the child's mother in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," she thinks avocation indicative of morality. As other stories indicate, however, outward appearance or occupation do not constitute infallible criteria for judging a person's inner goodness. The behavior of Bible salesman Manley Pointer, who disarms her with the finesse of the best used-car salesman, reiterates this point. Believing his guileless demeanor, Mrs. Hopewell thinks Pointer represents "good country people" like herself. Because Pointer follows a church-related vocation, Mrs. Hopewell thinks him innocent. Of course, he proves himself otherwise when he insists upon introducing Joy to the three great Southern sins, prophylactics, cards, and alcohol, and, after taking both her artificial leg and her eyeglasses, abandons her in the hayloft. As the story closes, both Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman see Pointer leaving with his valise, and they assume he sells Bibles to the blacks.

Since most of the story's discussions concerning goodness take place during meals, communion seems the primary sacrament. Mrs. Hopewell's inviting Pointer to dinner and his reference to her as Mrs. Cedars seem more than coincidental. The Seder meal, in the Judaic tradition, is a type of communion and includes certain foods "symbolic of the Israelites' bondage in Egypt and of
the Exodus."\textsuperscript{106} While eating, the participants hear the Haggadah, a portion of unwritten law in the oral tradition providing "instruction and edification, if not entertainment, of the layman through graphic discourse illustrating the meaning of moral and religious truths." The meal concludes with "stories from Jewish history, anecdotes of great and wise men [and] vivid anticipations of reward and punishment here and hereafter."\textsuperscript{107} Pointer's history, "the seventh of twelve children," "a father split in two," and his after dinner plans with Joy provide parallels to the Seder meal and foreshadow the story's religious truths.

Other references to sacrament also contribute to the collection's unity. Harvey Hill's proposal to Glynese that they wed before an ordinary in an office rather than before a priest in a church (183) recalls Mr. Shiflet's marriage to Lucynell. The sacrament of confession occurs as Joy and Manley profess their disbelief (188, 189, 195). Manley's devotion of his "life to Christain service" (180) refers to holy orders. Finally, Mrs. Hopewell's discovery that both Joy and Manley share the "same [heart] condition" (180), and Manley's placement of the whiskey, the cards, and the small blue box "like one presenting offerings at the shrine

\textsuperscript{106}Random House \textit{College Dictionary}.

of a goddess" (193), indicate a type of confirmation, the confrontation of the intangible concepts of sin and vice and their tangible representations. These confrontations emphasize the parabolic nature of the story.

David Eggenschwiler, in *The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor*, suggests that the story uses "the common mythical pattern of the ugly . . . who enchant the beautiful princess." His evaluation seems to gloss over a more significant myth represented by the Hopewells' assumption that only morally good people and Christian believers sell Bibles. "Good Country People" more closely recalls the warning against false prophets found in Proverbs 26:7, "The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouths of fools." In typically parabolic fashion, the story requires the reader to discern the false prophets from the true ones. Both Mrs. Hopewell and Joy interpret what their eyes see according to the established stereotype. These discrepancies raise disturbing questions. If a person with a terminal academic degree cannot distinguish the true from the false, how is a person with average learning to know? How can a person like Manley Pointer work within the frame of Christian ideals and prove to be evil? Conversely, can someone like Joy-Hulga profess evil yet actually prove to be Christian?

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Mrs. Hopewell, who "never liked to be taken for a fool" (178), and Joy, who considers herself everyone's intellectual superior, become the "foolish" ones referred to in Proverbs because they accept Manley Pointer at face value. Conversely, Pointer is also such a fool because he mouths the proverbs by selling the book which contains them.

"Good Country People" follows the traditional parable ending. Joy finds that neither the physical deformity necessitating her artificial leg nor her book-learned wisdom protect her against Pointer. Abandonment in the loft places Joy in a purgatorial region suspended between the sky (heaven) and the earth (hell). The reader decides how Joy, unable either to see clearly or walk without artificial aids or human assistance, overcomes either her physical disability or her handicap of pride and leaves the barn.

The theme of hypocrisy, the image of purgatory, and the question of goodness prepare the reader for the "The Displaced Person," the climax of all the previous stories. The story's surface plot concerns the Guizacs, a Polish family who, with the help of Catholic priest Father Flynn, arrive to work on Mrs. McIntyre's farm. There they join Mr. and Mrs. Shortley, a white couple, their daughters Annie Maude and Sarah Mae, and Astor and Sulk, two black
workers. The Shortley's resent the foreigners and perceive them as a threat, and so attempt to persuade Mrs. McIntyre to fire the Poles. Their efforts seem rewarded when Mrs. McIntyre decides she cannot sanction the interracial marriage Mr. Guizac plans between his Polish niece and Sulk. Mrs. McIntyre ultimately fires two workers, but it is the Shortley's who are displaced. During their move, Mrs. Shortley has a stroke and dies. Her husband eventually returns to the farm and convinces Mrs. McIntyre that she has a moral obligation to hire him. The Poles finally leave after a tractor "accident" fatally crushes Mr. Guizac. By the story's end, Mrs. McIntyre is in poor health, alone on the farm, and has only the priest to visit her.

The underlying plot of the story is more complex. The arrival of the refugee family focuses the question of goodness on the myths of bigotry and nationalism, and raises the issue of moral versus spiritual obligation. The characters and their prejudice toward the Guizac family logically follow earlier characters who believe such superficial restrictions as handicap, gender, or occupation influence an individual's worth. Mrs. Shortley's astonishment upon seeing the foreigners accurately summarizes that popular opinion: she thinks it "peculiar . . . that they [the Guizacs] looked like other people" (198). Because the Poles do not speak or understand
dialectical Southern English, the natives believe them to be inferior beings and treat them accordingly.

Mrs. Shortley's next comments, however, demonstrate the conflicting logic of that prejudice and indicate the extent of her own selfish pride. Moreover, Mrs. Shortley's selfish attitude, revealed as Mrs. McIntyre welcomes the Guizac family, recalls the offended Older Brother in the New Testament parable of the Prodigal Son, and prohibits any proffered hospitality. When Mrs. McIntyre, wearing "her largest smile" and "her best clothes and a string of beads" (198), eagerly greets the Poles, the welcome insults Mrs. Shortley. She jealously remarks that "the owner of the place [came] out to welcome them" even though "these people who were coming were only hired help, like the Shortleys themselves or the Negroes" (198). She speculates that the foreigners "can't even talk" and probably will not "know what colors even is" (200). Knowing the atrocities occurring in Poland, she insists that the Guizacs, in a perversion of the Golden Rule

could have carried all those murderous ways with them directly to this place. If they had come from where that kind of thing was done to them, who was to say they were not the kind that would also do it to others? (200)

She believes American life "more advanced" than Poland (204) and calls unreformed Catholicism the devil's responsibility. She generalizes ad hominem that the
Guizacs, like all foreigners, "always fight . . . amongst each other. Disputing. And then they get us into it. . . . and then they come on back over here and snoop around" (214). She believes nationality molds character, yet inciting others against the Guizacs makes her guilty of her own accusations.

Furthermore, Mrs. Shortley's myth of national superiority, is undermined by the characters' surnames: none typifies a "native" American. "McIntyre" is Scottish. Mr. Shortley reminds Sulk that blacks originally came from Africa. Mr. Shortley reminds Sulk that blacks originally came from Africa. Father Flynn's brogue seems Irish; and although "Shortley" has Anglo-Saxon origins, the Shortleys become displaced with each move. Even the peacocks are imported. In fact, the turkey, a bird native only to North America, represents the only indigenous creature in the whole story.

On the metaphorical level, Mrs. McIntyre's deceased husband, who is "sunk in the cornfield" and remains "always at home" (228), is the only person truly in his native physical habitat. Later, Mrs. Shortley's fatal stroke makes her "contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers" in their spiritual "true country" (223). After Mr. Guizac's accident, Mrs. McIntyre gains some

109Sulk, having "never felt no need to travel," has no affinity for the other culture (247). By remarking that the people in his ancestral homeland would likely "eat [him] up" (247), Sulk reveals his own prejudices.
understanding of displacement when she thinks she is "in some foreign country where the people bent over the body" of Mr. Guizac are "natives," and she is "a stranger" (250). Literal nationalities aside, all the characters are displaced foreigners; only duration of residency provides a difference.

Generally, all Mrs. Shortley's prejudices about the Guizacs prove false. Mr. Guizac talks, proves a good worker, and has technical abilities more "advanced" than any of the others'. Mrs. Shortley tells Astor and Sulk that they should hate the Displaced Person because he will make them as obsolete as the mule (212-13); ironically, the Displaced Person's departure, not his arrival, causes the farm hands to leave. Mr. Guizac, therefore, emerges as the only civilized character in the story because he expresses none of the other workers' acquired prejudices. Entering in medias res, he forces the others to confront their shortcomings. He offers the blacks an alternative to the Southern white workers' racism by treating them as equals and shaking their hands. Assuming the rules of honesty and integrity apply to everyone, he reports Sulk for stealing a turkey. Suggesting an interracial marriage

acknowledges the racial equality which the "black and white cows" (39) sharing the same pasture land in "The River" foreshadow.

The relationship between Mrs. Shortley and Mr. Guizac is, perhaps, among the most significant of the story. The contrasts between the Shortleys' and the Displaced Person's attitude toward work recalls the New Testament parable about the servants (Luke 19:11-28). Like the good servant, Mr. Guizac works to his full capacity for his employer and saves Mrs. McIntyre at least "twenty dollars a month on repair bills alone" (207). Thwarting Sulk's theft, Mr. Guizac takes both the black man and the evidence to Mrs. McIntyre (208). The Shortleys, on the other hand, do not practice such stewardship. Mr. Shortley smokes in the barn (205) and illegally uses her property without her consent or benefit (211); Mrs. Shortley knows Sulk steals turkeys, but does nothing to prevent her employer's loss (214).

Mrs. Shortley's actions and attitude reflect what Crossan terms a parable of words: Mrs. Shortley does not act herself, but she inspires others to act. All the farm workers in the story resent the foreigners, but Mrs. Shortley gives voice to their feelings and focuses their discontent into action. She betrays the Guizacs, the blacks, her "friend" Mrs. McIntyre, and the priest. She lies, steals, manipulates, and covets. Mrs. Shortley's

111Crossan 101.
behavior ultimately requires the readers to regard her with
disgust.

Once the readers reach that assessment and pass
judgement on Mrs. Shortley, they become as "guilty" as she.
Mrs. Shortley commits acts that the reader condemns, yet
her character foreshadows a felix culpa for others.
Without her actions, neither she nor Mr. Guizac would know
the "great experience" of their "true country" (223).
Similarly, Mrs. McIntyre would not be guaranteed the
frequent opportunity to experience salvation offered by the
visiting priest. Mr. Shortley would not "look for a new
position," and Sulk would not search parts unknown (250).

The immigrant's character illustrates what Crossan
terms a "parable of deed," which is based on actions rather
than words.\textsuperscript{112} The Pole emerges as the best man that the
reader encounters; the story's characters, however, do not
recognize this. Though he does nothing legally, morally,
or spiritually wrong, no fellow worker helps him when the
tractor "slips" and fatally pins him beneath the wheels.
By making the Polish man a scapegoat, they transform him
into their own "artificial nigger," and Mr. Guizac
functions as a living parable.\textsuperscript{113} Mr. Guizac's misfortune
makes grace possible for all the characters in the story,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[112]Crossan 123.
\item[113]Crossan 124-5.
\end{footnotes}
but they systematically reject him in the same way as the Jewish community rejected Christ's grace.

Mr. Guizac furnishes Mrs. McIntyre with several occasions for spiritual insight. She calls Mr. Guizac her "salvation" (209) because he is "an expert mechanic, a carpenter, and a mason . . . thrifty and energetic" (207). For the first time, she hires "someone she can depend on" (208), and referring to Mr. Guizac's diligent labor and his technical knowledge, admits she finally receives more than her money's worth. Mrs. McIntyre purchases a "new drag harrow and tractor" because Mr. Guizac "could handle" the machinery (215). Mr. Guizac not only physically "harrows" and breaks up the land; but he also spiritually harrows the other characters by mentally and emotionally distressing everyone on the farm. Thus, while Mr. Guizac's presence offers economic salvation, he also provides a means of spiritual rescue which, of course, money cannot buy.

Mrs. McIntyre, however, recognizes no obligation beyond that of a business transaction. Like the audience of Jesus' "Parable of the Sheep and the Goats" (Matthew 25: 31-40), Mrs. McIntyre could join the "blessed" by charitably helping the Guizacs, who personify the "least of these" which the parable names. Having experienced all forms of hunger, thirst, nakedness, and imprisonment, they hope to escape them by coming to America. They discover, however, that they have traded one poverty for another.
Their foreign background makes them social prisoners in a politically free land where, as strangers, they hunger and thirst for acceptance and normalcy.

Mrs. McIntyre chooses instead to exploit the Guizacs' misfortune to her own advantage, telling Mrs. Shortley, "One man's misery is the other fellow's gain" (209). Greed and pride negate her acknowledged benefits from Mr. Guizac's employment. Succumbing to social pressure and her own indignation, she decides she has "no moral obligation to keep him" (237) because "her real moral obligation" lies with "her own people" (241). Since morals are society's conventions and differ from one culture to the next, she justifies firing the Guizacs: "It is not [her] responsibility that Mr. Guizac has nowhere to go" because she is not "responsible for all the extra people in the world" (239). Echoing The Misfit's assessment of Christ, she tells the priest that Mr. Guizac "has upset the balance around here" (245), and realizes on a limited level that "Christ was just another D. P." (243). Ironically, because she passively watches the tractor crush Mr. Guizac and rejects the opportunity to be charitable, she ultimately forfeits her "own people." In a purgatorial scene reminiscent of Joy's abandonment in the loft, Mrs. McIntyre's health and sanity desert her: she is physically alive, socially dead, and spiritually suspended in the balance.
Mr. Guizac provides Father Flynn an opportunity to bring Mrs. McIntyre into the church, but the priest falls short in his relationship. The priest is "theological" while Mrs. McIntyre is "practical," but neither can see the synergy and compatibility of the two areas. When Mrs. McIntyre talks, the priest's "attention seem[s] to retire to some private oratory to wait until she [gets] through," or "his gaze rove[s] out onto the lawn as if he were hunting some means of escape" (243). Father Flynn, like Mrs. Cope before him, cannot hear past Mrs. McIntyre's protestations or address her fears because he lacks interest. Because he does not realize his religious conversation embarrasses Mrs. McIntyre "the way sex had her mother" (239), he, therefore, cannot assuage her discomfort. Consequently, a priest daydreaming through confession conveys neither forgiveness nor absolution.

Moreover, the priest visits Mrs. McIntyre, but never appears to visit the Guizacs. Father Flynn, as their supposed mentor, arranges the Guizac family's immigration, but he shirks his responsibility for their welfare in much the same way Mrs. Connin fails in her responsibility to instruct Bevel. Both the Guizac family and Bevel become victims of language and customs. Knowing Mrs. McIntyre wishes the Guizacs would leave, the priest stays away "as if he had been frightened" (242), avoids interceding for
them and, until he offers extreme unction to the mortally wounded Guizac, virtually abandons them.

In the traditional open ending of parable, "The Displaced Person" concludes with several unanswered questions. The reader must guess the fate of the surviving members of the Guizac family who, following the ambulance's removal of the body, are not mentioned again. Sulk and Astor leave, but the reader does not know where they go. The narrative indicates Mrs. McIntyre's declining health and Father Flynn's regular visits to her, but the reader can only speculate whether or not the priest's religious instruction ever penetrates Mrs. McIntyre's spiritual density. Of all the characters' fates, Mr. Shortley's seems the most predictable and the most forlorn. He follows the example of Mrs. McIntyre's previous hired help and simply leaves, continuing the journey of such earlier displaced persons as Manley Pointer, Mr. Shiflet, The Misfit, Powell, Boyd and his friends, the hermaphrodite, and the hitchhiker. The stories leave the impression these characters will never have a home until they, too, survey their true country.
Chapter 3- Social Parable and Short Story Cycle: A Curtain of Green and Other Stories

I.

Modern Southern authors come from a culture rich in the stories and sounds of the King James Bible. Eudora Welty is no exception. In One Writer's Beginnings, she states that she "grew up in a religious-minded society [where] . . . . pupils were used to answering the history teacher's roll call with a perfectly recited verse from the Bible."

Her mother's side of the family, Welty said in an interview with John Jones, boasted several Methodist ministers and at least one Baptist preacher. As a child, she says, she "loved to read" the Bible: "The King James version stays with you forever, rings and rings in your ears." In testimony to this fact she has filled her stories with direct references to Bible stories.

Although one of the biblical forms Welty employs in her early fiction is parable, critics—as in the case of O'Connor—have not found the influence of parable format


116Jones 13-14.
and motif obvious. In fact, the influence has not heretofore been explored, at least not directly. In the "Introduction" to A Curtain of Green, Katherine Anne Porter explains that Welty uses "an ancient system of ethics, an unanswerable, indispensable moral law, on which she is grounded firmly" and that "they relate to that true and human world of which the artist is a living part." These systems of ethics and morals are essential for parabolic understanding.

Though not directly taking parable into consideration, J. A. Bryant has in effect identified certain qualities in Welty's writing which are parabolic. He finds Welty's characters often "unsavory" yet "nonetheless real"; like "other forms of truth, they properly evoke a mixed response" by creating "a spectacle of petty barbarisms that we feel are authentic and suspect

117Pointing out the mythological elements in A Curtain of Green, Albert Devlin says that this work "demonstrates the truth of Paul Tillich's observation that a 'mythical element' encompassing 'original epochs and final epochs' penetrates all serious historical writing." Albert Devlin, "Eudora Welty's Mississippi," in Eudora Welty: Thirteen Essays, ed. Peggy W. Prenshaw (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1983) 109.

118Albert Devlin finds that "the most persistent myth of Southern life . . . the plantation legend of the nineteenth century" resides in Welty's Curtain of Green collection, but he does not explain how that myth is used. Albert Devlin, "Eudora Welty's Mississippi," 103.

to be universal." In short, Bryant says, these characters and situations appear in stories which, like the New Testament parables, "can best be described as a trap for those who would cast stones."\textsuperscript{120} Bryant comments on "her ability to make language suggest several dimensions of reality simultaneously, by the use of allusion, by the selection of detail and by free . . . use of metaphor."\textsuperscript{121}

One of the most important characteristics of parable is its use of myth. Critics have devoted many pages to identifying parallels to Greek and Roman mythology in her work, particularly in \textit{The Golden Apples}, but they include few discussions of cultural myths.\textsuperscript{122}

Welty employed these elements of parabolic style as early as 1925, when she contributed to student publications

\textsuperscript{120}J. A. Bryant, \textit{Eudora Welty}. University of Minnesota Pamphlets of American Writers, 66 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1968) 7.

\textsuperscript{121}Bryant 9.

\textsuperscript{122}In "Gossip and Community in Eudora Welty," Patricia Meyer Spacks finds that Welty includes "mythologizing talk about past and present," that her characters use "cultural myths" which locate them in "the universe" and explain "why things are as they are," and that those same characters need "to escape . . . the airlessness of" and "the confinement of communal myth." See \textit{Eudora Welty}, ed. Harold Bloom. Modern Critical Views Series (New York: Chelsea, 1986) 158-9.

at Mississippi State College for Women. The May 17, 1927 issue of the student newspaper, The Spectator, includes "Fables and Parables": "The Fearful Fate of the Little Girl Who Forgot to Pay Her Board by the Eighth," "The Harrowing Tale of the Little Girl Who Never Scrubbed Out the Tub Afterward," and "The Fearful Outcome of the Little Girl Who Chewed Gum During Zouave." Welty does not label any of the Spectator as specifically being a fable or a parable. Technically, since all of them conclude with a moral, they are fables. But her use of the term parable indicates that at an early age she was familiar with the form itself, even if she was unaware of its detailed formulaic requirements.

Other works Welty wrote in college show more clearly characteristics of parable. She subverts the cultural myth that women are treated as children in "Burlesque Ballad," the story of a maiden in distress held prisoner within a tall tower. Sawing through the bars of the window with a nail file, the maid plans escape. Finally, a knight attempts her rescue. He uses her long hair as a rope and climbs up the tower wall; then, still using her hair, he lowers her to the ground. Once sure of her safety, the knight ties the hair in the prison room and, like a child descending a staircase banister, slides down her hair to

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123Eudora Welty, "Fables and Parables," The Spectator, 21 (17 May 1927) 3.

the ground. In the process, the knight's spurs pierce the maiden's throat, and she bleeds to death. In despair, he takes his own life. Of course, as an adaptation of "Rapunzel," a fairy tale, this story is not technically a parable. Nevertheless, Welty's tale shatters "The Cinderella Complex," the social myth in which a chivalrous man rescues, cares for and restores to society a virtuous, but hapless, maid.

The reversal of myth foreshadows Welty's use of visual irony and myth in her drawings. One cartoon, "The Garden of Eden by One Who Has Never Been There," provides a twist to that myth. Printed in the campus literary magazine, the illustration transforms the physical garden into the school grounds. Adam wears clothes, Eve wears nothing, and unlike the biblical serpent who merely suggested, the president of the college actively hands out apples to the students. Welty's drawing pits the biblical myth's inherent warning about knowledge, obedience, and godliness against those social myths concerning education.

Welty's initialed contribution to The Spectator, "Song of the Spot," further explores these myths and follows parable form. In this tale Miss Wondrous Wise, a sophomore literature student with an excellent academic


record, stirs Professor Lorenzo Dauber's wrath and pride because she earned a "99 on a literature inquisition." In retaliation, he gives a 113-item spot-identification exam which she must take and finish before midnight. Upon surface inspection, this story may appear unimportant; in many ways, however, it mirrors the "Laborers in the Vineyard," a New Testament parable about the nature of grace; in the New Testament story, grace means an unmerited gift beyond expectation and beyond the normal concept of justice.

The parable, found in Matthew 20, presents a householder hiring laborers at various intervals during the day to work for him. At the end of the working day, the householder pays the same amount to all the workers, regardless of the amount of work accomplished. Those working the full day complain that they should receive more money than the laborers hired last. The householder replies that he may distribute his property as he pleases; then he asks if the complainers suffer true discrimination, or if they simply feel jealous because he seems more generous to some than to others.

Welty's story presents a parallel situation with an ironic reversal. Because the girl has been a faithful scholar, she may expect a fair exam and objective grading. As neither the exam nor the teacher proves fair, her expectation goes unrewarded; she fails. Welty's story,
therefore, becomes a parable about justice without grace. The myth in this story is subtle. Higher education is contractual; the student knows the objectives and the expectations of the course. The student who follows those guidelines can expect a proper grade (wage). In this story, as in the New Testament parable, the grades (wages) reflect the instructor's whim more than the student's efforts. Her impotence to control her academic progress undermines the whole educational process. This emerging parable quality, Welty's ability to use generally accepted conventions and present them in a startling or unexpected way so as to question that acceptance, foreshadows her mature use of parable in her first collection of short stories, *A Curtain of Green*.

*A Curtain of Green* (1941) has received less critical attention than most of Eudora Welty's works. Albert J. Devlin blames critics for this lack of attention, observing that "acute emphasis upon the distinctiveness of each story has obscured from critical view the formation of a larger social vision." But Devlin also says that the "diversity in mode and tone obscures whatever

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127Eudora Welty, *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* (1941; New York: Harcourt, 1979). All references to stories included in this work are taken from this edition, and citations will appear by page number within the body of this paper.

bibliographical and thematic unity this group may possess.129


130Suzanne Marrs, The Welty Collection: A Guide to the Eudora Welty Manuscripts and Documents at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1988) 31. Marrs does not indicate what specifically is the suggested reordering.
In effect, Eudora Welty tried to make *A Curtain of Green* form a single, closely interconnected work which is unified in at least three ways: one by the subtle, intertextual use of the parable form; another by the pattern of myth-breaking found in New Testament parables; third by the repetition of symbols and motifs. Each story's meaning builds upon that of the preceding story. The result is that *A Curtain of Green* is a unified whole.

Welty's stories, we note, clearly parallel the historically accurate setting of the New Testament parables. Her stories are, she says, "bound up in the local, the 'real,' the present, the ordinary day-to-day of human experience." Where the scriptural parables refer to pharisees, rulers, lepers, maidens, virgins, servants, prodigal sons, and housewives, Welty writes parables involving sheriffs, preachers' wives, newly-wed deaf-mutes, the senile, Campfire Girls, the mentally retarded, murderers, gardeners, nightclub singers, and suicides. The scriptural parables take place in agrarian surroundings; Welty sets her stories in rural Mississippi, where lumber and farming provide the chief economic industries.

131 Of course, numerous Welty critics, in particular Robert L. Phillips, Michael Kreyling, and Alfred Appel, Jr., have addressed the function of symbol and motif in individual stories, but they generally bypass the unifying structure that those elements, when repeated, provide.

scriptural parables endeavored to raise the spiritual understanding of their Jewish audience; Welty's stories capture the very essence of Southern culture and consciousness. Both the New Testament parables and Welty's parables lend themselves to multiple interpretations. In fact, of the seventeen stories in this collection, only three do not strictly follow parable model: "Old Mister Marblehall," uses present tense; "Why I Live at the P. O." uses first person narration. Although "A Memory" is also written in first person, the narrative functions as an interior dialogue between a divided self; because the narrator looks back and meditates upon a singular past experience, there is a sense of temporal objectivity which "Why I Live at the P. O." lacks. These stories are, nevertheless, an integral part of the collection.

Welty's stories in A Curtain of Green also follow the pattern of myth-breaking found in New Testament parables. In her essay "Must the Novelist Crusade?" Welty defines good fiction:

Fiction abounds in what makes for confusion; it generates it, being on a scale which copies life which it confronts... There is absolutely everything in great fiction but a clear answer... The first act of insight is to throw away the labels. People are not Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, Black and White personified.133

133Eudora Welty,"Must the Novelist Crusade?" The Eye of the Story, 150.
An in-depth analysis of the selections in *A Curtain of Green* shows how Welty, using parable, both dispels these labels or myths and unifies the collection. In "Words into Fiction," Welty writes that the purpose of a story is to make "its own impression upon the reader, so that he feels that some design in life . . . has just been discovered there." Welty's stories seem to do just that. Through the spirit and form of the parable, she illustrates common beliefs, stereotypes, and situations peculiar and close to the heart of Southern society in a way that belies their seeming truth.

A classic example of a story which often makes readers' doubt its seeming truth is "A Worn Path." According to Welty, "the unrivaled favorite" question put to her "most often . . . from students and their teachers" is "Is Phoenix Jackson's grandson really dead?" Leaving the reader to decide the grandson's fate is part of the parabolic quality of the story. Some New Testament parables were constructed in such a way as to allow debate over seemingly moot points. The parable of the woman who married seven brothers is such a parable (Matthew 22:25). The Sadducees and the Pharisees argued as to which of the seven brothers would actually be considered the woman's

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husband in heaven, yet the Sadducees gave no credence to the belief in life after death. They argued for the sake of mental gymnastics. Welty's story also raises questions which cannot be unequivocally answered, but in the process of reaching that impasse, the reader often discovers beliefs that had previously been only vague assumptions.

The collection's unity finds additional cohesiveness through repeated symbols and motifs. In "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," Robert Penn Warren notes that "almost all the stories deal with people who, in one way or another, are cut off, alienated, isolated from the world." As he explains,

the nature of the isolation may be different from case to case, but the fact of isolation, whatever its nature, provides the basic situation in Miss Welty's fiction. The drama which develops from this basic situation is of [sic] either of two kinds: first, the attempt of the isolated person to escape into the world; or second, the discovery by the isolated person, or by the reader, of the nature of his predicament.136

Although isolation and its nature provide the most obvious recurring thread in the collection, other strands also appear.

Each story in A Curtain of Green has at least one character, usually the main character, who undertakes a specific journey and performs a duty which echoes those found in classical mythology. Just as Aphrodite commanded that Psyche complete the virtually impossible tasks of

sorting grain, gathering fleece, filling a crystal goblet with water, and seeking beauty, so each selection in *A Curtain of Green* shows a character on a mission fraught with obstacles.\(^{137}\) Although in classical mythology charitable gods intervene for the travellers, Welty's characters encounter neither divine intervention nor comfort from moral values or fellow human beings as they seek their unattainable goals. The absence of intervention provides the overturning of the social myths presented in *A Curtain of Green*. Furthermore, each story includes both a character, often a significant stranger, who acts as a deus ex machina, and a significant object, such as a letter, a newspaper, a bottle, or whistle.

Also reappearing throughout the collection are some facet of charity or pity, the elements of water and fire, and characters suffering handicaps. Often Welty uses an immediately recognizable handicap, as in the case of the crippled black man in "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" or

\(^{137}\)According to Robert A. Johnson, the tasks carried out by Psyche provided the lessons which every woman must master in order to become a whole person. Filling the pitcher with water was dangerous because Psyche could easily drown. This task taught Psyche to handle the river a goblet at a time. In the quest for beauty, Psyche could succumb to temptations that would prevent her from reaching her greatest fulfillment. Sorting grain taught Psyche to choose her way through tiresomely repetitious responsibilities and prioritize them. Gathering fleece provided Psyche with the ultimate lesson: encounters with masculine beings should be handled without direct confrontation. See Robert A. Johnson, *She* (New York: Harper, 1989).
the deaf-mutes in "The Key." Other times, as in "Clytie," "Lily Daw," or "The Whistle," the character manifests an emotional or mental disability. The degree of handicap and the means by which the character deals with it help shape the unity of the collection.

Finally, after using parable form and recurring motifs, Welty reveals this "purposeful design" in life through the deliberate arrangement of the stories in A Curtain of Green. The collection seems divided into two distinct sections joined by a bridge. In the first eight stories, the principal characters meet conflicts not of their own making, engage in quests over which they have little control, and find themselves in situations that raise the question "what if?" The second section, consisting of the final eight stories, depicts principal characters who act of their own volition. The central story, "A Memory," focuses the shift in attitude found in the second grouping of stories and denotes the turning point from innocence to experience.

As the divisions unfold, however, the reader continues to meet characters and locales which strongly resemble characters and places previously met in the collection. "The Whistle," for example, takes place in Dexter, a town whose economic system, like that of Victory, depends on the "train after train of empty freight cars" that "stretched away, waiting and then being filled" (114). The "music box
... playing in the cafe across the way, and the crippled black man that walked like a duck" (114) remind the reader of Max's cafe and Lee Roy in Cane Springs. And like Mr. Whitaker in China Grove, Cane Springs has a man "taking poses for a dime." The reader even meets a transient worker who, like one of the tramps in "The Hitchhikers," stretches out under the trees and plays the guitar (115). These similarities unify the locale and provide the collection's continuity.

II.

A Curtain of Green begins with "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," a story establishing many of the themes and motifs which inform the reader's understanding of the next seven stories of the collection. Three town matriarchs have appointed themselves Lily's guardians after her father tried to kill her. Lily is mentally retarded and, because she "has gotten so very mature for her age" (5), the women decide they can no longer oversee her actions. They arrange her admission to the Ellisville Institute for the Feeble Minded. Lily reaffirms the wisdom of their decision when she announces her engagement to a xylophone player whom she met at a travelling tent show. Sure that Lily has been "had," the women dissuade her from any further ideas of marriage and hustle her to the train depot. As they put Lily on the train, the xylophone player appears. The story
ends with the townspeople divided as to whether or not Lily boarded the train before it departed; nevertheless, "everybody cheered . . . and a straw hat was thrown into the telephone wires" (20).

In "Lily Daw," Welty uses myths arising from popular assumptions about the mentally retarded. The ladies' attitudes establish these myths either by direct statement or by implication. First, the women assume that Lily cannot make any of her own decisions. Because they are convinced she will leave Victory and go to Ellisville, they make all the arrangements before asking her. Second, they assume that she cannot understand even the simplest business transactions. When the ticket seller at the tent show treats Lily as a normal person and expects her to pay for admission, townspeople explain to the ticket seller that Lily "wasn't bright" before she can answer for herself (4). Such actions indicate the townspeople do not recognize that Lily, by being responsible and paying for her own ticket, might viably contribute to society. Even though a woman at the tent show reported that Lily behaved herself and acted like "a perfect lady" (4) without an official chaperon, the three women consider Lily's "normal" actions cause for alarm rather than relief. Third, they assume that Lily is fantasizing when she declares she will get married: they tell Ed Newton that marriage is "just an
idea she's got in her head" (6). This attitude reveals a fourth misconception.

Because they remove the local threat by putting "the boys of Victory . . . on their honor" (6) that Lily's mental handicap will protect her from their sexual advances, the women have, in their own minds, denied any possibility of a sexual relationship for Lily. First, the women's attitude reflects a myth about sex that many parents hold true for their daughters: if parents don't talk about sex, and if daughters have strict supervision when with men, female virtue will remain unassailed. Moreover, the ladies assume that living at the Ellisville Institute removes Lily from sexual temptation. Actually, Lily will be more sexually vulnerable living among equally mentally handicapped individuals than with those, in Victory, presumably capable of controlling their biological urges. Institutions find adequate patient supervision difficult. Even now, the Ellisville State School requires the legal guardians to sign forms releasing the school from any liability should one of the clients become pregnant. Thus, the ladies use the Institute as a panacea, but for themselves, not Lily.

None of the ladies ever visited the Institute; since Mrs. Carson and Mrs. Watts travel only "as far as Jackson to help Lily change trains and be sure she went in the right direction," (15) even they will not see Lily's new
environment. Furthermore, the women do not know if anyone from the institute will meet Lily when she arrives in Ellisville. As Aimee Slocum wails, "I do hope they get our telegram to meet her in Ellisville! . . . And it was so hard to get it all in ten words, too" (15). Ignorance of the conditions of the institution, be they bad or good, or of Lily's reaction to her new environment frees the ladies from guilt: ignorance is bliss.

At this point, the arrival of a stranger, an unknown and uncontrollable element overturns two myths about men which the ladies' attitudes represent. The first asserts that all men desire a "good time" at the expense of a woman's virtue. As Mrs. Carson says, "That kind of a man. He was after poor Lily's body alone" (12). Linked to this myth of masculine lack of integrity is the implied idea that a handicapped or retarded person can only be exploited—not loved. These attitudes cause Mrs. Watts to declare that they should bring the xylophone player back. Mrs. Carson replies:

"It's better in the long run for him to be gone out of our lives for good and all [because] he wouldn't ever in this world make the poor little thing happy, even if we went out and forced him to marry her like he ought—at the point of a gun" (7).

The second myth purports that a man's worth lies in direct proportion to the prestige of his job. Because the unknown man works as a travelling musician, they believe he must embody the ostensible characteristics of his job:
shiftlessness, and irresponsibility. Furthermore, he is a stranger, and in small towns, strangers, like new ideas, are presumed evil until proven otherwise. The ladies believe that the musician has no reason to return for Lily since the couple has spent time together without benefit of a reputation and virtue-saving chaperon. These myths are subverted when the musician returns for Lily.

The xylophone player's reappearance sets into motion the parabolic ending of the story. Lily agrees to go to Ellisville only because she can take her hope chest with her. In this story the hope chest, traditionally serving as a modern symbol of a woman's dowry which indicates that the woman brings a visible contribution to the marriage, also symbolizes a normal union. Lily understands this concept partially, and she places within the hope chest "two bars of soap and a green washcloth" (9). Although insignificant monetarily, the items indicate what traditional wifely capabilities, however limited, Lily could bring to a marriage. When the ladies agree to contribute to the hope chest, they stipulate that Lily may never get married, a demand which directly contradicts the purpose of the hope chest (14).

Meanwhile, without knowing the outcome of Lily's plight, the townspeople celebrate. Perhaps they are glad that their responsibility of caring for her is over, or
are happy for her and her supposedly new adventure in Ellisville. They may be delighted that the xylophone player returned for her, or be secretly pleased that the town busy-bodies were thwarted, or simply consider Lily's departure as good an excuse as any to relieve the tedium of small town life. Will Lily marry the xylophone player? Will she ever go to Ellisville? If not, will she send after the hope chest? The readers must interpret the ambiguous cause of the townspeople's festivities according to the effect the story has on their own myths concerning the mentally retarded.

In addition to paralleling the form of New Testament parables in general, "Lily Daw" also mirrors specifically the New Testament parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-40). Christ gathers all nations before him and separates them according to their good works. The sheep inherit eternal life because they have nourished the hungry and thirsty, clothed the naked, sheltered the stranger, and encouraged the imprisoned. By compassionately performing charitable acts for their fellow men without thought of individual gain for themselves, they have also ministered unto Christ. The goats, who did not perform charitable acts, inherit damnation.

Similarly, after hearing that Lily plans marriage, the ladies rush to Lily's house in hopes of persuading her to go instead to Ellisville. Along the way, they reflect upon
Lily's life and the source of comfort they have given her.

Mrs. Carson explains,

"We buried Lily's poor defenseless mother. We gave Lily all her food and kindling and every stitch she had on. Sent her to Sunday School to learn the Lord's teachings, and had her baptized a Baptist. And when her old father commenced beating her and tried to cut her head off with the butcher knife, why, we went and took her away from him and gave her a place to stay" (7).

Mrs. Carson's recitation of their good works parallels the explanation Jesus gave concerning the blessed—that those people who have ministered unto the sick, the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned, and the friendless have also done these good works unto Him. Lily's life provides modern representation of the Christ-substitutes of the New Testament parable. The irony occurs in two ways. Omitting one of the primary ingredients of good works, the women care for Lily out of duty rather than love, and this sense of duty makes Lily a virtual prisoner. They also ignore one of the key beneficiaries of the good works by disdaining the stranger in their midst. Rather than taking the xylophone player in or welcoming him, they accuse him of dispassionately seducing Lily and of abandoning her, an act of which they are guilty.

138 Alfred Appel, Jr., believes that the three women hide "ugly private motivations ... behind the charitable impulse," but he restricts his interpretation by concluding that Lily becomes "The vessel into which all of their sexual repression is channeled." See A Season of Dreams: The Fiction of Eudora Welty. Southern Literary Studies, ed. Louis D. Rubin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1965) 45.
When Lily reiterates her plans for marriage, the three women try to seduce her by offering lots of "gorgeous things" if only she will go instead to Ellisville. Mrs. Carson offers "a pair of hemstitched pillowcases," Mrs. Watts offers "a big caramel cake," Mrs. Slocum offers "a souvenir from Jackson—a little toy bank," and then Mrs. Carson makes a second offer of a "pretty little Bible" with Lily's name imprinted on it, while Mrs. Watts adds a "pink crepe de Chine brassiere with adjustable straps" (12-3). In this passage, the women become goats in sheep's clothing. They offer their gifts, allusions to the temptations of food, protection, possessions, and religious worship which Satan offered Jesus in the desert, for their own benefit rather than for Lily's. Unlike Christ, however, Lily succumbs to their temptations and rejects the hope of some semblance of normal life which the xylophone player offers her. Through no merit of her own, she receives a second chance when the xylophone player returns of his own accord.

"A Piece of News" continues the motifs of marriage, happiness, mental handicap, and compassion by exploring the possibilities of this normalized lifestyle. Like Lily, Ruby Fisher is a mentally simple young woman. Married to a moonshiner who spends much of his time looking after his still, Ruby relieves her boredom by hitchhiking. On this
particular rainy day, she rides with a coffee salesman who gives her a sample of coffee wrapped in a newspaper. To amuse herself while drying from the rainstorm, she reads the paper and discovers that Mrs. Ruby Fisher "had the misfortune to be shot in the leg by her husband" (23). When Ruby shows Clyde the newspaper article, "The moment fill[s] full with their helplessness" and the possibility that "Clyde might really have killed Ruby, and [that] Ruby might really have been dead at his hand" [stands] timidly like a stranger between them" (30). Throwing the newspaper into the fire, Clyde realizes that the article appears in a Tennessee rather than a local paper. The fire concludes the incident as the couple "stood still and watched" the fire burn the newspaper. "The whole room was bright" (30).

"A Piece of News" is the logical companion to "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies." Lily, the name of the simple-minded girl before marriage, implies innocence. Ruby, on the other hand, is the simple-minded girl after marriage; her name implies the color of blood which often symbolizes sexual experience. Both characters struggle to find a measure of happiness and personhood. The hope chest which remains on the train to Ellisville represents Lily's search; Ruby's search, symbolized by a newspaper article, also takes place in a box, the square room of her cabin. Furthermore, each character's life changes through both the introduction of a written correspondence and the actions
of a stranger who passes through town. Lily's life changes when the three ladies receive a letter of acceptance from the Ellisville Institute and when the xylophone player offers marriage; a story in a Tennessee newspaper left by a travelling coffee salesman challenges Ruby's identity. The newspaper in this story provides the vehicle for the parabolic motif by breaking at least two myths.

The first broken myth in "A Piece of News" concerns the uniqueness of the individual name, a myth which goes back to the naming at creation. Biblical names often reflect a personality trait or characteristic. Sometimes, as in the case of Simon becoming Peter, the name change signifies a personality change; other times the real name, as in the name of God, indicates holiness defying speech or containing the very essence of personhood; an enemy who knew the real name of an adversary gained powerful advantage. Today when pledges in college social fraternities complete a task required for initiation, they receive new names which the society uses. Welty establishes the assumed singularity of the Mississippi Ruby Fisher at the onset of the story; she is both "lonesome" and "alone" (22). In "A Piece of News," this mythic element is overturned when the Tennessee Ruby Fisher intrudes upon the former's sense of individuality.

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This intrusion brings the Mississippi Ruby face to face with a "doppelganger," and prepares the reader for the next broken myth: the concept of truth as holistically separate from individual perception.\textsuperscript{140} Ruby reads the story which says that a "Ruby Fisher" was shot by her husband. Surrounded by the noise from the fireplace and the rain, however, and realizing that her husband was "mortally afraid of lightning" and "would never go out in it for anything," Ruby suddenly begins "to comprehend her predicament: it was unlike Clyde to take up a gun a shoot her" (25).

On the other hand, her lack of complete surprise indicates that domestic violence, although not quite as severe as that of her Tennessee counterpart, is nothing new to her. When Clyde "got word" of Ruby's outings, "he would slap her" (25), but his reprimands did not deter her activities. Due to the melodramatic nature of her imagination, however, Ruby can rather easily imagine Clyde fatally wounding her. Because a newspaper carries the story, the shooting must be true. On the other hand, Ruby realizes that "the account in the paper was wrong" and that "there had been a mistake made" (25). This similarity in name and situation belies any concept of individuality.

which Ruby may have had. The resulting "double pain" and "double pleasure" introduces a new self-knowledge which Welty personifies as a "stranger" (30). Thus, Ruby is not unique. For her, the newspaper story is simultaneously accurate and false. Truth, then, which before had existed as absolute for Ruby and Clyde, now becomes relative.

"A Piece of News" also advances from possibility to actuality the themes of sexual relationships and of compassion introduced in "Lily Daw." As "Lily Daw" ends, the three ladies quickly arrange Lily's marriage to the unnamed xylophone player, an act which moves Lily from the physical institute in Ellisville to the social institution of marriage. One reason for Lily going to Ellisville was to protect her from indiscriminate sexual intercourse, but as "A Piece of News" illustrates, marriage guarantees neither happiness nor appropriate sexual conduct. When Clyde made Ruby "feel blue, she would go out onto the road, some car would slow down, and if it had a Tennessee license, the lucky kind, the chances were good that she [Ruby] would spend the afternoon in the shed of the empty gin" (25). Thus marriage, though a socially sanctioned institution, carries no warranty.

Welty also uses "A Piece of News" to illustrate another difference between the virtue of charity and pity. In "Lily Daw," the three women care for Lily out of a sense of Christian duty, but when that duty becomes more trouble
than they had anticipated, they conclude their religious mission. As Mrs. Carson tries explaining, "We've all asked God, Lily, and God seems to tell us--Mr. Carson too--that the place where you ought to be, so as to be happy, was Ellisville" (13). Their pity is of a limited duration. In "A Piece of News," Welty shows another kind of pity: romanticized self-pity. When Ruby fantasizes the consequences which might occur should Clyde actually shoot her, she becomes "suffused with the warmth from the fire and with the pity and beauty and power of her death" (27). From this use of juvenile, yet harmless, self-pity, Welty moves to unappreciated charity and the negative and destructive forms of self-pity found in "Petrified Man."

Antithetical elements and themes of marriage and happiness reappear in "Petrified Man." Recognized as one of Welty's darker comedies, "Petrified Man" takes place in a beauty parlor, a place where women tell their troubles to beauticians in much the same way that men confide theirs to bartenders. Leota, the beautician, rents a room to "almost perfect strangers," Mr. and Mrs. Pike, newcomers in town (52). Within a week, Leota not only confides her whole life history to Mrs. Pike, who is "coincidentally" a fellow beautician, but also baby-sits Mrs. Pike's three-year-old son. Their friendship, however, falls out faster than the hair of her pregnant client, Mrs. Fletcher. While reading
One of Leota's old magazines, Mrs. Pike recognizes that one of the men in an FBI most-wanted picture is Mr. Petrie, her former neighbor. They have just seen him in a carnival freak show where Mr. Petrie impersonates a handicapped man for whom "ever'thing ever since he was nine years old, when it goes through his digestion . . . goes to his joints and has been turning to stone" (41). Although the man in question allegedly raped four women, the people who know the man as Mr. Petrie find him above reproach. Nevertheless, the Pikes turn the man in and receive a substantial reward for their coincidental recognition, but refuse to share the reward money with Leota. Meanwhile, the story leaves the reader with questions: will Leota really leave Fred? Will Mrs. Fletcher carry her baby full term? Will some other unscrupulous couple meet their match and rent a room from Leota?

One of the collection's recurring themes found in "Petrified Man" is the matrimonial quest for happiness and the myth of female subservience. Leota's marriage exemplifies love, or lust, at first sight. Leota met her husband Fred "in a rumble seat eight months ago and we was practically on what you might call the way to the altar inside of half an hour" (45). When Leota tells Mrs. Fletcher that such a relationship "don't last. Mrs. Pike says nothin' like that ever does," Mrs. Fletcher retorts that she and her husband "are as much in love as the day
[they] married" (45). Since she provides nothing by which to gauge how much "as much" is, such a declaration seems unjustified.

Earlier, an unhappily pregnant Mrs. Fletcher announces to Leota, "I don't like children that much," and "I'm tempted not to have this one" (37). When Leota protests that terminating the pregnancy will upset Mr. Fletcher, Mrs. Fletcher further exclaims that her husband "can't do a thing with" her: "if he so much as raises his voice against me, he knows good and well I'll have one of my sick headaches, and then I'm just not fit to live with" (37). Mrs. Fletcher's attitude about pregnancy raises the social myth about the sanctity of motherhood. Little girls are raised to believe that ultimate fulfillment lies in having children. In turn, society considers women who do not fit the expected patterns of wifely obligation and motherhood as unnatural or mentally ill.141

Moreover, Mrs. Fletcher cannot seem to make up her mind how she feels about marriage roles, for she asks Leota why Mrs. Montjoy's husband can't make his wife behave: "He ought to put his foot down" (48). When Leota explains that some women are "soft," Mrs. Fletcher expresses what many Southern women will acknowledge as the myth of male superiority: women rule the home by letting their husbands

141Kate Chopin's The Awakening (1899) is an earlier Southern example.
believe men are in charge. When the males fail to carry out women's wishes, the women simply become prostrate. As Mrs. Fletcher says,

"Oh, you mistake me, I don't mean for her to get soft--far from it! Women just have to stand up for themselves, or there's just no telling. But now you take me--I ask Mr. Fletcher's advice now and then, and he appreciates it, especially on something important, like is it time for a permanent--not that I've told him about the baby. He says, 'Why, dear, go ahead!' Just ask their advice" (48).

Obviously, either couple's matrimonial relationship lacks happiness. Just as marriage provides Ruby with many hours of boredom which she relieves by hitchhiking, even marriage with the promise of children cannot make Mrs. Fletcher truly happy. But marriage is a vehicle for only one of the story's many myths.

Another of the more obvious myths in this story concerns social attitudes toward beauty. Welty plays upon all the familiar adages about beauty by setting her story in a beauty parlor, a place where women have their hair fixed, nails immaculately manicured, and make-up skillfully applied in hope of fooling nature itself. Beauty and the ritual for becoming beautified take on religious proportions as the clients confess to beauticians who, by listening, grant some sense of passive absolution. All the cosmetic aids in the world cannot help any of these characters whose inner beings are beyond reach.

This social myth that physical appearance indicates a good or evil person culminates in the testimony of the
accused rapist's neighbors. They do not mention that he has any unusual physical appearance or abnormality. On the contrary, their comments go beyond physical appearance, addressing his personality, "he was real nice," and his economic solvency, he "lent money" (53). The revelation of his crimes shatters the popular myth that affluence and physical features result from inner goodness and bring tangible rewards.

Furthermore, the concept of a merit system of rewards parallels the New Testament parable of the unforgiving servant, a story which also underscores the quality of mercy, another predominant theme in the collection. A man who owes a large sum of money cannot repay his debt; therefore, he and his family and all of his possessions are to be sold. When he begs for mercy, his creditor declares the debt paid. This act of kindness is lost on the debtor, for he has someone who owes him a small amount of money thrown into jail until the debt is repaid. When the first creditor hears about this lack of mercy, he summons his original debtor and restores the debt.

Mr. and Mrs. Pike are like the first debtor. As strangers in town, Mr. and Mrs. Pike have received the hospitality first of Mr. Petrie in New Orleans and then of Leota. Despite their pleasant acquaintance with Mr. Petrie and his generosity toward them, they feel no debt of gratitude; mercenarily, they report him to the
Leota's property, albeit an old magazine upon which she places little value, makes possible the Pikes' good fortune, yet they feel no obligation to share with her. In this way, Welty's story also mirrors the parable of the sheep and the goats. Although taking in a stranger is vicarious ministry to Christ, the parable offers no guarantee that the stranger will behave himself after he partakes of Christian charity.

The emphasis upon the relationship between apparent acts of charity and their motivation, physical appearance and character, and matrimony and happiness continues more explicitly in "The Key." In this story, an unnamed red-haired young man, a "stranger in town" who "might have been a criminal" (59), watches Albert and Ellie Morgan as all three wait in a train station. The Morgans, deaf-mutes, are taking a long-awaited trip to Niagara Falls where, by leaning heavily against the railing surrounding the falls, they will hear, not with their ears, but with their whole bodies. Having "heard," they will never again wonder at the silence in their lives. That hope becomes the object of their journey. As the Morgans sit in the depot, the red-haired stranger drops a key which slides across the floor to Albert's feet. It makes a loud noise, but the deaf couple does not hear it. "Everyone else," however, "looked up for a moment" and "regarded the sound as an
insult, a very personal question, in the quiet peaceful room" (60). Moving to retrieve his key, the man realizes that "something is wrong" with the couple even though they appear normal (61).

Spying the key, Albert believes that the its sudden appearance represents something "unexpected, shocking, and somehow meaningful" (61). In a gesture mixed of awe and joy, he picks it up. He thinks the key will undo all the failures and disappointments in their lives and will transform their marriage of convenience into one of love. By appearing to him rather than Ellie, the key works here as a phallic symbol, restoring Albert's marital authority. He tells Ellie that the key appeared mysteriously, and that it miraculously symbolizes the happiness they deserve.

The red-haired man hesitates, then withdraws and watches the couple converse in sign language. While Ellie urgently signs to Albert, "shallow pity" floods the waiting room "like a dirty wave foaming and creeping over a public beach" and transforms Albert's moment of grace into public shame (62). Ellie commands Albert to hide the key because she suspects strangers. Ellie pulls out a picture postcard of the falls and guard rail. They discuss it, and then each muses on it separately. The postcard represents for Ellie what the key signifies for Albert. Water is a maternal symbol, and Ellie hopes reaching the falls will ensure at least one normal ceremony in her life. Many
newlywed couples traditionally begin their married lives at Niagara Falls, and she believes this link with normalcy will bring her marriage happiness. This opportunity seems lost because they have missed the train.

For Albert, the planned trip begins the understanding of a normal life. Albert explains that he never thought their plans would lead as far as the train station (72). Although Albert believes that the key emphasizes the vastness of their undertaking, he thinks the key perhaps symbolizes something for him apart from his wife (73). Just then, the red-haired man takes his hotel key out of his pocket and gives it directly to Ellie. As the man leaves, "you could see that he despised and saw the uselessness of the thing he had done" (73). The man's misplaced act of charity, manifested both in his failure to retrieve the first key and in his voluntary gift of the second key, provide the framework for the myths which Albert's and Ellie's attitudes and handicap express. The stranger undercuts Albert's masculine role; giving Ellie her own key transfers marital authority back to her and could possibly be considered an act of seduction on the stranger's part.

By believing that happiness "is something that appears to you suddenly, that is meant for you, a thing which you reach for and pick up and hide it in your heart, a shiny thing that reminds you of something alive and leaping"
Albert expresses the myth of predestination, that some viable power in the universe takes personal interest in his well-being. For him, the key provides a physical sign of an invisible grace manifested to him. Hiding the key may seem to indicate covetousness, but it is more likely a protective act. For example, the psalmist writes, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against God" (Psalm 119:11). The key gives him a reason to hope.

Ellie's attitude reflects two common myths. One equates a situation or physical locus, in this instance Niagara Falls, with inherent happiness or with a transforming power stronger than the sum of all past experiences, as if the human potential for any happiness at all lies outside oneself. Secondly, Ellie believes that all strangers will take something from her, and this belief informs her myth concerning strangers. Her "suspicion of the whole outside world" (67) culminates in her declaration that Albert must take the key and "hide it from the man" (69). The red-haired man's presentation of the second key to Ellie overturns these myths and reduces Albert's divinely significant act to an ordinary accident. Ellie's myth about strangers is disproved because the red-haired man harms her not in taking something from her, but in giving something to her. That gift destroys the inner
system of belief which the couple superimposes upon their trip to the falls.

Finally, the couple's physical handicap continues the myth that the residual effect of original sin causes disease and misfortune. If those afflicted seem above reproach, then others around them assume that the seeming innocence is actually hypocrisy; like Job's family and friends, they believe outward appearance hid secret sin. Thus, society often ostracizes those with physical afflictions. The actions of the railroad man who first appears "uncomfortable" and "rather angry," and then extends his arm and directs "a series of violent gestures and shrugs" (65) at the Morgans provides an example of this attitude. The narrator's subsequent speculations are also indicative; thinking that the Morgans may have been "afflicted in the same way, sent off from home to the state institute," the narrator recognizes "the feeling of conspiracy" (66).

The couple's deafness also provides a strong allusion to the New Testament parables. When the crowd asks Jesus to explain his parables, Matthew records Jesus' reply: "Let them who have ears hear" (Matthew 11:15, et al). The

\[\text{142In an interview with Linda Kuehl, Welty says, "I hoped to delineate characters by their physical qualities as a way of showing what they were like inside." See "The Art of Fiction XLVII: Eudora Welty" in Conversations with Eudora Welty, ed. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1984) 84.}\]
Morgans believe that their handicap causes most of their woes and alienation. Actually, their alienation results not so much from deafness as their lack both of self-awareness and of the ability to communicate their innermost thoughts. Welty's story never establishes whether the couple eventually visits Niagara Falls and receives the miraculous gift of pseudo-hearing, or if having obtained that goal their lives noticeably change.

The use of sign language leads to the process of non-verbal communication in Welty's story about confused gender. The Morgans have a physical handicap which makes normal speech impossible. Keela, in "Keela, The Outcast Indian Maiden," is also mute. Her silence comes not from physical impediments, but from the command that she should never "say nothin' to anybody ever" (76). As Robert Penn Warren concludes, the selection is "a story of a man who having committed a crime must try to establish his connection with humanity". Welty says the story is about "the moral response . . . of three different people." More important, perhaps, are the questions the story raises about the quality of existence and the degree of responsibility one person has over the reactions of

143 Warren 22.

144 Eudora Welty, quoted in "Interview with Eudora Welty," Jean Todd Freeman. Conversations with Eudora Welty. 179.
another. As in the earlier stories, "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" employs a stranger's act of charity in a parable about social responsibility. This act subverts the psychological and social myths held by the characters of Steve and Little Lee Roy.

The story opens with Little Lee Roy, a crippled black man, sitting on the front porch of his home. He hears and then sees two approaching white men. Steve, the younger of the two, formerly worked as a carnival barker and sold tickets to an attraction called "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden." While a fascinated audience watched, this savage woman would take a live chicken, bite off its head, pluck its feathers, and eat the white meat and the still beating heart. Then the maiden would growl and shake her cage's bars. One day, a spectator, realizing the show was a hoax, called the sheriff who took Steve, Keela, and the owners of the show to jail where the authorities discovered that the Indian "she" was in reality a Negro "he." Subsequently released from the physical prison, Steve cannot free himself from the intangible prison his guilt creates: feeling responsible for Keela's exploitation, Steve cannot find steady employment. To rid himself of his guilt, Steve decides to find the man and apologize.

After locating a black man in Cane Springs who fits Keela's description, Steve asks Max, the owner of the local cafe, to show him the man's house. Lee Roy does not
remember the man who called the authorities, but he does remember Steve. Max ridicules Steve's inability to distinguish a man from a woman, and Steve hits Max in the jaw. Steve apologizes and wants to give Lee Roy money. Because Steve has none, Max gives Lee Roy some change, and the men leave. Later, during dinner, Lee Roy begins telling his children about his visitors, but they merely tell him to be quiet.

The situation of Steve and Lee Roy, the location of their meeting, and their need to give and receive forgiveness inform the two basic myths in "Keela." Lee Roy lives in Cane Springs, a name which has biblical allusions. The word cane itself appears only twice in the Bible. The first citation is Isaiah 43:24, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou honoured me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." Similar wording appears in the other citation, Jeremiah 6:20: "To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me." The homophonic reading of the town name concerns the story of Genesis 4. In this passage, Cain, a farmer, makes an agricultural offering God finds unacceptable. The refusal of his offering makes Cain unhappy, but God tells Cain that doing right brings joy.
Cain does not take these words to heart and, after speaking with Abel, kills him. Later, God looks for Abel and asks Cain where Abel is. Cain answers with one of the most familiar questions in the whole Bible: "Am I my brother's keeper?" As punishment for the crime, God curses Cain "from the earth" and makes him become "a fugitive and a vagabond." The allusion and biblical references to cane and Cain parallel Steve's dilemma with Lee Roy. Both address the conflict arising when a gift is refused and question the nature of the gift and the motivation of the giver.

Steve, like Cain, does not recognize that doing right without expecting reciprocation inspires joy. Steve travels from a far country, offers an apology which is not accepted, knows increasing discontentment, assaults an innocent bystander and, because he expects something in return for his offering, becomes a vagabond. Steve cannot control Lee Roy's ability to absolve any more than Cain controls God's dislike of his offering. Their expectation and subsequent disappointment—reactions to which they give priority over simply doing right—prove the source of both Steve and Cain's misery.

This priority, Steve's consuming guilt concerning his role in the physical treatment of the crippled black man, makes Steve a psychological cripple. Steve believes that absolution given by the one wronged will release him, and
in a sense, cure him of his psychological or spiritual handicap. Rather, Lee Roy seals Steve's guilt permanently by admitting that, while he cannot remember the stranger who freed him, he can remember Steve. Realizing Lee Roy's impotence shatters Steve's belief in the myth of the healing power of forgiveness. Conversely, just as Lee Roy cannot heal Steve's handicap by forgiving Steve, Steve's offered apology cannot heal Lee Roy's handicap or erase Lee Roy's memory.

Steve's dilemma proves the antithesis of the New Testament parable concerning confession and forgiveness (the unforgiving servant: Matthew 18). Steve thinks his public announcements at the carnival prolonged Keela's exploitation. Although hundreds heard his invitation, now no one hears Steve's confession. As Max says, "I've got a juke box . . . so I don't have to listen" (40). Max's self-imposed deafness coupled with his disbelief and antipathy towards Steve's story obstructs any hope of absolution. Grace, necessary for absolution to occur, remains overwhelmingly absent in this story of Welty's.

The second myth concerns Lee Roy's return to normal life. During his rescue, Lee Roy/Keela clings to his benefactor's side and begs to stay with him. Such actions indicate that any other existence would be an improvement over Lee Roy's miserable travelling show life; anything
would be better than continued travel in his role as Keela. However, normal life lacks all that Lee Roy had hoped.

Lee Roy's excitement as he remembers his past adventures contrasts with the dull porch setting. When the men fall silent, Lee Roy holds his breath, "for fear that everything was all over" (42). When playing the part of Keela, Lee Roy leads an exciting and useful life. People notice him. By paying to see him perform, they indicate his worth. On the other hand, as simply a handicapped black, Lee Roy remains alone most of the day. The physical affliction, upon which he had previously capitalized, now prevents him from making a significant contribution to the family income. His children provide the final blow. When they, like the owners of the freak show, tell him to "hush up," they shatter any notion that normal life is preferable to stage life. This presents a conflict between the myth of the Puritan work ethic, "idle hands are the Devil's handiwork," which exhorts that work is good, and the myth concerning man's supremacy above the animals. As Grille in Spenser's Fairie Queene illustrates, men who revert to basic animal instincts gradually lose their humanity. In contrast, Welty's story shows Lee Roy more productive as the animalistic Keela than as a mere crippled black man: his work, however degrading in nature,

seems better than no work at all. Thus Lee Roy, like Steve, becomes an outcast in either world.

The inharmonious domestic situation following Lee Roy's return home after his stint with the carnival foreshadows the disastrous family life found in "Why I Live at the P. O." In this story, however, the central interest falls upon the daughter who, for whatever reason, stayed home. As with previous stories, this selection continues the motifs of the stranger, written correspondence, the quest for happiness, and the ideal of matrimony.

"Why I Live at the P. O." provides the first person narrative of another outcast, the postmistress of China Grove. She co-exists under one roof with her mother, grandfather and Uncle Rondo. The household's fragile domestic tranquility dissipates when the baby sister, Stella-Rondo Whitaker, "just separated from her husband" (89), brings home their two-year-old "adopted" daughter, Shirley-T. Old conflicts revive between the narrator and her sister. Finally, as the family tension escalates, the postmistress packs her things and moves into the local post office.

Although Katherine Anne Porter reduces this story to the comical, psychological study of a narrator exhibiting "a terrifying case of dementia praecox," Porter xx.

\[146\]
of mind seems unimportant to the development of the parable. Rather, this story depicts the effects of Southern society's restrictions upon marriageable females, and uses the sibling rivalry of Sister and Stella-Rondo to convey its point. According to the narrator, Stella-Rondo "always had anything in the world she wanted and then she'd throw it away," including an "add-a-pearl necklace" which she "threw away playing baseball . . . with only two pearls on it" (89). The narrator also asserts that Stella-Rondo told Mr. Whitaker rumors about the narrator's womanly physique: she complains that Stella-Rondo "told him I was one sided. Bigger on one side than the other, which is a deliberate, calculated falsehood: I'm the same" (89). The narrator accuses Stella-Rondo of taking portions of their conversations out of context so that the narrator seems the offender. Her comment, for example, that Shirley-T would look like Papa-Daddy "if he'd cut off his beard, which of course he'd never do in the world" translates to "Papa-Daddy, Sister says she fails to understand why you don't cut off your beard" (91). Unarguably, these incidents illustrating petty jealousy come to the reader through a questionably reliable narrator.

Of greater importance to this study, however, are the relational tensions resulting from conflicting social mores and the allusions to the New Testament parable of the prodigal son informing this confrontation. "Why I Live at
the P. O." comes from the vantage point of the child who, staying home and playing by the rules, not only has little to show for her acceptable behavior, but also has no one to petition for redress.

The narrator, Sister, has the same expectations held by most older daughters in pre-ERA Southern households. As the first born, she should marry first. Sister has learned feminine skills: keeping house, cooking, and humoring the males of the house. Despite the unpleasant conditions resulting from living with a habitually drunken uncle and a miserly and cantankerous grandfather, she has nonetheless stayed at home to practice these skills. Furthermore, her job as the China Grove postmistress allows her to contribute in a small way to the material welfare of the family. Sister "helped pay the most" on a sewing machine motor and bought "blue bird vases" for the walls (105).

Stella-Rondo, on the other hand, defies convention. She throws away her symbol of femininity and propriety, her add-a-pearl necklace, in order to play baseball, a boys' game. Furthermore, Stella-Rondo comes between Sister and her boyfriend, marries him, moves North and cavorts with Yankees, all the while ignoring her family. After separating from her husband, Stella-Rondo then returns home unannounced, brings with her a daughter, and denies any blood relation to the girl, although according to the narrator, Shirley T. is the "spit image" of her great-
grandfather (90). Stella Rondo's disavowal and Shirley T.'s family resemblance probably indicate that Stella-Rondo flaunted the social convention calling for wedlock before pregnancy and became pregnant before she married Mr. Whitaker. If Stella-Rondo is genetically related to Shirley-T., then Stella-Rondo's pride means more to her than her own flesh and blood. Her denial alludes to Luke 12:9. In this passage Jesus declares that anyone denying Jesus before men will be denied "before the angels of God."

Without apology or remorse, Stella-Rondo defies every Southern social precept; nevertheless, the adults of the family, as did the adults in the parable of the prodigal son, welcome her home with all the amenities offered an esteemed adult guest.

Small wonder it is that Sister feels betrayed by the system she diligently followed. The social myths of station, birthright, culture, and virginal propriety by which she and other Southern girls of that time were raised no longer prove viable for her. Marriage and motherhood are a Southern woman's rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Unmarried older women bear the social stigma of ridicule and pity, an attitude which the Old Maid card game played by the others reflects (103). Southern culture dictates that a woman who cannot find someone with whom to continue a bloodline must have something wrong with her. Sister is the older daughter: she has stayed home,
contributed to her family, and learned the skills necessary for being a wife and mother. She has, unfortunately, remained single, and that one adjective transforms assets, which up to a certain age have been sterling attributes, into liabilities: something must be wrong with her. As yet a spinster, filled with self-pity and indignation, and treated as a child by her family, the narrator has no choice but to become a prodigal and move. Following typical parable fashion, the story concludes ambiguously. "Some of the folks here in town are taking up for" the narrator and "some are turned against her" (110). The story also raises the question as to whether or not Sister, like Stella-Rondo, will be welcomed back with celebration.

The image of displacement from home and the question of man's place in the world continue in "The Whistle." Economic circumstances in Dexter force Jason and Sara Morton into tenant farming land they originally owned. They must protect this man's crops or lose the use of the farm; this dilemma forces them, therefore, to strip themselves and use their clothes to wrap the young plants.

Although one of the shortest stories in the collection, "The Whistle" appeals to both biblical and classical mythology. The Mortons' situation illustrates a partial reversal of the relationship between man and his environment found in the Old Testament story of Eden.
According to Genesis, man received dominion over all things on earth, and plants offered man his first loin cloth. The disruption of that symbiosis by the subsequent exile of Adam and Eve becomes evident in Dexter, where as Albert J. Devlin notes, the juxtaposition of "man and nature ... challenges the dictates of scientific optimism." There, seedlings have priority over humans. If frost threatens, the tenant farmers who live in utter poverty sacrifice their clothes to wrap the tender vegetation. Moreover, the Mortons' existence is threatened not only by ice, but also by fire, as found in Christian mythology. The eschatological signs given in Revelation 8:5-13 indicate that fire will cause the second destruction of the earth. Fire is also an important element of classical mythology. Given by Prometheus, provides man freedom and power and elevates him from bestial existence.

Welty's story overturns this myth, too. The Mortons must try to prevent the inevitable: they must protect the tomato plants from freezing after "the plants would be set out in their frames, transplanted always too soon, and there was a freeze" even though "according to the Almanac, it was spring" (113). The cold and its destruction of the only source of income, the crops, leave Jason and Sara Morton destitute. Jason rebels against the control the cold exercises on their lives. In a scene reminiscent of

the newspaper burning in "A Piece of News," Jason destroys the couple's tangible "worldly" possessions as he tries to destroy the cold. Dismantling what few furnishings he and his wife have, he builds a fire. Jason seemingly believes that overcoming the cold will give him some dominion over his life, but the fire burns hot only briefly. Rather than liberating them, the blazing fire makes the room seem colder after the fire dies, and it emphasizes the vast difference between their dreams and reality. The fire eliminates none of their poverty, nor does it provide them with the advantages of Prometheus. Instead, it both exacts a greater toll upon what they can call their own and increases their dependence upon the generosity of another man.

As the Mortons become cold again, the whistle signals the advent of another dangerous frost. The intrusion of the whistle underscores the futility of Jason's gestures. The confrontation with frustration and the extravagant waste of the Morton's few material possessions make the couple even less capable of carrying out an already futile task. Where once they had property and the continuity tradition afforded, where once they owned "a solid, steady four-legged table . . . that had stood for thirty years in one place . . . and had burned well and brightly" (119), almost with dignity, they now own nothing but ashes. Will the Morton's existence improve? Will they finally accept
the burden of change and move? Will they survive another year?

These threads of transience and permanence, homelessness and property, resume in the ensuing parable, "The Hitch-Hikers." On his way from Victory to Dulcie, salesman Tom Harris gives a ride to two strangers, Sobby, who has nothing, and Sanford, who carries a guitar. En route, the men stop at a diner/drive-in. Shortly after leaving, Sanford tells Harris that Sobby still has the diner's beer bottle and asks him to "drive back," but Harris responds by accelerating the car into Dulcie (127). While they stop at the Dulcie Hotel and Harris arranges overnight accommodations, Sobby uses the beer bottle "to bust the other one's head wide op'm" (129). Although taken to a hospital for treatment, Sanford dies, leaving behind the guitar. Since no one in authority wants "the po' kilt man's gittar" (146), Harris gives it to an unnamed black boy. On the surface, this last tale in the first section of A Curtain of Green seems an uncomplicated story of a good deed gone sour. Closer analysis, however, discloses that "The Hitchhikers" culminates the themes and images encountered in the previous stories and sets the tone for the second section of the collection.

As in the first story, the parable of "The Hitchhikers" has a New Testament prototype. Lest the
reader overlook the similarities, Welty signals this allusion by the inn's "old half-open stained glass window" through which Harris looks at the "proverbial" rain (132). Other images also call church and religion to mind. The obvious similarity to the New Testament Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-37) provides the most conspicuous feature of this story. In both, a man renders aid to someone less fortunate than himself, and a wounded man has his wounds treated, and receives shelter. Unlike the parable of the Good Samaritan, however, Welty's story has no happy ending. At this point the similarities cease, and the resulting contrasts between the two stories become significant.

Although the New Testament Good Samaritan who out of selfless compassion renders aid to the man left for dead at the side of the road, Harris acts out of his own loneliness: because driving makes him drowsy, "the world . . . underfoot [made] his stand very precarious and lonely" (121-22). He makes his offer of transportation more for himself than for the hitchhikers.

Secondly, the Good Samaritan treated the injured man as an equal by paying both the innkeeper and the doctor; Harris, however, has no intention of seeking good accommodations for the hitchhikers. When arranging for a place to sleep, Harris tells the innkeeper that, despite
the rain, the men should sleep on Mr. Gene's "little back porch" because "they would get fleas" in a bed (128).

Finally, the actions of the Good Samaritan thwart the social and religious authority figures of the day, the Levite and the Pharisee; by aiding the unfortunate traveller, the Samaritan circumvents bureaucratic indifference and neglect. When the hospital later admits Sanford as a patient, he dies because the hospital lacks equipment needed to perform transfusions, particularly for indigent patients. As the doctor tells Harris, the hospital "don't have the facilities for giving transfusions, and he's [the hitchhiker] been moved plenty without you taking him to Memphis" (133). The doctor's comment makes Memphis seem terribly far away, yet shortly after the incident in Harris' car, Mr. Gene sends Cato to Memphis to get whisky for Harris, and Cato completes the trip before Harris finishes registering at the hotel (132).

On the other hand, Sanford's death underscores the futility of one man's actions against an entire "system." The New Testament Good Samaritan accomplishes good only because he, not the system, charitably provides monetary compensation for the various services rendered. Had the hitchhiker been someone of property, had he been someone of family, perhaps the doctor or Harris would have undertaken the measures necessary to get the hitchhiker to Memphis and
adequate treatment. This institutional silence attacks the myths concerning the modern medical profession. Although doctors profess the Hippocratic oath to do no harm, the institutions in which these doctors practice take no such oath. A doctor's ability to render aid lies in direct proportion to the availability and adequacy of the physical facilities.

Another significant contrast concerns the ethnic prejudice involved in both stories. In the New Testament parable, the injured man is a Jew. Classed as a group, Samaritans and Jews loathed one another in the same way that blacks and whites in the South, or whites and Native Americans in various parts of the country were presumed to. The Samaritan, however, sees the injured man not as a symbol of a hated race, but as an individual whose needs supersede ethnic tensions. Welty's characters lack this insight. Harris sees no need for the men to occupy a bed since they would leave fleas, so he suggests the little hotel porch. Although this attitude reflects class differentiation, the real prejudice of the story arises when the constable seeks a place for the accused murderer. As Mr. Gene explains, the constable "got a nigger already in the jail, so he's runnin' round to find a place to put this fella of yours with the bottle, and damned if all he can think of ain't the hotel!" (132). When Harris protests that Sobby will be sleeping with him, Mr. Gene assures him
that Sobby will stay across the hall. As a law-abiding citizen Sobby does not merit a real bed and room; as an alleged murderer, however, he receives accommodations. In Dulcie, the townspeople prefer that an innocent man sleep across from an alleged murderer before that alleged murderer shares any part of a black's jail cell. Consequently, breaking the law brings Sobby a form of reward.

Sobby's close proximity annoys Harris. He, like the ladies in "Lily Daw," begins an act of questionable charity that he is unwilling to finish. Giving hitchhikers a lift is a neighborly gesture. Returning property to its rightful owner, regardless of value or the means of acquisition, is also the neighborly thing to do; not returning the bottle indicates approved theft. Also, small sins of omission often lead to larger sins of commission. If taking a beer bottle proves acceptable, who draws the line at taking a car? If Harris had fulfilled Sanford's request and returned Sobby's beer bottle, Sobby would not have had the bottle with which he assaulted Sanford.

Furthermore, Harris sees the consequences of his actions. Unlike the ladies in whose ignorance of what becomes of Lily removes their burden of responsibility, Harris finds no relief from his charges. Although his past experiences "meant nothing" and had no hold over him (141), his encounter with the hitch-hikers' inextricably entwines
his life with theirs. Their violence was not carried out by two faceless individuals in some far flung place: they rode, fought, and bled in Harris's car. The car, in turn, represents the one constant factor in the salesman's life. Since Harris cannot be separated from this possession needed for his livelihood, the hitchhikers and their circumstances form a history indistinguishable from Harris' own.

The sense of intertwined past and similar circumstances introduces the theme of pity and becomes more pronounced as the story continues. Harris' thoughts of the two hitchhikers turned to pity, to wonder about the two tramps, their conflict, the sudden brutality when his back was turned. How would it turn out? It was in this suspense that it was more acceptable to him to feel the helplessness of his life. (141)

In thinking further about Sobby and Sanford, Harris remembers other violence not of his doing--other fights, not quite so pointless, but fights in his car; fights, unheralded confessions, sudden love-making--none of this his, not his to keep, but belonging to the people of these towns he passed through, coming out of their rooted pasts and their mock rambles, coming out of their time. He himself had no time. He was free; helpless. (141)

Why, then, should Harris pity the two hitchhikers when his own life is little better than theirs? As physical hitchhikers, Sobby and Sanford often depend on others' kindness for transportation, food, and lodging. Although Harris has mobile independence, he is an emotional hitchhiker whose socialization depends on the residents in
each town. Even those he sees on occasion, however, cannot vouch for him. In Dulcie, Harris may inspire the legend that "everybody talks about all the time," but his friend Ruth denies him when she says that the salesman is "no kin of mine, he's nothing but a vagabond" (135). Instead of a home, Harris has only "a base" and perceives the past only in "the flash of a sensation" (121).

Having a sense of community and knowing its relationship to one's past separates the tramps from the displaced sojourner, a theme developed in "The Whistle." Sanford is a shrewd hitch-hiker; understanding this concept, he adapts his background to any proffered help and markets himself accordingly. Sanford, having "a voice that could assume any social surprise" (123), makes a good impression by going through the motions of common courtesy; he returns Harris' initial salutation, makes small talk, and thanks Harris for the ride. More importantly, Sanford understands the value of having a past, any past, by which those who meet him might evaluate

148Ruth M. Vande Kieft shares this observation. She writes, "The title suggests that Harris himself is one of the transients despite the relative economic security provided by his job." "The Mysteries of Eudora Welty," Eudora Welty ed. Bloom 55.

149The Mortons may not literally own either land or home where they work, but the years invested in that place provide them an inseparable identity, an intangible connection. This bond exists even in the modern South, where residents refer to homes by names of families which have not legally owned the property in generations.
him. In the tradition of the Southern tall tale, he creates a past for himself, saying: "I come down from the hills" and "We had us owls for chickens and fox for yard dogs but we sung true" (125). Later he "reveals" more about his past:

"My ma, she was one for ballats. Little in the waist as a dirt-dauber, but her voice carried. Had her a whole lot of tunes. Long ago dead an' gone. Pa'd come home from the courthouse drunk as a wheel-barrow, and she'd just pick up an' go sit on the front step facin' the hill an' sing. Ever'thing she knowed, she'd sing. Dead an' gone, an' the house burned down" (126).

Regardless of Sanford's real past or nature, he creates a tie with his familial roots through the guitar and his knowledge of music. Since "they have the same music ever'where" (125), he can make himself at home anywhere.

Harris, for all his higher social status, cannot use this concept to his advantage. The art and function of social small talk are lost on him, and his conversation with Carol, his date for the evening, clearly indicates his inability. First, he denies having a past and tries convincing Carol that she has mistaken him for one of his piano-playing cousins. Carol proves that she met him five years ago on the Coast when he had first started traveling. Then she makes a startling revelation: Harris talked about himself (143). Harris uproots their relationship by denying her any current information of himself. Their surroundings reinforce Harris' denial.
Sitting under "a calendar with a "picture of giant trees being cut down," they find little to discuss (144). Calendars, of course, subdivide human measurement of time. Trees, when cut down, subdivide natural time and are often metaphors for genealogical relationships. Oblivious to either of these signals, Harris smiles "at her from a little distance" (144) and "shut[s] the door" of the cab (145), all the while knowing "the past and present joined like this . . . probably won't happen again" (144).

Finally, although Sanford manages some connection with the past and present through his music, Harris overlooks his opportunity to do likewise. Carol, whose name is also a musical form, remembers how Harris played the piano and which songs he performed. Had he invested himself in renewing this acquaintance, Harris might also have music by which to be everywhere at home. The salesman's choice indicates his belief that existence without responsibility embodies freedom, and that owning something and in turn being owned by it denote prison. Thus, the myriad hotel rooms become as much a jail cell for Harris as for Sobby.

Harris learns other lessons about relationships through Mike, Mr. Gene's aging collie. Mike's rapid decline in the interim between Harris' trips surprises the salesman. Mike is dying of old age. Since a dog's life span telescopes that of man, Harris glimpses what lies in store for him, provided he survives any further hitchhiking
altercations. One of the major differences between Mike's infirmities and those which Harris might endure is that Mike has Mr. Gene to look after him. Unless Harris changes his ways, he could likely die like Sanford: having "nothing" and "no folks"

" (146). Of course, "things" and "folks" offer no guarantee that all will be well, but even in memory they often provide comforting support systems. Harris overlooks these truths as well when he off-handedly gives Sanford's guitar, a tangible symbol of connection, to the black boy.

The parable format leaves several questions with the reader. Which of the two hitchhikers was really responsible for stealing the car? Was Sanford killed because he wanted to steal the car and Sobby thought it wrong, in which case Sanford only got what he "deserved"; or was Sanford killed because he did not want to go along with Sobby's plan to steal the car? In either case, was the murder really a case of misnamed justice?

The townspeople sensationalize the crime and romanticize the act, yet they pay Sanford little attention. No one mourns his death, but his sole possession receives a great deal of attention. These attitudes and responses raise questions beyond the confines of story's plot. Can things be more important than people? Can a trip for whiskey be more significant than transferring a wounded indigent man? What determines when life merits the effort
needed for continuance? Is race a crime equal to or worse than murder? The second half of the collection addresses these significant questions.

III.

"A Memory" provides the transition between these two groupings of A Curtain of Green, for the middle ground is the central image in the piece. The story takes place, significantly, at "almost noon," (147) in summer, the middle of the day in the middle of the year. The setting for the story, the public beach of a city park's lake, establishes both the middle ground between the lake and the city and the vantage point for the narrator's observations. Albert J. Devlin notes that the narrator's central position between age and experience also reflects "the extraordinary growth" of the city of Jackson when "much of the nineteenth-century flavor would be lost."\footnote{Devlin, "Eudora Welty's Mississippi," 175.} The narrator's commentaries occur as she rests after swimming, a voluntary act which immerses the swimmer in water common to all who bathe there and which puts her in a micro-community where location and purpose supersede social ties. Here are no rich or poor, black or white-- only wet or dry. As the narrator remarks, the only persons then at the lake "were either children, who had nothing to occupy them, or those older people whose lives are obscure, irregular, and
consciously of no worth to anything: this I put down to my observation at that time" (147-8). The middle-age group, those persons working with civic or commercial responsibilities found in the two halves of the collection, is conspicuously absent.

The story omits the narrator's specific age, but certain remarks indicate a narrator in adolescence, that middle ground between innocence and experience, childhood and maturity. Like many adolescents, however, her attitude knows no middle ground. As the story shows, she uses exaggerated absolutes, gross generalizations, incidents viewed out of context, and romanticized terms to evaluate life. She remarks, "I felt a necessity for absolute conformity to my ideas in any happening I witnessed" (149), and "formed a judgement upon every person and every event which came under my eye" (148). When change comes unexpectedly, she becomes "terrified by a vision of abandonment and wildness" which tears her heart (148). She perceives that she has been on the beach "all through the summer" (148), that in school she "sat perpetually alert" (149); she also professes to have supersensory abilities and a new-found vision often showing "the weak and inferior and strangely turned examples of what was to come" (148). She believes, for example, that a young girl on the beach moves with a "fierceness that took
my breath away" and thinks she hears the "fat impact of all their heavy bodies upon one another" (155).

Second, the narrator not only exaggerates, but she also romanticizes ordinary situations. Like the Morgans in "The Key," she concludes that "the smallest gesture of a stranger . . . was to me a communication or a presentiment" (148-9). Her friend's blood is not red, it is "vermilion" (150). The narrator is "obsessed" (148), "doubly austere," has "unadulterated" recall, and experiences a "grotesquely altered" yet "hopelessly unexpressed . . . passion" (149).

Even though the strangers on the beach have not physically intruded on her space, she nonetheless feels "victimized" (156).

Third, like many adolescents, the narrator takes a single instance out of perspective and forces upon it "a kind of projection" (148). This framing technique reinforces her habit of seeing only a portion of a whole and allows her "to look out at everything" (147) as she travels from childhood to maturity. For instance, by focusing upon an incident when she accidentally touched "the wrist of the boy I loved on the stair," the narrator experiences at will the "shudder" and "heavy weight of sweetness," (156) that swelled "with a sudden and overwhelming beauty, like a rose forced into premature bloom" (149). Such stirrings often accompany the first awakenings of sensuality. As the story opens, this lack of
objectivity informs the narrator's whole point of view. By the end of the story, however, that view becomes more charitable.

To illustrate that transformation of attitude, Welty, using two little boys and their families, again introduces characters about whom little is ascertained. Since the narrator knows little about either set, she bases her feelings only on what she observes. The narrator met the first little boy at school, but she does not really know him. She admits, "the child was not actually my friend. We never exchanged a word or even a nod of recognition" (149). Furthermore, she knows even less about his home life. Her confession continues,

I never knew where this boy lived, or who his parents were. It was unbearable to think that his house might be slovenly and unpainted, hidden by tall trees, that his mother and father might be shabby--dishonest--crippled--dead. I speculated endlessly on the dangers of his home. Sometimes I imagined that his house might catch on fire in the night and that he might die (150).

Describing him only as a "medium-sized boy with blond hair" and "unconscious eyes" (157), she limits her evaluations to his nosebleed, his looks of "unconcern" and "even stupidity," and his manner of swinging his foot (150-1). Her ignorance of his actual circumstances fashions her emotions. On the basis of this fragmented knowledge and in the true spirit of adolescent romance, she thereby swears her love for him.
On the other hand, the narrator immediately recognizes the "common" nature of the family at the beach (152). She precisely describes them in negative and possibly sexually threatening terms. They wear "old and faded bathing suits"; the older boy "protrudes from his costume," is "sly," runs "clumsily,"-inflicts "pinches and kicks," and "makes idiotic sounds." The father has "flabby arms"; the mother has breasts "hung heavy and widening like pears," legs which are "bulwarks," an "open pouched mouth," and a "slow, repetitious laugh"; the girl has "genie-like rage" (153-4). In short, the narrator finds them "resigned to each other's ugliness" in "a confusion of vulgarity and hatred," and she wishes "that they were all dead" (154). Ironically, the two boys who catch the narrator's attention could be brothers, for they share a similar physical description.

For all she knows, the boy at school shares a family as "common" as the family on the shore, but he ceases to be ordinary to the narrator. What separates him from the boy with his family on the beach? Why does the narrator venerate the boy at school and make him the object of her dreams? The answer to those questions lies in the difference between love and lust. The narrator simultaneously loves without physical intimacy and hates without emotional provocation. By judging the boy at school on the basis of observation and interaction, not on
the basis of who his family is or of his sexuality, she raises her school mate above the common and makes him special. Of course, refusing to make the same allowances for the beach family proves that her love is still in the egocentric stage, yet it also raises hope that she will increasingly move beyond impersonal evaluation of outward appearance and think altruistically of another's humanity instead.

From this intrusion of reality, the narrator retreats to the "undefined austerity of her love." This time, however, she evokes the physical sensations, "but the memory itself" disappears (156). Like Harris' encounter with the hitchhikers, the narrator's "long narrative" of the encounter at school evolves into a story (156), and even though she remains innocently happy, "the meaning of her happiness" disappears. Unfortunately, seeing the fat woman "condescendingly" pulling "down the front of her bathing suit" and shaking out the sand in front of her husband gives the narrator a "peak of horror, as though [the woman's] breasts had turned to sand . . . and she did not care" (156). The narrator's innocent sensual fantasy confronts the wet imprint of bodies on sand, imprints which "changed the appearance of the beach like the ravages of a storm" (157).

Pity, similar in origin to that "shallow pity" which in "The Key" "washed over the waiting room like a dirty
wave foaming and creeping over a public beach" (62), fills the narrator as her gaze moves from the ravaged beach to the pavilion. In architectural terms, a pavilion signifies the principal component designating a facade, an elaborate and imposing front. Describing the pavilion as "small," "worn," and "white," the narrator "burst[s] into tears" (157). As a distant and inaccessible touchstone, the pavilion represents a fixed ideal battered by a swiftly changing world, a constant reminder of life as it once appeared. The narrator may only vaguely understand what she mourns. However, since she asserts that the beach welcomes only "children" or "useless adults," she now fits neither category and cannot spend another morning on this shore. The narrator leaves the stillness of the beach and begins immersion in adult life much as the storm reemerges from the peaceful eye of a hurricane.

IV.

From the meditations of an adolescent observer, the collection moves to "Clytie." This story both establishes many of the themes undergirding the second half of the collection and continues the themes of middle ground and centeredness begun in "A Memory." As the story opens, Clytie stands "in the middle of the road" (162) during a rainstorm. Clytie Farr's family is like the worn pavilion in "A Memory." The family was at one time the controlling power in the town bearing the family name. Now the town,
like the family's influence and wealth, has dwindled so that "not more than 150 people . . . counting Negroes" (162) reside in Farr's Gin. Her sister Octavia and her brother Gerald have lost their minds. Clytie seems on the same path because, like Octavia before her, she stands in the garden and curses softly to herself, but she nevertheless transverses the open world of progress the townspeople represent and the stifling world of immutable history her family represents.

One day when Mr. Bobo comes to shave their paralyzed father, Clytie takes the barber aside and strokes his face. Her gesture repulses the barber who leaves without completing his task. His reaction, in turn, frightens Clytie. Octavia calls for Clytie to bring in the rainwater for their father's shave. Clytie goes to the rain barrel and thinks she sees a face in the water, a face "she had been looking for, and from which she had been separated" (177). She leans over to get a closer look, but the ugly face and wild hair which return her gaze repulse her. In that revulsion, however, comes the soul-sickening revelation: the reflection belongs to her. Filled with loathing, she destroys the vision by submerging her head and drowning in the barrel.

In "Clytie," Welty examines social myths expressed through the Southern reverence toward history and the South's resistance to change. The South in general, and
Mississippi in particular, is a landed society: those with the most land generally have the greatest fortune, and they naturally assume the posture of power accorded such wealth. Although both land and tradition often pass intact through several generations, the demeanor of wealth remains long after the property is sold. The plantation as a viable economic resource and its way of life ceased functioning in the nineteenth century, but the modern public still reveres the myths that era and its attitude of aristocratic chivalry inspire. Even a century later, the South keeps the antebellum era accessible through annual "pilgrimages." Tour guides wearing confederate and antebellum regalia lead tourists through restored plantation estates and talk reverently of "the good ole days."151

In "Clytie," the Farr house signifies a dying family and obsolete aristocratic lifestyle, and its description seems more fitting for a mausoleum than for a family home. Clytie lives in an "old big house" (159) where "every window was closed, and every shade was down" so that outsiders might not intrude (161). Inside, the house is "very dark and bare"; downstairs the "solitary piece of furniture" (160), shrouded in a "white sheet" (160), is "an organ that was never uncovered or played except for

151 Devlin finds that the "most persistent myth of Southern life" is "the plantation legend of the nineteenth century." He says also that Welty removes that myth's "glamorous trappings" and illustrates instead a "decadent society." Devlin, "Eudora Welty's Mississippi," 160-1.
funerals, and then nobody was invited" (173). In the
parlor, cadaverous "ivory hands" hold back "red curtains"
which are "still as tree trunks in the airless house" (160-
1). The rest of the few furnishings are "unmovable relics"
(161), those things which memorialize vanished time. Since
the covered windows obliterate all natural light, a "bronze
cast of Hermes," hold[s] up a gas fixture" (161) and
provides the only interior light. Hermes, the patron god
of thieves and travelers, is an appropriate patron for the
Farr household. Clytie is the only one who travels between
her home and the town; through their psychotic
manipulation, her brother and sister have stolen from her
any sense of identity.

The diamond cornucopia which Octavia wears in this
dismal setting abounds in contrasts. The horn of plenty
symbolizes shared abundance and fellowship, but the
family's circumstances indicate the emptiness of this
symbol. A sign of wealth which the Farr's no longer have,
Octavia's version holds cold, hard and inedible diamonds.
Pins worn over the heart signify allegiance to the
institution the pin symbolizes. By wearing the pin "in
the bosom of her long black dress," Octavia shows her close
affinity to the indifferent hardness diamonds represent; by
"fondling" the pin, Octavia indicates the source of her
affection. Describing the caress as an "unwithered" and
"grand gesture," the narrator indicates that all other
surroundings must by contrast show decay (160), a decay extending to the Farr family itself.

Each family member suffers a different mental impairment preventing their engaging in meaningful relationships. Octavia's paranoia transforms everything happening outside the house into "some form of prying from without" (164); as acting head of the household, she allows admittance only to the town barber who regularly shaves their father. Gerald, an alcoholic suffering delirium tremens, had a wife until he "threatened time and again to shoot her," and "held a gun against her breast" in order "to show her that he loved her above life and death" (167); she left him. Their "paralyzed, blind" father communicates "in unintelligible sounds" and can only "swallow liquids" (164-5). Another brother, Henry, died "with a bullet hole through the forehead" (168). Now the townspeople perceive "that Miss Clytie's wits were all leaving her . . . the way her sister's had left her" (159). The decaying mental health, the family's social reticence, and the absence of a younger generation signify a decaying family.

A related myth in the story concerns the right relationships within the family hierarchy. Although the high casualty rate of the Civil War decimated male ranks, Southern families usually followed patriarchal rule. At the father's death, the authority passed to the eldest son. The completely ineffectual position of old Mr. Farr and
Octavia's tyrannical control overturn this myth of male authority. Old Mr. Farr represents the last of the town aristocracy, yet his insane children ritualistically keep a manicured and comely exterior for a father who is little more than a vegetable. This empty ritual, exemplifying the futility of the past and its unreasonable hold upon the current Farr generation, contrasts the attitude of the townspeople and the prosperity of the town bearing the family name.

Octavia's behavior, furthermore, provides a vehicle for another myth: wealth and social prominence always indicate superior beings. Octavia calls her neighbors "common" (161), and she obsessively guards against intrusions. Not only does she refuse personal association with any of the townspeople, and "never came all the way downstairs for any reason" (163), but she extends the physical boundary of the land to include neighbors' property. Using Clytie as a mouthpiece, Octavia expands her control to the physical elements and demands that the elderly woman next door "take that rose bush up . . . and move it away from our fence!" (170). She perceives that "rain and sun signified ruin" (163) rather than cleanliness and growth. By demanding they keep all windows and doors shut, Octavia hopes the family can hide from change. She believes the proud genealogy and social prestige set her family above common folk. The residents, sensing Octavia's
snobbery, declare that "the Farris" particularly Octavia, "were too good to associate with other people" (159). Her family's skeleton closet, however, holds socially stigmatized episodes of suicide, dementia, and social isolation. Obviously, such unenviable incidents depose those social myths.

Clytie, continuing the myths of isolation and ritual, becomes an extension of the adolescent narrator in "A Memory." The narrator, using a framing device both to evaluate her surroundings and inspire her daydreams until the common family interrupts her, believes that life might reveal concealed mysteries but knows not what she seeks or expects to find. Clytie, on the other hand, becomes more personally involved with her subjects. Mirroring the narrator's scrutiny, Clytie searches for a familiar countenance and concentrates on faces. They, "like an inspiration which drives all other thoughts away," make Clytie forget herself until something, "the rain com[ing] down" or "someone shout[ing] at her," interrupts her "meditations" (162). Clytie studies "the mouths of other people which concealed she knew not what, and secretly asked for still another unknown thing" (163). Both characters experience fear and love, but their responses to these emotions differ.

The narrator exhibits anger and enmity often associated with vacillating adolescent emotions. Clytie
counters with "gentleness . . . exhaustion and . . . overwhelming love" (171). The narrator has no sympathy for the small boy on the beach who must throw "himself time after time headfirst into the lake when the older child chased him to persecute him" (152). Unlike the narrator, Clytie knows sibling victimization. Clytie's experiences with Octavia and Gerald parallel those of the boy on the beach, and "like a small child who has been pushed by the big boys into the water" (165), Clytie gasps her frustration.

Secondly, although both the narrator and Clytie cry, the narrator cries for the nameless unknown which she fruitlessly pursued throughout the summer. Clytie, however, meets that which she sought, and the encounter brings agonizing results.

It was a wavering, inscrutable face. The brows were drawn together as if in pain. The eyes were large, intent, almost avid, the nose ugly and discolored as if from weeping, the mouth old and closed from any speech. On either side of the head dark hair hung down in a disreputable and wild fashion. Everything about the face frightened and shocked her with its signs of waiting, of suffering (177).

She reaches her goal, but the image makes her "completely sick at heart, as though the poor, half-remembered vision had finally betrayed her" (177). Her success proves too great a burden.

Finally, the third difference between the narrator and Clytie occurs in their respective immersion in water. Although the narrator of "A Memory" bathes in the public
lake, she remains uninitiated and comes to no self-knowledge. Clytie, on the other hand, receives two baptisms. As the story opens, she is christened by the afternoon rain—a fresh, spontaneous, natural rejuvenation. When she is out among the people and the natural landscape, she has a child's view of life. The rain barrel, however, impedes the natural "life" of rain and holds it beyond its appointed duration. The held water becomes stale, just as her family and its vanishing lifestyle have become stagnant by ignoring the natural flow of time and change. As Clytie gazes into the old water in the rain barrel, she sees herself as others see her, not as she perceives herself.

Clytie's myth lies in the belief that finding someone who knows her well will eliminate the isolation brought on by the town's association of her with the family madness; this new-found friend will regard her as an individual in her own right. At first, seeing the form in the rainwater verifies that myth. That same myth loses meaning when Clytie rejects the face in the barrel and then realizes that the face is hers. This revelation contributes to the parabolic quality of the story. By searching vainly for the mythic other person who will befriend and recognize her, Clytie betrays herself. To paraphrase the words of the cartoon character Pogo: "she has met her enemy and it is her." Her reflection, symbolizing the extent of both
her psychic disintegration and her healing, destroy that
myth. Furthermore, the self-realization robs her of any
purpose for living because she sees herself as the outside
world sees her.

Clytie's recognition alludes to Nathan's parable to
King David (2 Samuel 12:1-13). A poor man has a tiny lamb
which he has raised like a child. The sheep eats from his
plate, drinks from his cup, and sits in his lap. On the
other hand, a rich man has many herds of sheep. When the
rich man needs a lamb for a state dinner, he sends the poor
man's sheep to slaughter. When King David hears the story,
he condemns to death the man without pity. Nathan explains
that the rich man in the parable represents King David and
that as punishment, his family shall be overcome by evil.
Just as King David condemns himself, so Clytie has no
choice but to condemn herself. Instead of finding in a
stranger the saviour who knows her and accepts her, instead
of baptism by immersion initiating her into the accepting
community of man, she finds destruction.

Finally, this story offers ironic parallels to the
parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Like Sister
in "Why I Live at the P. O.,” Clytie becomes a prodigal
daughter. The other children continue vainly revering
everything for which the family stands and continue the
family myth. Clytie, while never leaving "home," becomes a
mental prodigal; she sojourns in the "far country."
civilization typifies. Unlike the Biblical prodigal, however, she can find no warm welcome from her father as she returns because past and present cannot be reconciled. Standing alone in the middle of the road rather than on either side further reflects her psychological dilemma: can she acknowledge the influence of her family heritage without sacrificing individuality? Can venerated tradition and progress peacefully co-exist? Do the common and the aristocratic really differ? Although the story literally closes with Clytie's chase after the rain barrel mirage and her subsequent death, Welty leaves the reader with several open-ended questions. Is searching for recognition or the need for reaffirmation a sign of madness? Is Clytie an accidental drowning or a suicide victim? Is Clytie's madness genetic, the result of her family's actions and the townspeople's reactions, or has she convinced herself that she is crazy? These are among the significant issues which "Clytie" introduces, and they inform the reader's understanding of "Old Mr. Marblehall," a story Michael Kreyling terms a "parable of history." 152

In order to show both the consequences of the static past simultaneously existing with the ever changing

152Michael Kreyling, "The Natchez Trace in Eudora Welty's Fiction," lecture, The Natchez Trace: A Literary Symposium, June 7-9, 1990. He did not indicate how he determined this story was a parable.
present, and the possible integration of Southern aristocracy with the average family, Welty sets her story in Natchez, a city fixed between the Mississippi River shipping traffic and the historic Natchez Trace, an important wilderness trail connecting Nashville to Natchez. Economically thriving on the union of past and present, Natchez celebrates Pilgrimage Week, a festival encompassing what Daniele Pitavy-Souques characterizes as "the decadent society of the Old South, the South as myth."\(^{152}\) In an interview with Peggy Prenshaw and Albert J. Devlin, Welty alluded to this lifestyle, saying that those persons "who were on the wrong side of Civil Rights" attempted to go "where their ideals led them, an idiotic return to something that was not any good in the first place."\(^{153}\) During pilgrimage, residents of the finest plantation homes dress in period costumes and open their homes so hundreds of strangers might see the way of life which the Southern aristocracy fought so hard to keep. Into this dual setting Welty introduces Mr. Marblehall, a man who leads a "double life" (185).

Mr. Marblehall's first life parallels many aspects of the Farrs' life in Farr's Gin. His family figures prominently in the Natchez community and, ironically,

\(^{152}\)Daniele Pitavy-Souques, "The Modernity of Eudora Welty," 130.

traces its lineage to a nineteenth-century actor who "arrived back in 1818" (183). His "ancestral home" (181), like the Farr's house, shows signs of decay. The Mississippi River continually erodes the soil, and already "the little back garden has assuredly crumbled away" (181). Both houses share a similar interior: "inside is dark" and "everything is draped and hooded and shaded . . . unaffectionate but close" (182). Both houses are nearly soundproof but, unlike the virtually airless and barren Farr house, Mr. Marblehall's home, filled with tapestries, brocades and couches (182), shows signs of life. The "breath against the prisms" and "stirring of the chandelier" (182) indicate a viable family lives within the home.

At sixty years of age, Mr. Marblehall married a woman whose physical features and demeanor evoke Clytie Farr. She, like Clytie who also must "stand to think," resembles an "elongated old woman with electric looking hair"; furthermore, "when she walks around the room she looks remote and nebulous, out on the fringe of habitation, and rather as if she must have been cruelly trained"; like Clytie's figure in the rain barrel, Mrs. Marblehall's "long, disquieted figure . . . looks something like an

154Since actors, like traveling musicians, were considered declasse and immoral, his family earned its prestige by duration of their Natchez residency. By living two lives at once, Mr. Marblehall seems, ironically, to be carrying on the family tradition.
accident" (180). Also like Clytie, Mrs. Marblehall exists in "perpetual amazement," "goes out in the rain," knows "how everyone . . . will suddenly grow quiet around her," and feels safe in the "domestic dark" of her home (181).

Mr. Marblehall's marriage late in life makes the townspeople ask: "What did he want to marry for?" (184). This question, implying that older yet unmarried people have no need for marital amenities, is one of the social myths the story addresses. As depicted in earlier stories in the collection, people generally marry because society expects it of them, because it is normal, because it signifies recognized adulthood, because it offers economic security, because they want to start a family, or because they want to guarantee lineage; rarely in this collection do characters use marriage as a socially acceptable means to engage in sexual intercourse. Furthermore, only recently has society acknowledged the possibility of seniors enjoying healthy sexual relationships. Small wonder then that fathering a son in the same year that he marries this Clytie clone amazes people. The people of Natchez "throw up their hands every time they so much as think about it" (182). They find Mr. Marblehall's "precious old health . . . inspiring" and with good reason assume that "he could have easily danced with a troupe of
angels in Paradise every night" (185). This son provides living proof that Mr. and Mrs. Marblehall, a couple "so terribly old" and "precariously preserved" (184), have a sex life.

In addition to indicating a fruitful union, the birth of Mr. Marblehall's son has a second implication. Mr. Marblehall symbolizes the old Southern aristocracy. Although James D. Neault believes that "the future is of only minor significance in Miss Welty's work," "Old Mr. Marblehall" clearly shows the future's importance to the past. Mr. Marblehall symbolizes the viability of that past, for from this heritage comes new life. Furthermore, the past need not reveal decadence and rust alone if viewed from the objective distance the passing of time, the future, provides. Significantly, Mr. Marblehall's age nearly doubles that of most first-time fathers. This true generation gap provides perspective and helps secure that impartial vision.

Examining a contrasting viewpoint also helps secure impartiality. An old adage suggests 'walking in someone else's shoes,' and Mr. Marblehall does just that in his second life. Since no one can really become another already existing person, he does the next best thing and

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155 This conclusion is itself a possible metaphor for pleasant sexual fulfillment.

creates an alter ego. Through the common life of Mr. Bird, Mr. Marblehall leaves behind a persona etched in the stones of stately tradition. Through this identity, Mr. Marblehall continues the psychological progress which began in "Clytie." Until she recognizes the face staring back at her in the barrel, Clytie seems a physical creature who has lost her soul. Unfortunately, her drowning cuts short any potential growth for her newly integrated psyche. Mr. Marblehall, although leading "two completely different lives, with completely different families, two sons instead of one" (190), lacks psychic integration. Recalling Stevenson's work, Mr. Marblehall is a social Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: whenever whim overtakes him, he literally walks from the aristocratic existence of Mr. Marblehall to the bourgeois existence of Mr. Bird.

At first glance, the worlds of Mr. Marblehall and Mr. Bird appear mutually exclusive. Mr. Marblehall's ancestral home seems a lifeless monument: when anyone looks "toward it" the way one can "always glance into tunnels," he sees "nothing" (181). On the other hand, Mr. Bird's nondescript shotgun house, although standing among the "scores of little galleried houses" which look "nearly alike," is in a neighborhood where "the people come out themselves" and work (185). This neighborhood shows visible signs of life. In this home, Mr. Bird also has a wife. Unlike Mrs. Marblehall who goes "into club work" and observes the
appropriate rite of social status by "belong[ing] to the Daughters of the American Revolution and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, attending teas" (180), Mrs. Bird epitomizes redneck elegance. She is "more solid, fatter, shorter, funnier looking," and "cymbal-breasted;" she "has thick shoulders," a "small, monotonous, round, stupid head," "tells everything she knows," wears "short, stubby house slippers," "screams to a neighbor" from her porch, and constantly announces "wifely complaints" (186-7). In a word, Mr. Bird's house, his neighborhood, and his wife exemplify all that "A Memory" and "Clytie" would designate common.

On the basis of mutually exclusive housing, spouse, and lifestyle, no one would assume that two separate identities inhabit one body. However, that one man successfully maintains a dichotomous existence in antithetical worlds undercuts one of the story's myths. First represented by Octavia in "Clytie," this myth purports an inherent difference between the privileged and the common. As Mr. Marblehall shows, no matter his spouse, no matter his residence, his means of entertainment, his "name," or his economic status, he remains physically one and the same man.

The very close resemblance between the two sons further underscores this point. Even though only one has the expensive clothes and private education which privilege
affords, both sons "have that look of cunning little jugglers, violently small under some spotlight beam, preoccupied and silent, amusing themselves," "go into sudden fits and tantrums that frighten their mothers to death," and "get anything they want" (188). In appearance, only a missing front tooth separates the Bird child from the Marblehall child, and by the time they reach adolescence, even that physical distinction will be gone. Wealth or the lack of it has no bearing on these children who share equally the same father's genetic material.

Mr. Marblehall's social standing, however, remains undivided. The custom of having both a legally recognized family and a common law family dates back to biblical days. Abraham, for example, had both a legal wife, Sarah, with whom he had Isaac, and a concubine with whom he had Ishmael, but only Isaac received the true inheritance. Later, Jacob's twelve sons produced the twelve tribes of Israel, but only Rachel's sons, Joseph and Benjamin, received God's full blessing: Jesus' lineage follows that line. The New Testament parable of the sheep and goats also addresses this problem of inheritance. The parable explains that, although both the sheep and the goats have the same Heavenly Father, only one group will inherit the Kingdom of God. Thomas Jefferson had a legal family which inherited his property, but he also supported the children produced through his liaison with one of his slaves. Yet
despite such precedent, modern society dictates that a man have only one wife. Therefore, even though Mr. Marblehall's actions represent the attitudes of many before him, his method of killing time breaks civil and moral law. As long as his duplicity remains secret, however, Mr. Marblehall's position in society stays safe.

The narrator suggests, however, that Mr. Marblehall's secret may be short lived. If his second son ever follows him back to the ancestral home, "then everything will come out" (190). The responses to the revelation will be varied. Publicly, "at first, no one will believe it"; the two wives will "topple over" and the two sons will "cringe"; and the legal system "will say, 'Stop! How dare you!'" (190). These incidents further shatter the myth that outward appearance indicates inner goodness. Because Mr. Marblehall's family have lived in Natchez so long, the townspeople evaluate him by his social position. They know him well enough to dismiss him. In the long run, however, society at large remains unconcerned about Mr. Marblehall's two lives: "Not an inhabitant of Natchez, Mississippi" cares (191). Such indifference also overturns the myth that the legal system protects and punishes all equally. Laws alone can do nothing. If society chooses to overlook someone's legal indiscretion, not out of mercy, but out of apathy, then the laws represent empty standards.
Another myth undercut by Mr. Marblehall's dualism requires life's measurement in absolutes. Man's life equals the sum of so many days after which he dies; man ages because time kills him. But by living two separate yet simultaneous existences, Mr. Marblehall advantageously manipulates time. Postponing fatherhood until his later years, he extends his youth and his sense of immortality; family names and fathers reach posterity through their sons. By living two lives at once, Mr. Marblehall "multiplie[s] his life, and plunging deeper and deeper he speculates upon some glorious finish, a great explosion of revelations . . . the future" (191). Finally, by constructing "a past, a memory" Mr. Marblehall "stores up life" (191). Rather than suffer the vagaries of passing time, Mr. Marblehall "kills time" by living twice. The narrator in "A Memory" freely recalls the memory of her true love "in a retarded, dilated, timeless fashion" (151). Mr. Marblehall similarly controls time by freeing it and himself from the absolute measurement of life in finite terms.

Disregard for law, the need to manipulate time, and the confrontation arising when two lifestyles collide continue in "Flowers for Marjorie," a story which includes characters that Alfred Appel calls the "low point in Miss
Welty's vision of human isolation.11156 Howard and Marjorie move to the city. Unable to find work and support his family, Howard stabs his wife, killing both her and their unborn child. Confused and in shock, he then roams the city. While wandering, he visits Radio City and, as the ten millionth visitor, he receives roses and a key to the city. He then goes home and sees a policeman standing outside the apartment building where he lives. He tells the policeman that a dead woman waits upstairs. Offering to escort him to the apartment, the officer treats Howard not as the perpetrator of a crime, but as a child who fears the dark.

"Flowers for Marjorie" provides the logical continuation of the major themes of time and change. In "Clytie," Octavia avoids time and change by locking it out of her family's home. "Old Mr. Marblehall" figuratively kills time by doubling his experiences. He easily transcends the worlds of Southern aristocracy and average populace and breaks the law, but no one cares. In "Flowers for Marjorie," Howard's struggle with time and change not only causes the death of his wife and child, but also illustrates the aftermath of colliding worlds and cultures. In specific, this story shows what may happen when the Southern heritage cannot merge with the present.  

156Appel 34.
Welty additionally unifies the collection by using water imagery. In "A Memory," "Clytie," and "Old Mr. Marblehall," water appears in its natural state. The lake represents the common water, available to all regardless of social or economic background, and remains constant though the town around it might change. Centered in the road during a summer rain, Clytie finds unity with the natural surroundings; diverted rain provides the vehicle for Clytie's death. The Mississippi River eroding Mr. Marblehall's property seems an immutable landmark, but over the years, almost imperceptibly, it changes course. In "Flowers for Marjorie," water imagery foreshadows the story's major confrontation. The park where Howard waits has no natural body of water or heat-relieving rain, but only a man-made "drinking fountain" whose artificially piped water "stem[s] with a troubled sound up into the glare of the day" (192). The scene parallels the struggle between the natural flow of life and technological change facing Howard and Marjorie.

Howard and Marjorie represent the Southern way of life. Hailing from rural Victory, Mississippi, they once formed part of an established community where "all girls were like Marjorie" (194). There, as the three ladies and Lily who also live in Victory illustrate, lifelong neighbors offered support, however motivated, through difficult times. Life had rituals that elevated events
into stories. Even the indigent Mortons had the comfort of familiar surroundings. People addressed each other by name, recognized each other by sight, and knew each other's family history. Regardless of one's circumstances or sanity, neighbors offered acceptance.

For Howard and Marjorie, such life no longer exists, and they become strangers among many. The story opens by describing a nameless he, "one of the modest . . . who would always have preferred waiting to one side. . . ." who is standing among "a row of feet" (192) belonging to other nameless, faceless people. Eleven paragraphs elapse before this anonymous character speaks to someone who knows him, and only then does the reader learn this character's name, Howard. Using Howard's nondescript persona and impotency, Welty further undercuts the social myth that success indicates goodness. Although Howard has already murdered his wife, he achieves positive affirmation when an unnamed woman gives him the symbols of esteem, power and celebrity: roses, a key to the city and a nationally broadcast interview. Howard receives these tokens not for some heroic deed, but for randomly being "the ten millionth person to enter Radio City" (205). Even then he obtains the trapping of celebrity anonymously, for the presenter must ask him his "name, address, and phone number. Are you married?" (205). Awarding a probable murderer the symbols of honor renders them meaningless.
Other myths which the story addresses involve assimilation, the instant success story of an immigrant who makes his fortune by conquering cultural differences, and the myth of leaving home and finding "greener pastures." Howard and Marjorie never leave America, but the cultural differences between rural Mississippi and the bustling city render them immigrants as well. When Marjorie recognizes Howard and calls him by name, she gives him a reference point in a sea of strangers. She also creates his greatest sense of failure and frustration by constantly reminding him of the duties his native culture requires him to perform.

In Southern families, the husband traditionally provides the money necessary for feeding, clothing, housing and defending his dependents. Howard fails miserably in all areas. The couple survives in a series of one room apartments equipped only with a couch, chair, bed, trunk, saucepan and butcher knife. They never know the source or time of the next meal; Howard has not worked in "six months" to "a year ago . . . back in Mississippi" (197). Although he frequently visits Miss Ferguson at the WPA office, he only makes a pretense of job hunting because he has lost all hope of finding a job. Howard succumbs to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Moving from the slow pace of Southern culture into the fast paced city also finds Howard ill-equipped to perform
workplace responsibilities. Constantly being the only unemployed man in a room full of working people and repeatedly having to ask for a job make Howard the outcast and injure his ego. Consequently, Howard feels comfortable with the other unemployed men, "the row of feet rest[ing] beside his own" on the park bench (192), and even begins copying "his pose and voice somehow from the agitators in the park" (197); their own hopelessness makes his more bearable. The other unemployed men give Howard a sense of community. Because he has a wife and the promise of children, however, Howard must do better than the group he accompanies. Furthermore, Howard feels that he is losing his wife's affection and attention to a stranger represented by the unborn child. He thinks Marjorie has become "remote . . . or it might have been the excess of life . . . that made her never notice any more the single and lonely life" he feels (194). Coming home to Marjorie and her wifely expectations constantly reminds Howard of the Southern way of life and emphasizes his failed responsibility. Howard perceives Marjorie as a remnant of a past life and a hindrance to assimilation in his new surroundings. Without a family, whether or not he works steadily affects only him.

In killing Marjorie, Howard parallels Mr. Marblehall who desiring to "kill time," nonetheless endured "clocking nights" (197) when time passes "like a bug in his ear"
Howard also wishes to control time and the onslaught of change it brings. The story abounds in time imagery. When Howard asks Marjorie, "How long before your time comes," she in turn asks him, "Can't you keep track of the time? Always asking me . . ." (195). Howard hears "the ticks of the cheap alarm clock" become "louder as he buried his face against her, feeling new desperation every moment in the time-marked softness and pulse of her sheltering body" (197).

These statements reveal Howard's inability to govern biological time as well as chronological time, a weakness he admits: "Time isn't as easy to count up as you think!" (197). Swinging the empty purse "like a little pendulum" reveals the association "time is money." Howard has nothing, and as he tells Marjorie, the birth of their baby "doesn't mean that everything else is going to happen and change." Angry, he lashes out at her optimism: "You may not know it, but you're the only thing left in the world that hasn't stopped!" (198). After Marjorie's murder, Howard hears "the clock tick . . . dreadfully," and throws "it out the window. Only after a long time" he hears "it hit the courtyard below" (200). When he returns to the apartment, he sees the clock on the sidewalk: "It lay on its face, and scattered about in every direction were wheels and springs and bits of glass" (207). Later, as he and the policeman speak beneath the "street intersection,"
the "chimes of a clock" strike six" and "even the policeman did not seem for a moment to be sure of the time and place they were in, but had to consult his own watch and pocket effects" (208). The broken alarm clock represents the disjointed time of Howard's world. The policeman, examining his own watch, shows synchronous time with the public clock. Even though Howard imagines everything stopped, the rest of the world continues. Howard has nothing left in his life but despair.

Marjorie's death also introduces the myth that true love conquers all. Virtually every children's fairy tale ends with the promise that the characters who marry will "live happily ever after." Bruno Bettleheim explains that fairy tales provide children with touchstones with which to face life.157 Another name for these touchstones is myth. Welty fills this story with images alluding to the myth of true love and superimposes over it the reader's knowledge that Howard has murdered Marjorie and the unborn child. Howard encounters numerous reminders of true love as he journeys aimlessly through the city. At least two shops exhibit pictures of the Virgin Mary. One store places the religious pictures above displays containing scatological humor: "miniature toilets and night jars . . . used in

157According to Bruno Bettleheim, "myths and fairy tales were derived from or give symbolic expression to, initiation rites" or "'models of human behavior.'" Bruno Bettleheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Vintage, 1977) 35.
playing jokes." Centering the display is "a bulb attached to a long tube, with a penciled sign," saying "Palpitator-the Imitation Heart. Show her you Love her" (201). On the subway, Howard sees "advertisements" showing "many couples embracing and smiling," then hears "a beggar . . . with a cane" sing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart' like a blind man" (203). The image of the innocent mother surrounded by profane, empty signs of love and the pictures of anonymous couples who, inanely smiling, are oblivious to the plight of the beggar further illustrate the difference between myth and reality. Howard and Marjorie do not live happily ever after.

Or do they? When Harold first comes home from the park, he sees the pansy on Marjorie's coat. As he watches, the flower loses "its identity of flower-size," and he yanks "the pansy from Marjorie's coat," rends "its petals off," and dispersing them, stomps them into the floor (195). As Marjorie fails to respond, Howard realizes "that he had not acted at all, that he had only had a terrible vision" (195). Howard's imaginary actions and his compressed, disjointed sense of time make him an unreliable central consciousness. He distinguishes between impulse and reality with difficulty, and, of course, his sense of time does not match standard time measurement. Quite possibly, what Howard thinks has transpired occurred only in his mind.
"Flowers for Marjorie also carries further the myth of law and order raised in "Old Mr. Marblehall." Mr. Marblehall commits a "victimless" crime with non-violent results. The authorities will overlook his transgression, or at worst, reprimand him with an effective, "Stop! How dare you!" (190). The policeman's incredulity at Howard's confession and his close proximity to the scene of a violent crime belies the myth that laws protect the innocent. In reality, laws are but conventions which society agrees to acknowledge. Murder in a small town is a monumental occurrence. Because residents usually have knowledge of the population at large, any crime committed against one is committed against all. In a large city where murder and other violent crimes become common occurrences, victims represent impersonal statistics rather than friends. Clytie's death, although significantly newsworthy in Farr's Gin, would be unimportant in a city.

The next story, which by default lends its name to the entire collection, continues several images introduced in earlier stories.158 As "A Curtain of Green" opens, the people of Larkin's Hill wait for impending rain. Usually

158Suzanne Marrs quotes a letter from John Woodburn which says that the publisher "wanted a better title for the book" that Welty had simply named "Stories." As Marrs explains, "Doubleday wanted a story title for the title of the book, and 'A Curtain of Green' was the only title that did not provoke serious objections." Marrs 169.
"a regular thing" that "would come about two o'clock in the afternoon," the rain makes this day thirst after five o'clock (209). A recent widow, Mrs. Larkin, who like the Farrs resides in the town bearing the family name, helplessly watched as their gigantic "fragrant chinaberry tree, suddenly tilting," crushes her husband to death in his car (214). Mrs. Larkin is also another recipient of misguided charity. At first, the townspeople visit "the widow with decent frequency" (212). They notice Mrs. Larkin has "never once been seen anywhere else" (210) but her garden nor has she offered "a single one of her fine flowers to any of them" (212). Interpreting her private grieving as a sign she "had not appreciated" their efforts (212), the neighbors assume that if they should become "sick and die," Mrs. Larkin "would never send a flower" (212). Making her and her garden the topic of judgmental gossip avenges their unappreciated efforts.

Mrs. Larkin and the neighbors represent opposing views. The women, like the clients in Leota's beauty parlor, believe imposing order on nature creates beauty; they brush "studiously at their hair" (212) and shut the windows against rain (219). Because their landscaping creates "an appropriate vista," "an effect of restfulness," and a "harmony of color" (210), they think that Mrs. Larkin's wild, natural vegetation resembles "a sort of jungle" (212) and has no place in an urban setting. They
assume "beauty" is a goal "she did not strive for . . . in her garden," and derive no pleasure from "looking at such a place" (210).

Mrs. Larkin's "overflowering garden" (211), however, accurately reflects her inner life. The "tangled garden" with "thick, irregular sloping beds of plants" appears "disreputable and heedless" (210). Mrs. Larkin's "streaming and tangled" hair, her "untidy overalls" (210) "now almost of a color with the leaves" (212), her "drooping walk" (213), her deep partaking of the morning dew where she begins each day "almost invisibly submerged . . . among the plants" (210), and her own "heedless form" (212) illustrate their close association.

These viewpoints appear diametrically opposed until Jamey, a yard boy, appears. One day as they work in the garden, Mrs. Larkin comes upon Jamey, kneeling motionless among the flowers. An "impossible dream" or "beautiful vision" prevents him from acknowledging her presence (215). His reverie infuriates Mrs. Larkin and reveals her true motive for working in the garden. The chinaberry tree crushing her husband's car caused his premature death. She relives that "memory . . . easily, without any prelude of warning or even despair" (213). Although Mrs. Larkin helplessly watched her husband die, she avenges his death by taking the most beautiful in nature and preventing its full beauty. Vines and grasses hide the flowers and screen
the garden from public view. Hoeing the plants before they fully mature or pruning the garden back before the flowers bloom defeats their purpose. Anger and resentment inspire her feverish work; indiscriminately planting "every kind of flower that she could find or order from a catalogue" gives sense of dominion. In this way, the garden grants her catharsis.

Jamey's pleasure in her garden of pain, however, undermines her purpose. Like Howard, whose wife's continual hope infuriates him, Mrs. Larkin finds "hopelessness almost approaching ferocity" germinating "with alarming quickness about her" (216). In that moment, she, too, realizes that "everything had stopped" (214). Gripping the hoe "tightly, tightly, as though convinced the wood could feel" and she could "indent its surface with pain" (216), Mrs. Larkin raises the tool above her head. Convinced that Jamey is nature's disciple, she contemplates his decapitation:

Such a head she could strike off, intentionally, so deeply did she know, from the effect of a man's danger and death, its cause in oblivion; and so helpless was she, too helpless to defy the workings of accident of life and death, of unaccountability. . . . Life and death . . . which now meant nothing to her but which she was compelled continually to wield with both her hands, ceaselessly asking, Was it not possible to compensate? to punish? to protest? (216-17).

Mrs. Larkin's questions imply the broken myths of love, justice, and retribution. A popular myth stating "love conquers all" finds a corollary in Mrs. Larkin's belief
that her love can protect her husband. As Mrs. Larkin watches the falling tree, she murmurs, "You can't be hurt" (214), but the tree continues falling. Still believing that her love protects him, she waits motionless on the porch as if all were only a bad dream from which she would awaken. When she realizes nothing can change, she decides "that the accident was incredible" (214). The empty myth, "Her love for her husband was keeping him safe," is overturned in her husband's death (214).

Mrs. Larkin's situation also illustrates a myth of compensation. Society promises that the punishment assigned those who do wrong will in some way compensate the victim. Had a person killed Mr. Larkin, his wife could take some comfort in knowing that the perpetrator would face justice. Had storms or high winds struck the area and caused the tree to fall, perhaps Mrs. Larkin could have understood mitigating circumstances. Because the tree struck her husband's car "exactly so as to crush him to death" (214), Mrs. Larkin must consider it a deliberate and calculated act. Insurance agents call such freak occurrences acts of God or nature. Nature, therefore, in executing Mrs. Larkin's husband, must now offer retribution. Consequently, if Mrs. Larkin wants vengeance, she must retaliate against God, for she has no one to petition for redress. As she discovers, her efforts are futile: "Against that which was inexhaustible, there was no
defense" (218). She, like Prometheus, becomes trapped in a never-ending conflict which starts fresh each dawn.

As Mrs. Larkin prepares to bring the hoe down on Jamey's neck, the tardy rain begins and distracts her from her purpose. She lowers the hoe and watches the landscape. The rain gives her a new perspective. Having a light "different from sunlight," it makes "everything . . . gleam unreflecting from within itself in its quiet arcade of identity" (217). As in earlier stories, the rain's appearance assuages and cleanses. Mrs. Larkin lets it fall upon her like a "broken . . . daily levee" spilling "tenderness . . . through her sagging body" (218). Its baptismal process washes away her anger and guilt, and reconciles her with nature. Jamey, startled by the rain, prepares to leave when Mrs. Larkin suddenly faints.

Calling her name, Jamey revives Mrs. Larkin, and his actions provide the first collection's hints of mature charity. As Mrs. Larkin lies on the ground, Jamey recalls "how something had filled him with stillness when he felt her standing there behind him looking down at him, and he would not have turned around at that moment for anything in the world" (219). Obviously misunderstanding the intent of Mrs. Larkin's vigil beside him, he charitably assumes something positive motivates her action and, without hesitation, helps her. Knowing her intent, however, may have changed his response. Although Mrs. Larkin had the
advantage before, "at this unseen place, it was he who stood looking at poor Mrs. Larkin" (219). Although Mrs. Larkin believes she wields a powerful force in her garden, nature once again beats her, this time in the garden of her own design. The same impetus which felled the chinaberry tree and killed her husband also initiates the falling rain and thwarts her proposed violence to Jamey.

The summer heat in "A Curtain of Green" gives way to winter sunlight in "A Visit of Charity." Not even "mid-morning sun" (220) offsets the permeating cold. As in earlier stories, the environment reflects the inner lives of the characters. The story takes place "on the outskirts of town" (220) at the Old Ladies Home, a place which removes women from normal social interactions. The "whitewashed brick" building, "reflect[ing] the winter sunlight like a block of ice" (220), thinly disguises the woefully inadequate interior. Inside, the water imagery changes from ice to unpleasant prevailing dampness. The "bulging linoleum" (221) floor indicates previous flooding. In the rooms, "everything smelled wet—even the bare floor," and the wicker furniture "felt soft and damp" (221). The receptionist-nurse, whose cropped hair looks "like a sea wave" (221), exemplifies the impersonal atmosphere. Wearing an austere "white uniform," she looks "as if she were cold" (220) and calls the old ladies
"residents" (221). Rather than mentioning a potted plant by its common name, *german ivy* or *miller's dust*, the nurse uses the scientific name, "*multiflora cineraria*" (221). The nurse's appearance makes Marian, a visiting Camp Fire Girl, wrap "her hair behind her ears, as she did when it was time to study Science" (221).

Marian's outward appearance also reveals her inner nature. Her "straight, yellow hair . . . hanging down loose" (220) reflects natural, unaffected childhood. The "pointed white cap" like the ones "all the little girls were wearing that year" (220) indicates that Marian, like Howard, seeks assimilation into her peer group. As a Camp Fire Girl, Marian must "pay a visit to some old lady" (220). The receptionist-nurse asks which resident Marian wishes to visit. Since Marian knows no one, the nurse randomly selects a room occupied by two patients and escorts Marian down the corridor.

Paralleling the Farr and the Marblehall homes, the nursing home room is "dark" because "the window shade [is] down, and the only door [is] shut" (223). The smallness of the room and its clutter appall Marian. In the manner of a fairy tale, one occupant welcomes her at the door, snatches Marian's cap, thanks her for the pretty flowers, and asks, "Did you come to be our little girl for a while?" (223). The cantankerous other woman, Addie, remains bedridden. Eventually the cloying atmosphere and the women's
interactions prove too much for Marian, and she flees. As Marian runs down the corridor, she passes the nurse and ignores a perfunctory dinner invitation. Once outside, Marian stoops beside a bush, rescues a red apple she had previously secreted there, hails a bus, and eats the apple on the way home.

Although Appel finds "A Visit of Charity" incorporates allusions to "the myth of descent to the Underworld," the more important myth in relation to this study is a variation on the Edenic story and centers upon Marian's belief that she and the old ladies in the nursing home have nothing in common. By leaving the institution's confines and boarding the bus headed back to mainstream society, she thinks she will leave that world behind. Welty explodes the myth, however, when she has Marian eat the apple. Long a token of man's mortality, the apple symbolically verifies Marian's experiences in the old women's room. There, becoming acclimated to the surroundings, Marian manifests the physiological aspects of aging. Marian's "heart beat more and more slowly, her hands got colder and colder"; her hearing and sight are affected as well (223). The longer Marian remains in the room, the more pronounced her transformation becomes: she cannot "remember her name" or what she studies in school (224).

159Appel 40.
As Marian experiences the physical signs of aging, the old women display childish characteristics. While talking to Marian, one woman "rock[s] so high that her black comfort shoes lifted off the floor like a little child's" (226), and then she bickers with Addie. Although roommates, they are not friends. Like children, they vie for Marian's attention. Addie beckons Marian close in order to tell a secret. Not to be outdone, the other tells Marian that something "[i]s the matter with old Addie" (227). Addie, crying, "whimpers . . . like-- a little lamb" (228). As Marian suddenly decides to go, the ambulatory woman follows and, like a little child, whiningly begs for "a penny for candy . . . just a nickel-- a penny" (229). Even when one woman tells Marian, "I was a girl like you, I went to school and all" (226), Marian does not recognize the full implication. The converse will also be true: one day she, too, will be an old woman.

Marian's frantic escape from the resident's clutching grasp, indicating that she denies the interrelationship of their lives, subverts another example of the Edenic myth. According to the Old Testament story, Eve immediately received full knowledge at the moment she ate the apple. By running away, Marian, unlike Eve, indicates that she has learned nothing at all from the experience signified by her apple.
The women's lives at the home overturn several myths about aging which the exterior whitewash represents. The well-manicured building and landscaped grounds provide a favorable impression. Marian should find, therefore, a happy atmosphere where nice, white-haired women live in a netherworld of shuffleboard, bridge and crochet needles, and wait with open arms for visiting Campfire Girls. This myth of innocuous, painless geriatrics is subverted as Marian listens to Addie's angry words addressed to her unnamed roommate:

"You never went to school. You never came and you never went. You were never born! You don't know anything. Your head is empty, your heart and hands and your old black purse are all empty... and yet you talk, talk, talk, talk, talk all the time until I think I am losing my mind! Who are you? You are a stranger - a perfect stranger! Don't you know you're a stranger? Is it possible that they have actually done a thing like this to anyone - sent them in a stranger to talk and rock... Do they seriously suppose... I'll be living in the same room with a terrible old woman forever?" (226-7)

Addie's outburst achingly summarizes the loss of privacy, self-determination, physical mobility, and identity faced by those who, unlike Mr. Marblehall, have neither financial nor familial resources necessary to care for themselves. Addie, like Sister and Mrs. Larkin, has no one to petition for redress. Unlike Sister, however, she has nowhere else to go. The mobile woman retaliates by explaining to Marian that Addie pouts because no one remembers her birthday: no one remembers that Addie was ever born. When Addie begins to cry, Marian "wondered about her - wondered for a moment
as though there was nothing else in the world to wonder about. It was the first time such a thing had happened" (228).

The ambiguous statement is a characteristic of parables. What wondrous "thing" reveals itself to Marian? Had Marian never seen an old woman cry? Had Marian never known someone forgotten on a birthday? Had Marian never realized that outliving all other family members meant that no one living remembered you? Perhaps Marian sees adulthood does not guarantee complete autonomy concerning life's decisions. The institution treats these women as children by removing the symbols of adulthood. Previously, they chose their companions, lived where they liked, sought privacy at will, and had independence. Now, the home distills the ladies' lives in one room. Does Marian suddenly recognize that, as a fourteen-year-old little girl, she has more freedom than the older women? Furthermore, does she now have an idea of what society's expectations are for her when she finally reaches the age of dependence?

The story also implies the popular myth that being with youth makes one feel young. Several allusions to time, like those in previous stories, help convey this myth. Before Marian enters the women's room, the nurse mechanically consults a wristwatch, a device which imposes social order over time. As Marian enters the hall,
however, she notices "a smell . . . like the interior of a clock" (221). Instead of imposing artificial units of measurement, Marian becomes the standard of measurement, a transformation reiterated by her comments to the ladies. By telling them, "I can't stay but a minute-really I can't," her actions supersede the standard chronometer; she determines how long a minute is. When looking at Addie, Marian wonders at the woman's age, but in that room, time measured in years becomes irrelevant.

Finally, the title, "A Visit of Charity," indicates another myth the story addresses. Campfire Girls and similar service organizations require activities designed to develop participants' moral and social awareness. The average observer usually assumes the participants will exhibit those qualities, particularly, charity. Despite her white hat, a traditional sign that the wearer is a "good guy," Marian neglects the spirit of the assignment, for her actions do not stem from selfless pity, a need to give, or a sense of caring, a predominate theme of the first half of the collection. Marian's actions, which should exhibit charity, actually show her inward penury. She comes to the nursing home to earn points. Visiting an old lady earns three points; reading the Bible counts "double," bringing a plant as a gift adds "one extra point" (225). Little thought went into Marian's choice of plant since she does not know what it is or what it looks like,
and "she had forgotten to look at the plant herself before giving it away" (223). The *multiflora cineraria*, with its many blooms, looks full of life. In reality, it is close to death because it usually dies shortly after blooming. Furthermore, cineraria also suggests the name Cinderella, the girl whose moments of beauty were as temporal as the plant's blooms. As a non-rejuvenating window plant, the *cineraria* will survive an even shorter time in the room's darkness. The nameless woman greeting Marian at the door accepts the flowers at face value and calls them "pretty" (223). Addie, correctly perceiving the lack of sentiment the plant represents, calls the flowers, "stinkweeds" (223).

The myth of one's deeds accurately reflecting one's attributes obviously parallels the story of the publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18). Hoping to gain divine reward, the Pharisee approaches God with great sweeping statements about what good works he has performed. The publican, on the other hand, approaches God with no hidden agenda. The parable concludes by explaining that the publican was justified because "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (14). According to the myth informing the Camp Fire Girls' image, Marian's attitude should parallel that of the publican. As the story shows, however, Marian's motivations for action closely parallel those of the Pharisee.
A second Biblical parallel concerns the parable of the sheep and the goats where, in Matthew 25:40, Christ explains that in acts of charity, those works performed "unto the least of these my brethren [have been] done unto me." Throughout the story, the narrator compares Addie to a sheep. Addie "clear[s] her throat like a sheep bleating" (221), has "a bunchy white forehead and red eyes like a sheep," and "bleat[s], 'Who-are-you'; she is "the old woman like a sheep" (224), who makes "soft whimpers . . . like a lamb" (228). Addie's character, therefore, seems symbolic of the New Testament parable. The other obvious allusion to Christ occurs when Marian transverses the floor "as if she were walking on waves" (221). Marian has opportunity to be one of the "blessed" and give comfort, but her gift, including nothing of herself but her desire for social glory, designates her as a goat in sheep's clothing.

A gift of charity literally causes "The Death of a Traveling Salesman," as the next story in the collection shows. R. J. Bowman is a composite of previous characters. Like Clytie, Bowman seeks "some strange thing" which always "escape[s] him" (244). He, like Howard, becomes impotent in a strange world: unable to "state his case," or "move," he discovers that "there was nothing he could do" (241-243). Like Addie, his sickness and weak physical condition leave him "angry and helpless" (231). He and Mr.
Marblehall know both elegant and average housing. He most closely resembles Marian in attitude, for neither understands the workings of charity. Through Bowman, Welty confronts either by direct statement or by implication two myths of modern life: money can buy anything, and new supplants old.

Veteran traveling shoe salesman R. J. Bowman boasts a fourteen-year continuous service record until influenza hospitalizes him. Even though his heart begins leaping uncontrollably, Bowman continues his route toward Beulah. The road he takes changes from paved gravel to "dirt path" (231), which ultimately ends at "the edge of a ravine that fell away" (234). Although Bowman applies the brake "with all his strength" (235), technology proves no match for nature's gravity. The car goes over the edge. Leaving the symbols of modern life behind, Bowman walks to a "shotgun house" (235) and asks a woman for help. She explains they must wait for Sonny. When Sonny comes home from working Mr. Redmond's farm, he not only retrieves Bowman's car, but he also turns it back in the right direction. Bowman then asks to stay the night. After ascertaining that Bowman "ain't no revenuer come sneak'in' here" (247), Sonny returns to Redmond's to "borry some fire" (247) even though Bowman offers his matches. While the woman prepares dinner, Sonny and Bowman retrieve homemade mash and drink by the fire. After dinner, the couple retires leaving Bowman to sleep
on the floor. Bowman decides he cannot stay and places all his currency on the table. Running toward his car, Bowman feels his heart make "tremendous explosions like a rifle, bang bang bang" (253) and sinks to the ground.

Until his illness, Bowman had personified the modern success story in which technological luxury and financial gain reduce everything to dollar amounts. Over the years, he stays at "better hotels in bigger towns" (232). He favors fashionable "wide brimmed black hats" (233), and gives his "nurse a really expensive bracelet" (232). He believes paying "the hotel doctor his bill" (232) buys his health. In short, Bowman uses cash to gain prestige, achieve popularity, buy affection, and offset illness.

When the successful businessman confronts a natural man, Bowman must reassess his sense of economy. After Bowman's car slides down the ravine, he is ready to pay for its rescue. Bowman thinks Sonny will more readily help him if he could "offer explanations and show money--at least appear either penitent or authoritative" (241). When Sonny retrieves the wayward car, Bowman insists he "pay" Sonny for everything. Even though Sonny retorts, "We don't take money for such," Bowman again insists, "I want to pay" (246-7). Bowman then asks to spend the night. By offering, insisting and then asking for something else, Bowman indicates his belief that taking money obligates the actor to the person paying. Bowman does not understand
that kindness is not for sale. Putting a price on it, reducing it to numerical standards, insults the giver.

By Bowman's material standards these people live in poverty: a "shot gun house" (235), no electricity, tattered clothing, meager food. No amount of money buys what this couple freely offer him. Taking Bowman to the buried mash, Sonny proves trust; sharing a meal provides fellowship; taking him at his word shows respect; helping him when he cannot help himself denotes charity; letting him sleep on the floor indicates equality. Despite realizing "these people cherished something here that he could not see" (246), Bowman stubbornly equates value with tangible objects. For all the success he may have elsewhere, he has not yet bought loyalty, pride, the physical strength of manual labor, the self-satisfaction of craftsmanship or the intimacy of a "fruitful marriage." Bowman realizes

There was nothing remote or mysterious here—only something private... But the memory of the woman's waiting silently by the cold hearth, of the man's stubborn journey a mile away to get fire, and how they finally brought out their food and drink and filled the room proudly with all they had to show, was suddenly too clear and too enormous within him for response (251).

His realization, like the half-clear, half-smokey lamp beneath which Bowman leaves his money, seems only partial. In city business Bowman may have authority, but here his currency is worthless.

Related to the myth that money can buy everything is the myth that anything new immediately supercedes the old
fashioned: newer is better. Bowman's sample case with the new line of shoes represents the ever changing trends of modern day. Sonny's "old military . . . Confederate coat" (241) symbolizes a way of life associated with the agrarian economy that era represents. Bowman's Ford, a symbol of technologically advanced transportation, is contrasted with Sonny's mule. Although slow and old fashioned, the mule proves better than the car. After retrieving the car from the ravine, the mule positions the car in the right direction for the return trip. Furthermore, a mule is not particular about the condition of the path it travels; a car seldom performs long or well on a rutted road. Modern travelers who cover many miles require road maps and street signs; people who consistently use rural thoroughfares need no artificial guides. Similarly, Bowman's matches would have been a quick, easy solution to the cold in the house. To depend upon chemically-produced fire, although achieving the same purpose, is to lose integrity. Things of importance require effort and respect. Bowman represents those who rushingly embrace any labor reducing device. Such conveniences make life seem easier and faster, but by reducing physical exertion, they exact greater stress. Bowman may be relatively young externally, but the stress of fast-paced living coupled with physical inactivity ages his heart.
Sonny and his wife, however, respect the environment and the elements. This respect for the elements implies a myth introduced in "A Curtain of Green." Modern man spends much energy subjugating nature, as if nature represented an adversarial rather than a cooperative force. Bowman's attitude echoes this myth. He displays impatience with the weather: "The sun, keeping its strength here even in winter, stayed at the top of the sky" and "made him feel angry and helpless" (231). He abuses his health. He stays in rooms "eternally stuffy in summer and drafty in winter" (232), and he resumes work too soon after having "a very high fever" which left him "weakened and pale" and unable to "think clearly" (231-2). He berates the road for reverting to natural dirt and mud. He finds the natural landscape "desolate" because there is "not a house in sight" (232). The sound of his own heartbeat shocks him. The stillness "of the fields" and the wind moving through the house fill him with a sense of "mysterious, quiet, cool danger" (239). He "avert[s] his head" when a mule looks at him (242). In short, Bowman despises rural life, nature, and his own place as a mortal man in it.

Bowman's only exception to this attitude occurs as he watches Sonny's wife sing. Welty uses unifying water imagery to express his momentary change of heart. Employing lake and river metaphors, Bowman conveys the depth of his loneliness. He thinks "of his heart now as a
deep lake, it should be holding love like other hearts. It should be flooded with love. There would be a warm spring day and a whole river would cover your feet and rise higher and take your knees in whirlpools" (243). His revelation, however, is brief. Shortly after his exclamations, the "insinuating" (245) noise of a stream frightens him.

Sonny and his wife, on the other hand, overturn the myth of rural inferiority. They perceive nature's usefulness not as something to be wrested but to be shared. Rather than spending effort subjugating nature, Sonny and his wife live compatibly with it. Their "shotgun house" may not be luxurious, but it "perche[s] on the hill" (235). The "heaped up vine" covering "the roof, light and green" (235) insulates the house in winter and provides shade in summer. The fireplace "hearth and smoked chimney" comes from slate "ribbing the hills" (239). Sounds of nature "seemed to enter and move familiarly through the house. The wind used the open hall" (239). Sonny's "muddy blue pants" and "wide filthy black hat" signify the relationship between him and the earth which provides his living. The dogs travel with Sonny, enjoy the fire with him, then eat the leftovers from dinner. Even the mule, "in the window," shares in this equilibrium as "the woman look[s] serenely back at the mule, with only satisfaction on her face" (242). Sonny buries his mash in the dirt of "a wilderness
of thicket" (249). Even their belongings prove compatibility. They have "yellow cowhide" (238) chairs and a "bone-handled knife" (250). Sonny and his wife live productive lives without waste or needless hostility to their environment. Although their lifestyle seems primitive, they practice good stewardship.

Furthermore, bereft of artificial cosmetics, Sonny's wife appears old because she works outside, has "weather-beaten skin" and "curious dulled eyes" (236). Bowman, "who automatically judged a woman's age on sight," and "set her age at fifty" (236), evaluates everything according to the "modern standard." When Sonny's wife does not engage in social small talk, he thinks she is "stupid" (237). Her "formless garment" made of "gray coarse material, rough-dried from a washing," and her "shoes . . . like bundles" (236) represent the ultimate in unchic attire. Bowman later discovers that outward appearance misleads him. She is pregnant, and probably younger than he.

The apparent contrast between wealth and poverty suggested by the characters' differing lifestyles also alludes to two New Testament parables in which possessions determine personal identity. The first (Luke 12), concerns a rich fool who, obsessed with health, food, and clothes, believes accumulated tangible wealth equally indicates spiritual riches. The second (Matthew 19) tells of a wealthy administrator seeking entrance to heaven on a
contractual basis rather than accepting entrance as a gift. The administrator does not understand that neither actions nor big offerings can buy membership into heaven, a teaching found frequently in the New Testament.\footnote{See also John 4:10, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8.}

"The Death of a Traveling Salesman" also provides multiple allusions to Isaiah 62, a prophecy about the New Jerusalem, heaven.\footnote{"I will not hold my peace . . . and I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth" (1). "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be term Desolate, but . . . thy land [shall be called] Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee and thy land shall be married" (4). "I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured: but they that gathered it shall eat it . . . and they that brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness" (8-9). "Prepare the way of the people, cast up the highway, gather out the stones" (10). "And they shall call them, The holy people . . . and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken" (12).}

The burning lamp of salvation parallels the wife's burning lamp after Sonny retrieves fire from the hill; and both the biblical narrator and Bowman are unable to rest. More significantly, the biblical passage explains that a land previously considered "forsaken" and "desolate" becomes known as Beulah, "the land of God's Delight." Bowman originally calls the hill country where Sonny lives "desolate" (232). He realizes later that the land has the riches of a "fruitful marriage" (251). In Welty's story, "Beulah" may represent "heaven," but the salesman's intended destination represents a
physical place, a false Beulah. As Appel notes, while "Beulah brings to mind the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, and the gospel hymns, it is also an actual place: Beulah, Boliver County, N. W. Mississippi." Welty's story and the Bible dispel the same myths: money and status are catalysts for happiness, and those who are closer to God receive greater financial and social blessing. The further away Bowman travels from Beulah, Mississippi, the closer he journeys to a spiritual Beulah, represented by Sonny and his wife, where money and status have little significance, but happiness and personal satisfaction abound. Bowman, insisting he must pay his own way in any situation, cannot bear the indebtedness gratitude brings. Because Bowman cannot accept the lifestyle Sonny and his wife symbolize, he returns to his car which is now headed back toward the false, earthly Beulah.

Welty completes the story's parable format by adding to the myth-breaking a traditional, ambiguous ending. Bowman feels "his heart beg[in] to give off tremendous explosions," sinks "in fright onto the road" with "his bags falling about him," "cover[s] his heart with both hands to keep anyone from hearing the noise it made," (253). The title suggests the most probable story ending: Bowman dies. Other possibilities, however, remain. He could be having a simple anxiety attack. Bowman's symptoms, the rapid heart

162 Appel 262.
beat which occurs spontaneously, the sensations of feeling
and hearing his heartbeat, and the weakness in
extremities, could also indicate tachycardia, a cardiac
condition often initiated by stress. The frightened
patient usually reacts just as Welty depicts Bowman, but
the condition is generally non life-threatening and
responds well to a daily low dosage of digoxin or other
comparable drug. Whether Bowman physically dies, or
whether he gives up the life of a traveling salesman
ultimately remains for each reader to decide.

The solitary "old drummer long on the road" (231) and
the fast-paced career of R. J. Bowman's memory reappear in
"Powerhouse," the story of a black musician and his band.
As the story opens, Powerhouse and his band perform for "a
white dance" (255) in Alligator, Mississippi. While they
play "Pagan Love Song," Powerhouse remarks he has received
a telegram telling him Gypsy, his wife, has died. After
playing several sets, the band declares a midnight
intermission, and walks in the torrential rain to the World
Cafe in Negrotown. There Powerhouse repeats the telegram's
purported message, embellishing the details. When the
waitress presses him to produce the telegram, he admits it
never existed. Several blacks talk to the band members,
but Powerhouse pays little attention. On the way back to
the white dance, the drummer suggests Powerhouse call
Gypsy. Powerhouse declines. After returning, the band retunes the instruments and plays "Somebody Loves Me."

The final song Powerhouse plays seems indicative of the story's purpose: to show the difference between the adulation of fans and serious love. Appel believes the central point of the story "explores the communal involvement in the process of primitive comic myth-making".¹⁶³ Through Powerhouse's character, Welty continues exploring themes of alienation, charity, identity, and truth using familiar images of water and time, in a story which overturns myths of public life.¹⁶⁴

One of the first myths concerns the attitudes of whites toward blacks, which Welty also addresses in "The Hitchhikers." In that story, an alleged murderer receives hotel accommodations rather than share a jail cell with a black man. In "Powerhouse," fame elevates performers above ethnic barriers. As the narrator explains, "When any group, any performers come to town . . . people always come out and hover near" (255-6). At the white dance,

¹⁶³Appel 36. Of course, other arguments as well can be made for what constitutes the central message of the tale. There is evidence to support that "Powerhouse" also comments on the differing roles of the artist and the performer, but this topic seems more suited for later exploration.

¹⁶⁴In "On Welty, Her Style, and Her Audience," Harriet Pollack says, "Powerhouse is an opaque parable." Pollack, however, neither addresses her reasons for using the term parable, nor cites the elements of the story which she believes comprise parabolic form. Welty: A Life in Literature 60.
eventually "everybody, laughing as if to hide a weakness," gives Powerhouse "a written request" (256) and "stands around the band and watches Powerhouse" (258). The social integration ceases at intermission when, like the midnight hour in fairy tales, the celebrated band members become ordinary Negroes who must leave the "white" hall, "step outside in the drenching rain" (262) and walk to a Negrotown diner. The "hundred dark, ragged silent, delighted Negroes" who "come from under the eaves of the hall and follow them wherever they go" respect the band. Not only can these men play, but they have been the only blacks at an all white social function in a small Mississippi town. The cafe kitchen workers recognizing Powerhouse from "a picture they seen" (266) crowd around. The "humble waitress" and "the other Negroes watching" (266) seem awestruck; the watching whites at the dance, however, express disdain. Despite their attention, they exchange looks which communicate, "you know how it is with them-Negroes-band leaders" (258).

Another social myth asserts that performers are larger than life. The public hears them "on records" (255). They can travel constantly, and always will "be somewhere else this time tomorrow" (256). Their performances seem "marvelous, frightening" (255). The audience "watch[es] them carefully," listens to "hear the least word" (256), and "follow[es] them wherever they go" (263). Powerhouse,
in particular, seems "powerful" (255), and "obscene" (254); he performs like a "sibyl" (255), "roars" (262), and smiles "dreamily" (271). The conversation between the band and the waitress expresses the general response to famous people. When the waitress asks if the man sitting at the table is "Mr. Powerhouse," the answers have religious implications; Scoot replies, "That is him in the flesh," and Valentine asks, "Would you like to touch him?" (265). For many, being in the presence of a celebrity almost equals being in the presence of God.

Welty dispels this myth of celebrity in several ways. First, she shows that fame cannot prevent the men from getting wet while walking in the rain. Next, she shows that life on the road can be unpleasant. The men eat at "silent, limp" cafes where "flies hang onto an obelisk-shaped ketchup bottle" (263). They have limited funds: Powerhouse admits he does not "carry around nothing without limit" (263). They have no privacy; when the band eats, people stand around and stare. Always strangers "just passing through" (265) strange places, Powerhouse forgets where they are this night. The band explains: "White dance, week night, raining, Alligator, Mississippi," but most significantly, they are "long ways from home" (265).

Secondly, through the imaginary character Uranus Knockwood, Welty personifies the effect prolonged absence has on family life. Because the men cannot "expect people
doing what they says over long distance" (262), they credit Uranus Knockwood with all the problems arising on the road. According to Powerhouse, Uranus "follow around after me," "bets my numbers," "sings my songs," and "gets close to my agent" (268-9); he takes their "wives when we gone," and "come in when we goes out" (269). After talking about his wife, "Powerhouse lets out a long sigh," but when Scoot asks if Powerhouse will "call up Gypsy long distance the way [he] did last night in that other place . . . just to see if she there at home," he forcefully says, "no" (272).

Finally, overturning the myth of fame, Welty compares Powerhouse's exciting yet imaginary horror story about his wife to real life. In the cafe, Powerhouse adds progressively gruesome details to the story that his wife is dead: Gypsy falls "kadoodling down . . . Ssssst! Plooeey! See, there she is in her little old nightgown, and her insides and brains all scattered around," and "Old Uranus Knockwood . . . look down and say Jesus! . . . Look here what I'm walking round in" (268). Powerhouse's story, although graphic, remains imaginary. Like Ruby Fisher in "A Piece of News," the waitress believes that information in writing must be truth. Powerhouse confesses his wife's death is a lie. His explanation, "Truth is something worse" (270), summarizes his traveling life in general. He must increasingly elaborate the gruesome details both to
keep the attention of the group and to shield himself from the numbing repetition of endless strange towns and strange people. In short, he invents excitement because his own personal experience, despite the public's perception, holds little more than banality. The myth of fame is subverted by a local nobody. As the band discusses Gypsy's demise, one of the local Negroes introduces Sugar-Stick Thompson. Although a non-swimmer, he recovered the bodies of fourteen white people from the bottom of July Creek. Thompson personally knows death-defying excitement and the terrible vision closely handling fourteen water-logged corpses brings. Although only locally famous, Thompson has experienced more real adventure than has Powerhouse.

Another myth which the story addresses concerns responsibility. The cafe where the band members discuss the origin of Powerhouse's telegram has a sign providing the blanket disclaimer, "Not Responsible" (263). In an attitude reminiscent of Mrs. Larkin's desire to place accountability for her husband's death, Scoot asks who is responsible for sending the telegram. By attributing his imaginary telegram to a non-existent person, Powerhouse transfers any responsibility for his marital problems. As the other band members chime in, they also relinquish any guilt they may deserve for any undesirable circumstances in their lives. By refusing responsibility, the band members parallel such previous characters as Mr. Marblehall,
Howard, Mrs. Larkin, Marian, and Bowman. Denying responsibility, however, does not necessarily guarantee absolution.

In "Powerhouse" Welty also reiterates the theme of charity. She does this by incorporating allusions to key scenes in "The Death of a Traveling Salesman." The initial reference occurs as Powerhouse performs during the first set at the white dance. Powerhouse, like Sonny and his wife, has integrity in his art. As the narrator explains, Powerhouse is a professional who puts forth the ultimate effort, even if "for an audience of one" (259). The white listeners at the dance, however, share Bowman's mortified response to Sonny's gift of generous hospitality: "when somebody, no matter who, gives everything, it makes people feel ashamed for him" (259). The second allusion takes place as Powerhouse leaves the cafe. He, like Bowman, "folds money" and puts it "under glass" (271) on the table as he goes out the door. By leaving money on Sonny's table, Bowman relegates the home to a place of business, and hospitality to a level of servitude. This attitude makes Sonny less than the master in his own home. On the other hand, tipping the waitress is a correct response. Cafe customers understand they hire the waitress to work for them while there, just as performers know that the people they play for also buy them. The act begins in an
understood contractual agreement, and the customer pays for services rendered.

The boisterous, daily travel of Negro musicians becomes the solitary winter pilgrimage of a Negro grandmother's trip through the woods in "A Worn Path." During the Christmas season, Phoenix Jackson, a very elderly grandmother, walks from the Old Natchez Trace into town to get medicine for her grandson who swallowed lye. Making the journey requires overcoming several natural and man-made obstacles. Although the trip taxes the old woman, she manages to reach the clinic and procure the needed medicine. As Phoenix leaves, the clinic attendant, showing her Christmas spirit, gives her a nickel. Combining it with the nickel she already has, Phoenix announces she will buy a paper windmill for her grandson before returning home. A simple tale of a grandmother's love for her grandson, this story "embodies the quintessence of selfless devotion and human endurance"165 and addresses the central myths by which society judges what makes and keeps life important.

One of the most obvious myths "A Worn Path" subverts is the superiority of America's youth culture over an elderly person's abilities or contributions to modern society. First appearing in "A Visit of Charity," this

attitude asserts that old people lead helpless, unproductive lives. In "A Worn Path," the hunter and the clinic attendant personify the modern attitude. Assuming Phoenix travels for the frivolous purpose of seeing Santa Claus, the hunter advises she "go on home" (282) and "stay home" so that "nothing will happen" to her (284). He assesses that town is too far for someone her age to travel. Furthermore, after helping her out of the ditch, he bullies her. First, he demonstrates the fierceness of his hunting dog, and then he points his gun at her. The clinic attendant also treats Phoenix disdainfully. She unfeelingly calls the old woman a "charity case," commands her to "speak up," and hurls rapid, successive questions without giving time for reply. Shouting, "Are you deaf?" (285-6) when Phoenix remains silent, the attendant provides a final indignity.

Phoenix proves that, even though she is old, she takes care of herself and capably performs meaningful tasks by compensating for her impairments. She begins her journey "in the early morning" (275) because she moves slowly. Although "an old woman without an education" (287), she uses internal landmarks to find her way through the woods. When her feet feel "like there are chains about" them and the "hill pleads" her to stay, then she knows she has successfully completed one stage of her trip and the oaks come next (277). When she gets to Natchez and finds the
landscape changed with Christmas decorations, she "depend[s] on her feet to know where to take her" (284). She knows which dangers to expect: "foxes, owls, beetles, jack rabbits, coons and wild animals . . . little bob-whites . . . big hogs" (276). Phoenix also knows what dangers will not hamper her: winter is "not the season for bulls" or snakes (279). As a precaution, she uses a cane made from an old umbrella both to keep her balance and "to rouse up any hiding things" (276) which might be in her path. When she does tumble into a ditch, she remains calm. When the hunter taunts her with the gun, she keeps his actions in perspective, telling him she has "seen plenty go off closer by, in my day, and for less than what I done" (283). When she realizes she has been unresponsive to the clinic personnel, she offers a dignified, calm apology and clearly answers their questions. Despite her age, she admirably cares for her grandson. In short, despite the limitations others would place on her, Phoenix leads an independent, productive life.

The second related myth concerns the incompatibility of old and new, a myth set up implicitly through such earlier stories as "Clytie" and "Flowers for Marjorie." Phoenix, whose age has "no telling" (282) and who "was too old at the Surrender" (287) to get an education, is "the oldest people" (278) she knows. Phoenix represents the past. Her young grandson represents the future. According
to Phoenix, they are "the only two left in the world" (288). Since her little grandson cannot "swallow," "get his breath," or "help himself" (287), Phoenix must work in his behalf. She gets "soothing medicine" (287) which keeps him alive. The relationship between Phoenix and her grandson, between the past and the future, proves compatible.

The confrontation between Phoenix and the hunter also overturn the myths of gratification: success isn't everything--it's the only thing. Only that effort which produces immediate, tangible results, regardless of means, is important. When Phoenix tells the hunter she is walking into town, he replies, "Why, that's too far! That's as far as I walk when I come out myself, and I get something for my trouble." He patted the stuffed bag he carried, and there hung down a little closed claw" (282). The hunter's desire to get "something" overrides all else. He shoots indiscriminately at birds and dogs. Although in seeming jest, pointing the gun at Phoenix further evidences this point. Fulfillment of his desire outweighs the means of fulfillment; the hunter, therefore, blatantly disregards both environment and humanity. As he and Phoenix go separate ways, she still hears him "shooting again and again over the hill" (284).

Phoenix's actions, on the other hand, prove that the means, especially if fraught with peril, can be as
important as the end. Like the relationship between Sonny and his environment, Phoenix travels in harmony with her surroundings. Speaking to the animals she might encounter, she warns of her approach and enlists their aid in her mission. While carefully disentangling her dress from the thorn bush so she harms neither, she tells the thorns she realizes they are doing their "appointed work," (277), and she patiently accepts responsibility for her predicament. She drinks from a familiar stream. When finally an approaching black dog surprises her, "she hit[s] him only a little with her cane" (281). Furthermore, if the hunter returned home with nothing to show for his time, he apparently would think his time ill-spent. He wants tangible results. By the hunter's standards, Phoenix wastes her time. Because the grandson's chronic condition will probably never improve significantly, getting the medicine is a worthless effort. As Phoenix's efforts indicate, tangible results do not always indicate an effort's success.

Phoenix's confrontation with the hunter and with the clinic attendant also overturn a third myth: selfish materialism motivates most actions. When Phoenix insists she will journey to Natchez despite the hunter's advice, the hunter assumes her purpose is frivolous. He replies, "I know you old colored people! Wouldn't miss going to town to see Santa Claus!" (282). Christmas is a time of
giving, but by referring to Santa Claus and the materialism that figure represents, the hunter shifts the emphasis to receiving. At the clinic, the attendant immediately assumes Phoenix is there on her own behalf: "What's your name? We must have your history. Have you been here before? What seems to be the trouble with you?" (285-6). The attendant refers to Phoenix as a charity case in the contemptuous sense, as someone wishing to get something for nothing. That attitude changes after the nurse explains, "She doesn't come for herself—she has a little grandson. She makes these trips just as regular as clockwork" (286). That revelation somehow softens the attendant's hostility. As Phoenix leaves, the attendant gives Phoenix a "Christmas time" nickel (288). Even after her long journey, Phoenix thinks not of herself, but of the boy. Using what must have been to her a fortune, she declares she will selflessly buy her grandson a paper windmill.

The story ends as Phoenix descends the stairs. The standard ambiguous parabolic ending of "A Worn Path" leaves readers wondering not only whether or not Phoenix makes it home with the medicine in time to save him, but also if the grandson is dead long before she reaches the clinic. Of course, the reader emphasizing such detective work overlooks the central issue the story raises. Reality exists in questionable terms at best, and motivation often
provides dignity to actions which at first glance may seem ludicrous.

Although "A Worn Path" seems a simple Christmas story, it overturns the myths found in the previous stories. Phoenix embodies the characteristics which the collection's mainstream, modern society finds undesirable: she is an old, uneducated, destitute, perhaps senile, female Negro who lives on the outer fringes of society with her physically handicapped grandchild. Phoenix is, nevertheless, the only character whose journey meets success. Regardless of the obstacles she encounters, the strangers who interrupt her or treat her poorly, the things which could frighten her from her goal, or her own mental faculties, she is victorious in her purpose. Extreme age, which makes earlier characters obsolete, does not diminish her ability to make a viable contribution. Memory, which cripples such characters as Mrs. Larkin, Howard, and the adolescent narrator, empowers Phoenix. The altruistic love which places her grandson's needs above her perceived limitations makes her successful where the others failed. That same love knows the purpose of the journey, recognizes the goal when reached, and seeing beyond her grandson's mutilated physical body, acknowledges his worth as a person. Phoenix's journey culminates all the earlier characters' empty searches because Phoenix is herself a parable.
John Dominic Crossan characterizes Jesus the parabler as becoming Christ the Parable, a person who "continually and deliberately subverts final words about reality." As he explains, the New Testament "parables give God room. . . . They are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world . . . . They remove our defences [sic] and make us vulnerable." Phoenix Jackson works within the *A Curtain of Green* collection in much the same way. Her character gives readers room to escape the confines of social myths and prejudices. As the only character who leaves and comes home again, she is successful where others, whose social and economic backgrounds should lend themselves to success, fail. Phoenix, therefore, represents one of what Crossan calls the "parables of deed." 

V.

In her essay "Words into Fiction," Welty writes that the purpose of a story is to make "its own impression upon the reader, so that he feels that some design in life . . . has just been discovered there. . . . This form that emerges . . . may do the greatest thing that fiction does:


167 Crossan 121-2.

168 Crossan 89.
it may move you." She sets about revealing this "design" in life by purposefully arranging the stories in *A Curtain of Green*, using religious imagery and parable form, and repeating symbols and motifs. In her attempt to move her audience she captures the spirit and form of the parable. She discovers common beliefs, stereotypes, and situations particular and close to the heart of Southern American society. Whether concerning the mentally retarded, happiness, age, or youth, she portrays these stereotypes ways that disprove their seeming truth.

Welty sets about dispelling the misconceptions or myths which inform life by communicating their unreliability in subtle ways. She writes:

> Communication through fiction frequently happens in ways that are small, that are unannounced; that are less direct than we might first suppose on seeing how important they are. It isn't communication happening when the reader predicts the . . . plot or agrees with, or anticipates, or even quotes the characters; when you hail the symbols; even when the whole landscape and climate have transported you where it happens. But communication is going on when you believe the writer . . . and remember what in the world of feeling we have been living in the story.\(^{170}\)

Such technique, such writing, takes time to discover. Even Welty admits that it "takes time to look back and realize things are a recurring theme [for I] did it for all those

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169Eudora Welty, "Words into Fiction," 144.

170Eudora Welty, "Words Into Fiction," 144.
years and didn't catch on. Welty provides readers with the opportunity to face their own feelings and actions and to understand better what they mean. In this way, too, the reader is finally "catching on."

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171Eudora Welty, in a conversation with students at Mississippi University for Women, March, 1981.
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