"Rag-Tag and Bob-Ends of Old Stories": Biblical Intertextuality in Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor.

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“Rag-tag and bob-ends of old stories”: Biblical intertextuality in Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O’Connor

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"RAG-TAG AND BOB-ENDS OF OLD STORIES": BIBLICAL INTERTEXTUALITY IN FAULKNER, HURSTON, WRIGHT, AND O'CONNOR

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Timothy Paul Caron
B.A., Louisiana College, 1987
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1992
May 1994
This whole book is but a draft—nay, but the draft of a draft. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience!

Herman Melville
Moby Dick
I would like to thank three women without whom I would not have had the resilience to complete this project: my wife, Shea, who loves me despite the stacks; my sister, Cindy Lounsberry, who is still looking out for me like big sisters should; and my mom, Carol Caron, who taught me the power of stories and made me go to Sunday School.
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ABSTRACT

Light in August, Moses, Man of the Mountain, Uncle Tom’s Children, and Wise Blood all borrow from the South’s religious traditions. Recognizing the authority given to the Book, Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O’Connor invoke and re-read its central stories, characters, and tropes in order to voice their individual contributions to the South’s intra-cultural conversation on race. In various ways, each work claims the necessity of the South to revitalize its practice of biblical interpretation.

All of these texts comment upon the South’s racial struggles over exactly how the Bible was to be interpreted: is it a book to aid in the exercising of leverage in maintaining racial inequality; is this a text for galvanizing a heterodox group of individuals into a community; is this book to provide a common rhetoric for overturning Southern racial bigotry; or, is the Bible, for the majority of white readers, only concerned with personal piety and salvation? Chapter One explores these questions while outlining my methodology and providing a historical context for my investigation.

Chapter Two examines Faulkner’s Light in August as a critique of an interpretive community within the white Protestant South which read the Bible as divine justification for its racist practices. In Chapter Three, Hurston’s Moses, Man of the Mountain is shown to reflect
the black church’s appropriation of biblical stories to provide models for the black community’s support and to undermine white racists’ biblical readings. Chapter Four studies Wright’s declaration in *Uncle Tom’s Children* that true social and economic equality for Southern black church members will only come through politically committed confrontation. Chapter Five examines how O’Connor’s *Wise Blood* replicates the white Southern church’s emphasis on personal salvation and its de-emphasis upon material conditions such as racial equality. Quite simply, *de facto* segregation and African-American second-class citizenship became so naturalized as to no longer concern the white South’s religiosity. The concluding chapter, Chapter Six, speculates on the benefits of an intertextual critical practice for Southern studies and literary investigations, in general.
CHAPTER ONE:
"RAG-TAG AND BOB-ENDS OF OLD STORIES": BIBLICAL INTERTEXTUALITY IN FAULKNER, HURSTON, WRIGHT, AND O’CONNOR

Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer’s story.

--- Alice Walker

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

---II Timothy 3:16-17

In "Faulkner Between the Texts," Michel Grisset comments on the richest source of intertextual borrowing in American literature: "The Bible (itself admittedly an intertextual nexus) may be considered as a well-nigh inextinguishable source of intertextuality in the field of English and American literature: the biblical connection is even one of the most outstanding characteristics of American literature" (3). Given America’s involvement in dissident Protestantism since its earliest settlement, such a claim suggests a reading strategy or orientation one might utilize in reading our national literature. As valuable as this statement is, it seems to hold a particular promise for the study of Southern literature, a literature situated in a region more homogeneously Protestant and more firmly rooted in a tradition of personal Bible study than any other in the United States.

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1 All scriptural quotes throughout this study are from the King James translation of the Bible.
My dissertation proposes to investigate the Bible as an intertextual source in selected white and black writers of the South, in William Faulkner's *Light in August*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*, and Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. Intertextual reading "leads one to think of a text as a dialogue with other texts, an act of absorption, parody and criticism...; it makes one particularly sensitive to the special referentiality of literary works" (Culler "Presupposition and Intertextuality" 1383). And I am convinced that the referentiality of these four Southern works extends both toward the central Southern book, the Bible, and the religious culture in which Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor all participated.

*Light in August* displays an antagonism toward the racist manifestations of white Southern personal piety and a tradition of racist biblical interpretation; *Moses, Man of the Mountain* responds to the white South's racist appropriations of the Bible by asserting that God's Word also contains powerful models for constructing an affirming African-American community; *Uncle Tom's Children* contributes to this cultural dialogue by illustrating the utility of biblical discourse for the political mobilization of such newly created communities; and *Wise Blood* demonstrates one common white Southern response to the "intrusion" of politics into religion by emphasizing
the need for individual redemption, stressing the continued viability of Christian salvation. As reflected through their individual uses of biblical intertexts, these works display the Protestant concerns of redemption, salvation, and regeneration which are central to both the white and black churches of the South. Following the suggestion of Culler’s dialogue metaphor, I view these works as engaged in a "cultural dialogue," of course not responding directly to each other, but all reflecting and influencing the South’s religiosity.

As with any true dialogue, consensus is difficult to achieve, and most of the profits and insights result from differences of perspective and perception. While Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O’Connor’s fiction argues for the centrality of the Bible in the black and white Southern experience, *Light in August*, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, *Uncle Tom’s Children*, and *Wise Blood* each produces a different viewpoint on how this iconic text has shaped Southern society and its fiction. Political, racial, and religious differences impact the way in which each text revoices the Bible, while the South’s violence reverberates throughout each text: for example, *Light in August’s* critique of the white South’s biblical justifications for brutal racial violence, like the lynching of Joe Christmas; *Moses, Man of the Mountain’s* insistence upon the construction of a sustaining African-American community as
an antidote to this racially motivated violence; Uncle Tom’s Children’s demand for a black church which is actively working to overthrow the Jim Crow South; and Wise Blood’s insistence to an apostate South that it violently forsake the concerns of this world and concentrate instead on the necessity of personal, spiritual regeneration.

Within this colloquy, all of these works appeal to the apparently common language of the Bible, the text which, in many ways, authorizes the South’s dominant discourse and informs many of the society’s central concerns, such as its dominant religiosity, race relations, and rhetoric. Despite the common invocation of the Bible’s authorizing power within Southern culture, each text makes its appeal in a different and often conflicting manner. The re-occurring topic of this cultural conversation is violence—brutal lynchings to preserve and justify Jim Crow, vehement differences over biblical interpretation and what passages interpretive communities emphasize, fierce refusals to live by the dehumanizing strictures of Southern racism, violent metaphors of Christian conversion. These various types of violence mark the spaces within this dialogue where sharp divisions occur, usually differences in how each work’s biblical appropriations are at odds with the biblical revoicings of the other works considered.

In this opening chapter, I will attempt to establish my working boundaries, which are of two types: first I
will define crucial intertextual terms central to my investigation; second, I will delineate some of the more relevant historical and social movements and forces of the South's two Protestant churches, white and black. My goals for this introduction are two-fold: to provide a theoretical and methodological framework while briefly outlining the religious context which shaped, and was shaped by, these four texts.

* * *

While it is certainly not necessary to rehearse the entire history of intertextuality\(^2\), a familiarity with the concept's development and some of its leading practitioners will prove helpful in understanding my appropriation of the term "intertextuality," in general, and my investigation of biblical intertexts in these four Southern authors, in particular. (Needless to say, my appropriation and use of the term intertextuality represents a definition of the concept by an extended example: from the many theorists and critics of intertextuality, I have constructed my own intertextual praxis.) Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes have produced some of the most significant writing on

\(^2\)For two excellent essays which do trace the evolution from source and influence studies into the development of intertextuality, see Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein's "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality," in their volume Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History and Judith Still and Michael Worton's "Introduction" to their volume Intertextuality: Theories and Practices.
intertextuality, and the term was coined in her 1966 essay on Mikhail Bakhtin, "Word, Dialogue and Novel."

Specifically from Bakhtin, Kristeva borrows the notion that writing is intrinsically predicated upon previous writing. But Kristeva expands upon Bakhtin's ideas by speculating on the nature of writing, not just novelistic discourse. She maintains that we create meaning from the contexts of previous communications, and "each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read.... [A]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity...." (Kristeva 66).³

This formulation, though much more expansive than Bakhtin's, indicates a clear indebtedness to his ideas regarding the dialogic nature of the novel, the "heteroglossia" created by the inclusion of many voices within a single text (Discourse in the Novel 262-3). The key word for Kristeva is mosaic—we make our communications (writings) from the bits and pieces of our previous communications (writings). Under particular scrutiny in my

³In a recent argument regarding the place of Bakhtin in intertextual theory, Hans-Peter Mai concludes that "Bakhtin's relevance to the intertextual debate is rather doubtful.... Kristeva, it can safely be said, appropriated Bakhtin's ideas for her own purposes" ("Bypassing Intertextuality" 33). Mai's unwillingness to acknowledge Bakhtin's important role in the evolution of intertextuality seems unfair considering his writing on the "carnivalesque" nature of the novel and the foundational dialogic character of the novel as a genre.
investigation is the Bible's role in the construction of Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor's verbal, textual mosaics.

While nearly all of Barthes' post-structuralist writings reveal a strong debt to the concept of intertextuality, his essay, "Theory of the Text," offers some of his fullest statements on the topic. Echoing statements found in "The Death of the Author," he contrasts works and texts: reading a literary artifact as a "work" "closes" it, because Barthes maintains that author-centered analyses lead to the hermeneutical practice of revealing the work's one, true "deep hidden meaning." Perceived as a work, it is chained "to its letter, rivet[ed] ... to its signified" while perceiving it as "text" "disperses the author as the centre, limit, and guarantor of truth, voice and pre-given meaning" (Barthes 33, 31). This dispersal of mandated interpretation allows one the freedom, and the responsibility, to view the text as a "polysemic space," (37) an intersection of many voices which leads Barthes to assume multiple textual significations. This freedom to pluralize interpretation arises from the notion of intertextuality because "any text is an intertext" which is taken from the "previous and surrounding culture":

Any text is a tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text....[T]he text
Quite simply, textuality is always intertextuality for Barthes. These comments, however, indicate an element within Barthes' ideas on intertextuality that are not often emphasized, namely what might be called a contextual or historical element. Intertextuality studies the relations between texts and the relations between texts and the contexts which shaped them and which these texts, in turn, helped to create. Intertextual readers must study both literary texts and the social or cultural "texts" which inform them.

Such a notion, at first glance, may appear to bear some semblance to the traditional practice of source or influence study: from whom or from what previous work has a particular statement, image, or quotation been transmitted to and included in or encoded into the text at hand? But intertextuality is hardly a case of employing inflated critical jargon to contemporize a traditional literary activity. Instead, intertextuality, after Barthes, represents a shift in critical attention away from the author-dominated concerns of influence and source

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4Source and influence studies are usually categorized together, as in Clayton and Rothstein's "Figures in the Corpus," because of their related philological concerns. Source studies track down the source of particular allusions, acknowledged or unacknowledged, and influence studies seek to detect and measure the impact that an artist has had on his or her successor.
studies (What works of Eliot did Faulkner read, and what textual allusions can we identify?) to textual concerns. In particular, I will be focusing upon these "textual concerns" as they unfold within the context of the Souths'—both black and white—very Bible-oriented culture. The questions one asks now sound more like those suggested by Barthes: why are particular "bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages" "redistributed" into a certain text? What differences might appear when two texts evoke the same preceding intertext? For this study in particular, why is the Bible, with all of its attendant discourse and constituent stories, figures, and images, so prominently encoded into the texts of Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor? What is revealed in the differences within their individual evocations of the same Bible? Imagining intertextuality within these larger societal contexts allows one to situate "...the diachronic text of...literary history" within "the synchronic text of a cultural system," (Montrose 17).

Even the briefest excursion into recent applications of intertextuality reveals the various ends to which it has been employed. For instance, Geoffrey Hartman, whose eclectic writings have long invoked the Hebraic tradition of midrash, has recently co-edited a volume of essays titled Midrash and Literature, many of whose contributors (including Hartman himself) liken the Hebrew Bible's
midrashic tradition of creative exegesis to the creative critique inherent in the intertextual absorption of a part of one text by another. Harold Bloom's well-known and highly Freudian theory of the "anxiety of influence" which claims the dependence of and familial relationships among great poets also displays some debt to ideas of intertextuality. Perhaps the most ubiquitous presence in recent writings on intertextuality has been Michael Riffaterre. Riffaterre, in early essays such as "Syllepsis" and "Interpretation and Undecidability," states that an allusive intertext "provides the clue to interpretation by canceling the undecidable reading" (283). In more recent writing, such as "Compulsory Reader Response," an intertext is described as one or more texts which the reader must know in order to "understand a work of literature in terms of its overall significance" (56). As these quotes demonstrate, he vigorously proclaims the interpretative benefits of intertextuality, believing that a reader must utilize intertexts in deciphering the text, perhaps not to create the reading, but one which is complete and takes into account all problematic aspects of the text. All of these critics lend something to the concept of intertextuality as it is used here: Hartman, a seriously playful attitude in regard to the task of appropriating a "sacred" text for inclusion in a "secular" one; Bloom, a sense of agonistic struggle among writers and
texts when borrowing from perhaps the most revered text of Western civilization; and Riffaterre, an indication of the possible interpretive insights rendered through an intertextual critical practice.

Riffaterre's use of intertextuality as an interpretational strategy is also advocated and executed by many other theoreticians of intertextuality; however, few critics seek to reconstitute the historical or cultural context into which the intertext is placed. Jonathan Culler hints that such an inherent, historicizing component in intertextuality is vital, insuring against a return to past productions of influence and source studies:

Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. The study of intertextuality is thus not the investigation of sources and influences as traditionally conceived; it casts its net wider....

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In examining these larger relationships between authors, cultures, and texts that Culler discusses, a critic must

5For a wide range of intertextual studies of particular texts, see Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction, Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis, editors; Intertextuality, Heinrich F. Plett, editor; Intertextuality: Theories and Practices, Michael Worton and Judith Still, editors; Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History, Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, editors; and Intertextuality in Faulkner, Noel Polk and Michel Grisset, editors.
demonstrate an awareness of the receiving text's cultural milieu (how is that source text, in its intertextual manifestation, employed? how might a source text be employed by the dominant culture? how might that same source text be used differently by another, less powerful member of a culture?) and, as best as possible, an author's response or participation in that milieu (what artistic strategies demonstrate a response to the cultural setting?).

Recent comments by Kristeva and Virgil Nemoianu help in postulating the type of text-oriented, culturally and historically situated intertextual practice necessary to realize Culler's ideas. In an interview, Kristeva utilized the example of reading Faulkner to emphasize her similar opinions about the need to recapture the larger contextual environment of a text. She said, "If one reads Faulkner without going back to the Bible, to the Old Testament, to the Gospels, to the American society of the period and to his own hallucinatory experience, I believe one cannot reconstitute the complexity of the text itself" ("Interview" 282). While Kristeva mentions the central role of the Bible necessary in realizing the historical context for reading Faulkner, the intersection of intertextuality and the disciplines of history and religion are even more manifest in Virgil Nemoianu's essay,
"Literary Play and Religious Referentiality," wherein he utilizes the example of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*:

Discussing *Pamela* in Jungian or Freudian terms is certainly an interesting exercise, but is only and exactly that: an exercise. Samuel Richardson was thinking in neither Freudian or Jungian categories, but rather in the only terms he knew to think: those of dissident Protestantism, virtue preserved and virtue lost, free will, salvation, and sin. These are categories that belong to a specific time and place, to a specific social and intellectual environment, to a specific religiosity. (emphasis added)

The value of Nemoianu's theorizing, besides the specificity of its example, lies in avoiding two potential pitfalls of historically oriented criticism: he subtly cautions against the dangers of reading backwards, imposing contemporary reading strategies upon unsuspecting texts, and he adroitly side-steps Wimsatt and Beardsley's "intentional fallacy" by never presuming to speak of Richardson's intentions for his novel, instead focusing upon the need to recapture, in our reading, the larger societal and cultural configurations of a "specific time and place."

Therefore, intertextuality describes not only relationships within the circumference of traditionally defined "literary" texts; intertextuality also occurs when a text refers to the world beyond the boundaries of the page, when it refers to social institutions, people,
places, history, songs, or stories. Virtually any acknowledgement by the focused text of this kind to other text-like webs of significance can be considered as an instance of intertextuality. For the purposes of my project, "intertextuality" refers both to the references outside of the narrative world of the focused text and "to the linked and effective presence in a text of another text" and these intersections—where one small textual realm nestles inside of another—are called intertexts (Still & Worton 22). All of the authors considered in this project make extensive use of the Bible as an intertextual source, as in Faulkner's obvious play upon the New Testament Jesus Christ in depicting the life and death of his Joe Christmas; in Hurston's repackaging of the Old Testament story of the Hebrew liberation from Egyptian bondage into a type of blue-print for freedom-seeking African-Americans; in Wright's transubstantiation of the "Bright and Morning Star" of Revelation into the red star of a racially integrated and socially responsive American Communist Party; and in O'Connor's Haze Motes, her blind, Christian ascetic whose name conjures up Christ's admonition to remove the log from your own eye before attending to the "mote" in your neighbor's. But both definitions of intertextuality are important because Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor all make use of
both the Authorized Version of the Bible\textsuperscript{6} and the white and black Southern Protestant institutions surrounding the Bible.

* * *

To use Flannery O'Connor's phrase, the South was--and to a large extent, still is--a "Christ-haunted" region. It is "haunted" because it has long been under the virtually hegemonic religious control of Protestant denominations--both black and white--which stress the need for personal salvation and require an individual, close reading and knowledge of the Scriptures after this conversion. A 1906 religious census of the white South, east of the Mississippi River and excepting Kentucky, revealed that 96.6\% of the population was Protestant, and nine-tenths of them were Baptist and Methodist (Hill The South and the North in American Religion 110). This numerical, and theological, dominance has continued in the white South, at least until as recently as the 1960's when "membership in Baptist and Methodist churches constituted nearly 80\% of the total church affiliation" in the Deep South (Flint 23). These dominant Protestant sects gained ascendancy in the South beginning in the colonies' first great, widespread religious revival. The first Great Awakening of the

\textsuperscript{6}The Authorized Version, or the King James Version as it is more commonly called, will be used in this study because it was the translation most commonly used throughout the South in both black and white churches.
1740's turned the white South away from its Episcopal/Church of England roots and toward the denominations which control it today, primarily the Baptists and Methodists, along with the Presbyterians, which number a distant third (Hill, "Survey of Southern Religious History" 388). Success in proselytizing their Episcopal neighbors, whose churches were seen as being too liturgical, can be attributed to the heightened emotional appeals and emphasis upon sin which characterized the Baptist and Methodist churches. Also, following the American Revolution, Baptists and Methodists had none of the taint of the "establishment" that still lingered over their Anglican brothers (Hill, South and the North in American Religion 24, 21).

The Second Great Awakening began in Tennessee and Kentucky, moved throughout the South, and solidified the dominance of the white Southern evangelical sects, achieving a powerful majority by 1810. According to Samuel S. Hill, a type of regional "orthodoxy in religion" became evident by 1830 ("Historical Survey" 395). In Southern Churches in Crisis, Hill proclaims that the "diversities within Southern Protestantism are minimalized by the
striking sameness within and between denominations" (76). 7

Wayne J. Flint succinctly characterizes this "sameness":

Appeal was to the heart more than to the head, and conversion was the dominant religious experience. The quest for personal holiness which followed conversion took an individual course; reform was inward and aimed at the individual, not outward and aimed at society. Theology was heavily laced with Calvinistic notions of the sinfulness of man and the need for repentance. Services were less liturgical, reliance on biblical authority more complete, the importance of good, popular preaching greater than was true among other American Protestants.

Without a doubt, one could easily rouse a stirring debate among various Southern Protestant denominations over questions such as infant baptism or even the scripturally required mode of baptism; however, Flint and Hill recognize the role played by the Bible as an iconic book, possessing a central and profound role in the white South’s religiosity. In fact, Hill, in numbering the common denominators of the "radical wings" which exercised the most control over Southern Protestant denominations, first lists their common call to "maximize" the Bible (Southern

7Perhaps the most apparent differences among white southern Protestant denominations were class distinctions. Of the major sects, Baptists were held in lowest esteem, usually because of poor, rural memberships, Methodists were a little more respectable, and the Episcopal church was the church of the aristocratic and mannered South. It is interesting to note that Faulkner was christened in the Methodist church as a boy but began occasionally attending Oxford's Episcopal church with his wife Estelle after he was no longer called "Count No 'Count" and had bought and restored the Rowan Oak estate.
Churches in Crisis 76). That is, the Bible provided the guidelines for their theology and a manual for stewardship after conversion, and a thorough knowledge of it was expected as a result of personal study.

Flint explores some of the major historical causes which produced what he calls this "common ideology" of the white "Southern church." He points to two key factors: first, the incredibly popular revivals and camp-meetings, which were extremely inter-denominational, and inter-racial during the Second Great Awakening, effectively propagated this "common ideology;" second, only a small minority of churches had full-time, one-vocation ministers, so weekly preaching and church-going also overlapped denominations ("One in the Spirit..." 27, 37). "The Bible Belt was a well-entrenched stereotype by the early twentieth century," writes David Harrell, Jr., "and it was one with clear substance to it" ("Introduction" 2). The theological homogeneity of the white South's white church-goers intensified the Protestant concerns of salvation, redemption, and saving one's soul.

While seeking to fulfill a different mission and following a different history, similar claims regarding the emphasis upon scriptural knowledge and the necessity of personal biblical interpretation can be made for the black
church in the South. Granted, low-levels of black literacy in the beginning stages of the black church of the nineteenth century prevented a widespread, true reading knowledge of the Bible. In fact, the Bible provided one of the greatest incentives for freedmen to learn to read as they struggled for literacy so that they might develop their own hermeneutic in opposition to the Bible messages they often heard which proclaimed their supposed inhumanity. Yet, African-American Christians, even those earliest worshipers who had the Bible read to them, continually demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the Bible and its stories, images, and tropes. Cain H. Felder attests to the reverent attention rendered to the Bible, the Book which "has come to occupy a central place in the religion of the Black diaspora" (155-6). And as Lawrence Levine has demonstrated, one would need look no further than the spirituals—with their "vivid biblical imagery, compelling sense of identification with the Children of Israel, and...tendency to dwell incessantly upon and to

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8To speak of a unified, and univocal, black church in the 1990's would be a gross inaccuracy considering the religious diversification of African-Americans, particularly if one takes into account the rise of Islam, Black Judaism, and neo-African and Caribbean religions. However, the phrase "black church" serves as a sort of historical short-hand to describe the black Christian church which arose from Christian missionary efforts in the South and the "invisible" slave church of the antebellum period. By the same token, the term "white church" will be used to describe a cluster of denominations—usually Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian—that contained the majority of the white South's believers.
The black church's reverence for the Bible and its identification with select Bible stories can be traced back to its earliest participation in evangelical Protestantism, particularly the Great Awakenings. It is no mere coincidence that the Baptists and Methodists took the lead in this region-wide revival and the establishment of predominantly black churches (Hill, South and the North in American Religion 24). From these revivals which swept across virtually the entire settled South, black churches (which often were forced to operate under the bureaucratic and ecclesiastical control of whites in their formative years⁹) "adopted wholesale the credal confessions and the governing and ritual formats of their white counterparts" (Lincoln, "Black Heritage in Religion of the South" 52-3). Furthermore, they also adopted "wholesale" what I call the Prime Imperative of Protestantism, that is, the mandate to personally study God's Word. Central to the dissidence of Protestantism is a belief in the Priesthood of the Believer which constrains all of its followers to work out their salvation in fear and trembling, and this conversion is reinforced by personal investigations into the Holy Scriptures. Of course, this examination of the Bible,

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⁹In this case, I am thinking particularly of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, although much the same could be said for their Baptist counterparts.
while it may be aided by a minister, certainly requires no mediation from a sanctioned ministerial representative or clergy member. The black church learned from white evangelical Christianity two important lessons in constructing a distinct African-American hermeneutic: faith was to be interpreted in the light of the Bible, and each person had a freedom to interpret the Bible. While accepting the Bible as the central document of their religiosity, African-Americans chose to interpret it in their own fashion (Wimbush 86, 89).

Beginning with the earliest endeavors of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1701 (Lincoln, "Development of Black Religion in America" 13), African-Americans have struggled with their white brethren, attempting to wrest interpretation of God's Word away from a Christianity which neither affirmed nor validated their existences. C. Eric Lincoln describes the early messages of white Christians to blacks as a "gospel distorted by an insidious racism and compromised by self-conceit and economic self-interest" ("Development of Black Religion in America" 20). Yet, taking their lead from leaders such

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10A dissenting opinion is offered by John B. Boles in his essay, "The Discovery of Southern Religious History," found in Interpreting Southern History. He maintains that ante-bellum religion provided the closest thing to a level playing field that southern blacks had: "Blacks heard the same sermons, took communion with whites, were buried in the same cemeteries, and participated in the church disciplinary procedures" (520-1). Boles, regardless of whether these claims are true or not, seems to overlook the insults,
as Richard Allen, who established the first recognized black church in America in 1794 (Gravely, "Rise of African-American Churches" 302), and from the preachers of the "Invisible Church," generations of African-American congregations have culled from this white-slanted Gospel a distinct, black, Christian religiosity.

African-Americans, beginning with the earliest slave preachers of the antebellum period, adapted and transformed "the white man's message of subservient obedience into a confident awareness that things were not as they should be, or as they would be" (Lincoln, "Black Heritage" 46). And the authority for this "adaptation" and "transformation" results from their interpretive strategies for reading the iconic book of the Protestant heritage, the Bible. As inheritors of Protestantism's Prime Imperative, African-American congregations had a justification for their hermeneutical practices at least as strong as their white brethren. The Bible provided the Southern black church "the assurance of the ephemeral quality of the present situation and the glories and retribution to come, both in this world and the next." Familiarity with the Bible provided paradigms—Daniel, David, Joshua, Jonah, Noah, and, especially, Moses—of deliverance in this world (Levine 63, 50).

segregation (such as "nigger heaven"), and condescension that African-Americans were forced to endure in Southern interracial worship.
The white church was instrumental in legitimating, consolidating, and perpetuating the white South's "secular culture through the instrumentality of conservative Protestant Christianity" (Hill, "South's Two Cultures" 29). On the other hand, the black church utilized paradigms, such as the stories of Old Testament heroes, to postulate a Christian theology and practice opposed to this biblically sanctioned, racist culture, i.e., a culture which often justified its commitment to making African-Americans second-class citizens with appeals to the Bible. As J. R. Washington, Jr. insists, the black church "is the quest for...freedom, justice, dignity, and equality of opportunity in this world because [its members] know it to be realized in the world to come" (61). The black church adopted the Bible as the revealed Word of God but invented a new hermeneutic for itself: from its beginnings in the "invisible institution" of the slave church, the black church viewed the Bible as a document of liberation, containing God's promise of delivery in the here-and-now.

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The pervasive utilization of biblical stories, symbols, images and myths by Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor reflects a key element of their inheritances as Southerners and the enduring cultural power of the South's two powerful religious traditions. Moreover, the intertextual practice of these authors reflects and informs
one of the South's most abiding cultural conflicts: who may read the Bible and for what purpose? *Light in August*, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, *Uncle Tom's Children*, and *Wise Blood* are all participants in the South's struggles between whites and blacks over exactly how the Bible was to be interpreted; all of these texts struggle with the question of whether the Bible is to exercise a leverage over believers in maintaining racial inequity, or to galvanize them into working toward the overturning of Southern racial bigotry. Each of these works evokes and also invokes the South's white and black biblical hermeneutical traditions, calling forth a powerful cultural resonance created by the region's reification of the Bible. Yet the evocations and invocations of the Bible by these texts are never simplistic or naive. The biblical intertexts of these novels, in fact, reveal the paradox of intertextuality: to incorporate a fragment of text into another is often an act of homage, of respect paid to a distinguished predecessor, but intertextual citation is also a tool for critique.

Intertextuality allows one to utilize that which is useful, powerful, or appropriate while at the same time adapting it, making it new through parody, elision, or some other type of subtle troping. What is borrowed from the

> "While intertextuality continues to receive more and more attention, both in theoretical investigations and textual applications, few have written on its invocational power. See "Titles and Mottoes as Intertextual Devices," by Wolfgang Karrer, in Plett's Intertextuality."
Southern religious traditions—black and white—by each text's intertextual citation is a bit of the reified power accorded to biblical stories, for, in the South, the Bible tends to be granted an unsurpassable power for moral instruction. It is even venerated as physical object. Recognizing the authority rendered to the Book, Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor commandeer its central stories, characters, and tropes in order to voice their individual contributions to the South's cultural conversation.

While all of the works considered here all participate in a type of dialogue, they all invoke the lingering power of the Bible's heritage for radically different causes in very disparate situations. Faulkner's intertextual practice demonstrates his wary modernist's ambivalence toward the white Southern religious community which believes itself to have experienced the regeneration advocated by evangelical protestantism, yet which still commits acts of racial violence; Hurston's exemplifies the continual need of Southern blacks to reinterpret the Bible and its myths and stories for the purpose of creating a nurturing and sustaining community in the midst of this violently segregated and unregenerate region; Wright's calls for a new, politically invigorated reading of the black church's Bible as a necessary foundation for the effective political activation of the African-American
community; and O'Connor's asserts her belief in the need for personal redemption through Christ in order to stop the grotesque violence she sees as perpetrated because of a willful distancing from God. These drastically different appeals to the Bible, and the violent repercussions which usually follow, most dramatically reveal the distinctions between the white and black Southern religious traditions. In various ways, each work claims that a revitalization in the South will occur only after a revitalization of the region's biblical interpretation occurs.
Works Cited in Chapter One


There is some one myth for every man, which, if we but knew it, would make us understand all that he thought and did.

--William Butler Yeats

Contrary to widespread popular belief, ... the persistence of lynching in the region down to the present has not been due simply and wholly to the white-trash classes.... I have myself known university bred men who confessed proudly to having helped roast a Negro.

--W. J. Cash

The Mind of the South, W. J. Cash's examination of the South as a distinct entity within the rest of the United States, may strike the contemporary reader as an arrogant title, one presuming to enforce a homogeneity over the region's values, views, and outlooks. To be sure, this is a very real objection, for the "mind" Cash proposes to examine is the mind of the white, male, middle-class (or upwards) Southerner. While students of various disciplines have lately begun to examine the previously neglected constituents of Southern society while calling into question the actual cohesion that existed in the region, few have disputed the fact that the white South closed its ideological ranks in the early twentieth century (the period during which Cash worked on his study) and displayed a hegemonic, singular mind in opposition to the struggles
of African-Americans for civil and social equality. Cash labels this malicious racial unity the "Proto-Dorian" bond: simply stated, this unwritten creed declared that Southern white men, regardless of economic or social status, were bound together by a collective belief in their innate superiority over any African-American. The power of this bond is attested to in the second epigraph: from the "white trash classes" to the "university bred men," the white South was ready and willing to lynch blacks to maintain its racial hierarchy.

To justify this proclivity toward violence while cementing this racial bond, the white South created several myths which took their genesis from the region's iconic book, the Bible. From the paralleling of Joe Christmas with Jesus Christ, to the numerous preacher and prophet figures in the novel, to the text's invocation of the white South's racist biblical hermeneutic, William Faulkner's \textit{Light in August} intertextually challenges the white South's dominant religious ideology. The biblical intertexts

\footnote{1I am employing the definition of myth found in Thomas Virgil Peterson's study of the myth of Ham, \textit{Ham and Japheth: The Mythic World of Whites in the Antebellum South}, which is heavily influenced by the structural anthropologists Claude Levi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz. In turn, from Geertz, Peterson borrows his definition of the term myth: a narrative which both helps to explain "the nature of the universe" and justifies to individuals their own "everyday values and beliefs."}

\footnote{2In my use of the word "ideology," I am thinking of Louis Althusser's definition of the term in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an}
within the novel--the infusion of one text into another, of one story into another--mark these sites of conflict with the white South's ideology because, as Michel Grisset notes, "no quotation is innocent of a meaning which, though it may escape a writer's conscious mind, in no way escapes the cultural web" (3).

Two of the primary, intertwined forces of white Southern ideology contested in Faulkner's writing are race and religion, and Light in August is the site of his greatest confrontation with these inter-related forces. Light in August intertextually summons elements of the white South's religiosity so that Faulkner might engage in a dialogue (through allusion, parody, silent quotation, and appropriation) with the social context of the white South's gospel, a curious combination of religion and racism. The intertextual dialogue between Faulkner's novel and the

Investigation)" as the subtle, pervasive, and nearly unconscious cluster of beliefs and practices which direct our everyday actions (124-73). While they are not exactly synonymous terms, myth and ideology, as employed by Geertz and Althusser, do both attempt to explain the powerful unwritten rules which govern the life of a community.

3In her Faulkner's Un-Christlike Christians: Biblical Allusions in the Novels, Jessie Coffee identifies thirty-four direct, easily recognizable allusions to the Bible in Light in August (129) but does not take into account the numerous other intertexts which indicate the novel's interaction with the South's religiosity nor the implicit critique of such an intertextual practice. Even the very earliest of Faulkner's prose writings display examples of biblical intertextuality, revealing the centrality of Christian myths and stories in his artistic vision. For example, consider his "apprentice work" for the New Orleans Times-Picayune, such as "The Kingdom of God" and "Out of Nazareth" (Biography 140ff).
Bible, and its attendant white institutions, constitutes a powerful literary and cultural criticism which forces us as readers to re-examine the ways in which the Bible was appropriated by the white South as a justification for its racism.⁴

Some readers have puzzled over what to make of the differences between Faulkner’s characters and the biblical figures which they invoke. For example, H. L. Weathersby asks, do the divergences between the stories of his Yoknapatawpha chronicles and their antecedent biblical stories reveal in Faulkner a combination of "a more than common knowledge of traditional Christian images...with...a more than common ignorance of Christian doctrine and theology" (354)? Weathersby’s answer to his own question is that "the theological dimension in the novels is muddled not for any deliberate artistic reason" (356). On the contrary, Faulkner’s biblical allusions do not represent shoddy craftsmanship but are the site of an intertextual confrontation with one of the South’s powerful "interpretive communities,"⁵ that is, the element of white

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⁴Alan Nadel makes a similar point about the critical nature of literary allusions in "Translating the Past: Literary Allusions as Covert Criticism," but he stops short of considering the larger societal or ideological implications possible within the notion of intertextuality.

⁵In Biblical Interpretation, Robert Morgan and John Barton apply Stanley Fish’s concept of "interpretive communities" to biblical studies, drawing attention to the ways in which various Christian sects are composed of believers who agree to read the Bible according to shared
Southern Protestantism which turned to the Bible for a justification of its racist practices. In these early twentieth-century white interpretive communities, the Bible was not considered in the historical and cultural contexts which helped generate it, but was naturalized to the interpreters' world and made to render incontrovertible statements on questions of concern to the community (McKnight xi-xii). These interpretive communities may or may not be drawn along denominational lines, but members of such an interpretive community both arrive at similar answers to inquiries and utilize analogous hermeneutical strategies. In the early twentieth-century white South, interpretative communities existed over concerns such as dancing, card playing, drinking, attending movies, and swimming on Sundays.

One of the white South's more influential interpretive communities sought justifications from the Bible for maintaining African-Americans "in their proper place." By putting African-Americans in this segregated and alienated "place," the white South performed a vital act of self-definition. Blacks and "blackness" were defined by one assumptions (257-60).

"See Cain Hope Felder's "Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives" for an investigation of common racially motivated readings of the Bible. Felder comes to the conclusion that "the Bible contains no narratives in which the original intent was to negate the full humanity of black people or view blacks in an unfavorable way. Such negative attitudes about black people are entirely postbiblical" (127).
criteria: black was anyone (or anything, such as an act or deed) which was "not white" (Davis 14). To these racially prejudiced interpretive communities seeking a justification for their beliefs and practices, blacks represent "the other half of the racially divided world," forming an "antithesis or a counterpoint to the white world" (Davis 3). The juxtaposition of the Bible and its promulgating institutions and ministers with the fictional world of Faulkner’s novel "begets" (Grisset 6) a third text, created in the reader’s imagination, which is then a damning indictment of the interpretive community’s attempts to seek a divine sanction for the white South’s gospel of racial discrimination. What Weathersby perceives as being muddled actually often emerges in Faulkner’s writing as an ironic gap between Faulkner’s reworking of the Christian stories and the actual debased practices for which these same stories are employed in the Southern gospel of racism.

How did Faulkner himself respond to the discursive network of Southern racism and religion? Was he able to establish a critical distance from his region’s dogma? These will prove to be important questions that must be asked of Hurston, Wright, and O’Connor as well in order to determine the "voice" each uses in the colloquy on Southern race and religion and how each will intertextually "re-

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7As Althusser reminds us, ideologies are disseminated with the aid of institutions and functionaries.
voice" the Bible in his or her fiction. An examination and determination of Faulkner’s position (or something as close to this as possible) within the "text" of the South’s "cultural system" (Montrose 17) becomes imperative because of Faulkner’s Southern heritage. If one is ever to determine the nature of Faulkner’s critical response to the South, these types of difficult questions must be asked, as Eric J. Sundquist maintains, even if they yield only partial or incomplete answers. In Faulkner: The House Divided, Sundquist examines race in the Yoknapatawpha novels and advises critics to keep Faulkner’s comments on topics such as race relations and segregation in proper focus when examining his fiction because taking them too lightly "divorce[s] his fiction from the realities it constantly sought to incorporate," and taking them too seriously would easily "convict Faulkner of a lapse in moral vision." Rather, Sundquist maintains that critics should view these statements as expressing "both a defiance [of] and a tragic sympathy" (65) for the white South’s prevailing expressions of racial intolerance. And this advice seems sound, for Faulkner made many confusing and contradictory statements regarding the racial inequalities of the South, espousing both a "defiance" of the white South’s racial practices and a residual "sympathy" for the white South’s unwillingness to abandon its Jim Crow practices.
These two extremes of "defiance" and "sympathy" mark the emotional space in which the group of Southerners whom historian Joel Williamson describes in his study of Southern race relations, A Rage for Order, as "Conservative" often travelled. While the "Liberals" of Williamson's conception of the Southern "mentalities" on race are characterized by a belief in the unlimited upward potential of African-Americans (a position not really found in any of Light in August's characters) and "Radicals" by a belief in a limitless degeneracy outside of the "civilizing" influence of slavery (a position exemplified by characters such as the male Burdens, Doc Hines, and Percy Grimm), Conservatives are distinguished by their comparatively moderate position on race: while perhaps acknowledging some of the evils of segregation and discrimination, they realize the vested interests of whites in the Jim Crow South and are, at best, grudgingly willing to overturn some of the injustices suffered by blacks as second-class citizens (Rage for Order 70). The advantage of such a term to describe Faulkner's racial outlook lies not in categorizing him within a large group of Southerners or with justifying his beliefs or actions; rather, such a term provides a reader of Faulkner a larger social network within which to place the man and his response to the South's racial intolerance.
In a 1956 interview with Russell Howe, Faulkner displays a deep ambivalence over the situation of blacks in the South, sounding many of the keynotes of a Southern racial Conservative. Faulkner, exhibiting what Sundquist might call a "defiance" of the white South's racial position, did admit that the white South was in the wrong on the Civil Rights question of the twentieth-century as it was in the nineteenth-century on the question of slavery. At one point, he stresses his compassion for blacks, emphasizing to Howe, "The Negroes are right—make sure you've got that--they're right.... I've always been on their [the Negroes'] side" (Lion 262). He goes on to say that "I will go on saying Southerners are wrong and that their position is untenable" (Lion 262). However, Faulkner, as revealed in several other comments from this same interview, apparently drew a distinction between positions which are "untenable," those of the white South, and those which are indefensible, those of the meddlesome federal government and civil rights agitation and groups like the NAACP. The dangerous result of such agitation would be the eventual alliance of moderate, conservative whites, such as himself, with more extreme, radical, and potentially violent white supremacists. Faulkner succinctly expressed this opinion when he claimed, "As long as there's a middle road, all right. I'll be on it. But if it came to fighting I'd fight for Mississippi against
the United States even if it meant going out into the street and shooting Negroes" (Lion 260-61). As a sanction for this claim, Faulkner invoked the South's knight chevalier, Robert E. Lee, equating his choice of Mississippi over the United States to Lee's reluctant choice of Virginia over the Union in 1860 (Lion 262).⁸ Faulkner, in most of his pronouncements on the South's racial problems, characterized his stance as a "go-slow" policy, a key phrase in the Conservative vocabulary which contains within it the potential for movement between the rhetoric of racial harmony and un-Reconstructed Southerner.⁹

In determining Faulkner's response to the intertwining of white Southern Protestant ideas on race and biblical explication, it is just as important to attempt to

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⁸The editors of Lion in the Garden, James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, maintain that this interview "must be treated with considerable caution because the two published versions differ from one another" (257) and because Faulkner repudiated parts of it, claiming that it contains "statements which no sober man would make, nor, it seems to me, any sane man believe" (265). In his biography of Faulkner, Blotner addresses the question of Faulkner's sobriety, mentioning that Faulkner had been drinking heavily during this period because of anxiety over the potential violence surrounding the admittance of Atherine Lucy to the University of Alabama. Furthermore, Blotner maintains that Saxe Commins, in whose office the interview took place, does not dispute any of the statements attributed to Faulkner in this interview.

⁹Faulkner passed away just months before the "Battle of Oxford" over the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi, a battle he probably would have seen as the tragic result of increased meddlesome federal intervention.
determine (again, as closely as possible) Faulkner's reaction to the region's dominant religiosity. The ideology of Southern piety and zeal nearly completely permeated Oxford as indicated by a 1907 religious census which revealed that "there were only 180 unconverted persons in the community, 2/3 of this number being under the age of 12 years" (Blotner, *Biography* 16). The early religious training Faulkner assimilated was from both the Baptist denomination and the Methodist denomination, the church to which his family belonged and into which he was baptized. Among the town's most faithful attendants of Methodist Sunday services and annual camp-meetings was Faulkner's mother, who took her son with her, while his grandmother would sometimes take him to the Baptist church (Blotner, *Biography* 16, 21). As a boy, Faulkner not only attended church but was also expected to follow the Prime Imperative of Protestantism: the study of the scriptures. One of the family members holding him to this task was the stern and imposing figure of his great-grandfather, Dr. John Young Murry, who expected everyone, from children to adults, who sat down to a meal with him to recite a Bible verse before eating (Faulkner, *Lion* 250).

Faulkner's church attendance decreased after about the age of twelve as he began to prefer spending time at his father's livery stable or pursuing other Southern masculine
pastimes, such as hunting. After his marriage to Estelle Oldham (which could not be performed in her home Episcopal church because of her previous marriage), the Faulkners could best be described as infrequent church attenders, usually only making an appearance at Oxford’s St. Peter’s Episcopal church on religious holidays (Blotner, Biography 483). While his adult church attendance record was poor at best, Faulkner never failed to execute the Protestant Prime Imperative, saying that he remained a student and reader of the Bible all of his life (Faulkner, Lion 284). He even invested in a fourteen-volume Cambridge edition of the Bible, including the Apocrypha, an edition normally used by biblical scholars (Blotner, Faulkner’s Library 87).

Despite his early religious training and his continued study of the Bible, one would be hard-pressed to claim any type of narrowly conceived Christian orthodoxy for Faulkner, especially any type of orthodoxy which would meet the approval of the dominant Southern Protestant sects. When asked by a student at the University of Virginia about the proliferation of biblical imagery in his works, Faulkner replied:

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10See Ted Ownby’s Subduing Satan for an insightful examination of how Southern Protestantism challenged many of the male traditions and pastimes of the region.

11Evans Harrington, in "Religion and Faulkner’s Art," comes to a similar conclusion regarding Faulkner’s relationship with Protestant Christianity (161-62).
Remember, the writer must write out of his background. He must write out of what he knows and the Christian legend is part of any Christian's background, especially the background of a country boy, a Southern country boy. My life was passed, my childhood, in a very small Mississippi town, and that was part of my background. I grew up with that. I assimilated that, took that in without even knowing it. (Gwynn and Blotner, 86, emphasis added)

What Faulkner utilized in the creation of his mythical county was not so much doctrine as narrative, utilizing what he called the "Christian legend" as an intertextual well-spring for his fiction. The fundamental value of the Christian stories for Faulkner was in their ability to teach humanity its potential. He once said that the Bible "shows [mankind] how to discover himself, evolve for himself a moral code and standard within his capacities and aspirations by giving him a matchless example of suffering and sacrifice and the promise of hope" (Faulkner, Lion 247).

Despite Faulkner’s own revealing statements regarding his relationship with Christianity, several critics continue to attempt to claim orthodox doctrinal beliefs for him, with Cleanth Brooks being perhaps the most

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12Perhaps the clearest formulation of Faulkner's religious sensibility can be found in John W. Hunt’s William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension. Hunt concludes that Faulkner accepted the Christian view of the universe as a place where evil has very real effects and that man is in some sense fallen; however, Faulkner does not display a belief in the Christian tenet of redemption through supernatural agency (22).
influential. Brooks concludes "Faulkner's Ultimate Values" by claiming that "Faulkner's conception of the human being is thus right in the mainstream of the great classical-Judaic-Christian tradition" (28). Yet, as John N. Duvall has observed, such pronouncements continue to dominate the majority of Faulkner criticism (101). Views such as Brooks', which so completely identify Faulkner with the Christian norms of his community, pose the potential danger of deflecting the critical thrust of his work. Faulkner's work could easily become enmeshed in the Southern gospel's web of racial hatred and no longer pose a critical challenge to the region's beliefs. On the contrary, Light in August challenges the Southern network of religion and race as Faulkner confronts the Southern gospel with its own discourse.

Faulkner's intertextual tactic for confronting the Southern interpretative community's invidious gospel is executed in two stages: first, he intertextually invokes the central Christian myth and encodes it into Joe Christmas's life, and, secondly, he extratextually replicates the Southern biblical justifications for racism in the vitriolic rhetoric directed toward Joe, emblem of the community's fears of racial violation, by the representatives of this interpretative community. As the

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13See Brooks' "Faulkner and Christianity" for another of his essays which advances this position.
novel unfolds, the life of Joe Christmas comes to bear an uncanny resemblance to Jesus Christ due to a parallel development of their lives. The very name Christmas, and the initials J. C., initiate the correspondence between the two lives. Joe's advent, his first appearance at the orphanage where he spends a pivotal, developmental portion of his childhood, occurs during the Christmas season, on the "Lord's sacred anniversary" (363). As with our sketchy, speculative knowledge of Christ's early adult years, our knowledge of Joe's actions and whereabouts during his adolescent years is unfinished. Christmas continues this wandering lifestyle until he arrives in the town of Jefferson at about the age of thirty. Like Christ the carpenter, in order to support himself, Joe takes a job in a wood shop, work which he appears to have done before. Here at the planing mill, Christmas selects his "disciple" (40), Lucas Burch. For three years, Joe lives in Jefferson and associates with the modern variety of publicans and sinners, thereby insuring that he will remain the object of much speculation by the townspeople. During these three years, Joe wonders, much like Christ, "just when do men that have different blood in them stop hating one another?" (236). After Joe, like Christ, threatens to destroy the pervasive societal constructs (in his case, a racial hierarchy and the chastity of Southern white womanhood), a known criminal, Lucas Burch, is released in exchange for
Christmas, just as Barrabas is released in exchange for Christ. Because of a conflict of jurisdictions, Christmas is transferred from Mottstown to Jefferson where soldiers spend their time gambling, patiently awaiting his death (Holman 153). Joe is then ritualistically executed at age thirty-three at the hands of an angry, violent mob that never understood him or what compelled him to act as he did. Finally, like Christ, Joe is a knowing, surrendering victim who calmly accepts his fate, viewing his own death through his "peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes" (439).

Joe Christmas, or more specifically, the community's discursive response to Joe Christmas, is fundamental to Light in August's critique of the South's synthesis of racism and religion. Christmas comes to occupy a somewhat analogous position with Christ because both become living embodiments of language's generative, creative power: Christ the incarnate Word or Logos made flesh who dwelt among humanity, and Joe Christmas who becomes the embodiment of the racist interpretive community's

14C. Hugh Holman, in his outstanding examination of the parallels between Christmas's life and Christ's, "The Unity of Light in August," argues that Faulkner patterned Christmas after what might be called the "Suffering Servant" interpretive community (158). Not only does Holman's argument account for why some events from the life of Christ are re-enacted in that of Christmas (i.e. those which reinforce the view of Christ as Suffering Servant), but it also raises the question of what is emphasized in biblical hermeneutics. The South's interpretive communities must emphasize certain portions of the biblical text over others.
discourse. Christ is the Word of God, His "only begotten Son" (John 3:16) and yet a man who walked among men and women, whereas Joe becomes the word "nigger," the construct of the community’s racist language. In the Gospel of John’s invocation of the Genesis story of creation, the Word is the means by which everything is created:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. John 1:1-3

The writer of John’s use of the opening phrase, "In the beginning," and the Greek term Logos hearken back to God’s construction of the universe through the power of language. All of the components of the cosmos were created by God speaking the phrase, "Let there be...". Whereas God pronounces all of his creation to be "good," particularly His Son whom he blesses through the symbolic descent of a dove, the rhetorical construction of Joe Christmas by the racist interpretive community is undertaken to make him the villain, the embodiment of evil which must be exorcised.

Language is used to determine Joe, to create his identity within the community, only now the all-defining Word becomes the racial slur, "nigger." When he arrives in Jefferson, Christmas appears to be a white man, and, though he performs "nigger-work" at the mill, no one attaches such a label to him personally. As one would expect in a
community concerned with policing racial purity and exposing hidden violations of communal strictures, Joe's initial appearance, however, does raise doubts regarding his racial identity. As one man at the mill asks, "Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas?" (20). However, these misgivings can easily be overcome by assigning Joe the status of "foreigner," and Christmas is not yet stigmatized with the approbation of being the town's ultimate Other, the most fearsome thing Jefferson, and the South, could imagine.

When this assignation does occur, when Jefferson does eventually define Joe as outsider, as black and loathsome, the community also defines itself. As long as there is a Joe Christmas to embody everything reprehensible to the community, then the townspeople clearly proclaim themselves to be acceptable, harmonious elements of their society. This violent process of establishing social definitions is foreshadowed in Joe's proclamation of himself as not "womanly" and weak like his adoptive mother when he participates in the sexual initiation with the black woman in the shed, and then rejecting others' designations of himself as "black" by then violently attacking the woman who offers herself to the five boys. In much the same way, the white citizens of Jefferson declare their communal identity through their discursive practices and eventual violence. "To merge white and black would have been the
ultimate holocaust, the ultimate damnation of Southern civilization. And yet that was precisely what the mulatto, by his very being, represented" (Williamson, *New People* 95).

Joe carries within himself the secret of his uncertain heritage and tells only two people in Jefferson of his belief that he may be of mixed racial ancestry: Joanna Burden and Lucas Burch, both of whom play key roles in the community's discursive definition of Joe. While Joanna believes Joe to be black, she tells no one her lover's secret. Instead, it is Brown who first affixes this label to Christmas in Jefferson; "Accuse the white and let the nigger run," he proclaims in his interrogation by the sheriff. The sheriff, skeptical at first of Brown's revelation, warns him to be careful of his accusation, saying, "You better be careful what you are saying, if it is a white man you are talking about.... I dont care if he is a murderer or not" (91), but then concludes that his prisoner is "telling the truth at last" (92). In Jefferson, killing can be honorable, as when Colonel Sartoris kills two Burdens to prevent African-American voting, or when Doc Hines murders his granddaughter's lover because of his supposed black blood. These killings are

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15 Faulkner revised the manuscript of *Light in August* to remove all definite clues pertaining to Christmas' racial identity (Fadiman 125).
justifiable—to the white community—because they preserve dominant communal values.

In the eyes of white Jefferson, only one thing can be worse than being a "nigger" and that is being a "nigger" who murders one of the emblems of Southern ideology, that is, a white woman. While Joanna is ostracized by Jefferson during her lifetime because of the abolitionist sins of her forefathers, once she is murdered, "she becomes as white and respectable and Southern as the communal hysteria requires" (Sundquist The House Divided 84). As Philip Weinstein has noticed, a typical transformation occurs after the sheriff believes Brown and the "knowledge" of Christmas' black ancestry is leaked to the community: "Pronounce the word nigger and Joanna Burden's murder becomes a rape...." In the South, "racism proceeds...through discursive insistence" (51).16

Several characters in Light in August serve as self-ordained mouth-pieces for the Southern interpretative community's gospel of prejudice. First is Calvin Burden,

16A similar type of communal insistence is depicted in "Dry September," the story of another lynching in Jefferson triggered by a supposed sexual attack upon a white woman. In the story, the town is easily swept into a vigilante frenzy because of the claims of a spinster who has a history of fabricating stories about attacks upon her sexual virtue. Like Light in August, the townspeople of Jefferson, with the notable exception of the barber, Hawkshaw, are quick to read the situation in terms of Will Mayes's black skin. Regardless of either his past humility or service to the white towns-people, his societal position as "nigger" guarantees his guilt. "Dry September" was published in 1931, a year before Light in August.
Sr., who like Simon McEachern, attempts to inculcate his religious values into his family through domestic violence, promising his family that he would "beat the loving God into" them as long as he was strong enough to raise his arm (230). While he was not born in the South, Burden, and his son, Nathaniel, appropriate one of the region's most commonly held biblical sanctions for racial hatred: the myth of the curse of Ham. If this twisted hermeneutical strategy did not originate in the South, it certainly received a hearty endorsement there. Nathaniel Burden's advocacy of this justification is revealed when, speaking to his daughter Joanna, he characterizes blacks as living under a "curse which God put on [the] whole race before your grandfather or your brother or me or you were even thought of" (239).

Burden pronounces all African-Americans to be "lowbuilt black folks: low built because of the weight of the wrath of God, black because of the sin of human bondage staining their blood and flesh" (234). Here he alludes to the story of Ham, his brothers, Shem and Japheth, and their father, Noah, as recounted in Genesis 9:20-26:

And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and
they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

The myth of Ham enjoyed great popularity throughout the entire region, gaining ascendancy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although racial prejudices were wide-spread and common throughout the South in the late colonial- and early national periods, they could hardly be called unified or coherent in the sense that they formed a single, sustained, and explanatory narrative. However, Thomas Virgil Peterson argues, in Ham and Japheth: The Mythic World of Whites in the Antebellum South, that the myth of Ham provided just such an explanatory function for the postbellum and "New" Souths. The myth derived its power and claim to veracity from its emergence from the Bible, the South's iconic book and secure anchor for its intertwining web of racism and religion. Out of this Genesis story, the South extrapolated an elaborate myth to justify the enslavement

17See Winthrop D. Jordan's White Over Black for a detailed examination of the proliferation of race prejudice in the white American mind.

18See Forrest G. Wood's The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century for another, more recent discussion of the myth of Ham. Wood also deals with the history and development of this hermeneutical practice and, unlike Peterson, finds that it served as a popular justification for slavery in the antebellum South.
and segregation of blacks. While Shem and Japheth cover their father's nakedness, in the white South's reading of this story, Ham commits some ambiguous sin while viewing the naked patriarch. For his transgression, Ham and his off-spring, on into perpetuity, are sentenced to be "servant[s] of servants" to his brothers. Perhaps the most important result of this transgression of Ham is the fact that he is excluded from his tribal nation's patriarchal power structure; in much the same way, since they were viewed as the children of Ham, African-Americans' biblical interpretive communities were either excluded from or denigrated by the interpretive practices of the white South.

Based upon its appeals to these few biblical verses, the South embellished this myth until it seemed to explain and account for many of the most widely perceived differences and inferiorities of blacks. For example, the darker skin pigmentation of blacks resulted from God's mark being placed upon Ham and his family to distinguish them as the race of servants. Of course the white Southern racist interpretive community strongly adhered to a belief in an omniscient and infallible God; therefore, this wise God provided a designation, a mark, to indicate exactly who belonged to this group of social and moral inferiors. Many commentators on this myth highlighted the sexual nature of Ham's sin. While men such as Nathan Lord and John
Fletcher, leading proponents of the myth, could not specify what exactly Ham's sin was, both, along with many of their followers, agreed that it involved some violation of God's laws of sexual purity (Peterson 78). Members of the white interpretive community--like Burden, Sr., who perceive blacks as being the descendants of Ham--believed that African-Americans proved their ancestry with their licentious forefather by virtue of their continued insatiable sexual appetites and sexual aggression. Zora Neale Hurston lampooned this white interpretation of Ham's curse in her one act play, "The First One," the "first one" of her title referring to Ham as the first black person. While Hurston revels in her dismantling of one of the myths that helped to prop up the white South's stereotypes of African-Americans, *Light in August* reveals the deadly earnest with which this myth was adopted by racist interpretive communities. It is, after all, the perception of Joe as a descendant of Ham that provides one of the reasons why Jefferson so quickly equates Joanna's murder with sexual violation: once Christmas is convicted of the killing and of being a cursed descendant of Ham, he is also incapable of resisting the temptation to soil the most highly regarded emblem of the South's ideology of racial purity, a white woman.

For the Burden men who take upon themselves the task of interpreting God's Word, the Bible is a poorly
understood document whose only seemingly transparent passages attest to God's eternal vindictiveness toward blacks (after all, the semi-literate Calvin Burden, Sr. reads from the Bible in a language, Spanish, which none of his children comprehends). For the last, and most malignant, of *Light in August*'s "preachers" of racist dogma, Doc Hines, the Bible as physical object is of only peripheral importance. Instead of quoting the Bible or commonly held interpretations of its stories, Doc Hines presumes to speak for God, assuming for himself the power of an Old Testament prophet who emerges from the wilderness, filled with all of the righteous indignation of a Jeremiah. In this respect, he represents the logical extension of the South's racially dogmatic biblical interpretive community. While the Burden men are insidious interpreters of Holy Writ in their readings of key passages, namely, the myth of Ham, Doc's single concern with the Bible is with the message the South's iconic book delivers to him on black inferiority; he reads the Bible only through the lens of his own racism. He takes this hermeneutical tactic as an authorization to deliver his racist message straight into the heart of Southern African-American society, its churches, entering "the pulpit and in his harsh, dead voice and at times with violent obscenity, preach[ing] to them humility before all skins lighter than theirs, preaching the superiority of the white race,
himself his own exhibit A" (325). Doc Hines is the literal personification of the white South's racist biblical hermeneutic.

He assumes this role of God's Spokesman, or "His chosen instrument" (365) as he prefers to call himself, in dealing with both blacks and whites. For example, in his questioning of the orphanage dietitian, Doc pours out what he feels to be God's hatred against "bitchery and abomination" (341), in this respect, sounding much like the "Thus Saith The LORD" of the Old Testament prophets railing against the wickedness of Israel. And like a true prophet, he not only communicates God's message to the people, but Doc also spurs the masses into taking action. As Gavin Stevens reports, it is Doc Hines who stands on the street corners of Jefferson "preaching lynching" (423) and exhorting the community to take their final retribution upon Joe Christmas. The raw hatred Doc Hines displays toward Christmas, who is his own grandson, is different only in degree, not in kind, from what the rest of the community feels toward Joe. Doc Hines has fully absorbed the white South's racial gospel, particularly its Old Testament-like predilection for pronouncing curses.

Augmenting the white South's belief in the curse of Ham was its belief that blood was a carrier of racial traits. The curse of Ham was hereditary because it was passed from generation to generation through the agent of
blood. The South's dogmatic, insistent endorsement of the blood myth is reflected in Doc seeking out the man he views as Milly's seducer and murdering him because the old man believes that God reveals to him "that the fellow had nigger blood" (354). Again, Doc's faith in the white South's gospel of racism is different in degree, not in kind from the whole-hearted belief of every character in Light in August that Christmas has "nigger blood" in him after Burch makes his "confession." John Mencke, in Mulattoes and Race Mixture, asserts that in the early 1800s the foundation of the one-drop rule was laid and testified to as fact when pseudo-scientists began to theorize not only that blood was the agent for the transmission of individual characteristics but that entire races demonstrated identifiable properties which were

19 At the Nagano Conference, Faulkner referred to the white South's belief that racial difference was transmitted through the blood as a "delusion." On this occasion, Faulkner went on to make the argument that the basis of racial conflict in the South was economic and that many moral smokescreens (such as the concept of blood differences) were offered to deflect attention away from these economic considerations (Faulkner, Lion 183).

20 The one-drop rule clearly stated that one drop of black blood in a person's veins made him or her black. Of course "blackness" in individuals was inextricably connected to sexual taboos, and the one-drop rule was enforced to protect the virtue of Southern white womanhood as emblem of Southern purity and as property of the white Southern male. As Charles Staples Mangum, Jr. declared, "If it is known that an individual has the least modicum of Negro blood, then he or she is considered a suitable mate of colored persons only" (quoted in Williamson's New People 98).
carried in their blood (37-87). In other words, race as ideological construct determines behavior.

The presence of black blood represented a stain (with all of that word's connotations about physical and moral contamination) as evidenced by one South Carolina woman who received a court affidavit in the mid-1800s to pronounce her blood pure and free of any color taint (Jordan 166). Josiah Priest, writing as early as 1843, neatly summed up the notions of black, corrupted blood which would have currency well into the twentieth century South when he stated, "The baleful fire of unchaste amour rages through the negro's blood, more fiercely than in the blood of any other people" (Fredrickson 276). By the end of the nineteenth- and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the concept of blood "attained the proportions of an article of faith" (Jordan 167) in the South. The phrase "article of faith" is significant because it suggests the religious zeal with which the South stood by this abstraction.

Blood assumed a paradoxical status in the white South's religious/racial ideology, connoting release in the discourse of evangelical religion and an inescapable curse in racial matters.\(^2\) From the evangelical pulpits of the

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\(^2\)See René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* (36-38) for a discussion of the dual functions of blood as both purifier and stain in religious discourse. Girard's study informs my examination of Joe Christmas as sacrificial victim.
South, the doctrine of the remission of sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ was proclaimed. His blood was the agent, the catalyst, for removing the stain of humanity’s burden of Original Sin from each individual soul. The presentation of blood as this instrument of redemption is conspicuous in its absence from *Light in August* considering the number of churches, ministers, and true-believers in the novel. Hightower’s church is one of the most likely venues to present this depiction of blood; it is the message his congregation longs to hear. What they hear instead of "the dogma he was supposed to preach" (57 emphasis added) is the message of Hightower’s grandfather’s galloping cavalry. All of these various curses of genealogy and blood, are "invented, discursively disseminated, randomly internalized, [and] fatally acted upon" as facts by the community (Weinstein 52) and Faulkner’s novel exposes how all of these beliefs become incarnated in the South’s discourse of race and religion.

While the male Burdens and Doc Hines represent the most vitriolic mouth-pieces of the white South’s racist interpretative community, Simon McEachern represents another common response of the white South to the region’s intertwining tendrils of race and religion. McEachern, and those like him, remains silent in facing the dilemma of reconciling Christian faith and unjust social practices. Whereas some white Southerners "naturalized" Jim Crow
practices with the aid of the region's greatest moral authority, the Bible, McEachern does not consult it on matters of racial justice, not even in a negative manner, like the Burdens and Doc Hines. McEachern emblematizes the response of many white Southern Protestants: his energy and attention are focused on the other-worldly concerns of personal redemption; therefore, he has little concern for the improvement of material concerns on this earth, particularly of improving the material concerns of a race widely considered to be inferior by most white Southern Protestants (Hill 409). In this respect, McEachern reveals himself to be the spiritual kinsman of Hazel Motes of Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood; both pursue their salvation to the exclusion of societal considerations. All he has taught to his foster-son is a long list of "Shalt Not['s]" (194) that Joe escapes from only when he brings the chair down on McEachern's head. McEachern's religious vision is so fully implicated in perpetuating the status-quo on an individual or personal basis that he could never answer Joe's question of when "will men with different blood stop hating one another?" (236); in fact, he could never even formulate the question.

In stark contrast to these lay ministers who either proclaim the twisted gospel of racial hatred in the South or who are unwilling to recognize the racist practices of the white South's religiosity is the Rev. Gail Hightower.
As his name indicates, he is perhaps never able to reintegrate himself fully back into daily contact with humanity after having secluded himself within the high ivory tower of Southern romanticism over the Civil War. Despite his retreat from the community, he is the only one of these preachers who is a true ministering pastor22 to at least some of Light in August's characters. For example, he offers rest and hospitality to the Hines family, and, even more importantly, he delivers Lena's baby. Unlike the Burdens and Doc Hines, he never uses the pejorative term "nigger" when referring to Christmas, or any African-American for that matter.

Most importantly, however, Hightower realizes the full murderous implications of the community's insistence that Christmas has black blood in his veins. Sitting in his home, Hightower hears the town's church-bells and, in a moment of prescience, understands that Jefferson will soon lynch Christmas, thinking that "in [this] crucifixion they too will raise a cross" (348). René Girard's thesis from Violence and the Sacred reverberates through Hightower's insight: in that study, Girard asserts that sacrifices are

22I am employing the term pastor not as a distinction between Protestant preachers who have or have not received training and/or ordination from a seminary. Southern Protestantism, especially of the rural variety, has never really emphasized seminary training, insisting only that a preacher truly be called of God to spread the Good News. Instead, I am using the term pastor to underscore the nurturing, sustaining, and edifying work that ministers perform among their congregations.
performed upon "sacrificeable" victims to deflect violence away from a community and knit it even closer together (4, 1–35 passim). This connection between Christmas’ impending death and the crucifying of Christ is more than a casual reference to the Bible in Light in August; this intertext reveals the community’s consciousness, what Faulkner calls its "collective memory," exposing the town’s need to exorcise its greatest communal fears and doubts. As Hightower foretells, Jefferson will lynch Christmas "gladly,...since to pity him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope for and need pity themselves" (348). To respond in any other way would indicate a less than wholehearted faith in the Southern gospel and reveal misgivings about the self-identity they have created for themselves as members of the white community and the identity they have created for the African-American community. In Thadious Davis’s words, Christmas is lynched "in order to preserve Jefferson as it is" (173), that is, racially pure and confident that the white community’s opposite and corresponding other half poses no threat to the sanctity of their community.

Consonant with this obsession with racial purity, the white South often feared men of mixed ancestry the most because there was no black skin to correspond with the perceived "black" heart longing to spoil white women.
Despite some notions of mulatto impotence, the sexuality of men of mixed ancestry was very distressing to the white South because some mulattoes could "pass" as whites. This power to escape detection made the paranoid white South fear that mulattoes were the most frequent violators of the region's primary taboo: in the words of Senator Benjamin Ryan Tillman of South Carolina, white women of the South were virtually besieged by sex-crazed men of tainted blood, their "breast[s] pulsating with the desire to sate their passions upon white maidens and wives.... Forty to one hundred maidens are sacrificed annually to the Minotaur, and there is no Theseus in sight" (quoted in Rage for Order 84). These alleged mulatto rapists were driven to act as they did because of their blood inheritance from the "wild, naked, man-eating savages of equatorial Africa" (Mencke 117) whose sexual degeneracy was now a widely held belief. Their potential danger could be cloaked because of the difficulty of determining who these "white niggers" were, these men "with black hearts under white skins who might

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23Some few Southerners believed in the so-called notion of the "mule-atto." According to this theory, a mulatto was equated with a mule, both being the off-spring of what the South would view as cross-breeding. Just as no mule could reproduce, so it was assumed no mulatto could either. Faulkner was aware of this theory, once saying to Sherwood Anderson, "the cross between the jack and the mare that produced the mule" and its sterility "was just the same" as the cross between "the white man and the Negro woman" (Blotner, Biography 180). Blotner feels that Faulkner was pulling Anderson's leg, simply telling him some of the quaintier and more eccentric Southern notions.
marry [the white South's] daughters, who might by that fact quietly, insidiously rape them" (Rage for Order 239). The very existence of mulattoes threatened the South's discursive practices on race because the entire system could break down if whites were no longer able to find the community's signifier of evil.

Southern negrophobia and apprehension over the evil influence of black blood during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries caused a new, metaphorical definition of "blackness" and the creation of a new category—the "white nigger." The supposed curse upon Ham's offspring persisted until the early twentieth-century, but physiognomy was no longer an accurate test to determine who might be a member of this cursed race because the offending black blood could have traveled through several white generations. No perceptible trace of African ancestry was necessary to define a person as black. The label "white nigger" was a definition after the fact; some sin or moral failing (often some sexual transgression) proved a person's blackness because no virtuous member of the white community could betray his or her race in such a heinous manner (Rage for Order 239). After a member of the Mottstown crowd brands him with this title, shouting, "Christmas! That white nigger that did that killing" (326), the community's suspicions are confirmed, and Joe's lynching becomes nearly inevitable. And, as if to add
insult to the white community's injury, Joe flouts these beliefs, right up until he is captured, going "into a white barbershop like a white man, and because he looked like a white man they never suspected him" (331). Such insolence can not be tolerated. After having this walking violation of their beliefs in their midst for so long, undetected, the townspeople must have vengeance. The town of Jefferson, swayed by all of these discursive practices, makes Christmas its most radical expression of its fear of "blackness" because Joe's blackness is internal, detectable only after the fact by his alleged crimes. The community, therefore, responds with the time-honored Southern practice of lynching.24

Light in August is a novel of "outsiders," a text whose two primary characters are placed outside of the community through their actions: Joe because he supposedly possesses black blood and Lena because she violates the community's strictures on white female chastity which have been established ostensibly to help protect her from "black beasts" such as Christmas. Percy Grimm, on the other hand, is the ultimate "insider" in Jefferson's racial ideology (Sykes 81) who expresses the lowest common denominator of Jefferson's racial fear and hatred. His "blind obedience

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24Between the years 1882 and 1927, an era which greatly overlaps with Faulkner's life, 4,951 men, women, and children were lynched, and 3,513 of these victims were African-American (Harris 7).
[to the]...belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races" (426) makes him the community’s greatest defender of the South’s creed of racial purity. Grimm quietly assembles with machine-like efficiency the mob which will help him chase Christmas into Hightower’s kitchen, and Jefferson rewards him by revising its collective opinion of the young man whom they had previously barely noticed at all: "the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs" (432 emphasis added).

After establishing a link between Joe and the myth of Ham, the town believes Joe’s blood to be tainted, a foregone conclusion which receives expression when Grimm castrates Christmas, declaring, "Now you’ll let white women alone, even in hell" (439). The community displays a deadly logic concerning the crime of which Joe is accused: Joe raped Joanna before murdering her, and maybe even again after murdering her, (272) because he has black blood and his black blood accounts for and explains this heinous crime. Faulkner depicts the ultimate result of this "reasoning" as a violently ironic commentary on Christ’s injunction from Matthew 18:7-9 to avoid sin:

Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that
man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thy eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Whereas this biblical passage functions as the justification of Hazel Motes’s very individual, self-mutilating quest for salvation in *Wise Blood*, these same verses have grave consequences for the white community’s health in *Light in August*. Joe’s mutilation functions as a symbolic exorcism of the community’s evil. "Because Joe is accused of the rape-murder of Joanna Burden and because he is labeled ‘nigger’ by [Lucas Burch] and consequently hunted as a ‘nigger,’ Joe dies a nigger’s death" (Davis 167). As the repetition of this slur-term indicates, the label "nigger" takes on a nearly religious significance in its ability to designate that most reprehensible element of the underside of Jefferson, the hidden evil lurking behind a white facade.

At the close of Chapter 19, the reader confronts Faulkner’s ambiguous comment upon the execution of Joe Christmas in Hightower’s kitchen. Faulkner uses the analogy of a rocket to describe the release of Christmas’s blood which has been of such central importance to Jefferson’s citizens:
It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading,...of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. 440

Although Joe’s life parallels that of Christ, the intertextual intersection of these two stories provides no neat solution to the societal problem of race which has been graphically played out in Christmas’s life. The lack of correspondence between the two lives in this particular area, the failure of Joe’s life to provide any transcendence or glimpse of an alternative way of being in the world, has proven to be the biggest hindrance in much of the criticism tracing the Christic resonances of Light in August. These critics feel that Joe’s death has accomplished nothing because the social networks of Jefferson, its prejudicial interpretative communities, and its discursive practices have not changed. And yet that is precisely the point. Joe’s death reinforces the community’s religious belief in black blood; furthermore, the community will pass Joe’s story—quiet, steadfast, never fading—down to its children as a communally reinforcing story. The key biblical story that illuminates Jefferson’s citizens’ reading of Joe’s life is the myth of Ham, not the story of Christ’s passion, "the crucified
shape of pity and love" (462) which Hightower regrets not offering to his congregation.

The ironic distance between Christmas's death as a Christ-like figure and its function as a prop for the community's racist discourse emerges after considering the case of Gavin Stevens. Stevens, who appears as perhaps the most sensitive, intelligent, and eloquent individual in Faulkner's "postage stamp" of Yoknapatawpha County, continues to depict Joe as a victim of a struggle with his racial ancestry, a conflict he describes in the community's racist dogma of feuding black blood and white blood:

It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life.... He merely...ran on and crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. 425

Even though Stevens probably distances himself from the impassioned rhetoric of the local Protestant sects, the blood concept was so pervasive, even more ecumenical than the South's written and formally accepted Protestant tenets, that the very secular lawyer, a District Attorney, Harvard graduate, and Phi Beta Kappa, subscribes to its theology. Moreover, Stevens' recounting of Christmas's life in many of the key terms of the racist interpretive community, particularly the "doctrine of blood," links him
with characters such as Percy Grimm, Doc Hines, and the Burdens through his perpetuation of the South’s racist discursive practices.

*Light in August* concludes on a note of guarded optimism. The story of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch closes the novel, the comic ending emphasizing the "newer hopes" of creating a community which is not implicated in Christmas’s death, as is the one they are leaving. Their relationship provides an alternative to the community’s conventional morality, the dominant ideological system which has been complicitous in the death of Christmas through its mindless adherence to the notion of chaste Southern white womanhood. Lena and Byron’s relationship is not yet one of marriage, falling outside the boundaries of such "conventional" sanctions, and Byron’s attempts at expressing himself in the language of love provide the conclusion with an element of alternative hope. Whether Lena gently rebuffs Byron’s sexual advances because of the furniture peddler sleeping nearby, because of physical inability due to the recent birth of her baby, or for some other reason, Byron still returns to the truck. This union of Lena and Byron indicates a willingness on his part to learn how to develop and maintain a nurturing relationship.

However, readers of *Light in August* can not escape the fact that Joe and Lena’s lives are only tangentially connected, neither having much of an immediate impact on
the other because of Joe’s expulsion from the community. As Sundquist argues in "Faulkner, Race, and the Forms of American Fiction," "the refusal of the novel fully to integrate Christmas’s story into those that surround him is a function of the fact that his life and his story are identified with mechanisms of segregation and exclusion, with violent expulsion...from...the larger community of human compassion" (13). Yet one asks why this is so; not only have both violated communal precepts, but Lena and Joe also share a number of thematic and descriptive links. Both are "alone, without family connections in a society that is historically conscious of ancestors and family ties," and both are similarly portrayed as participating in questing journey motifs (Davis 155, 158).

So why does Lena receive at least a modicum of pity and charity from communal members such as Byron’s landlady (who feeds Lena and suggests that she stay in the cabin at the Burden place) and Martha Armstid (who gives her hard-earned egg-money to Lena for her trip into Jefferson)? Perhaps Lena becomes an object of (grudging) charity and pity because, while she has violated communal laws on the chastity of white women, the community does not believe her guilty of violating its strictest taboo—racial mixture. Lena is therefore never associated with the white South’s biblical justifications for violence and social exclusion. Instead, the white community can invoke precedents from the
Gospels where Christ displayed mercy and kindness to adulteresses. On the contrary, Joe becomes so hated and hunted because he threatens the sanctity of white Southern society and its common biblical myths. While his actions, such as the "rape" of Joanna Burden and his incredible surrender in Mottstown, verify these myths, his "parchment" colored skin belies them. Maybe the "tragic, central idea" of Light in August is not, as Faulkner himself once claimed, that Joe does not "know what he [is]" (Faulkner in the University 72); maybe the central tragedy of the novel is the community's projection onto Joe of all of its doubts about its own "blackness" because if Joe can be morally tainted then perhaps they are too.

The white community of Jefferson is willing to go to very violent lengths to guard against what they felt to be an encroaching "blackness." For instance, Doc Hines kills his granddaughter's lover because he thinks the young man might possess some moral taint carried in his blood. The community sanctions this violence, and Doc faces no penalty for taking a man's life. Surpassing even this communal sanction of murder is Doc's belief that God endorsed his actions, going so far as to claim that God held the pistol steady while he pulled the trigger (356). The Ku Klux Klan, self-appointed guardians against "blackness" within the white community, nearly beat Hightower to death when it appears he might deviate too drastically from the society's
norms. This kind of social and physical violence propels Joe Christmas down the road he travels until his arrival in Jefferson; his questions regarding his racial ancestry insure that he will be unwelcome in white society because he is perceived as a threat, yet white racism has so strongly affected him\textsuperscript{25} that he is nearly destined to never find the kind of strength and affirmation that Hurston finds so prevalent in African-American culture when he experiments with briefly living with a black woman in the North.

The fictional depictions of these savage acts mark key points of divergence from Hurston, Wright, and especially O'Connor's contributions to the cultural dialogue on the South's intertwined issues of race and religion. *Wise Blood*'s violence is of an adamantly personal nature, serving as a metaphor for O'Connor's insistence upon the need for Christian conversion in her characters and, by extension, her readers. In *Uncle Tom's Children*, Richard Wright asserts that the white South's societal violence must be countered with a violence that has the power to liberate Southern blacks from a life of living Jim Crow. Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* replies to this pervasive violence by imagining an African-American community that, after winning its freedom, might exist

\textsuperscript{25}See Andre Bleikasten's *The Ink of Melancholy*, particularly p. 317, for a discussion of white racism's impact upon Joe and how he reproduces that racism.
outside of these violent patterns. The violence of *Light in August*, especially Christmas's death, however, seems unavoidable. Percy Grimm, who functions as something like the white community's avenging angel, is guided in his pursuit of Christmas by a supernatural agency, "The Player" who moves him like a figure on a chess-board.

The optimistic reader of *Light in August* is offered little hope of the occupants of Yoknapatawpha County ever overcoming the South's gospel of racism; Joe's life, and more importantly, his death, are enlisted in the services of the prejudicial interpretive communities which still hold sway at the novel's conclusion. Yet, rather than merely replicating the South's biblically "sanctioned" racist discursive practices, Faulkner challenges them by demonstrating how the region's Old Testament zealousness and scapegoating is not tempered by a New Testament grace. His use of biblical intertextuality in *Light in August* demonstrates the debased ends to which the Bible was used by the white South: instead of functioning as a "moral code and standard" of "suffering and sacrifice and the promise of hope" (Faulkner, *Lion* 247), the South's iconic book rendered judgements and inescapable curses upon African-Americans. If *Light in August* is to participate to its greatest potential in the Southern colloquy on race and religion, it is into our memories as readers that Joe is to ascend, affecting us so deeply through the tragic example
of his death, brought about by the white South's racist interpretive community's rhetorical practices, that we begin with "newer hopes" (440) to envision a time when men with different blood in them will stop hating each other. Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* responds to this hatred and violence by offering an alternate vision, looking forward toward the creation of a loving environment distinct from the pervasive religiously sanctioned racial hatred which is critiqued in *Light in August*. 
Works Cited in Chapter Two


CHAPTER THREE:
"TELL OLE PHARAOH TO LET MY PEOPLE GO":
BIBLICAL INTERTEXTUALITY AS COMMUNAL DELIVERANCE
IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON’S MOSES, MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

In the main, the message the American Christians communicated to the African diaspora was a gospel distorted by an insidious racism and compromised by self-conceit and economic self-interest. It made God a partner to the white man’s cupidity and laid on Him a false ordination of human separation and a spurious consignment of a whole people to perpetual indignity rather than lifting His common fatherhood and publishing His commandment to love. —C. Eric Lincoln

How might it be possible to make visible those who have been rendered invisible religiously and historically?
—Charles Long

Alice Walker concludes her "Foreword" to Robert Hemenway’s Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography by asserting that African-Americans constitute a "people," and "a people do not throw their geniuses away. If they do, it is our duty as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children. If necessary, bone by bone" (xviii). Walker is, of course, speaking about her own well-documented attempts to mark the grave of her spiritual and artistic predecessor while at the same time speaking of the necessity of Zora Neale Hurston and her work to complete the mosaic of American literatures. Hemenway and Walker speak eloquently of this need to excavate Hurston’s work, and yet the project of excavation is central to nearly all of Hurston’s work: Zora Neale Hurston mined the black folk imagination, revealing a
distinctly African-American creativity. In Moses, Man of
the Mountain, Hurston digs deep into the black folk
consciousness to exhume one of its central, cultural
figures, Moses. She reconfigures, "bone by bone," this
central black folk hero so that her Moses, by the novel's
conclusion, has been transmuted from a figure out of a long
ago past whose story might not seem readily applicable to
the African-American experience into a great cultural hero
who delivers Southern blacks to a "land flowing with milk
and honey" (Exodus 3:8). Moses, Hurston's politically
empowering re-voicing of the Exodus story, responds to the
white South's racist communities of biblical interpretation
by appropriating a key figure from the Bible,
intertextually re-casting Moses as an African-American
liberator. Drawing upon a hermeneutical tradition of the
black church, Moses promises a communal deliverance from
those who oppress God's Children. Hurston's Moses leads
his people out of the "Egyptland" of the American South's
violent Jim Crow practices, delivering them to a Promised
Land that, like her own home-town of Eatonville, Florida,
is settled to insure African-American autonomy.

In his seminal study of African-American literary
history, From Behind the Veil, Robert Stepto declares that
a primary "pregeneric myth"--a shared story or myth that
exists within a given culture prior to a literary
expression of it but which shapes the culture's literary
forms—undergirds black American literary history: "The primary pregeneric myth for Afro-America is the quest for freedom and literacy" (ix). He examines how twentieth-century black writers respond to the earlier "call" of nineteenth-century literary works, such as the slave narratives, to express an eloquent call and response structure in black American literary history. These later authors "revoice" the earlier concerns of their forefathers' quest for literacy. Stepto surely is correct in linking literacy with democracy and determining that literacy is the primary myth which informs the black literary experience, for what can be more valuable than learning to decipher the language of a biracial society, most of whose expressions contain dire warnings and not-so-subtle statements of your "proper place" in society?

What Stepto does not consider, however, is the role of the Bible in the African-American literary tradition, in general, and in the black quest for literacy, in particular. The Bible served as one of the strongest motivations for slaves to learn to read so that they might study "the Book" themselves for messages of hope, looking for passages which said something more than "Servants, obey your masters." Quite simply, slaves were distrustful of white Southern interpretations of the Scriptures and wanted to be able to search the Bible for themselves. Even before these slaves became literate, their inability to read
"proved to be less of an obstacle to knowledge of the Bible than might be thought, for biblical stories became part of the oral tradition of the slaves" (Raboteau 239, 241). What they found in their reading of the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, were stories of God helping the oppressed, of God aiding those who served Him faithfully; they found the stories of Jonah, Daniel, Elijah, Isaac, and Abraham. However, the story which captured African-Americans' imaginations so strongly that it became one of their pregeneric myths was the Exodus story of Moses leading God's children from Egyptian bondage, through the Wilderness, to the Promised Land. As products of the black church, Hurston and Wright were very familiar with this story, and its power resonates throughout both Moses and Uncle Tom's Children, Hurston emphasizing the life lived after deliverance and Wright emphasizing the act of liberating oneself.

Critics, in the wake of the Hurston revival, largely have been silent regarding Moses, focusing much of their attention upon her better known work, Their Eyes Were Watching God.¹ Those who have written on Moses often

¹Hurston's own writings are also strangely silent regarding Moses. Her autobiography, Dust Tracks On A Road, was largely written in 1941 and published in 1942, over two years following the publication of Moses. In chapter 11, "Books and Things," Hurston provides a brief summary of her writing career, sprinkling it with interesting anecdotes about her work's production, but she fails to even mention Moses.
relegate it to the lower echelon of Hurston's work, describing the novel with phrases like "a noble failure," and "one of the more interesting minor works in American literary history" (Hemenway 270, 260). Other critics have focused on Moses's humor, Darwin Turner going so far in his study of Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, and Hurston, In a Minor Chord, to characterize the novel as an elaborate "joke" which "entertains readers but does not comment significantly on life or people" (111). Much the same point is argued by Robert Hemenway who claims that Moses "falls short of its goal" because Hurston "is unable to find a consistent tone that can treat Moses as both divine deliverer and common man"; this supposed inconsistency results because she "seems content with [making] small jokes when a situation calls for tragic irony" (260). What Hemenway and Turner fail to consider are the political implications of laughter. As we will see, O'Connor's devout Christian beliefs allow her to laugh the laugh of the Redeemed, a superior sort of laugh at the expense of those who struggle with the machinations of Grace. On the contrary, Hurston's Moses demonstrates a politically liberating laugh that is achieved by (to paraphrase Ralph Ellison) slipping the yoke of the South's Jim Crowism through changing the white South's joke told at African-Americans' expense: the Bible says not only "Servants, obey your masters," but it also contains messages of hope
for dispossessed Southern blacks. When critics of Hurston's work sometimes do credit her with a politics of dissent, this most often occurs when reading Their Eyes. For instance, in "The Politics of Zora Neale Hurston," David Headon finds evidence of a type of liberation politics in Hurston's work from the 1930s, relying heavily upon a reading of Their Eyes which sees Janie as liberating herself from a series of repressive men and refusing to subjugate herself to any of them (33). Moses, a novel which employs the familiar folk preaching technique of equating Southern black history with the biblical story of the Hebrew exodus from slavery, is conspicuous in its absence from such discussions. What could be more "political" than re-voicing one of the key texts by which the white South justified its Jim Crow policies?

Hurston intertextually evokes the materials of the black folk's hermeneutical practices into her novel, undertaking the radical venture of validating a distinctively African-American strategy for reading the Bible. Hurston strives so vehemently to verify the worth of this distinctly African-American cosmogony that her endeavor functions as a type of protest. Walker seems to recognize this, but like most of Hurston's critics, gives with one hand while taking with the other. For instance, while probably doing more to resurrect Hurston's career than anyone else through her thoughtful and sensitive
readings of these rediscovered works, bestowing upon Hurston the title of "cultural revolutionary"--a phrase which perfectly captures the intertextual project of Moses--Walker stops short of realizing the political significance of Hurston rescuing a black legacy. Referring to comments such as "slavery is the price I paid for civilization," Walker dismisses Hurston’s politics as "weird" without even considering the political implications of works such as Moses. Walker states, "I think we are better off if we think of Zora Neale Hurston as an artist, period--rather than as the artist/politician most black writers have been required to be" ("Dedication" 1,2,3). Whereas an over-emphasis upon salvational concerns within O’Connor’s Wise Blood deflect attention away from matters of racial prejudice, or an over-emphasis upon the Marxist overtones of Wright’s Uncle Tom’s Children might overlook that text’s indebtedness to the black church, the rhetorical move of viewing Hurston as an artist outside of the context of the Jim Crow South closes off discussion of the political implications of her work. June Jordan, who first read Hurston at the prompting of Walker, however, recognizes

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2In her "Dedication" to the Hurston reader, I Love Myself When I’m Laughing..., Walker seems strangely naive both to the political connotation of her own analysis when making statements such as "there is enough self-love in [Their Eyes Were Watching God]--love of community, culture, traditions--to restore a world. Or create a new one" (2) and to her own sometimes strident position as a black "artist/politician."
that the "affirmation of Black values and lifestyles within the American context is, indeed, an act of protest. Therefore, Hurston's affirmative work is profoundly defiant..." (87). Moses, with this insight held before us, then serves as a great call for an African-American leader to unify his or her people into a true community. 3

In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates posits a theory of intertextuality manifested in many areas of African-American culture. 4 African-American creativity is informed by borrowing from both black and white traditions. Yet what these artists borrow is not passively or uncritically taken, for Gates, using the example of black literary artists, argues that "black writers...learn to write by reading literature, especially the canonical texts of the Western tradition.... But black formal repetition always repeats with a difference" (xxii). This creating, constructing "difference" is also readily detectable in the history of the black church in America, in terms of both

3Alice Walker testifies to not only the importance, but the efficacy of Hurston's cultural reclamation project. She gave her family, "who are such typical black Americans they are useful for every sort of political, cultural, or economic survey," ("Zora Neale Hurston--A Cautionary Tale and Partisan View" xiii) the works of Zora Neale Hurston so that they might reclaim their vital inheritance as African-Americans.

4In addition to Gates' work, many of this chapter's theoretical underpinnings are indebted to Houston Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and African-American Literature*. Both Gates and Baker emphasize the critically revisionary impetus of much of African-American culture.
its struggle for autonomy and its teachings. While under the auspices of white denominational control before the Civil War and as independent bodies of believers after the War, the black church differentiated itself from white Southern Protestants by emphasizing a theology often grounded in social justice while the white South remained committed to the theological concerns of personal piety. As Hurston herself reminds us, "while he lives and moves in the midst of a white civilization, everything that [the African-American] touches is re-interpreted for his own use. He has modified the language...and most certainly the religion of his new country" (43).

The origins of the black church—both its victories and the overwhelming odds it faced—can be traced back to the early efforts of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), an organization founded in 1701 in England for the purpose of proselytizing slaves in the American colonies. While laying the foundations for the black church by providing slaves with some of their earliest Christian indoctrination, the SPG was allowed to operate in the South only after promising slave-owners that

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5These are, of course, general tendencies and not hard and fast categorizations. As a Christian church, the black church did address matters of salvation and personal piety, delivering sermons on sex, drinking, card-playing, sometimes sounding much like its white counter-part, and the white church took stands on some social issues, particularly on the temperance question. But the general tendencies still stand: the black church concerned itself with social justice and the white church with personal salvation.
"the Blacks would be taught nothing which might be inimical to their status as slaves" (Lincoln "Development of Black Religion" 13, 17). Richard Allen and Absalom Jones led a walk-out of Philadelphia's St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church's black members in 1787 and eventually established their own churches in 1794 (Gravely 302). Some Southern masters allowed their slaves to worship in separate facilities, but the Christian message of antebellum whites was one of subservience. Slave masters constantly reinforced the conservatism of their brand of Christianity, often "encouraging" slave preachers to emphasize "the ideals of loyalty, obligation, and duty in their sermons" (Marable 321). In fact, some slaves thought that white slave owners had a different Bible from the ones black ministers preached from since the only message preached by white ministers was "Servants, obey your masters" (Raboteau 295).

These slaves, perhaps, spoke truer than they knew, for the antebellum South's racist ideology led to the construction of a "Bible" to endorse its "peculiar institution." Of course, no white fundamentalist who believed in the literal truth and divine inspiration of God's Word would presume to create a new Bible or rewrite the existing one; however, white theologians, preachers, and devoted Bible-readers of the South contributed to the creation of what might be termed a "racist Bible" when
their hermeneutical practices emphasized certain portions of the Scriptures. In an attempt to justify slavery and, later, Jim Crow, the white South turned to one of the region's greatest moral authorities. If the Bible could be made to endorse the white South's treatment of African-Americans, who could countermand that powerful an authority? These interpretive communities underscored passages which they often returned to in order to justify their enslavement of Africans. As we have seen, Faulkner's *Light in August* mounts an attack upon one of the racist interpretive community's legacies, specifically the prolonged influence of the "myth of Ham" as a justification for white Southern segregation and violence toward blacks, but there were many such biblically based prejudices. Of the biblical justifications for these antebellum interpretive communities, perhaps the one most often cited was a passage from one of the New Testament epistles of Paul. 6 In Ephesians, Paul writes:

> Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of

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6See Forrest G. Wood's *Arrogance of Faith* for a discussion of many of the most prevalent biblical defenses of slavery found in the antebellum South. Southerners often cited the Old Testament stories of patriarchal figures such as Abraham and Isaac who owned slaves, the curse of Cain (where God supposedly put His mark on Cain by blackening his skin), the curse of Ham, the lack of a condemnation of slavery by Christ, and the writings of Paul as justifications for their enslavement of a race of people.
Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as the Lord and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.  

Ephesians 6:5-8

In a text so large and heterogeneous as the Bible, a collation of materials written at different times, for different audiences, for different purposes, what was often over-looked were the passages which directly contradicted such biblical supports for slavery. For example, Deuteronomy 23:15-16 proclaims that "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him." Should one own human beings and admonish these slaves to be subservient, or should one give aid and comfort to escaping slaves, thereby invalidating the entire institution of human bondage? There was, of course, only one answer to this question given the white South's racist interpretive community's hermeneutics. However, this ability to be selective in creating a biblical hermeneutic also worked to the black church's advantage, allowing African-Americans—who were also empowered by the Protestant imperative to search the Scriptures—to give priority to those biblical passages which spoke of their eventual liberation.
Racist interpretive communities of the Bible, of course, existed well into the twentieth-century and not only in the South. Justifications for racial segregation and abuse occupied the time and energy of professional and lay theologians. One of the most infamous and invidious of this type of theologian was Charles Carroll, author of *The Tempter of Eve; or, The Criminality of Man's Social, Political, and Religious Equality with the Negro, and the Amalgamation to Which These Crimes Inevitably Lead*. From the title alone, one perceives the racism that underlies Carroll’s investigation of the Scriptures. Carroll takes great pains in his introduction to present his credentials as a God-fearing Christian so that his argument will carry more weight with his fellow believers:

My father was an old Methodist class teacher, and I am the child of a Methodist mother.... This induced me in my investigation of the negro to first take up the Bible. I reasoned thus: If the Bible is the Word of God...surely God would not turn loose upon the Earth such a creature with no record of him by which he might be identified in all ages of his history. The result [i.e. this book] proved the correctness of my reasoning.\(^7\)  

Racist books like *The Tempter of Eve* found receptive audiences in the white South as the region scrambled for

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\(^7\)See *The Biblical and Scientific Defense of Slavery*, an anthology, edited by John David Smith, which reproduces texts for students and scholars of race and race relations in American literature and history.
divine justifications for physical and social violence perpetrated against Southern blacks.

Hurston was fully aware of just such racist hermeneutical strategies of Southern Protestants. In fact, she directly confronted one of the most pervasive and insidious religious justifications for Southern racism in a one-act play, "The First One," which appeared in Charles S. Johnson's 1927 anthology, Ebony and Topaz.8 "The First One" dramatizes the biblical story which served as a cornerstone of Southern racism and which is critiqued in Faulkner's Light in August, namely Noah's curse upon his son, Ham.9 As she will to a much greater degree a dozen years later with the publication of Moses, Man of the Mountain in 1939, in this play, Hurston appropriates a biblical text to offer her critique of the white South's racially biased religiosity. Hurston's Ham displays all of the stereotypical characteristics that Southern whites believed were inherent in blacks: Ham offers no material

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8Biblical intertextuality occurs not only in Moses and "The First One" but is prevalent throughout Hurston's work, from her earliest stories, such as "Book of Harlem" (1926) and "The Fire and the Cloud" (1934), both contained in Spunk: The Selected Stories of Zora Neale Hurston, to her last, uncompleted work, a fictionalized biography of Herod the Great, Roman governor of Israel who supposedly ordered the slaughter of the innocents during Christ's childhood.

9See the Harper Perennial reprint of Dust Tracks on a Road, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., which contains an alternative version of "My People," a chapter from Hurston's autobiography, for another of Hurston's investigations into the myth of Ham.
sacrifice to Jehovah but plays the happy minstrel, bringing music and dance instead. While his brothers, Shem and Japheth, toil in the fields and with the flocks, Ham entertains the benevolent father (who sounds at times like the kindly plantation owner of antebellum Southern fiction) with songs. In fact, "The First One" lampoons the school of Southern literature characterized by moonlight and magnolias, which depicted an "organic" society based upon the contented family of the South's plantation patriarchy. Hurston's Ham parodies this stereotyped character because his jocularity causes trouble in this agrarian paradise. Noah becomes drunk, but in a significant re-reading of the biblical text, Ham becomes a victim of a conspiracy when his brothers' wives plot to have Noah deliver a curse upon Ham after the old man has stripped off his own clothes in a drunken stupor. Ham is then no longer a two-dimensional type character of the contented slave, becoming instead the object of scorn and derision. "The First One" crystallizes the paradox of white Southern ideology's contrasting characterizations of blacks.

Noah is duped into cursing whoever has laughed at his drunken nakedness without realizing who is to be the recipient of his anger. Still drunk, Noah bellows, "He shall be accursed. His skin shall be black! Black as the nights, when the waters brooded over the Earth!... Black! He and his seed forever. He shall serve his brothers and
they shall rule over him" (55). Like Moses, the hoodoo man of her subsequent novel, Noah's supernatural powers are as much the result of his own conjuring abilities as they are any authority or command given by Jehovah. Why else, as Ham's wife asks, would Jehovah listen to "a drunken curse" (56)? Noah quickly sobers after realizing he has cursed a member of his organic society, but his hoodoo proves too powerful even to be removed through his own actions. The amazing thing about "The First One" is that it is essentially a comedy, a lampoon of white biblical justifications for racism. At the play's conclusion when Ham and his family are banished by Noah, in typical Zora Neale Hurston fashion, they display no anger, no resentment over being black; this Ham, like his literary creator, is not "tragically colored." One can easily detect in Ham the same feelings that Hurston expressed in her infamous essay, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me": "There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it" (1652). In fact, "The First One" concludes with Ham displaying scorn for those he is leaving because he is going to continue to laugh, dance, and sing in the sun.

If the "white Bible" that Hurston attacks in her one act play and in Moses spoke of submission, then the "black
Bible" had the story of Moses and other Old Testament deliverers of God's Chosen People writ in large, bold letters.\textsuperscript{10} Stories of Moses, Daniel, Joseph, and numerous other Hebrew patriarchs provided Southern blacks with an assurance that God delivered the enslaved and punished oppressors in this world and not the next. The spirituals provided African-Americans with the artistic medium to express these hopes, and images of these Old Testament heroes are ubiquitous in the black religious cosmogony. In the "communal re-creation" of the black community's constant variation upon the theme of deliverance, slaves even depicted Jesus as a sort of Old Testament "warrior" enlisted in their fight for freedom (Levine 43). Levine uses the evidence of the slaves' transformation of Jesus from Redeemer to Deliverer to support his belief, like Albert J. Raboteau's, in a black biblical hermeneutical practice which selected relevant passages and images from the Bible to construct a message of hope. "This transformation of Jesus is symptomatic of the slaves' selectivity in choosing those parts of the Bible which were to serve as the basis of their religious consciousness" (Levine 43). The white South culled through the Bible to

\textsuperscript{10}Cain H. Felder's "The Bible and Re-Contextualization" demonstrates that "the Bible has come to occupy a central place in religions of the Black diaspora" because "blacks have...developed an experiential sympathy with much of the biblical witness to which they in turn give reverent attention as quite literally the revealed word of God" (155, 157, emphasis added).
find justifications for its racial policies and the black church responded by appropriating one of the dominant culture’s tools: African-Americans combated racism with the same Bible that the white South used to justify its discriminatory practices.

The strongest identification with and greatest attachment to an Old Testament story, however, was reserved for the account of Moses’ delivery of the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. In fact, this story can be said to function as one of Stepto’s pregeneric myths. The Exodus story exerted such a powerful influence over the African-American imagination because the black church "stressed the parallel between God’s directing Moses to lead the Jews out of their bondage and the surety that He would see that they were delivered from enslavement" (Montgomery 337). The common heritage of enslavement in a foreign land far from their native home, forced by demanding masters to work under cruel circumstances, to "make bricks without straw"—all of these factors encouraged a close identification between African-Americans and a race designating themselves as "God’s Chosen People."

As Albert Raboteau argues, Southern blacks, before and after Emancipation, incorporated "as part of their mythic past the Old Testament exodus of Israel out of slavery.... [They] applied the Exodus story, whose end they knew, to their own experience of slavery, which had not ended. In
identifying with the Exodus story, they created meaning and purpose out of the chaotic and senseless experience of slavery.... The sacred history of God’s liberation of his people would be or was being repeated in the American South" (311). While the black church was still very much Christ-centered, emphasizing Jesus as the forgiver of sins and provider of relief from suffering once the saint reached heaven, Moses played a pivotal role in the African-American cosmogony because his story "provide[d] a historical example for modern application" (Genovese 253, 252, 242). This "historical example" insured the black church’s participation in African-American struggles for liberty.

The twentieth-century black church inherited a very distinct legacy from its beginnings as the "invisible institution" of the slave church: a tradition of viewing the Bible as a sacred text "relevant to the everyday problems of a Black man," (Mitchell 113) and a continued commitment to freedom and full participation in American democracy. In fact, these two characteristics fueled one another. Rather than stressing questions of biblical inerrancy and personal piety, like drinking," as did the

"See William B. McClain’s essay, "Free Style and a Closer Relationship to Life," for a similar characterization of the differences between the South’s black and white Protestant churches: "Preaching in white churches tends to be of a more pastoral nature, emphasizing individuals and their personal behavior rather than the revolutionary ethic of Jesus and the prophetic judgement on the whole community"
white church, the black church and its ministers presented a Bible accentuating messages of hope and liberation in order to bolster and edify their congregations; these ministers presented "fiery glad" messages of hope (Mitchell 50). (This zealous rhetoric, replicating the ardor and enthusiasm of these ministers, is often evident in the writing of historians investigating the black church and its characteristics.) For instance, while the black church evolved not within the formal, unified strictures of a single denomination but as "an attitude, a movement," it still highlighted "the black man's humanity, his relevance, his responsibility, his participation, and his right to see himself as the image of God" (Lincoln, "Black Religion & the Black Church" 3). This description is amplified by historian Leon W. Watts who writes that the black church used the Bible to "'turn on' a people for liberation rather than to pacify them for the condition of enslavement;... to free the spirit from bondage that the body might wrest liberation from the oppressors" (25). One would have to look no further than the well-known rebellions of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner to find very early indications of the "double-edged sword" (Raboteau 290) that African-Americans
had obtained in their adoption and incorporation of Protestant Christianity.\textsuperscript{12}

Young Zora Neale Hurston was initiated into and edified by this religious community, beginning with her earliest childhood, and quickly mastered its biblical hermeneutic. Her father was a Baptist minister in Eatonville, was invited to preach throughout Florida, and served as moderator for the South Florida Baptist Association (Hemenway 14). Perhaps sparked by the instruction she received from the pulpit, or perhaps sparked by the intellectual curiosity she displayed throughout her life, Hurston began early in her reading and imaginative life to study the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, recognizing the Bible as the African-American text of political deliverance. In a classic demonstration of the black church's biblical hermeneutic, Hurston returned again and again to those stories which speak of God's very direct intervention into human affairs. Even as an adult, Hurston declared, "Except for the beautiful language of Luke and Paul, the New Testament still plays a poor second to the Old Testament for me. The Jews had a

\textsuperscript{12}See James Cone's \textit{God of the Oppressed} for a similar insight into the earliest efforts of the black church to insure liberation for its members where he maintains that in the African-American religious tradition, Christ was transformed into "the liberator of the oppressed from sociopolitical oppression. Under the influence of this Christ,... Nat Turner saw Jesus as the spirit of violent revolution against the strictures of slavery" (114).
God who laid about Him when they needed Him." A particularly favorite Old Testament figure of Hurston was David, a man who was quick to "smite" his people's enemies, those who were "crying out for a good killing" (*Dust Tracks* 40). The stories of the Old Testament gave the black church an assurance in a God who dispenses retribution, both in this world and in the next, upon those who oppress his faithful believers.

The black church was so vital to African-American psychological and spiritual health because it proved to be such an effective weapon against the white South's religious defenses of racism. To be sure, not all white Southern Christians held vitriolic race prejudices. As Eugene Genovese demonstrates, instances of sincere white Christian concern for fellow black human beings and believers can be traced back to the earliest proselytizing of blacks in America (190). However, the South's major Protestant sects were "dominated by spokesmen who held firmly to the dogma of Negro inferiority, and who thus maintained that the system of black-white separatism represented the normal development of a divinely implanted instinct" (Smith 304-5). The propagation and adoption of these ideals by white congregations was evident to Hurston. In fact, they figure prominently in her characterization of the white Arvay Henson, the heroine of her final published book, a novel called *Seraph on the Suwanee* which relates
the courtship and life-long marriage of Arvay to her husband. As a young woman, Arvay possesses an evangelical fervor and entertains ideas of becoming a foreign missionary, and while her religious enthusiasm wanes, her commitment to the church is never completely extinguished. She attends an unnamed Protestant church which loudly preaches the Southern homily of "Christ and Him Crucified."

From this same pulpit, Arvay receives religious instruction which allows her to look with scorn upon a woman who has married a husband considered not "quite white." Like Joe Christmas from *Light in August* when he first comes to Jefferson, this man (a day laborer working for Arvay’s husband) becomes socially feared and stigmatized because his alien status as an Other prevents a definite knowledge of his racial history. In Arvay’s mind, "the woman had gone back on her kind and fallen from grace" (242, 120, emphasis added) because Arvay believes this woman may have violated the South’s prohibition on race mixing. A racism endorsed by white pulpits prevailed across the South, declaring that God had "elected" blacks to an inferior status. As James Cone writes, Southern whites "tried to make us [African-Americans] believe that God created black people to be white people’s servants. We...were expected to enjoy plowing their fields, cleaning their houses, mowing their lawns, and working in their sawmills" (2).
Although she was "born with God in the house," quickly "tumbled right into the Missionary Baptist Church," and acknowledged the vital role of the black church in African-American culture, Hurston developed the anthropologist's ability to emotionally distance herself from the object of her curiosity. She never quit believing in the cultural centrality of the Bible and the black church for African-Americans, but her early religious training began to leave what she called a "lack" in her mind. As an adult, Hurston maintained that "organized creeds are collections of words around a wish." Despite her individual lack of personal faith in organized religion, Hurston treated all religious views with respect, including Christianity and belief systems often dismissed or denigrated from Western cultural biases, such as voodoo or folk beliefs. Hurston adamantly believed "that any religion that satisfied the individual urge is valid for that person" (Dust Tracks 193-203, 40, 149). This sensitivity to and respect for others' religious beliefs, along with her irrepressible curiosity, led Hurston to recognize the cultural importance of the loose cluster of associated folk religious beliefs common to Southern blacks.

Hurston, graduate of prestigious Barnard college, student of anthropology under Franz Boas, and theorist of African-American folk culture, stressed the importance of mythic and folkloric stories for Southern blacks,
emphasizing both their necessity as a foundation upon which to build a community that could provide an antidote to the poisonous influence of slavery and then Jim Crow and their ability to evolve. In her essay, "High John de Conquer," she demonstrates both folklore's edifying nature and its mutability. Hurston identifies "High John" as one of the central characters of black folklore, dating him all the way back to slavery, yet very few whites have ever heard of him. She explains that during slavery "Old Massa met our hope-bringer all right, but when Old Massa met him, he was not going by his right name. He was traveling, and touristning around the plantations as the laugh-provoking Brer Rabbit" (The Sanctified Church 70, emphasis mine). Since folklore stories function as "ceaseless variations upon a theme" (Hurston "Characteristics" 229), African-American struggles for freedom could be described by the exploits of John in one story, Brer Rabbit in the next, and some other trickster figure in yet another hope-bringing story. It is precisely this ability to shift names and shapes that makes High John so effective as a "hope-bringer." Regardless of his incarnation--High John, Brer Rabbit, or even Moses--the liberating hero is always spreading a message of promise. In Hurston’s estimation, these stories served a religious function; like the adoption of Old Testament heroes, these folk stories and folk beliefs helped African-Americans to "make a way out of
no way," to survive the American South's violence with an emotional and spiritual health. The sacred world view of blacks, composed of both Protestant doctrine and folk beliefs, created a distinctly African-American religiosity, providing Southern blacks with an alternative to the oppressive beliefs of white Southern Protestantism, an alternative which kept their "legal slavery from becoming a spiritual slavery" (Levine 80).

Hurston once wrote that "Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making" ("Characteristics" 229), and Moses, Man of the Mountain serves as her best demonstration of this statement. While she often collected folklore, this novel demonstrates her participation in the constantly evolving mosaic of African-American folklore. Into Moses, Hurston interjects these two crucial elements of the black belief system, elements which have their roots in the era of slavery: the formal creeds of Protestant Christianity and the more protean beliefs of folk religion. Levine explains the contribution of each to the construction of black Southern religiosity:

Christianity...provid[ed] the assurance of the ephemeral quality of the present situation and the glories and retributions to come, both in this world and the next, by solidifying the slaves' sense of communality, and by reinforcing their feelings of self-worth and dignity. Folk beliefs...offered the slaves sources of power and knowledge alternative to those existing within the world of the master class.
Rather than accepting wholesale the Christian teachings of the master class, early African-Americans engaged in an act of "communal re-creation" to use Lawrence Levine's term (29), complementing their recently adopted Protestant theology with folk beliefs to create a world view which affirms the value of an African-American community. Moses capitalizes upon both these folk and Protestant beliefs, transmuting the biblical patriarch into the greatest hoodoo man in the African and African-American traditions. Hurston's Moses, like High John and other folkloric figures, is first and foremost a "hope-bringer" for Southern blacks in their struggle for political equality.

In order to be a true hope-bringer, in the long line of such folklore figures for Southern blacks, Hurston's Moses must possess some virtue or endowment that makes him larger than life, that imbues him with the capacity to deliver his message of promise. Moses' gift is his hoodoo or conjuring powers. Hemenway, in his biography of

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13 See C. Eric Lincoln's essay, "The Black Heritage in Religion in the South" for a similar observation. Lincoln writes: "The black denominations had adopted wholesale the credal confessions and the governing and ritual formats of their white counterparts, except for those necessary changes giving recognition to the full sovereignty of black churches and the full humanity and responsibility of black people." Crucial to making those "necessary changes" were folk beliefs and practices and "vestigial African ritual traditions like the 'ring dance'" (52-3, emphasis added).
Hurston, offers an insightful definition of this belief system:

Hoodoo and conjure are collective terms for all the traditional beliefs in black culture centering around a votary’s confidence in the power of a conjure, root, two-head, or hoodoo doctor to alter with magical powers a situation that seems rationally irremediable. At its most basic level it is sympathetic magic; at its most complex, a highly complicated religion. Many scholars believe that some practices are of African origin. (118-19)

Practitioners of these arts have fulfilled a vital role in Southern black folk culture since before the Civil War. As Levine notes, "The whites were neither omnipotent nor omniscient; there were things they did not know, forces they could not control, areas in which slaves could act with more knowledge and authority than their masters, ways in which the powers of the whites could be muted if not thwarted entirely" (73-4). After the Civil War on into the twentieth-century, when bold assertions of civil and social equality by black men and women could lead to death at the hands of white mobs, conjuring still fulfilled the vital function of providing African-Americans an alternative means of responding to and interacting with an often malevolent world, providing "an access to power for a powerless people" (Hemenway 119).

Hurston’s Moses explores the secrets of conjuring from his earliest childhood in the Pharaoh’s palace. He frequents the palace’s libraries and asks the priests how
they perform their magic. Mentu (Hurston’s pun on the word "mentor"), Moses’ servant and attendant to the royal stable, provides the prince’s first lessons in a world of knowledge outside of the official ways of seeing and doing sanctioned by the power structures of Pharaoh’s Egypt. Mentu initiates young Moses into the world of black folk belief: he tells "hope-bringing" animal stories, particularly ones about monkeys, and tales about how the world was created. Mentu reveals to Moses a seamless world without divisions between the sacred and the secular, where every story teaches to the initiate his moral responsibility to his fellow man. For example, a story that Mentu tells of a crippled old lizard clearly imparts his own needs for companionship and food, so Moses quickly begins to feed his friend from the royal kitchen (59). One of young Moses’ earliest lessons from his mentor is thus also one of the primary lessons of African-American folklore: cunning and manipulation, and a little love, often achieve what force or direct appeals cannot. The old man no longer has to fight with the other palace servants for the morsels left on the cast-off head when the kitchen prepares boiled pork because his management of Moses insures that he eats "further back on the hog now" (61). The analogy is clear—in order to deliver his people from their captivity in the Egyptland of the American South,
Moses must possess an alternate vision to the dominant culture he opposes.

Moses' instructions from Mentu have larger implications for Hurston's analogy throughout the novel between the conditions of the ancient Israelites and Southern blacks. Although Mentu is not himself a Hebrew (71), his subservient position within the Egyptian social order clearly links him on a narrative level very closely with the Israelites. This linkage, this common status of both Mentu and the Israelites as second-class citizens, reveals the generative and transforming power of folklore to insure psychic health. By this I mean, Moses—conjurer, deliverer, man of power and action—is as much created as appropriated in black Southern folklore. He is obviously taken from the Hebrew Bible and Christian Old Testament, but that is simply his origin. The value of Hurston's Moses is that he is of the folk. Hurston clearly reveals the fruits of her Barnard studies by depicting Moses as a member of the royal house of Pharaoh, an idea which was common among anthropology students of the 1930s,14 perhaps finding its most well-known expression in Sigmund Freud's

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14 In the "Introduction" to Mules and Men, Hurston writes she was familiar with black folklore from "the earliest rocking of my cradle," but this culture "was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through" (1).
Moses and Monotheism. Despite his noble lineage, however, his association with the lowly Mentu and his advocacy of the Hebrews aligns Moses with the oppressed. In order to be a true hope-bringer, he must have strong ties with the community he seeks to aid while still having the capacity to draw upon resources, knowledge, or power that transcends the powerlessness of those he has come to liberate.

The Hebrews of Moses are, indeed, a people without hope when Hurston's novel opens; they have no gods to worship, no deities to protect them. On the contrary, Southern white Protestantism adamantly proclaimed that the Hebrews faithfully worshipped Jehovah during their Egyptian enslavement. White Southern Protestants asserted this uninterrupted fidelity to God so that they might depict themselves as the ultimate manifestation of God's church on Earth. The Exodus story was read typologically by the white South, as an Old Testament prefiguration of enslavement to sin and the spiritual liberation afforded by Christ's sacrificial death.  

A tradition of uninterrupted worship of Jehovah, however, did not square with the experience of Africans in America. Just as white slavers sought to deprive Africans of their ancestral histories,

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15For example, the Landmark Baptist denomination reached the zenith of its appeal in the first few decades of the twentieth-century. Landmark Baptists maintained that they could trace a continuous history back to the earliest Christian church of the first century and that they, not Catholicism, represented the one, true church.
language, and religious practices, Hurston's Egyptians strip their slaves of any former religious legacy so that they might break their servants' wills and make them more tractable workers. Jethro tells Moses of the desperation of the enslaved Hebrews "down there in Egypt without no god of their own and no more protection than a bareheaded mule" (156).

Jethro will coach Moses for his role as hope-bringer to the enslaved Hebrews, but long before he meets his future father-in-law, Moses performs two decisive acts which release him from his ties to the royal house of Egypt: he kills an Egyptian overseer and then crosses the Red Sea as he flees his angry uncle. The writer/redactor of Exodus renders Moses' killing of the Egyptian in a very laconic style. In the Old Testament account, Moses "spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand" (Exodus 2:11-12). The biblical account gives no identification of the Egyptian, revealing nothing personal about this man and, certainly, nothing about his social status. Contrastingly, Hurston's re-reading of the account describes the dead Egyptian with several key terms. Moses' victim is described variously as a "foreman," (93) a "bossman," (94) and, most significantly, an "overseer" (95). Each of these descriptors underscores the fact that
Moses has just struck a liberating blow for his newly adopted people. Moses has just fulfilled many of the Southern blacks' silent wishes, the secret desires of an oppressed people who felt the overseer's lash on Southern plantations before the Civil War, and who often worked for cruel bosses and foremen after Emancipation.

The second of Moses' liberating actions, crossing the Red Sea, not only foreshadows his upcoming crossing with the newly freed Hebrews but also emphasizes his new role as an emancipator. Hurston closes Chapter Ten with Moses' renunciation of his former way of life:

Moses had crossed over. He was not in Egypt. He had crossed over and now he was not an Egyptian. He had crossed over.... He did not have friends to sustain him. He had crossed over. He did not have enemies to strain against his strength and power. He had crossed over. He was subject to no law except the laws of tooth and talon. He had crossed over. The sun who was his friend and ancestor in Egypt was arrogant and bitter in Asia. He had crossed over. He felt as empty as a post hole for he was none of the things he once had been. He was a man sitting on a rock. He had crossed over.  

Hurston herself achieves the eloquence of a folk preacher with her measured cadences and repetition of the phrase "crossed over." If Moses is to liberate his newly befriended people, he must first liberate himself from his former lifestyle, a lifestyle of ease and opulence which would hinder his identification with the Hebrews. This "crossing" is vital to Moses because it allows the young prince to work on behalf of an oppressed people while the
term resonates with theological implications for African Americans. Just as black preachers urged their congregations to "cross over" into a new life by accepting Jesus Christ, Hurston's Moses will have a similarly Liberating effect when he leads the Israelites in "crossing over" from their old life of exploitation and oppression into a new life of freedom.16 Whereas O'Connor's Haze Motes yearns for a personal salvational deliverance, a deliverance of his individual soul from sin, Hurston's Moses struggles to effect a political liberation, delivering African-Americans into a new life by constructing a community apart from the degradations of living Jim Crow.

Although Hurston's Moses has distanced himself from the royal house of Egypt, he still has no direction or mission after crossing the Red Sea. Eventually his wanderings lead him to Jethro, his future father-in-law and magic teacher, who further instructs Moses about conjuring and the ways of Jehovah. While living with and learning from Jethro, both constituents of Moses' power--his conjuring and his selection by God--are bestowed upon him

16Robert Hemenway, in his biography of Hurston, makes a similar argument in reading this passage: "Like a black minister exhorting his congregation to cross over into a new life in Christ, Hurston's prose not only uses the phrases, but also captures the repetitive pattern and rhythm of the folk sermon--leaving one to gasp for breath and interject the rhythmic aaaah of the black preacher after each 'he crossed over'" (270).
in fateful encounters: his hoodoo powers result from his successful quest for the mythical Book of Koptos, and his divine power follows his encounter with the great I AM at the burning bush. In a journey typical of many folk heroes' adventures, Moses seeks great wisdom from a book which is guarded by a frightening monster at the bottom of a body of water. After besting the priests at Koptos in a magic contest, Moses compels them to work for him in the retrieval of the sacred Book. After reading this book, Moses

was able to command the heavens and the earth, the abyss and the mountain, and the sea. He knew the language of the birds of the air, the creatures that people the deep and what the beasts of the wilds all said. He saw the sun and the moon and the stars of the sky as no man had ever seen them before, for a divine power was with him. 

(154)

Moses now possesses the means by which to free the Hebrew people from their slavery; the Book of Koptos furnishes him with the power—his "high hand"—to bring plagues against Pharaoh's house and to protect his adopted people. What

17 In Hurston's Mules and Men (194), she tells of her training under a two-headed doctor named Luke Turner, a man who claimed to be the nephew of Marie Leveau. Leveau lived and worked in New Orleans during the mid-1800s and is considered, among the initiated, to have been one of the most powerful practitioners of conjuring. Turner told Hurston a story which may have influenced her creation of Moses' battle with the deathless snake: Leveau's greatest totem was a large snake which served only her until it mysteriously disappeared after Leveau's death.
Moses still lacks is the commission delivered at the burning bush.

Hurston immediately follows her account of Moses’ exploits at Koptos with her re-reading of his encounter with Jehovah at the burning bush. Moses’ meeting with Jehovah actually is the origin of African-American conjuring. Part II of Mules and Men documents Hurston’s investigations in New Orleans into American hoodoo, and the introduction to this section includes her re-presentation of a folk story explaining the connection between Christian beliefs and hoodoo. As one might expect, the central figure of this reconciliation is Moses. In a miniature version of Moses, the Moses of Hurston’s folk story learns conjuring from Jethro, "a great hoodoo man." Moses masters his father-in-law’s teachings and then has his encounter with God at the burning bush. "But Moses never would have stood before the burning bush, if he had not married Jethro’s daughter" (Mules and Men 184). This God of the mountain, with the deep voice of "rumbling judgment," augments Moses’ considerable power by giving him a rod and sharing his powerful, magical words with him. By implication, all of the hoodoo practitioners whose stories follow this account of what the "old ones said in ancient times" (Mules and Men 184-5) follow in the direct but diminished foot-steps of Moses, the first conjure man of the African-American tradition. The Moses of Hurston’s
novel, the progenitor of all African-American conjuring, is to use his powers to liberate the enslaved. As Jehovah tells him, "I want you to go down and tell that Pharaoh I say to let my people go" (162). Now he has a mission and the means to accomplish it—free the enslaved Hebrews, fulfilling God's promise, and fashion these people into a community with his conjuring powers. Through his encounters with the Book of Koptos and the burning bush, Hurston's Moses' accumulation of power serves as another analogy of the struggles of Southern blacks: his folk beliefs (i.e. his conjuring skills) both augment and adapt the region's dominant religiosity (the Christianity of the burning bush) so that African-Americans might have the necessary anthropological means for constructing a separate, nurturing community.

Moses' task of constructing a people begins in dramatic fashion when he leads the Israelites out of Egypt and drowns Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, but he still has not molded them into a cohesive, communal unit. Moses must now use his hoodoo and divinely given strength to shape the Hebrews into a unified people as they face the threat of a neighboring tribe, the Amalekites. Joshua, serving as a sort of field general, leads the newly liberated Hebrews to victory, but Moses makes their victory possible. Aaron and another tribal elder, Hur, aid Moses as he calls upon both sources of his power; they support
his arms when he grows weary so that he might manifest the power of his conjuring right hand and the magic rod God gave him in his left. While Moses clearly carries the day with his supernatural powers, this battle with the Amalekites is one in which all of God’s people must participate. The building and maintaining of an African-American community will not come without a struggle.

Before the battle with the Amalekites, Moses clearly explains the importance of the upcoming conflict, illustrating his point with a folk tale. After equating the Israelites with a "passel of rabbits," Moses recounts the story of how these harmless creatures decided to drown themselves "because nothing looked up to them and nothing was scared of them":

[Just before they got to the river there was a marsh that the rabbits had to cross and while they were crossing it they ran over some frogs and the frogs hopped up crying, 'Quit it! Quit it!' So the rabbits said to one another, 'Those frogs are scared of us. We don’t need to kill ourselves no more because something in the world is scared of us. Let’s go on back home.’... Now that is just what the Israelites need--a victory. They just come out of slavery where they’ve been stomped down and trampled on.]

The hope-bringer must now provide a victory over the dominant culture he opposes. Hurston recounts the exact same tale in Mules and Men, her collection of Southern folklore, and its example as a sort of autotextuality attests to the story’s importance in Hurston’s own reading of the text of African-American folklore. As folklorists
and scholars are realizing, and as African-Americans have long understood, the rabbit is often the coded substitute for black people in folkloric animal stories. Brer Rabbit and all of his rabbit relatives had to survive in the capriciously cruel world with "grit and mother-wit." What made the rabbit such an admirable stand-in for Southern blacks—in fact, what elevated him to the status of "hope-bringer" like Moses—was that he survived on native intelligence and resilience, overcoming his physically stronger opponents with his quick-thinking. In the animal stories often told among Southern blacks, the rabbit is the perfect stand-in precisely for the reasons that Hurston's Moses lists: in an environment often filled with lynchings and dire warnings for blacks to always remember their "proper place," it was often difficult to find some other inhabitant of the vicious "forest" of Southern race relations who feared or respected them.

As Gates' *The Signifying Monkey* 18 reminds us, intertextuality within the African-American tradition possesses a certain critical edge; black artistic expression repeats with a difference. For instance, the second recounting of this tale, within the context provided by Moses, possesses an unmistakable revolutionary quality. In its first incarnation in *Mules and Men* (published in

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October 1935), the rabbit tale is just one of many "lies"
told to pass the time on the way to a fishing-hole. Despite the idyllic surroundings in which the story is told, this folk-tale expresses a truth about Southern black political powerlessness. No matter how pleasant life may seem for the moment, the violent caprices of the white South might destroy life's calm exterior. In other words, the rabbits' victory is not yet accomplished in Mules and Men. However, the "rabbits" of Moses, i.e. the Israelites, have undergone a profound change. After their victory, Moses and his people stand victorious upon "a truly bloody battle-ground" (259) and are, by virtue of their victory, no longer even rabbits. Moses realizes that he has brought a people, a true community "out from under Pharaoh with a high hand," "crossed the sea on dry land" with them, and together they "have fought and conquered a nation today" (260). In this re-reading of her own work, Hurston's folk-tale, collected during her field excursions through the South in 1927-28, undergoes a quite literal revolutionary metamorphosis: under the beneficent protection of their distinct religiosity, African-Americans have won the hard fought victory which allows them to exist and pursue their dreams as something other than "rabbits." The deadly seriousness of the Hebrew/liberated African-Americans' accomplishment and the consequences if they had lost, belie
previous critics' characterizations of Moses as one big joke.

A militant element also manifests itself when Moses dispatches his former allies—Aaron and Miriam who believe themselves to be Moses' siblings—in freeing the Hebrews. For instance, the Israelites often stray, temporarily abandoning the folk religiosity that won them victories over adversaries like the Amalekites. In fact, the recalcitrant Hebrews' apostasy often leads them right back to the religion of their original oppressors, the Egyptians, as when they revert to worshiping Apis, the bull-god, while Moses ascends Mt. Sinai to retrieve the stone tablets containing Jehovah's laws. Hurston lays the blame for most of the newly-freed Israelites' waywardness at the feet of Miriam and her brother, Aaron. Eventually, Moses removes these two mill-stones from around the collective neck of his people, giving Miriam a dread disease and killing Aaron, so that the Hebrews might finally claim the Promised Land. Ever since witnessing the Egyptian princess bathing in the Nile, Miriam sought the trappings of prestige and power to impress her fellow Israelites. "All of her life she was going to remember the gait of the Princess when she walked. She wondered if that movement was a special gift to royalty or if people like her could copy it" (43). Miriam parlays this early encounter with royalty into a position of honor among the
Hebrews, becoming a great conjure-woman in Goshen, but her skills in no way rival those of Moses. In a direct contest, Moses proves that he is the one, true spokesman of Jehovah and punishes Miriam's impudence by afflicting her with leprosy for seven days. As in the Old Testament rendering of her disease (Numbers 12:10), Miriam's disease renders her completely white. Hurston states that "Miriam was a horrible sight in her leprous whiteness! Everybody shrank away from her in terror and disgust" (301). Leprosy rendered a person "unclean" in ancient Hebrew society, and such victims were ostracized from the community. Likewise, Hurston's message is clear: any person opposing Moses' mission will suffer both physical affliction and communal scorn.

Hurston's novel reveals its militancy not only in the conflict between Moses and Miriam, but also in the power-struggles of Moses and Aaron. In a startling re-reading of the Old Testament, Hurston's Moses actually kills Aaron so that the meddlesome chief-priest might no longer interfere with the progress of the Hebrews toward the long sought-after Promised Land. Numbers 33:38-39 provides the intertextual antecedent for Hurston's startling re-voicing of the biblical narrative:

And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the Lord, and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the first day of the
fifth month. And Aaron was an hundred and twenty and three years old when he died in mount Hor.

In the biblical story, no mention is made of Moses ascending the mountain with Aaron, and certainly there is not even an implication that Moses is responsible for Aaron’s death.

Hurston dramatically alters this story in her appropriation of it in Moses. In a premeditated move, Moses accompanies Aaron up the mountain together, and the two men argue over Aaron’s importance to the tribe of Israel. Aaron plans to install himself at the center of the nation’s religious life once they claim the Promised Land, but Moses cannot tolerate the insult of Aaron’s duplicitous service any longer. Moses kills Aaron to affect a type of redemption, a communal redemption. Whereas O’Connor’s characters often commit violent acts to lead another character to a redemptive encounter with Christ, as Haze’s killing the "false prophet," Solace Layfield, in Wise Blood, Hurston’s Moses kills Aaron to insure the community’s eventual delivery to the Promised Land.

The knife descended and Aaron’s old limbs crumpled in the dust of the mountain. Moses looked down on him and wept. He remembered so much from way back.... Moses looked down the mountain at tented Israel and shook his head. "I have made a nation, but at a price." Then he buried Aaron and marked the place.... Then he picked up the robes and walked firmly down the mountain to where Eleazar waited.
The implications of Hurston’s intertextual revision are several: not only must Moses labor for the freedom of his adopted people, but he must also insure that nothing detracts from the dignity of their struggle. And perhaps even more importantly, Moses must remove, with decisive power, all impediments to the inexorable progress of his people. Hurston’s Moses, like the characters of Wright’s *Uncle Tom’s Children*, realizes that violence may be necessary to liberate African-Americans from the repressive strictures imposed by the white South; however, Hurston’s fiction seems more intent upon protecting against internal divisiveness in the struggle for freedom than in confronting the white South like Wright.

Hurston’s intertextual appropriations from the Exodus story and her subsequent re-readings of these narrative antecedents place her squarely in the tradition of the black folk preacher. Moses is one "long black song" of signifying upon a favorite preaching text of black ministers. As Faulkner would say, "the writer must write out of his background,... out of what he [or she] knows," and the story of Moses’ liberating the children of Israel had been a part of the African-American folk cosmogony since before the Civil War. In fact, Hurston is guaranteed a sort of cultural resonance when evoking Moses’ story because the entire novel invokes "the traditional Sunday morning sermon on Moses that all black people born before
1965 have heard at least once" (I Love Myself Walker 176). Blyden Jackson, in his essay, "Some Negroes in the Land of Goshen," realized early on that Moses's dominant, Old Testament imagery clearly marked it as a type of folk sermon (106). What Jackson does not fully explore, however, is the novel's political function as a folk sermon. The black churchgoer who possesses the hermeneutical skills of the folk tradition is able to understand the full revolutionary implications of the Moses sermon he or she hears "because it is between the lines of Scripture that the narratives of insurgence are delivered" (Spillers 41). The fictionalized Moses of Hurston's novel is firmly grounded in this insurrectionist tradition of preaching and serves a function as necessary and heroic as any actual "real-life" African-American hero or heroine. Hurston's hope-bringing Moses revitalizes a folk tradition, providing a summons for a new race leader to join other "militant leaders" in African-American history like David Walker, Ida Wells, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and the woman who was often called the Moses of her people, Harriet Tubman (Sheffey 220).

19 James Weldon Johnson recreated the powerful poetry of the traditional black folk sermon on Moses in his poem, "Let My People Go," contained in his volume God's Trombones. One can hardly escape the revolutionary sentiments like the ones that follow: "Listen! --Listen!--/ All you sons of Pharaoh./ Who do you think can hold God's people/ When the Lord God himself has said,/ Let my people go?" (52).
In many ways, the Promised Land which Moses leads his people toward is patterned after Hurston’s hometown of Eatonville. The Hebrews’ first reports on their future homeland come from Joshua, Caleb, and ten other spies sent by Moses into Canaan. While only Joshua and Caleb advocate an immediate attack to take Canaan, all of Israel is overwhelmed by the produce of the fertile land. The spies return with "a bunch of grapes that it took two men to carry and they brought back melons and cucumbers and various fruits and vegetables" (313). This catalogue of food evokes many of Hurston’s lush descriptions of Eatonville, a city of bountiful fruit and vegetables and lots of well-stocked fishing holes. While Wright’s autobiographical recollections of childhood are filled with accounts of gnawing hunger and random acts of violence committed against blacks, Hurston’s autobiography tells of eating oranges and receiving enchanting books from the occasional white visitor. Eatonville, as depicted in Hurston’s writing, is a world apart from the brutality of Wright’s Mississippi.

Yet Eatonville represents more than just a full stomach to Hurston; in fact, the town occupied a central position in her creative imagination. Eatonville was an autonomous black community where one could be whatever one chose, without encountering the restrictions of the dominant culture. Hurston opens her autobiography, Dust
Tracks On A Road, not with her birth or with a family genealogy, but rather with a history of Eatonville. In order to fully appreciate her work, one must begin to understand the importance of her hometown because, as Hurston says herself, "time and place have had their say" (1).

Hurston closes the "Introduction" of Mules and Men with the following description of her hometown: "So I rounded Park Lake and came speeding down the straight stretch into Eatonville, the city of five lakes, three croquet courts, three hundred brown skins, three hundred good swimmers, plenty guavas, two schools, and no jail-house" (4). This brief portrait speaks volumes about her belief in an African-American "Promised Land"—a land of natural beauty that nurtures a true community which feeds its members not only upon abundant natural resources but also with the big ol’ lies told on Joe Clarke’s porch. In order to found an Eatonville, however, Hurston’s Moses learns a lesson similar to Richard Wright’s own Moses-figure, Dan Taylor, from "Fire and Cloud": freedom belongs to those strong enough to claim it.
Works Cited in Chapter Three


CHAPTER FOUR:
"THE REDS ARE IN THE BIBLE ROOM":
BIBLICAL INTERTEXTUALITY AS POLITICAL ACTIVISM
IN RICHARD WRIGHT’S UNCLE TOM’S CHILDREN

When Israel was in Egyptland,
    Let my people go,
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
    Let my people go.

Go down, Moses...
Tell old Pharaoh,
    Let my people go.

Whatever we may say in print, we Americans have a
"favored race" clause in that unwritten constitution
of ours which is more "national" than our written
documents.
   --Thomas Pearce Bailey, Race Orthodoxy in the South

[T]he law is white.
   --Richard Wright

Thomas Pearce Bailey, America’s turn of the century
spokesman for white-supremacy and the race-solidarity W. J.
Cash would later call the "Proto-Dorian Bond," along with
his collection of essays on how to solve the South’s "race
problem," Race Orthodoxy in the South, are both largely
forgotten today. Yet Bailey provides a key insight into
the white South’s ideology of race, an understanding of
which Richard Wright acquired first-hand during his
childhood in rural Mississippi. Bailey speaks with the
smug assurance of a man who enjoys the status of "favored
race," the beneficiary of America’s "unwritten
constitution" of white supremacy; on the other hand, Wright
speaks with the anger of one who has been wronged by the
unwritten laws of the land. Not only does he speak with the outrage of one who has been wronged, but also with the voice of one committed to overturning these unwritten, but very real, laws. And while Wright did not embrace the black church, as an African-American from a Mississippi contemporaneous with Bailey's vision of the South, he certainly did recognize the vital role the church played as a bulwark against the tide of white racism in the lives of Southern blacks: like Zora Neale Hurston, he recognized that African-American religiosity provided psychic health for blacks by assuring them that they would not always be oppressed in the "Egyptland" of the Jim Crow South; and, moreover, he came to recognize the radical potential of the black church and its ability to equip Southern blacks with an indigenous belief system for hastening and contributing to their own liberation.

The political, revolutionary lessons Wright learned during his affiliation with the American Communist Party (CPUSA) in Chicago allowed him to recognize the revolutionary potential within the Bible-lessons he learned from the black church. The lessons from these seemingly conflicting sources entered into what he once called the "community medium of exchange" ("Bigger" 9) of his imagination and were transmuted into the fictive works of *Uncle Tom's Children*. Each of the collection's stories demonstrates either the tragic consequences of life without
a church committed to revolutionary politics, as in "Big Boy Leaves Home," "Down By The Riverside," and "Long Black Song," or the victorious results of a Christian praxis driven by a Marxist demand for social justice, as in "Fire and Cloud" and "Bright and Morning Star."

Despite Ralph Ellison's proclamation that Wright "found the facile answers of Marxism before he learned to use literature as a means for discovering the forms of American Negro humanity" ("The World and the Jug" 120), Richard Wright could not help but "discover" the forms of his African-American heritage. As Ellison has also said,

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1 Several critics have touched upon Wright's relationship with and influence from the black church, most often when discussing *Black Boy*. Michel Fabre's biography, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, does an outstanding job of detailing Wright's complex relationship with the black church. See also Robert L. Douglas's "Religious Orthodoxy and Skepticism in Richard Wright's Uncle Tom's Children and Native Son" and Thomas Larson's "A Political Vision of Afro-American Culture: Richard Wright's 'Bright and Morning Star,'" both included in C. James Trotman's *Richard Wright: Myths and Realities*, for two insightful discussions of Wright's indebtedness to African-American religiosity in the creation of his early fiction.

2 Ellison's pronouncement regarding Wright's involvement with American Communism overlooks his own role within the CPUSA and its allied fronts during the 1930s. This comment probably has as much to do with disagreements between the two authors as with the prevalent anti-Communist attitude of the nation during the Cold War, the period during which this essay was first published. Reviewers and critics have been suspicious of Wright's communist affinities throughout his career, however. Upon the publication of *Uncle Tom's Children*, Zora Neale Hurston wrote in the *Saturday Review of Literature* that Wright's work presented "the picture of the South that the communists have been passing around of late.... Mr. Wright's author's solution, is the solution of the PARTY--state responsibility for everything and individual responsibility for nothing..." (10).
quoting Heraclitus, "geography is fate" ("Remembering Richard Wright" 198). While the first volume of Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*, does claim "the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes" and the "cultural barrenness of black life,"^3^ (*Black Boy* 45) it also catalogues many of the joys and strengths of that same "black life": the Thomas Wolfe-like lists of beautiful sights, sounds, smells, and sensations of Southern black rural life; the lyrical catalogues of black folk beliefs that, like Hurston, he recognized as being vital to African-American survival in the racially hostile South; the indomitable will that Wright inherited from his mother; and, perhaps most importantly for Wright as an artist, his imaginative quest through literature for insight into understanding his

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^3^Statements such as these have been taken out of context to charge Wright with being unduly harsh upon African-American culture and to deepen the rift between Wright and Hurston, an example of which is John Lowe's labeling of Hurston as Wright's "literary nemesis" (2). Realizing the degree to which Wright viewed black folk culture, particularly the black church, as a source of cultural strength helps to facilitate the kind of reconciliation between Hurston and Wright advocated by June Jordan. She argues that "the functions of protest and affirmation are not, ultimately, distinct:... affirmation of Black values and lifestyles within the American context is, indeed, an act of protest. Therefore, Hurston's affirmative work is profoundly defiant, just as Wright's protest unmistakably asserts our need for an alternative, benign environment. We have been misled to discount the one [author] in order to revere the other" (87). Both artists viewed African-American religiosities as a source of black vitality and as an integral component of their art, Hurston to promote racial solidarity and Wright to help to stir "Uncle Tom's children" to action.
own lived experience.\textsuperscript{4} It is important to remember that Wright's "geographic destiny" also included a thorough indoctrination into the black South's religiosity, a fact also documented in \textit{Black Boy}, but often overlooked. His initiation into the symbology of stories and the power of verbally constructed images as taught to him in the black church formed a vital part of his literary apprenticeship.

Because of the past animosity between Christians and communists, particularly during the Cold War era, critics have often conceived of Wright's representation of these two movements as being in conflict, claiming that he rejected African-American culture, i.e., the black church, in favor of Marxism, a god which later failed him.\textsuperscript{5} Such a view underpins Ellison's assertion about Wright discovering the "facile answers of Marxism" and not embracing the forms of "Negro humanity" fully. Keneth Kinnamon voices a

\footnote{See Robert Stepto's \textit{From Behind the Veil} on the importance of the pursuit of literacy upon Wright's career as detailed in \textit{Black Boy} and in African-American literary history in general.}

\footnote{Uncle Tom's Children was written at the height of Wright's commitment to the CPUSA, and, despite later disappointments with the party, he spoke in the 1940s in nearly religious terms of his dedication to communism during the writing of these stories: "I remembered the stories I had written, the stories in which I had assigned a role of honor and glory to the Communist party and I was glad they were down in black and white, were finished. For I knew in my heart that I would never be able to write that way again, would never be able to feel with that simple sharpness about life, would never again express such passionate hope, would never again make so total a commitment of faith" (\textit{American Hunger} 133).}
similar argument, but much more explicitly, claiming that "Fire and Cloud" and "Bright and Morning Star" reveal Wright's belief that Christianity, specifically, that which was espoused by the black church, must be abandoned in the struggle for racial equality; in Kinnamon's reading, Wright exhorts African-Americans in these stories to enlist in more economically and politically revolutionary movements, such as international communism (113). Such readings of the black church's history (and Wright's relationship with it) belie the submerged, but very real, revolutionary elements within African-American religiosity which have brought about leaders from Richard Allen to Harriet Tubman, from Nat Turner to Martin Luther King.

If Zora Neale Hurston was born with "God in the house" and quickly "tumbled" right into the Missionary Baptist church, Wright proved not to be such a willing participant in Southern black religiosity. Some of the earliest and most intense exposure that Wright had with the black church came in his childhood when his mother's poor health (brought on by a stroke) forced him to live with his maternal grandmother, Margaret Wilson. Grandmother Wilson was a staunch Seventh Day Adventist, and as a member of her household, Wright was forced to attend services with his grandmother and perform daily pieties, such as reciting Bible verses before every meal, much as William Faulkner was made to do at the breakfast table of his grandfather.
During his childhood, he grumbled about the numerous church services he was forced to attend with his mother and grandmother, resented the required family prayers and Bible-readings, and resisted every attempt made to save his soul.

The majority of early twentieth-century Southern blacks belonged to either the Baptist or Methodist denominations, so Grandmother Wilson’s membership in the Adventist church is slightly unusual. However, Wright’s Seventh Day Adventist experiences still seems to have been founded upon the distinctively black biblical hermeneutic. Wright heard the folk sermons of the black church and sat in churches with believers who viewed the Bible as the text which invested their lives with meaning, gaining from his church-going many first-hand insights into the Bible’s centrality within the African-American cosmogony. In Black Boy, Wright recalls the sermons he heard in his grandmother’s church, a gospel clogged with images of vast lakes of eternal fire, of seas vanishing, of valleys of dry bones, of the sun burning to ashes, of the moon turning to blood, of stars falling to the earth, of a wooden staff being transformed into a serpent, of voices speaking out of clouds, of men walking upon water, of God riding whirlwinds, of water changing into wine, of the dead rising and living, of the blind seeing, of the lame walking;...a cosmic tale that began before time and

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Seventh Day Adventists attend church services on Saturdays instead of Sundays and preach abstinence from tobacco and alcohol while regarding the believer’s corporeal body as God’s holy temple (Mitchell 687).
ended with the clouds of the sky rolling away at the Second Coming of Christ....

Wright claims in Black Boy to have "remained basically unaffected" (124) by the emotional appeals to save his soul made during these colorful sermons of his early childhood, perhaps because he did not want to compromise his narrative persona's carefully cultivated sense of uncompromising independence. The Wright of Black Boy is virtually self-created. But, as Michel Fabre notes, Wright was tremendously influenced by these sermons' vivid images and stories (35), learning from them early lessons in storytelling and narrative technique and later harkening back to them as he intertextually invokes them in his mature fiction.

Wright most clearly and extensively explains his ideas about the radical nature he perceived within the black church in "Blueprint for Negro Writing," an essay originally published in The New Challenge in 1937.

While making this observation, Fabre mentions only "Big Boy Leaves Home" as a note-worthy example of a work from Uncle Tom's Children that draws upon Wright's early biblical and religious training at the hands of his Grandmother Wilson. However, as with Faulkner, Hurston, and O'Connor, Wright's entire corpus—from his first novel, Lawd Today, (published posthumously) until his last, The Long Dream—consistently demonstrates his reflection upon and participation in the religious heritage of the South.

See Gunther Lenz's essay, "Southern Exposures: The Urban Experience and the Re-Construction of Black Folk Culture and Community in the Works of Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston," for an insightful analysis of Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing." Lenz, like myself, concludes
Written while composing *Uncle Tom's Children* and during the early stages of his relationship with communism, Wright is filled with the ardor of the newly converted in this essay, and he shows how his Marxist faith informs his view of the black church's role in the inevitable revolution to come. The black communist artist will be in the vanguard of this struggle, as if to receive the baton passed on from the black church:

> With the gradual decline of the moral authority of the Negro church, and with the increasing irresolution which is paralyzing Negro middle-class leadership, a new role is devolving upon the Negro writer. He is being called upon to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live, and die. 398-9

Despite his criticism of the black church, Wright does not dismiss it as being without value in the revolutionary struggle for full participation in American democracy. Elsewhere in this essay, Wright asserts that "there is...a culture of the Negro which is his and has been addressed to him; a culture which has...helped to clarify his consciousness and create emotional attitudes which are conducive to action. This culture has stemmed from two sources: 1) the Negro church; 2) and the folklore of the Negro people" (396 emphasis added).

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that Wright mined the rich tradition of the black church in the creation of his fiction and was not as estranged from African-American folk culture as he is depicted.
In Wright’s vocabulary, action almost always means collective, political action, as in *Uncle Tom’s Children*, particularly, "Fire and Cloud." The Reverend Dan Taylor struggles over whether or not he should help the local communist organizers to stage a demonstration to petition the city’s power brokers for help in feeding the town’s poor, both black and white. In this gesture of racial unity, Wright’s invocation of the South’s response to the Bible sets his intertextual practice apart from Faulkner, Hurston, and O’Connor’s. In *Light in August*, the white character Doc Hines enters into black churches, but he goes only to preach sermons of white superiority; in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Moses and the liberated Southern blacks keep to themselves to insure that they will not become victimized again by the Jim Crow South; and in *Wise Blood*, the novel’s single black character, a Pullman porter, delivers the worldly-wise message to Hazel that Jesus is long dead. There are no examples of bi-racial congregations in these other texts. But, when Taylor is finally galvanized into action, he feels a part of a "many-limbed, many-legged, many-handed" and multi-colored organism as he participates in the march. Taylor has discovered a new and deeper relationship with his community and with God through his commitment to social justice. And Wright advocates much the same in "Blueprint for Negro Writing." Folklore and the church have been the African-
American's medium for expressing what Wright labeled African-American "racial wisdom" (although "cultural wisdom" might be a more accurate phrase), and this wisdom has, in turn, given meaning to the experiences and suffering of American blacks. In Wright's opinion, the black church has done much to crystalize and shape the collective "meaning" of the African-American experience because black religiosity has long served as an "antidote for suffering and denial" (396). The "meaning [of] their suffering" is crucial for producing activism in African-Americans because "at the moment when a people begin to realize a meaning in their suffering, the civilization that engenders that suffering is doomed" (396-7). To continue Wright's metaphor, if the black church had traditionally functioned as an "antidote" for racial oppression, he believed it was time for the black church to become politically active in the fight against Jim Crow and to act as a "prevention" against further racial injustices.

James H. Cone, one of the most outspoken theologians of the contemporary black church, has described its theology as a type of "liberation theology" ("Black Theology as Liberation Theology" 178).9 After all, the black church has been about liberation since its earliest

9The title of Cone's essay, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," is a clear allusion to the work of Latin American theologians such as Gustavo Guttiérrez and other pioneers in the development of liberation theology.
beginnings: in its adopting of the pregeneric myth of Moses delivering God's children from bondage; its embracing of a biblical hermeneutic grounded in the here and now; in its serving as one of the earliest outlets for black creativity and community advancement, African-American religiosity has served "roles of both protest and relief" (Washington 52). The history of the black church documents African-Americans' struggles for social equality: Richard Allen's founding of the first black church; the innumerable slave preachers of the "invisible institution," each repeating the pregeneric Exodus myth and espousing an embryonic "liberation theology;" Nat Turner's violent attempt to wrest freedom from Southern slave-owners; Harriet Tubman, the Moses of her people, leading escaped slaves to freedom in the North, via the Underground Railroad. Black church congregations have worked "together to pursue and achieve equal rights and opportunity for each and all" (Washington 52) throughout their history.

Wright's contribution to the cultural conversation on the role of the Bible in Southern religiosities, outlined in "Blueprint for Negro Writing" and even more forcefully in the stories of Uncle Tom's Children, is his insistence that the black church become even more political and fully actualize its revolutionary proclivities, evolving into an even greater agent for dramatic action in righting the social wrongs committed against African-Americans.
One catalyst for Wright's insistence for political activism from the black church was his involvement in the Communist Party. While he later withdrew from the Party and became increasingly outspoken in his opposition to international communism,\(^{10}\) Wright was a committed member of the Party when he wrote *Uncle Tom's Children*. What Wright initially found so appealing about communism was the highly spiritual sense of community it inspired in him:

> [M]y attention was caught by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred people into a whole.... Out of the [communist] magazines I read came a passionate call for the experiences of the disinherited, and there was none of the lame lisping of the missionary in it.

> "I Tried To Be A Communist" 118

In many ways, communism was Wright's church. He went so far as to use the discourse of Protestantism to underscore his youthful commitment to the CPUSA, describing his joining as a "total commitment of faith" (*American Hunger* 133). As Cornel West reminds us, "the classical Marxist critique of religion is not an *a priori* philosophical rejection of religion; rather, it is a social analysis of,

\(^{10}\)See Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 165-170, for a discussion of Wright's increasing disillusionment with communism, particularly after leaving the United States. See also Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* and its discussion of Wright's critique of Marxism, pp. 416-440, wherein Robinson quotes Wright as saying, "Marxist ideology...is but a transitory make-shift pending a more accurate diagnosis.... Communism may be but a painful compromise containing a definition of man by sheer default" (433).
and historical judgement upon, religious practices" (199).

Much the same could be said of Wright’s investigation of the black church in "Blueprint for Negro Writing," as he never faults the institution of the black church as such, only exhorting it toward greater political participation.

In "On the History of Early Christianity," Frederick Engels writes

> The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights.... Both Christianity and the workers’ socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery....

Likewise, Wright, in "Blueprint for Negro Writing," credits the black church with being informed by a quest for freedom (397). Wright explored these similarities and possibilities for tactical alliances between Marxism and Christianity in Uncle Tom’s Children, particularly the final two stories, "Fire and Cloud" and "Bright and Morning Star," alliances which were not explicitly explored by black theologians and historians until the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and ’70s.

Slave ministers, members of the "invisible institution," and church members and pastors after Emancipation "understood and explained their existence not through exclusive theological propositions or dogma, but chiefly on account of social—here including political and
economical and educational—realities" (Wimbush 142-3). The theologians and historians of black religion of the Black Power era, perhaps best exemplified in James Cone, looked no further for a justification of their work than did Wright himself a generation earlier: all of them looked back to the distinct history of the black church, i.e. its biblical emphasis, its leading figures, and the forms of its expression, especially the spirituals. Because of the tainted history of Western theology, much of which had lent its support to the oppression of Africans for several hundred years, both Wright and the Black Theology movement "looked to Scripture itself so as to analyze its message in the light of [their] struggle for freedom" and re-staked a claim to the liberation stories of the Old Testament, particularly the pregeneric myth of Moses and the Hebrew emancipation from Egypt. Like the proponents of Black Theology a generation after himself, Wright celebrates the real-life Moses-figures of African-American history—Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth—by creating the Moses-like freedom fighters of "Fire and Cloud" and "Bright and Morning Star." While all of the stories of *Uncle Tom's Children* display intertextual appropriations from black religiosity, only these two concluding stories exhibit a church committed to the radical goal of overturning Jim Crow.
As Abdul JanMohamed has noted, the cohesion of *Uncle Tom's Children* derives from its incremental repetition of themes (192), with Wright's concerns progressing outward from individual survival toward community solidarity and eventual political activism. Wright even revised the collection for its subsequent 1940 publication by adding an introductory essay, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," and a fifth and concluding story, "Bright and Morning Star," to make this outward expansion even more explicit. Wright explained his decision to revise the collection in this manner in "How 'Bigger' Was Born," the introduction to his next work, *Native Son*: "I had written a book of short stories which was published under the title of *Uncle Tom's Children* [in 1938]. When the reviews of that book began to appear, I realized that I had made an awfully naive mistake. I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about" (31). Wright deprived his readers of the consolation of tears and challenged them with a more unmistakably political work in the revised *Uncle Tom's Children*. Southern whites were stripped of their stereotypical views of blacks as contented workers and were faced with the unsettling specter of increased CPUSA activity in their region, while Southern blacks were faced with a radical challenge that called upon its strongest cultural institution to increase its radical political
activities. Wright maintained that "Big Boy Leaves Home," and all of the stories of Uncle Tom’s Children, posed one central question: "What quality of will must a Negro possess to live and die with dignity in a country that denied his humanity?" (American Hunger 88-9). By the collection’s (revised) conclusion, there is no mistaking Wright’s answer to this question--African-Americans must utilize the legacy of the black church, which has always maintained the worth and dignity of its members, but they must employ that spiritual legacy within the collectivization of Marxist politics in pressing together toward the goal of civil equality.

Biblical imagery and religious institutions as intertexts permeate Uncle Tom’s Children, and the collection displays a spectrum of responses presented by the black church to the injustices of living Jim Crow. The first story, "Big Boy Leaves Home," depicts the black church as a crucial survival mechanism for African-Americans when the elders of the local congregation arrange the protagonist’s safe passage to the North and freedom; "Down By the Riverside" illustrates the church’s role as guarantor of hope as Mann relinquishes his life, secure in his belief in a heavenly reward in the after-life; "Long Black Song" demonstrates the hopeless condition of Silas, a black man so intent upon replicating the ruthless business practices of white land-owners that he isolates himself
from the nurturing of his folk-beliefs and the black church; "Fire and Cloud" displays the rewards possible when African-American religiosity amplifies its nascent political element and its leaders, such as Dan Taylor, demand social justice in the here-and-now; and "Bright and Morning Star" documents the common, tactical goals of Christianity and Marxism through the alterations in Aunt Sue's faith as she realizes the common ground outlined in her understanding of the spirituals and of the CPUSA's doctrines.

In addition to "Bright and Morning Star," Wright's 1940 version of Uncle Tom's Children also marks the first inclusion of "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," an autobiographical essay which introduces the collection. The essay's focus upon Wright's quest for employment in an economic system controlled by whites reinforces the entire collection's demand for a revolutionary opposition to Southern Jim Crowism. As autobiography, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" establishes the book's existence as a physical object outside of the narrative world and evokes a historical context--the context of Wright's own life as it was lived in the Jim Crow environment of the racist South. As an artist writing with an eye toward the future, Wright, of course, sought to address an enduring audience, yet "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" also functions as a specific address to a "real time." A familiarity with this "real
time"—Mississippi and the Deep South of the 1920s and '30s—is crucial to understanding Uncle Tom's Children; in order to understand the stories, readers must first understand something of the Jim Crow South from which Wright escaped.\textsuperscript{11} Wright's documentation of the violence and day-to-day humiliations of living Jim Crow exposes the falsity of popular conceptions of Southern tranquility, the propaganda behind songs like the one which serves as the book's epigraph:

\begin{quote}
Is it true what they say about Dixie?
Does the sun really shine all the time?
Do sweet magnolias blossom at everybody's door,
Do folks keep eating 'possum, till they can't eat no more?
Do they laugh, do they love, like they say in ev'ry song?
If it's true that's where I belong.
\end{quote}

As Wright's introduction makes clear, he never knew this Edenic South, a land flowing with milk and honey which seems so reminiscent of Hurston's Eatonville, Florida. Instead, he was confronted with the same racial violence experienced by his literary characters. Unlike most of the characters from Uncle Tom's Children, however, Wright would never surrender himself to the black church, despite feeling the powerful pull of its symbols and its "dramatic vision of life" (Black Boy 123). Wright spent the

\textsuperscript{11}See C. Vann Woodward's The Strange Career of Jim Crow for an account of how the white South gradually enacted Jim Crow legislation throughout the region.
remainder of his life looking for something to provide him with this "dramatic vision of life," searching, in turn, through communist doctrines, French existentialism, and, finally, international Pan-Africanism.

In "Big Boy Leaves Home," the first story of the collection, biblical intertextuality evokes the hopes and dreams of a life lived free from the horrors of living Jim Crow. The Bible, as it was re-voiced into the spirituals and social structure of the black church, is shown to sustain the African-American community, offering a shelter from the white South's racist fury, but no means of successfully overcoming it in this opening story. For instance, as Big Boy and his friends make their way to the fateful water-hole on old man Harvey's property, they sing the spiritual, "This Train Bound for Glory," about the "freedom train" that they hope will one day deliver them to the Promised Land. The spirituals have always spoken with a double voice, promising heavenly rewards for faithful service to God and deliverance here in this life for black believers. Their singing is triggered when they hear an actual train heading North toward greater freedom than they know in the Jim Crow South. The dual nature of the spirituals is made even clearer when the boys hear another north-bound train whistle after they reach the swimming hole, and their speech reinforces the association of the
"freedom train" with spiritual and social liberty outside of the South:

Far away a train whistled. "There goes number seven!" "Headin fer up Noth!"... "Lawd, Ahm goin Noth some day." "Me too, man." "They say colored folks up Noth is got ekual rights."

Their song and speech are vaguely prophetic because the social network of the black church engineers Big Boy's escape after he shoots the white soldier in self-defense. Everything about this escape evokes the Underground Railroad which delivered escaped slaves to the North: Big Boy hides in a kiln in the side of the hill where the boys used to play as if they were train conductors, and he escapes in the pre-dawn darkness. A church elder's son is a truck-driver who makes regular deliveries to the North, and Big Boy will hide until morning and catch a ride to Chicago. While the church will later become an organ of political action in Uncle Tom's Children, making advances against the South's Jim Crow laws, in the volume's first story it is powerless to stop the lynching of Bobo and can only provide a means of escape for Big Boy. After the murder of Lester and Buck, Big Boy manages to flee to his house where his parents assemble the church elders to plot his escape; however, this same congregation seems powerless to stop the white mob from burning down Big Boy's parents'
house in retribution. Just like when Big Boy squeezes Bobo's neck so that Lester and Buck will abandon their friendly wrestling match, the white South realized that, in the absence of a politically unified and active black church, "a little heat" (23), as in a well-timed cabin burning or lynching, will often dissuade others from opposing Jim Crow.

Biblical intertextuality functions as ironic commentary in the second story, "Down By the Riverside," contrasting the church's otherworldly promises with the horrors of political disfranchisement and second class citizenship. As his neighbors and fellow church-members gather in his house during the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 to pray for his wife, who is in the throes of child labor, Mann's mind wanders to the practical considerations of transporting his wife to the hospital in a stolen rowboat. Mann sets off, rowing against the current of the flooded river and the tide of Southern white racism, and events in the story begin to transpire with a nightmarish speed. He kills the boat's original owner in self-defense, delivers his wife to the Red Cross only to find that she died in child-birth, confronts the family of the man he killed when he chooses to aid in evacuating stranded families in town, and finally forces the armed soldiers to shoot him after they discover that he killed the white man in town. Mann stakes everything on his faith in a
supernatural deliverance, yet the soldiers and their guns prove to be powerful reminders of the necessity for political action. Every white family has fled before the flood waters while every black man has been forced at gunpoint to reinforce the weakening levee. The refrain of the spiritual sung at the conclusion of the prayer at Mann's house, "Ah ain gonna study war no mo," is the story's strongest ironic indictment of the militarily enforced and segregated Jim Crow system that eventually costs Mann his life. While each believer in this small group of black believers promises to lay down his or her "sword and shield...down by the riverside" (63), the swollen river annihilates everything in its path, regardless of color. Meanwhile, the white South continues to demand compliance with the artificial distinctions of Jim Crow. What endows Mann with the super-human strength he displays is his faith in God. As he says in one of his interior monologues, "Nobody but God could see him through this.... He would have to trust God and keep on and go through with it, that was all" (71). Mann’s prayers for deliverance, however, are answered only upon his death. As Abdul JanMohamed argues, death becomes Mann’s "only viable, but highly paradoxical, route of escape from [the] radical liminality" of a Jim Crow existence because African-American religiosity offers little hope (in this story, at least) in
providing a weapon for fighting against the "social death" of Southern racial oppression (192).

"Long Black Song," the middle story of Uncle Tom's Children, is the fulcrum upon which the collection pivots. Here Wright addresses more explicitly his larger, societal concerns while still extensively appropriating a religious rhetoric to deliver his political message. Yet there is a cardinal paradox within "Long Black Song" that becomes apparent when one considers the name of the story's protagonist: Silas, who is Wright's intertextual invocation of the New Testament missionary of the same name, is a hard-working share-cropper, but despite this biblical name, Wright's Silas struggles for civil and economic equality without the aid of the black church. While the New Testament Silas renounces worldly gain to proclaim the early Christian church's gospel with the apostle Paul, the Silas of this text pursues money and property to the exclusion of everything else. So strong is his commitment to material gain that Silas often neglects his wife and child. Likewise, Sarah, Silas's wife, also seems to deflect the intertextual resonances of her name as she mothers no Isaac, no patriarch of God's Chosen People. Instead, after experiencing a religious and sexual ecstasy while listening to a spiritual played on a gramophone, Sarah succumbs to the advances of the white college-boy salesman who tries to interest her in buying the fancy
combination clock and record-player. Silas refuses to accept what he sees as a betrayal with the easy tolerance demanded by the Jim Crow South. As John Lowe notes, "Like his biblical counterpart, Silas refuses flight, and elects to stay where he is, letting the enemy come to him" (62).

In his violent and inarticulate struggle against white racism, Silas bears a strong resemblance to another of Wright's literary characters, Native Son's Bigger Thomas. At first glance, Big Boy, from the collection's opening story, might seem like Uncle Tom's Children's closest literary relative to Bigger: there is the correlation of names, Big Boy and Bigger, and Big Boy's story ends ambiguously, with him traveling to Bigger's home-town of Chicago. But Silas proves to have a closer emotional kinship with Bigger. Both characters are filled with a similar murderous rage and refuse to abide by the pervasive racist mores of their environments; both grapple with a language inadequate to express their anger and achieve

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Some critics maintain that Sarah was raped by the white salesman. See, for example, C. James Trotman's introduction to Richard Wright: Myths and Realities, entitled, "Our Myths and Wright's Realities" (xii). Sarah initially resists the young man's advances, but her longing for her first lover, Tom, and the memory of the spiritual played on the gramophone combine to produce a sexual ecstasy in her that Wright describes in rapturous tones. See Myles Raymond Hurd's "Between Blackness and Bitonality: Wright's 'Long Black Song" for a thorough examination of the sexual politics between Sarah and the white salesman. Hurd sees parallels between their encounter at the well and the New Testament story, recounted in John 4:5-19, of Jesus and a Samaritan woman who discuss her infidelity at a well.
their greatest eloquence in their violent refusal to tolerate America's color prejudices. Wright's commentary upon the forces which could produce a Bigger Thomas ring equally true of Silas: the creation of such an individual is, in Wright's opinion, largely attributable to a person's becoming "estranged from the religion and folk culture of his race" ("Bigger" 15). Bigger estranges himself from his culture because of his desire to be like the glamorous, flickering shadows of the movie-screens and his self-immersion into the petty thievery and anger and indignation of ghetto-life while Silas, on the other hand, estranges himself by pursuing material gain in the same ruthless manner as the white land-owners. Even in his death, Silas is isolated, unlike the other characters of Uncle Tom's Children who force confrontations with the Jim Crow society, such as Dan Taylor from "Fire and Cloud" and Aunt Sue from "Bright and Morning Star." While the South's Jim Crow system has deprived him of his wife and child, he gains temporary mastery over oppressive whites with their own weapons, the material emblems of the white South's Jim Crow ideology, i.e., a gun and a whip, but Silas's death is not employed in the service of some larger cause. His lynching effects no appreciable change, however small, in the political realities of the Jim Crow South. Like Joe Christmas' actions before his death in Light in August, the white South has no glimpse into Silas' decision to become a
"hard" man and resist the social system which has taken everything for which he has worked so hard. Also, like Christmas, his lynching serves as another buttress and sanction for the white South's racist ideology.

After exploring the elements within African-American religiosity which deflect concerns for social justice and emphasize survival by means of escape ("Big Boy Leaves Home"); and those components of the black church that stress heavenly rewards for enduring seemingly inescapable racial tribulations here on earth ("Down By the Riverside"); and depicting the ineffectual anger of a man cut off from the social network of the black church by the white South's racist economic and social system ("Long Black Song"); "Fire and Cloud" fully marshals the latent political energy within the religious discourse of the black church. Dan Taylor is the first character from *Uncle Tom's Children* to reconcile the aims of communism and the black church. Wright's commitment to communism was at its height in the 1930s, the period in which he drafted the stories of *Uncle Tom's Children*, and it was also a period which held great promise for combining the efforts and energies of the black church with the CPUSA, which reached the zenith of its influence in this era.

In 1931, the CPUSA provided legal counsel for the defendants in the Scottsboro case, and their advocacy of these young men proved to be a major factor in gaining a
sympathetic audience among Southern blacks. As a result of their efforts, the communists succeeded in making the case an international cause celebre and gained invitations to speak in many black pulpits (Klehr 335-6). A year after the Scottsboro case, the in-roads of the CPUSA (which were extremely hard won considering the rabid anti-communist sentiment of the white South) were reflected in the opinions expressed by participants in a symposium of leading black newspaper editors printed in The Crisis. While Roscoe Dunjee expressed skepticism toward but a willingness to listen to radical whites with apparent "love in [their] heart[s]" for Southern blacks, Carl Murphy said that "the Communists appear to be the only party going our way. They are as radical as the NAACP were 20 years ago" (Dunjee 154, 147 emphasis added).

Crucial to Wright's becoming involved in the CPUSA was the party's endorsement of full civil and equal rights for African-Americans, yet Wright had detected a flaw in the party’s strategy for winning the support of large numbers of African-Americans. For Wright, the CPUSA's emphasis upon enlisting the masses made them too inflexible in meeting the particular demands of the specific people they sought to help. In American Hunger, he writes, "The Communists, I felt, had oversimplified the experience of those whom they sought to lead. In their efforts to recruit masses, they had missed the meaning of the lives of
the masses, had conceived of people in too abstract a manner." American communism was not responsive enough to black culture, in Wright's opinion, and he saw himself as something of a mediator between the new dispensation of communism\(^\text{13}\) and the vitality and specific needs of African-Americans. In this same passage, he goes on to say,

> I would make voyages, discoveries, explorations with words and try to put some of that meaning back. I would address my words to two groups: I would tell Communists how common people felt, and I would tell common people of the self-sacrifice of Communists who strove for unity among them. \(^65-66\)

Essential to communicating the feelings and hopes of the Southern blacks he knew first-hand and interviewed during the composition of *Uncle Tom's Children* was Wright's demonstration of the principal role the church—its Bible, its strong, determined congregations, and its devotion to civil equality—played within the black community.

"Fire and Cloud" opens with Reverend Dan Taylor debating what role he, as a preacher and, therefore, a leader of the black community in his home-town, should take in helping to bring about a resolution to a tense stalemate over food distribution during the Depression. Whereas Hurston's intertextual figuration of the Old Testament

\(^{13}\)Elsewhere in *American Hunger*, Wright expresses the depth of the communist convictions he held during the writing of *Uncle Tom's Children* when he says that "with the exception of the church and its myths and legends, there was no agency in the world so capable of making men feel the earth and the people upon it as the Communist party" (122).
Moses relies only upon the resources of the distinctive African-American religiosity, Taylor struggles to decide if he will support the Party's agenda. Should he endorse the plan of direct action and public demonstration advocated by local communist organizers, Hadley and Green, or should he instruct his congregation to maintain their faith in God's eventual deliverance from this problem and not to take matters into their own hands by participating in the planned communist march? On the one hand, the direct confrontation advocated by Hadley and Green seems to offer hope because of the strength possible through their numbers. He thinks that a large, organized assembly "could do something, awright! Mabbe ef fiv er six thousan of us marched downtown we could scare [the white city administration] inter doin something! Lawd, mabbe them Reds is right!" (130).

On the other hand, Taylor still maintains a firm faith in God the Deliverer, the God who liberated His People from Egypt and destroyed Pharaoh for daring to contradict His will. He longs for divine retribution, thinking, "The good Lawds gonna clean up this ol worl some day! Hes gonna make a new Heaven n a new Earth! N Hes gonna do it in a eye-twinkle change; Hes gotta do it! Things cant go on like this ferever!" (131). The reader is introduced to a dialectical world of either assertive, collective political action or patient waiting upon God's sublime time-table;
Wright quickly reconciles these two courses of action when he likens Taylor to Moses, the pregeneric hero. Before the economic hardships brought on by the Depression and a reduction of the land available for black farmers, Taylor had been "like Moses leading his people out of the wilderness into the Promised Land" (131). Invoking Moses assures a type of hallowed sanctioning of his eventual alliance with Hadley and Green because, like his biblical predecessor, Taylor is working for the liberation of God's people. The biblical figure of Moses suggests a reconciliation of the story's opening dichotomy: Moses is both man of God and man of action, serving Jehovah by liberating his chosen people.

But Moses is not the only biblical character intertextually evoked in this story; Deacon Smith plays the roles of Judas and Satan to Taylor's Christ because, to fulfill a kind of typology within "Fire and Cloud," Taylor must be both Moses and Jesus.¹⁴ Like Christ, Taylor is presented with the temptation to abandon his mission—Jesus refusing the worldly temptations of Satan in the Wilderness, and Taylor politely deflecting the mayor's bribe to "take care of him" if he "does the right thing" (151). Following Taylor's rejection of this offer, the

¹⁴See James Cone's God of the Oppressed for an examination of the New Testament Jesus's role as "liberator" of poor, dispossessed African-Americans in the black church (187).
mayor sounds suspiciously like Pilate, washing his hands of the whole affair, when he tells the reverend that compromise is no longer an option. Mayor Bolton says, "I've done all I could, Dan. You wouldn't follow my advice, now the rest is up to Mister Lowe and Chief Bruden here" (152). Like Christ who was persecuted and bore his tribulations "without a mumblin' word" but will, according to the spirituals, implement God's plan of divine justice, the reverend is beginning to realize the necessity of undertaking his own liberating mission. These New Testament evocations suggest parallels between Taylor and the Gospel accounts of Jesus, and as James Cone reminds us, associating Christ with liberation is a cornerstone of what he calls "black theology" and is an association which can trace its roots back at least as far as Nat Turner who was inspired by Jesus to "the spirit of violent revolution against the strictures of slavery" (God of the Oppressed 114). Wright's characterization of Taylor fluctuates between these two affiliations, sometimes invoking Moses and sometimes Jesus, but always evoking their emancipating missions. Taylor, drawing upon the liberating legacy of these two biblical figures, will adopt the communist course of action and lead the march, while the exercising of this political power represents a fulfillment of God's commission to the black church.
Taylor's faith in the righteousness of his mission shines through the prayer he offers to comfort some of his church members. Narrative tension is at its height as the preacher juggles the demands of everyone who has crowded into his house to meet with him; he must calm the fears of his flock (who have been stirred up by the "snake in the grass," Deacon Smith), deliver a decision to the Party organizers, and pacify the white civic leaders who have come to demand that he not lead the march. Despite this chaos, Taylor takes time to edify the assembled believers and assure them that they play a key role in God's intricate plan. Throughout the call and response format of Taylor's group prayer, he invokes numerous examples of God's benevolence, outlining the Bible's course of sacred history from Genesis to Revelation, particularly emphasizing the constancy and fidelity God shows toward His Chosen People. Beginning with the Creation, Taylor lists God's intercessions on behalf of His people—the Exodus out of Egypt, the deliverance of the Hebrews from the fiery furnace, the victory of the Israelites over their enemies at Jericho. He concludes the prayer with a specific request, asking for direction in guiding his flock: "Speak t our hearts n let us know what Yo will is!... Try us, Lawd, try us n watch us move t yo will!" Just like these previous generations of faithful servants, Taylor and his church will comply with God's will once they discern what
He would have them do. In contrast, the powerful, white "Lords of the Land," Wright's term from *Twelve Million Black Voices*, for the avaricious white land-owners, are depicted as violating God's divine plan. If the black church is seeking to serve God, the dominant white South is guilty of controverting God's wishes: "The white folks say we can't raise nothin' on Yo earth! They done put the lans of the worl in their pockets! They done fenced em off n nailed em down! Theys a-tryin' t take Yo place, Lord!" (138). As a statement underscoring the common concerns of Party and church, Taylor's prayer, issued on behalf of the entire African-American community, indicts greedy whites for attempting to disrupt God's sacramental plan. The doctrines of both Christianity and Marxism, in the reverend's prayer, assure that everyone should have equal rights. Taylor and, by extension, the black church have turned the tables on Southern whites who appeal to the Bible in attempts to characterize African-Americans as somehow sub-human; in this cosmogony, these racist interpretive communities have clearly violated God's promises.

In order to inscribe Marxist doctrine within the black church and thereby activate what he saw as the revolutionary potential within black religiosity, Wright insists upon a new dispensation. Whereas the white Southern church viewed Christ's sacrificial death upon the
cross as superseding the rituals of the Hebrew Law—Wise Blood’s Enoch Emery and the satiric treatment he receives from O’Connor for failing to realize this come to mind—the South’s Jim Crow oppression of Southern blacks demands a new system of promises. In the Gospels, Jesus states that his intention is to realize the writings of the Hebrew Bible, not to destroy them in any way: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17-18). Jesus proclaims himself the fulfillment of the Law, its ultimate, truest expression. In a similar fashion, Wright’s fiction maintains that the truest and most politically committed expression of the black church’s love and concern for its members can be voiced with the aid of communist doctrine. This inscription of the CPUSA’s goals into the black church is symbolized in "Fire and Cloud" by Wright’s placement of the communists Hadley and Green within the Bible Room. Their political agenda should suffuse the Scriptures. Even though Taylor initially seems to distance himself from Hadley and Green, referring to them as "them Reds," which is the same pejorative label affixed by the white civic leaders, Taylor calls the communist organizers "Brother Hadley" and "Brother Green." Most notably, Taylor even extends this title of love and
respect, normally reserved for other Christians, to Hadley, a man whose white skin would ordinarily make the reverend view him at least with suspicion, if not outright animosity.

As a result of his refusal to abandon the demonstration, Taylor is kidnapped and tortured by the city council’s henchmen, and he undergoes a metaphorical "death and rebirth" (JanMohamed 221). Before his whipping, Taylor vacillates between his two courses of action, and, while he still has doubts immediately following the beating, his speech and thoughts are now of a very different quality. As he makes his way home, he must cross through a white neighborhood, which, as Wright reminds us in "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," was a particularly dangerous situation for a black man in the Jim Crow South:

Negroes who have lived South know the dread of being caught alone upon the streets in white neighborhoods after the sun has set. In such a simple situation as this the plight of the Negro in America is graphically symbolized. While white strangers may be in these neighborhoods trying to get home, they can pass unmolested. But the color of a Negro’s skin makes him easily recognizable, makes him suspect, converts him into a defenseless target.

Caught in this dangerous situation, Taylor views these white houses as emblems of the unjust system he has struggled against. The fiery pain of his beating has transformed Taylor into a "pillar of fire." God directed the Hebrews to follow a pillar of fire out of Egyptian
bondage, and Taylor likewise longs to function as an instrument of God's will and lead his people out of the bondage of the white South's racial injustices. This invocation of God's means for directing the Israelites through the Wilderness before delivering them to the Promised Land triggers several other biblical intertexts. Taylor, a leader of God's people and emblem of fiery zeal to do His bidding, prophesies a fiery, divine retribution when he looks at the white homes and thinks, "Some days theys gonna burn! Some days theys gonna burn in Gawd Awmightys fire!" (167). Filled with a fervent desire to fulfil this prophesy, to render some miraculous service to his people, Taylor pleads, "Gawd, ef yuh gimme the strength Ahll tear this ol buildin down! Tear it down, Lawd! Tear it down like ol Samson tore the temple down!" (167). Like an Old Testament deliverer, Taylor longs to be an instrument of God's divine will, but he desires to serve in the fulfillment of a New Testament-like apocalyptic vision where a new heaven and earth of economic and political equality replaces the reality of the Jim Crow South.\footnote{For a different reading of "Bright and Morning Star," see JanMohamed's "Rehistoricizing Wright: The Psychopolitical Function of Death in Uncle Tom's Children," perhaps the most thorough, sophisticated, and engaging treatment of this collection as a whole. In his essay, JanMohamed argues that "religion becomes the potential source of rebellion, but the final transformation of Taylor does not occur until that source of power is ridiculed and seems to have failed." He goes on to argue that Taylor's prayer during his lynching falls upon deaf ears because of the "void left by God's absence" (222, 223 emphasis added).}
Taylor succeeds in this role of deliverer, leading his people in a successful march that takes them to the Promised Land of political participation. The crowd is conscious of parallels between their struggle for liberation and the struggle of their Old Testament predecessors, singing as they march:

So the sign of the fire by night
N the sign of the cloud by day
A-hoverin oer
Jus befo
As we journey on our way

Drawing strength from his gathered congregation, Taylor realizes the validity of the communist imperative of collective action. In fact, the reverend achieves his greatest sense of strength while in the midst of the protestors: "Taylor looked ahead and wondered what was about to happen; he wondered without fear; as though whatever would or could happen could not hurt this many-limbed, many-legged, many-handed crowd that was he" (179). Singing God's promise in the spiritual while massed together for collective political action, Taylor senses their unified strength. The white civic leaders acquiesce before the demonstrators' demands, agreeing to give them food, and the accomplishment of this political goal fills Taylor with a religious ecstasy. "A baptism of clean joy" (179) sweeps over him, and his faith in God the Deliverer is affirmed, for Taylor's God is one who shows His strength
in the arms and legs of His active children and who delivers upon His promises of liberation. "Fire and Cloud" ends on this hopeful note of baptizing "clean joy," as all of the institutions of Jim Crow oppression seem to topple in Taylor’s tear-filled eyes. This new heaven and earth can be accomplished when the black church at large learns the same lesson that Taylor has learned, a lesson learned via Lenin, "Freedom [economically, politically, and spiritually] belongs to the strong!" (180).

Uncle Tom’s Children originally concluded with this Marxist benediction, but Wright amended the collection, beginning with the 1940 reprinting, to make this message of the black church and the CPUSA’s common goals of liberation even more emphatic by concluding with "Bright and Morning Star." If, as Leon W. Watts maintains, the traditional impetus of the black church has been "toward preserving the people of an oppressed community for struggle" (27), "Bright and Morning Star" looks forward toward a black religiosity which is fully engaged in wresting "liberation from the oppressors" (25). In fact, Aunt Sue’s heroic sacrifice at the story’s conclusion is made possible only by the new dispensation of communism, which converts her Christian endurance into a political commitment to overturning the strictures of the Jim Crow South. Aunt Sue grew up in the bosom of the black church, "feeling buoyed with a faith beyond this world," and she had viewed "the
cold white mountain" of Southern racial oppression as "a part of the world God had made in order that she might endure it and come through all the stronger" (184). It was in this spirit of perseverance—an endurance akin to the stamina so valued by O'Connor in many of her non-fiction statements regarding the necessity of a redemptive encounter with Christ—that Sue formerly sang the spirituals, particularly "The Lily of the Valley."

Before her conversion to the CPUSA, in moments of depression or during hard labor, when Sue sang

Hes the Lily of the Valley, the Bright n Mawnin Star
Hes the Fairest of Ten Thousan t ma soul...
He walks wid me, He talks wid me
He tells me Ahm His own...

she was convinced of God's love and her own self-worth. These assurances provided her with the strength to endure the injustices of the Jim Crow South because the tribulations of her life would be forgotten after her heavenly union with Christ. But Aunt Sue's convictions change, and a dramatic alteration in her faith is brought about by her acceptance of her sons' "new and terrible vision" (184), which results from their communist commitment. Wright underscores the religious intensity of Sue's new faith by describing it in the Christian rhetoric of the black church:

[D]ay by day her sons had ripped from her startled eyes her old vision, and image by image had given her
a new one, different, but great and strong enough to
fling her into the light of another grace. The wrongs
and sufferings of black men had taken the place of Him
nailed to the Cross; the meager beginnings of the
party had become another Resurrection; and the hate of
those who would destroy her new faith had quickened in
her a hunger to feel how deeply her new strength went.

emphasis added, 185

Like Saul of Tarsus, Sue's religious vision is completely
and violently over-turned when both figures realize that
their new knowledge--Saul's gained on the road to Damascus
and Sue's from the party--demands a new and total
dedication. In Wise Blood, Hazel Motes, O'Connor's
invocation of the New Testament's Saul/Paul, responds to
his conversion with a furious introspection, subjecting
himself to scourges of the flesh to try to atone for his
spiritual unworthiness. Hazel's faith turns his vision
violently inward, and he studies his soul and makes the
refinements necessary for salvation. On the contrary, Sue
learns, like Taylor, that God can be found in politicized
groups of people. Her faith demands that she focus upon
her fellow sufferers in an unjust economic/social system
and forsake her previous other-worldly musings to devote
her full strength to the this-worldly objectives of the
CPUSA. In Sue's new belief-system, Jesus's assurance in
Revelation 22:16 that He is "the root and the off-spring of
David, and the bright and morning star" is subsumed within
her certainty that the apocalyptic vision of the Bible's
final book will be accomplished by a political apocalypse instigated by the CPUSA.

The courage and conviction inspired in her by this "new and terrible vision" animate Sue with a willingness to confront white oppression, even in her own kitchen. When the white sheriff and his deputies barge into her house looking for her son, Johnny-boy, they find no obsequious old black nanny but a proud woman willing to make any sacrifice for her new faith. As she tells the sheriff, "White man, don yuh Anty me!" (194). For her resistance, Sue is beaten unconscious. What sustains Sue during her first confrontation with this group of white vigilantes is the "grace" bestowed upon her by her new "faith" (206). The depth of her new faith is demonstrated even more fully when she out-races Booker, the white traitor of the communist cause, to the clearing where Johnny-boy is being tortured. She must get there first to insure that Booker does not reveal the Party membership to the sheriff, and once she gets to the clearing, Sue acts with the resolve of a determined martyr.

Sue does not pursue vengeance for her beating or even for the life of her son. In her mind, Johnny-boy has already been sacrificed for the greater good of the Party; likewise, she will sacrifice herself for the realization of a new heaven on earth—the racial and social equality promised by the CPUSA. Sue arrives at her fatal
confrontation with a shot-gun wrapped in a sheet, telling the white vigilantes it is a shroud for her son.16 After she fatally wounds Booker and is shot herself, Sue feels her life slowly ebbing away, and Wright again closes with a Marxist benediction. Through her sacrificial death, Sue is "focused and pointed..., buried in the depths of her star, swallowed in its peace and strength" (215). Sue’s conversion is complete as the former devout believer and church-goer, now communist activist, no longer identifies the "Bright and Morning Star" with the Christ of Revelation but with the red star of communism.

While the 1938, unrevised version of Uncle Tom’s Children garnered Wright a large national audience and a lucrative publishing contract, that incarnation of the collection left him unsatisfied, feeling as if he let his white readers escape through the emotional loophole of pity ("Bigger" 31). Wright felt that characters such as Big Boy and Mann and Silas could easily elicit a condescending charity from white readers. Even Reverend Taylor might be...

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16In Black Boy, Wright recounts a similar story he heard in his childhood "of a Negro woman whose husband had been seized and killed by a mob. It was claimed that the woman vowed she would avenge her husband’s death and she took a shotgun, wrapped it in a sheet, and went humbly to the whites, pleading that she be allowed to take her husband’s body for burial. It seemed that she was granted permission to come to the side of her dead husband while the whites, silent and armed, looked on. The woman...knelt and prayed, then proceeded to unwrap the sheet; and, before the white men realized what was happening, she had taken the gun from the sheet and had slain four of them, shooting at them from her knees" (83).
mis-read by a white audience as a heroic example of a Southern black who endured. Instead of functioning as the hallmark of a newly politicized black church's struggles for economic and social equality, Taylor possibly might be made to reinforce stereotypical (and wishful) depictions of extraordinarily patient Southern blacks who wear down kind-hearted but tradition-bound Southern whites.

Wright's first novel, Native Son, and the revised Uncle Tom's Children, concluding not only with the political activism of Dan Taylor but also with the strength of Aunt Sue's sacrificial vision of a new age, assured him that the white South would have to confront his work "without the consolation of tears" ("Bigger" 31). Yet even without the escape of sympathy, few critics have followed his apocalyptic vision of a politically committed black church toward "the place where the different paths of [African-American society's] religious-centered culture...and its need for a working-class political vision can meet" (Larson 158). While Wright explored the violence resulting from African-American resistance, the white South remained absorbed in its dominant religiosity and its demand for a violent submission to Christ's call to sinners, a submission documented in Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood.
Works Cited in Chapter Four


I have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace. Their heads are so hard that almost nothing else will do the work. This idea, that reality is something to which we must be returned at considerable cost, is one which is seldom understood by the casual reader.

— Flannery O’Connor

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

— Matthew 10:34

Flannery O’Connor often spoke of the impact of her Christian views upon her art and claimed that her notion of reality was a supernatural one, a reality given meaning through her commitment to Jesus Christ: "I am no disbeliever in spiritual purpose and no vague believer. I see from the standpoint of orthodox Christianity. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that" (Mystery 32). This vigorous proclamation of Christian belief, which sounds so alien to most of Wise Blood’s readers, distinguishes her intertextual use of the Bible from that of Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright. Whereas these other authors do not view the Bible as a numinous text but as a contested site where each struggles with the white South’s dominant religiosity, O’Connor’s Wise Blood endorses many of the
tenets of that dominant religion. *Wise Blood* intertextually evokes the Bible in an attempt to elicit a commitment of Christian faith. O’Connor seeks a modification within her readers who, like her characters, she views as having become so hard-headed through unbelief that they too do not recognize the necessity of God’s grace. While Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright invoke the Bible in order to comment upon and critique prevailing Southern racial inequities, O’Connor’s intertextual evocations of the Bible replicate the way in which the region’s iconic book is traditionally used by the white South, that is, to deflect concern away from societal considerations toward matters of personal piety and salvation.

O’Connor hoped her fiction would serve as a corrective to America’s secular influence upon the South, which she perceived as undermining the white South’s traditional emphasis on personal salvation. Her work seeks to change the wandering South, to confront it with the sword of Christian convictions so that her Southern readers will return to their region’s diminishing faith. For example, one thinks of Solace Layfield, murdered by Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*, who could be said to have been redeemed, saved by God’s grace as Haze runs him down with his Essex and then backs over the fallen prophet. Layfield dies with God’s name upon his lips, asking for forgiveness of his
sins (108). Within *Wise Blood*, violence is divorced from the social context of the racially divided South and placed squarely within the theological realm; violence serves as a metaphor of Christian conversion. In a similar manner, O'Connor relentlessly pursues her readership, violently confronting them with the message that they are doomed if they persist in living without Christian redemption.

Following the posthumous publication of O'Connor's collected occasional prose, *Mystery and Manners*, and her letters, *The Habit of Being*, her critics have been quick to discuss the pervasive violence within her fiction in just such a manner: the violence experienced by her characters becomes the means by which O'Connor's evangelical message reaches her audience's ear. She felt that the importance of her mission justified such measures, maintaining that you must "shout" or draw "large and startling figures" to reach the spiritually "hard of hearing" and "almost blind" (*Mystery* 33-4). To paraphrase the litany of many Southern Protestant preachers (or at least those who practice baptism by immersion), critics have been quick to read O'Connor's fictional brutality as illustrating her characters' death to their old way of life and their rebirth into Christ to walk with Him. Louise Gossett's entry under "Flannery O'Connor" in the encyclopedic *History of Southern Literature* exemplifies this reading trend:
The religious implications of [O'Connor's fiction] do not eventuate in reassurances that the characters who come to recognition [of their sinful nature] will live cheerful, successful lives. For O'Connor, the non-negotiable, incontrovertible terms of the demand that man change constituted the drama. The human being hears, refuses to listen, persists in his own ways, attempts to escape, and is finally struck down by his conceit, which proves to have been working in the cause it has resisted. (emphasis added) 490

For such readers, "the crux of the fiction is the human being's need to recognize the peril of damnation in which he lives" (Gossett 490). In most of the book-length investigations of her work, critics have credited O'Connor with writing as if she were some sort of modern Moses come down from the mountain to smash her audience's false idols. Because of the confrontational tone of much of her non-fiction and the instructions she often gave on how she wanted her stories and novels to be read, many O'Connor critics have aligned themselves with her passionate advocacy of the Christian message and read her stories and novels only through the critical lens of evangelical Christianity.1

But herein lies what Martha Stephens has labeled the "problem of assent" (10) in reading O'Connor's fiction.

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What if, unlike O'Connor herself, one does not read with the eyes of faith? To take a smaller example before considering the novel *Wise Blood*, what is a critic such as Stephens or Andre Bleikasten, who raises many of the same questions, to make of a short story like "The River?" In this story, a young boy's parents—who could serve as the prototypes of worldly dissolution which so dismayed O'Connor—are too hung-over to attend to their son, so they leave him in the care of a good country woman who takes him to a "preaching and healing at the river" (*Stories* 169). There the preacher baptizes the boy, initiating him into his new life within the "Kingdom of Christ." The following day, while his parents are again hung-over, little Harry Ashfield slips out of their apartment and makes his way back to the river where he drowns trying to baptize himself again. As he goes under for the final time, he feels a "long gentle hand" (*Stories* 174) pulling him along the way toward a union with the saints.

O'Connor’s second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, also deals with a baptism/drowning and provides the context for her explanation of her recurring tendency toward depicting violent conversions by saying, "When I write a novel in which the central action is a baptism, I am very well aware that for a majority of my readers, baptism is a meaningless rite, and so in my novel I have to see that this baptism carries enough awe and mystery to jar the
reader into some kind of emotional recognition of its significance" (Mystery 162). Alarmed and angered by the cool dispatching of characters such as Harry or the blinding of Hazel Motes, critics like Stephens and Bleikasten have been quick to accuse O’Connor of misanthropy. For instance, Stephens declares that "what is oppressive about O’Connor’s work..., what is sometimes intolerable, is her stubborn refusal to see any good, any beauty or dignity or meaning, in ordinary human life on earth" (9). Similarly, Bleikasten wonders if her religious faith is somehow an "alibi" for O’Connor’s "black derision." He wonders what "distinguishes the extreme bleakness of her vision from plain nihilism" (142).

O’Connor anticipated most critics’ recalcitrance to her sacramental vision and, concerning "The River" and Harry’s ultimate fate, defended her work by embracing the white South’s salvation-oriented religiosity: "[Harry] comes to a good end. He’s saved from those nutty parents, a fate worse than death. He’s been baptized and so he goes to his Maker; this is a good end" (Conversations 58). The grief of the young boy’s family, the pain of his death—neither of these factors is allowed to weaken or is acknowledged in O’Connor’s insistence that this character’s death be viewed by her readers only in the best possible terms. Critics and readers "too far gone in anthropocentric irreligiosity," (40) the half-joking term
used by Stephens to categorize herself and her critical concerns in opposition to O’Connor and the white South’s redemption theology, do not see the boy’s home life as a fate worse than death, or agree with the proposition that spiritual vision can be gained by blinding oneself.

The value of critics such as Stephens and Bleikasten lies in their contrariness, precisely in their insistence upon reading O’Connor "against the grain" so to speak. Their readings and their questions, which contrast so strikingly with the majority of O’Connor criticism and its tendency to espouse the same causes as the woman whose work it studies, highlight the value Southern Protestantism places upon unanimity among those who subscribe to its basic dogma. Partisan O’Connor criticism, while often yielding valuable insights, actually closes off many avenues of investigation and exchange. And much the same can be said of O’Connor’s fiction itself, especially its intertextual borrowings from the Bible. O’Connor’s fiction invokes the Bible not in any openly revisionary sense—neither revising the white South’s popular notions of the Bible nor that particular interpretive community itself—but as an authorization, an appeal as if directly to the ultimate expression of God on Earth, His Holy Word.

O’Connor’s evangelical intertextual appropriations from the Bible are very similar to one of the white South’s strongest biblical interpreting strategies: the Bible’s
perceived evangelical thrust makes it more of a document of the relationship between God and humanity and less of a guidebook for the relationships between Southern whites and blacks. For example, the historian Eugene Genovese reads the Gospel of Matthew, particularly quotes like the one which serves as the epigraph for this chapter, as a text providing hope in the here and now to the black church, promising social justice, a divine retribution, and equality between the races (164-65). As we have seen, Wright utilized this African-American hermeneutic in his re-voicing of key scenes from both the Old and New Testaments to demand political action from the black church. In contrast, the title of O' Connor's second novel, The Violent Bear It Away, represents an instance of biblical intertextuality from the very same Gospel of Matthew, which, like the white South's evangelical Protestantism and its persistent silence regarding social concerns because of an emphasis upon an other-worldly reckoning, is employed to spur her readers to a Christian commitment. What could easily be interpreted as political insurrection in the biblical text--"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:12)--is read as a challenge to one's soul. Likewise, Wise Blood's re-voicings of the New Testament turn away social
questions of racial injustice by focusing upon the efforts of true believers to claim the "kingdom of heaven."

O’Connor’s identification and shared sympathies with Southern Protestantism influence her intertextual project, giving her, in her appropriation of biblical materials for her fiction, a different agenda from the rest of the authors in this study. For example, William Faulkner’s intertextual use of the Bible in *Light in August* assails the segment of white Southern Protestantism which views the Scriptures as a divinely sanctioned statement of white superiority. Through his depiction of Yoknapatawpha County’s fear and hatred of Joe Christmas, he exposes the white community’s use of the Bible to authorize Christmas’s eventual lynching. Hurston’s *Moses, Man of the Mountain* creates an alternative African-American world apart from the oppressive white South, and Wright’s Dan Taylor and Aunt Sue, from *Uncle Tom’s Children*, employ a distinctly black religiosity as a foundation in the fight against Jim Crow. Both *Moses, Man of the Mountain* and *Uncle Tom’s Children* utilize theological legacies of the black church to inform their respective intertextual practices. Whereas Hurston and Wright adopt elements from the black church’s struggle against a society which has long treated African-Americans as second-class citizens, and Faulkner reveals the racist practices of a small but vocal biblical interpretive community of white Southern Protestants,
O'Connor's intertextual practice replicates the white church's silence over unjust racial practices that arise from a militant emphasis upon personal salvation and redemption.

This salvational emphasis of the white South, though diminished, still characterizes the region as the Bible Belt. O'Connor stresses that the South is the last remaining region of America where Sam Jones' grandma would read "the Bible thirty-seven times on her knees," and it is "made up of the descendants of old ladies like her. You don't shake off their influence in even several generations" (Mystery 201-2). What the white South has inherited but not "shaken off" from figures such as Grandmother Jones is a common medium of expression, a shared set of images, allusions, stories, and tropes which provides white Southerners with a common vocabulary emphasizing the soul's need for salvation. Reading the Bible in the South is the pursuit of literate individuals from all classes, from the educated upper classes to the poorest dirt farmers (Mystery 203). As a devoted reader and student of the Scriptures herself, O'Connor uses the Bible as her primary "instrument to plumb Christian

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2Samuel Porter Jones (1846-1906) was one of America's most popular evangelical preachers in the late nineteenth- and very early twentieth-centuries. He swore at his father's deathbed to forsake alcohol and his profligate lifestyle, accepted Christianity shortly afterward and preached his first sermon within a week after his conversion (Bowden 367).
meaning" (Mystery 209) because her project of biblical intertextuality allows her to invest her characters' struggles with a religious urgency and ground them in the supernatural reality she believed in so strongly herself.

Because of her adamant Catholic position, O'Connor might seem out of place, an outsider, among a grouping of Southern writers that includes William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright. As Southern historians, and Southern historians of religion in particular, have long known, the overwhelmingly Protestant South, outside of a few areas, has not been very tolerant or accepting of Catholics. Louis D. Rubin was given perhaps only to slight exaggeration in his characterization of many Southern Protestants of the 1950s and '60s when he described them as believing that "the Pope of Rome is a minion of Satan, and a Catholic priest a mysterious and dangerous man" (50). 3 However, as a Southerner, O'Connor received what Rubin calls a "double heritage" (71), that is, a Catholic doctrinal orthodoxy along with a knowledge of and affinity for the region's evangelical fundamentalism. As to the latter component of her amalgamated theological heritage, O'Connor discusses these submerged, or "underground

3 Typical animosity toward and blaming of Catholics for the ills of the region, and the nation, can be found in an article in the Memphis Commercial Appeal from 1928 which claimed that "three of our presidents have been assassinated, and it is understood that every one of them fell at the hands of Catholics. I have never heard a statement to the contrary" (qtd. in Bailey 104).
affinities" in her essay, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South." She defines the Protestant South as the last region of America where Christianity and Bible reading have not been demoted to a "department of sociology...or personality development." Here, at least, the supernatural is not an embarrassment, she claims. Because of her common concern with the saving of souls and her commitment to personal Bible study, O'Connor proclaims a religious "kinship" with Protestant "backwoods prophets and shouting fundamentalists" (Mystery 207). As she explained elsewhere, "in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological" (Mystery 44).

More specifically, O'Connor's kinship with her Protestant neighbors results from a shared belief in the "divinity of Christ,...the Redemptive Power, [and] the physical resurrection" (Rubin 69). O'Connor maintained that the differences she had with Southern Protestants were "on the nature of the Church, not on the nature of God or our obligation to Him" (Mystery 202). O'Connor wrote to the novelist John Hawkes that she accepted "the same fundamental doctrines of sin and redemption and judgement" (Habit 350) as her Southern Protestant fellow-believers. Despite differences of denominational loyalty, a white

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4 See Robert Brinkmeyer's The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor for another insightful discussion of the common spiritual concerns O'Connor shared with her Protestant neighbors.
Southern "Child of God"—whether Sam Jones or Flannery O'Connor—would know his or her spiritual brothers and sisters because he or she would recognize a similar concern with salvation.

Samuel S. Hill characterizes the emphasis placed upon personal salvation by white Southern Protestants as "verticalist" (Crisis 92). The term verticalist emphasizes the dominant relationship of the white South's theology, a relationship plotted along a vertical axis between a morally requiring God and sinful humans. Conversion, or, in the white church's vocabulary, "getting right with God," is necessary to establish this vertical bond. Therefore, because the pulpit serves as a platform for this other-worldly emphasis, "religion is dominantly a conservative or reinforcing agent for the traditional values held by white Southern society" (Hill "South's Two Cultures" 36). As sociologist Edgar T. Thompson has written, his childhood "minister rarely if ever had anything to say about child labor, sharecropping, illiteracy, or race relations" (58-9). Such Southern social ills received little attention from the region's religion because the white church emphasized "the temporary nature of this world as a place whose evils must be endured" (Hill "South's Two Cultures" 41). O'Connor's own verticalist disposition is apparent in Mystery and Manners when she proclaims her readers' need to realize their "dependence on the grace of God [for
salvation], and a knowledge that evil is not simply a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured" ("Catholic Novelist" 209). As with the South's white church, her focus upon the soul's condition de-emphasizes the region's social concerns.

Crucial to an understanding of and commitment to the common tenets of O'Connor and her Southern Protestant fellow-believers is an evangelical, salvation-oriented study of the Bible because the Scriptures serve as the proving grounds for the resolution of these concerns. In the intertextual weavings of Wise Blood, O'Connor utilizes her familiarity with the Bible and relies upon a similar, although perhaps lesser, knowledge in her Southern readership. As she says elsewhere:

Abstractions, formulas, laws will not serve here. We have to have stories in our background. It takes a story to make a story. It takes a story of mythic dimensions, one which belongs to everybody, 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 "story" necessary for the construction of O'Connor's fiction, its cornerstone, is the story of individual sinners' redemption white Southern Protestants stress in their readings of the Bible. O'Connor's fiction then is

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5This reading of the Bible as a single, sustained narrative which relates the Christian story of Christ's redemption is common to Protestantism. See theologian Carl Ficken's God's Story and Modern Literature for a succinct
to lead readers back to its narrative source—the Bible. Upon (re)turning to the Bible, readers will find there what the white South's Protestant tradition finds in its "infallible Bible,...especially the King James version of it" (Thompson 61): the salvation story. In white Southern religiosity, the Bible provides insight into the state of one's soul—does one stand before a demanding God as an unregenerate sinner, or as a redeemed believer? White Southern ministers and their congregations deflected questions of Southern race relations because they did not conceive of the South's "race problem" as a matter of individual morality; as a result, the white South often made comments like those of George W. Truett in his address to the Southern Baptist Convention who belittled "the great itch abroad in the land demanding 'reform'" (qtd. in Bailey 24) in areas such as race relations.

For O'Connor the relationship between her words (i.e. her fiction) and the Word of God is an anagogical one, revealing the link between the known world and the supernatural reality embodied in the three acts of Christ's incarnation, his redemptive death, and his resurrection. Wise Blood's biblical intertextuality, which is perhaps the

statement of this hermeneutical principle: "The Christian's life and faith are shaped within a community that exists because of the great story of God's freeing and sustaining love. The Bible tells that story; the church has repeated it, lived it, been nourished by it for centuries. We are a people who know how to read a story and how to tell one" (ix-x).
novel's prime anagogical manifestation, can be said to be "verticalist" in much the same way that O'Connor's theology is verticalist; Wise Blood's intertextuality is verticalist in that the novel invokes the Bible in an insistence upon personal salvation dispensed by a morally demanding God before whom everyone will one day be accountable. O'Connor appropriates stories, figures, characters, and tropes from the Bible so that her work might echo with the same urgent redemptive message she finds so prevalent in the Scriptures.

O'Connor often referred to the anagogical element present in what she considered good fiction: "The kind of vision the fiction writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is called anagogical vision, and that is the kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or one

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'Anagogy has its historical roots in the medieval period when the Venerable Bede (673-735) divided biblical exegesis into four levels of interpretation: the literal, allegorical, tropological, and the anagogical. Bede was capable of discerning these four levels of interpretation from nearly any scriptural passage. For instance, George Brown quotes the following passage from Bede's writing to illustrate his skills of biblical interpretation: "The Psalmist says, 'Praise, O Jerusalem, the Lord'...because, according to the letter, as a citizen of that city, in which the temple of God was, he exhorts it to speak praises. But according to allegory Jerusalem is the Church of Christ spread over the whole earth; likewise, according to tropology, that is the moral sense, each soul is rightly called a holy Jerusalem; likewise, according to anagogy, that is the intelligence leading to things above, Jerusalem is the habitation of the celestial fatherland, which is made up of holy angels and men" (48 emphasis added).
situation." Within her own work, she strove to invest her writing with an "anagogical vision" in an effort to reveal "the Divine life and our participation in it" (Mystery 72). Mediating the encounter between her fiction and the supernatural realm it seeks to engage is her reading of and intertextual appropriations taken from the Bible.

This mediation is encapsulated in Wise Blood's twin characters of unbelief and belief, Enoch Emery and Hazel Motes respectively, whose every exploit is calculated to demonstrate O'Connor's fervent belief in the necessity of spiritual rebirth. She exhorts the South, person by person, to abandon its apostasy. There is no Pentecost in O'Connor's fiction; instead, each individual must singularly choose Christ, as does Haze, or the world, as does Enoch. Wise Blood's either/or theology provides another link between O'Connor's fiction and the white South's dominant religiosity. As Robert Brinkmeyer has noted, a fundamentalist, evangelical theology, embodied in the text by Haze's mother and grandfather, underpins the novel (105). "Every fourth Saturday," Hazel's grandfather drove "into Eastrod as if he were just in time to save them all from Hell, and he was shouting before he had the car door open" (10). And the message delivered by the old man was extremely simple--each individual must surrender to the "soul-hungry" Jesus, or he or she would face the Hell from which Jesus was so desperate to save them. No fine
theological points or room for discussion--one chooses redemption or damnation, Jesus or the world.

As they move through the city of Taulkinham, Enoch and Haze's anagogical function and intertextual link to the Bible first become apparent through their names' ability to render moral pronouncements about the vacuity of life outside of Christ: Emily Archer concludes that O'Connor's "consistent attention to meaningful, unarbitrary character naming should...be perceived as an anagogical signal, a clue that names can somehow 'make contact with mystery'" (22, emphasis added). For example, Enoch Emery is an intertextual re-voicing of two separate men named Enoch from the early chapters of Genesis (Green 418). The first of these Old Testament Enoch's, whose history is given in Genesis 4:17, is the son of Cain, born after his father received the curse which resulted from killing Abel. In his wanderings, Cain founded a city which he named after

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Several critics have discussed the symbolic function of Taulkinham in relation to some of the more decadent cities of the Bible. See Thomas Lorch, "Flannery O'Connor: Christian Allegorist," for a reading of Wise Blood which examines O'Connor's debt to Christian allegorists, such as Bunyan, and which reads Taulkinham as a contemporary version of Vanity Fair; Horton Davies, "Anagogical Signals in O'Connor's Fiction," for a catalogue of recurring religious symbols in the depiction of Wise Blood's apostate Southern city; and Sallie McFague, "The Parabolic in Faulkner, O'Connor, and Percy," in which she finds that, like the Gospel parables of Christ, O'Connor's fiction is rooted in the everyday world while revealing a supernatural reality. See also Marshall Bruce Gentry's Flannery O'Connor's Religion of the Grotesque, particularly pp. 123-4, for an insightful discussion of the absent and/or twisted theologies of Taulkinham's citizens.
his first born son. As the son of Cain, the white South’s religiosities "reads" this Enoch as a figure for sinful man. Therefore, Enoch Emery’s name links him to this first Enoch’s Old Testament story; Enoch Emery is the "son," or descendant, of the Bible’s first example of willfulness and distance from God after the Fall. The familial connection between O’Connor’s character and the Old Testament Cain is further revealed when Enoch mentions his daddy’s scar when talking to Haze. O’Connor’s character, like his intertextual biblical predecessor, is a man living under a system of rituals, outside of the Grace of Christ, who possesses a spirituality, but who is completely clue-less about the redemptive mission of Jesus. Despite Enoch Emery’s boast that he knows a "whole heap about Jesus" (26), he fruitlessly seeks to fulfill his spiritual impulses through a series of rituals in the park, such as his viewing of the shrunken mummy, without an evangelical faith in Christian redemption. These rituals display Enoch’s religious nature, but in O’Connor’s redemption-oriented vocabulary, he is only "Christ-haunted" and never "Christ-centered."

Enoch emblematizes for O’Connor the component within humanity "that demands the redemptive act" (Mystery 48),

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8Harold Fickett also argues that Enoch’s religious desires are revealed through the rituals he constantly performs and even goes so far as to liken them to a type of liturgy (42-3).
yet he is unable to convert the factual knowledge of Jesus he acquired at the Rodemill Boys Bible Academy into a practicing Christian faith. For O'Connor, faith is not a matter of facts or biographical knowledge about the life of Jesus. Enoch further demonstrates his alienation from Christ's offered redemption when he sheds his "wise blood" in a gesture which links him even more strongly to the sinful city of Taulkinham. After being hit by the rock Hazel throws at him, Enoch's blood strikes the ground, yet it looks as if it is springing forth from the ground, as if the city's irreligious blood and Enoch's blood are one and the same:

He put his fingers to his forehead and then held them in front of his eyes. They were streaked with red. He turned his head and saw a drop of blood on the ground and as he looked at it, he thought it widened like a little spring. He sat straight up, frozen-skinned, and put his finger in it, and very faintly he could hear his blood beating, his secret blood, in the center of the city. 52, emphasis added

In an ironic inversion of the story where Cain incurred God's wrath for shedding the blood of his brother and was forced to live outside of God's benevolence (Gen. 4), O'Connor shows that Enoch Emery's wise blood, acquired from his spiritual father, Cain, is the very same blood flowing

9Frederick Asals, in his Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity, makes a similar point regarding Enoch's spiritual connection with the city of Taulkinham as symbolized through the shedding of blood.
in the veins of the city's citizens who worship consumption.

Taulkinham's citizens worship at the "altar" of consumerism and kitchen gadgets (18), paying more heed to the pitches of street hawkers than to the sermons of street preachers. Like Sabbath Hawkes they seek spiritual guidance from advice columnists in newspapers who offer only secular counsel about "adjustment to the modern world." In a letter that could have been written by Nathaniel West for Miss Lonelihearts, one of these columnists advises Sabbath:

Perhaps you ought to re-examine your religious values to see if they meet your needs in Life. A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper perspective and do not let it warp you. Read some books on Ethical Culture.

Wise Blood's underlying theology, the message directed toward its straying Southern readers, is the exact opposite of this message. A Christian faith which is not strong enough to mold or "warp" a believer's values is useless for O'Connor. As she maintained, the term "Christian" had lost much of its potency and nowadays simply referred to anyone with a golden heart (Mystery 192). Like Paul advising the church at Corinth to be "fools for Christ," (I Cor. 4:10) O'Connor endorses an extreme Christian faith. The people of Taulkinham have so lost sight of spiritual matters that
their self-indulgent pursuits obscure the majesty of God as revealed through His creation. High above the city,

The black sky was underpinned with long silver streaks that looked like scaffolding and depth on depth behind it were thousands of stars that all seemed to be moving very slowly as if they were about some vast construction work that involved the whole order of the universe and would take all time to complete. No one was paying any attention to the sky.

No heavenly light, for the spiritually desiccated occupants of Taulkinham, can outshine the light of a movie marquee.

While Enoch Emery is the legitimate off-spring of the biblical Cain by virtue of his distance from God and, therefore, easily equated with the first Enoch, his intertextual relationship with the second Enoch of Genesis is ironic. This second Old Testament Enoch, off-spring of Adam and Eve's third son, Seth, was a righteous man and a Hebrew patriarch from whose descendants Noah would eventually be born. Genesis 5:24 describes this Enoch walking with God, avoiding death, and being taken directly into communion with God: "...and he was not; for God took him." Unlike every other patriarch listed in the genealogy between Adam and Noah, the length of Enoch's life is not given, because, in Paul's¹ intertextual evocation of the

¹Contemporary biblical scholars and theologians generally agree that Hebrews is not an official Pauline epistle but is instead a theological essay anonymously written after Paul's death by some member of the Christian church. However, tradition has long ascribed this work to Paul, and the individual authorship of Hebrews is not of
story, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5).

In an ironic re-telling of this biblical story, O’Connor also "translates" her Enoch from what the white South’s theology would consider a spiritually vacuous human being into an animal, both lacking the ability to connect with God. All of Enoch’s innate religious desires have been twisted by the consumerism of Taulkinham; for instance, the greatest goal Enoch has is to be "THE young man of the future, like the ones in the insurance ads" (98). As the logical conclusion of Enoch’s quest to fulfill his religion of self-advancement by virtue of his own actions, he becomes an animal, assuming the form of a gorilla and is translated into an it. As Enoch dresses himself in the gorilla-suit, O’Connor shifts from the human pronoun "he" to the inhuman pronoun "it":

In the uncertain light, one of his lean white legs could be seen to disappear and then the other, one arm and then the other: a black

overwhelming importance for considering O’Connor’s intertextual using of the name Enoch.

"See William Allen’s "The Cage of Matter: The World as Zoo in Flannery O’Connor’s Wise Blood" for a discussion of Enoch’s "translation" into the gorilla. Allen sees this change as prefigured in Enoch’s fascination with the zoo animals and as a reward for the religious offices performed at the zoo. Like many O’Connor critics, Allen does not consider Wise Blood within the context of race."
heavier shaggier figure replaced his. For an instant, it had two heads, one light and one dark, but after a second, it pulled the dark back head over the other and corrected this. It busied itself with certain hidden fastenings and what appeared to be minor adjustments of its hide.

After worshipping the shrivelled mummy, the unregenerate god of pop psychology and profit-motive theology, Enoch Emery's deity rewards him, and "no gorilla in existence, whether in the jungles of Africa or California, or in New York City in the finest apartment in the world, was happier at that moment than this one" (102).

Richard Giannone uses O'Connor's and the white South's rhetoric of Christian salvation when he writes of this scene, "the Enoch of Genesis may have been translated to heaven..., but the gorilla on the rock is humanity shorn of glory" (25). But the translation of Enoch Emery from man to gorilla reveals *Wise Blood*’s deferral to prevailing Southern opinions on race. The South’s racist images of blacks as sub-human beasts lurk just beneath the surface of this scene from *Wise Blood*.12 By the end of the

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12The extent of O’Connor’s complicity in the South’s hierarchy of heavenly concerns over earthly ones is suggested by her refusal to meet James Baldwin in Georgia in the spring of 1959. In a region where, to use O’Connor’s own words, it "just wouldn’t do" for a white woman (regardless of the fact that O’Connor never considered herself a real Southern "lady") to meet with a black writer of the stature and reputation of James Baldwin to discuss art, she explained her reasons in a letter to Maryat Lee for not meeting with Baldwin: "No I can’t see James Baldwin in Georgia. It would cause the greatest trouble and disturbance and disunion. In New York it would be nice to meet him; here it would not. I
transformation, Enoch is a black, shaggy brute completely ruled by base or "animal" desires. In attempting to demonstrate the urgent need of all humans to have a regenerative encounter with Christ, O'Connor creates a portrait precariously close to the South's stereotype of the menacing black male. Enoch's metaphorical transformation sounds suspiciously close to the core of Gavin Stevens' speech about Joe Christmas's "warring" white and black blood from *Light in August*: both men succumb to inherent weaknesses. O'Connor's insistence that her fiction be interpreted according to anagogical principles deflects attention away from racial considerations. Not only Faulkner, but Hurston and Wright also comment upon this traditional Southern link between race and religion, what at its most benign could be called a program of "action through inaction" (Hill "Historical Survey" 409), and at its most malignant an active participation in promoting violent racism. For O'Connor and the evangelical white South, racial injustice is not a matter of individual piety but is one of the injustices of this world which must be endured.

O'Connor links Enoch Emery to the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, to demonstrate the consequences of life

observe the traditions of the society I feed on--it's only fair." O'Connor concluded by saying that one "might as well expect a mule to fly" as for her to see Baldwin within the state borders of Georgia (*Habit* 329).
without Jesus; on the other hand, her protagonist, Hazel Motes, is intertextually linked primarily to the New Testament. His name invokes the pervasive New Testament imagery of blindness because Haze is initially blind to God's summons, and then so completely submits to God that he blinds himself to diminish any distractions which might divert his newly acquired spiritual vision away from God. O'Connor's character derives his name from Jesus's admonition in Matthew 7:3-5:

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

The young man from Eastrod is blind to God's call because of the obfuscating "haze" of his apostasy and the log-sized "mote" of personal pride in his own eye, i.e. thinking he has not sinned and, therefore, does not need salvation.13

Haze Motes's metaphorical beam renders him blind to

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13Haze's metaphorical and, later, literal blindness evoke a large network of New Testament images all connected by the white South to proper seeing, that is, the ability to distinguish Jesus' teachings and how one is to follow them. For instance, Christ proclaims that "the light of the body is the eye," and if it is filled with light, "then thy whole body shall be filled with light" (Matt. 6:23). In O'Connor's re-voicing of this New Testament trope, before his conversion where he acquired his spiritual sight and lost his physical sight, Haze was guilty of having eyes, yet having no sight (Mark 8:18).
God's call from the very beginning of the novel. Every other character--Mrs. Ida Bee Hitchcock, the cab-driver in Taulkinham, and Leora Watts, for example--sees God's hand upon him and recognizes the anagogical link between his outward appearance and his inner calling from God. In his glare-blue suit and large, ugly "Jesus-seeing" hats (as Leora Watts describes them), Haze appears as exactly what he is despite himself--an evangelical preacher. Even the secular-minded Enoch possesses enough religious insight to discern that Haze has "nobody or nothing but Jesus" (30), and Sabbath Hawkes recognizes that Haze "didn't want nothing but Jesus" (96) the very first time she sees him. "The hand of God and its descent" (Mystery 202) upon Hazel places him firmly within the tradition of God's servants who seek to squirm from beneath this hand, a tradition that includes Old Testament figures such as Jonah and the primary intertextual model for Hazel, the New Testament's Paul the Apostle. Eventually Hazel's metaphorical blindness becomes a literal blindness after he rubs quick-lime into his eyes, the first of several mortifications of the flesh that he performs after realizing that God will not relinquish the claim He's laid to Haze's soul.

Enoch Emery and Hazel Motes, with their biblically derived names and placed against the backdrop of the modern-day Vanity Fair of Taulkinham, reveal O'Connor's project of biblical intertextuality most dramatically
through their actions. Nearly everything they do is meant to point toward the futility of life without an encounter with God's grace while exhorting O'Connor's readers to return to or establish relationships with Christ. For example, the anagogical significance of Enoch's pursuit of the "new jesus" which he believes to have found in the shriveled mummy clearly reveals O'Connor's scorn for all false idols. O'Connor utilizes a key word from her religious vocabulary to describe the mummy and its significance to Enoch: "It was a mystery, although it was right there in a glass case for everybody to see and there was a typewritten card over it telling all about it. But there was something the card couldn't say..." (41 emphasis added). What this shrivelled little man is incapable of communicating to Enoch is some sense of the divine Mystery (as O'Connor usually designated it) of God's redemptive involvement in and concern for human affairs.

The disdain O'Connor feels toward such frail idols is revealed in her manipulation of biblical intertexts surrounding Enoch's veneration of the mummy and the reward dispensed by this false god. Compelled by his non-Christian spiritual yearnings, Enoch begins to clean his rented room in expectation of the arrival of his sacred visitor. The object which receives the most attention, since it will be the future resting place of his god, is a washstand which was "built in three parts and stood on bird
legs six inches high.... The lowest part was a tabernacle-like cabinet which was meant to contain a slop-jar" (my emphasis, 67). He paints the inside of his tabernacle with gilt paint and places the mummy inside of what O'Connor, in an obvious allusion to the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant, calls an "ark" (89). Enoch, like a chief priest from the Old Testament, now waits for directions from his god, whose relics are to be housed within a completely secular version of the Ark of the Covenant inside the holy of holies of Enoch's room. The mummy is, for O'Connor, no more spiritually enlightening than the human excrement that used to fill the slop-jar the washtub was designed to hold. The result of Enoch's willful pursuit of this new jesus has already been seen: he spiritually de-evolves from a human being "made a little lower than the angels" and "crowned with glory and honor" (Psalms 8:5) and is translated from a person into an "it."

O'Connor once described Enoch as a "moron and chiefly a comic character" (Mystery 116). O'Connor laughs the laugh of the justified out of a firm religious faith that emphasizes personal redemption, including her own. If readers are able to find humor in the exploits of Enoch, there is little to laugh at in the grim spectacle of Haze working out his salvation "in fear and trembling" and numerous mortifications of the flesh. Not only does Haze blind himself, but in the last days of his life, he also
wraps barbed wire around his chest and fills his shoes with pebbles and broken glass. To understand Haze's struggle against unbelief, one must understand the Motes family's religious legacy. Haze received some of his earliest teaching about Christ from the frightening figure of his grandfather, "a waspish old man who had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (9), a circuit preacher who delivered his sermons from the hood of his car. The grandfather spoke of a relentless, frightening, "soul-hungry" Jesus who would chase sinners "over the waters of sin," and despite any obstacle, He "would have them in the end" (10). As O'Connor claimed, the only thing that Hazel retained from this frightening exposure to the evangelical tirades of his grandfather was "a sense of sin.... This sense of sin is the only key he has to finding a sanctuary and he begins unconsciously to search for God through sin" (qtd. in Fickett 39, emphasis added). This quest for redemption, regardless of where it might lead one, is the common ground that forms the religious kinship she shares with the white South's evangelical Protestantism, which O'Connor acknowledged in

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14 In this passage, Pickett is quoting from an unpublished letter of O'Connor's written to serve as a summary of Wise Blood for potential publishers. She wrote this letter before Wise Blood was accepted for publication by Robert Giroux, who would eventually publish all of her work, and after John Selby had released her from a contract given to her based upon the merit of her early stories and M.F.A. thesis.
her "underground affinities" with "back-woods prophets" and "shouting fundamentalists."

If Haze is to move "through" sin toward salvation, he really picks up speed then when he buys himself a car, an Essex, "a high rat-colored machine with large thin wheels and bulging headlights" (35). As Jill Baumgaertner points out, Haze buys a car so that he might run from Jesus more effectively (124) because Haze believes "if you got a good car, you don't need to be justified" (58). The physical miles that Haze covers in his jalopy correspond to a type of theological distance that he travels, for it is Hazel's car which helps to spread the "gospel" of his blasphemous Church Without Christ. The disavowal of a Christian, supernatural reality, with its attendant notions of sin, redemption, and grace, leads Haze to found his heretical Church Without Christ. As with his relationship with the prostitute, Leora Watts, Haze practices what the white South would call "sin" merely to prove that he does not believe in its existence.

The cornerstone of the Church Without Christ is the denial of Christ's divinity because, in Haze's theology, without the Incarnation, God's redemptive involvement in humanity's affairs becomes a moot point: as Hazel proclaims in his church's inaugural sermon, "There was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgement
because there wasn’t the first two" (54). The rat colored Essex serves as his pulpit, as Hazel climbs upon the nose of his car to preach to the citizens of Taulkinham. Just as his car propels him through the city and surrounding countryside to spread the "good news" of his new church, his impious theology propels him further from a redemptive knowledge of Christ.

Haze’s willful rebellion and flight—both in terms of theology and geography—from his calling from God is dramatized in the opening and closing scenes of chapter seven of Wise Blood. Just as God directed Moses and the Israelite nation out of Egyptian bondage with a pillar of cloud to direct them by day, He also seeks to lead Hazel with a cloud, this time with one reminiscent of an Old Testament patriarch: "The sky was just a little lighter blue than [Hazel’s] suit, clear and even, with only one cloud in it, a large blinding white one with curls and a beard" (60). Haze, however, is too busy trying to seduce Sabbath Hawkes (who is busy trying to seduce Hazel) to take notice of God’s attempts to provide him with spiritual guidance. By the end of the chapter, the cloud-image of an Old Testament, patriarchal figure has given way to "a bird with long thin wings and was disappearing in the opposite direction" (65). The text seems eager to bestow upon Hazel an anointing similar to that received by Christ when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove (Matt.
3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). The distance between Haze's theology and that of the evangelical South—which read this New Testament intertext as the starting point of Christ's redemptive mission—is revealed in the simple act of Hazel driving "in the opposite direction" of this heavenly sign. Despite their nearly constant grumbling against Jehovah and the insurrections they mount against Moses, even Hurston's recalcitrant Hebrews from Moses, Man of the Mountain are more spiritually attuned to God's signs than Hazel.

The clouds in the countryside are not the only signs the "soul-hungry" Jesus has placed in Hazel's path which he fails to read. With the log-sized mote of pride in his own eye--Haze commits the sin of pride when he repeatedly claims not to need the intervention of Christ to save him, as he tells the waitress at the zoo's restaurant, "I AM clean"--Haze cannot read such subtle signs as the clouds or determine the anagogical significance of the vault of heaven stretched over Taulkinham. As he tells those who listen to his Church Without Christ teachings, "You needn't to look at the sky because it's not going to open up and show no place behind it" (84). Hazel is so blind to the efforts of the "soul-hungry Jesus" that before his conversion he also fails to interpret correctly the most obvious signs the "wild ragged figure" (10) of the relentless Jesus places before him. These are literally
the road-side signs whose fundamentalist urgency demands that Haze abandon his sinful ways. Whereas the city of Taulkinham has signs that the country-bred Hazel eventually learns to interpret, as in Hazel's quick discovery of where to find prostitutes like Leora Watts, the country-side displays divine messages which are much more straightforward but inscrutable to Haze because of his metaphorical, spiritual blindness.

On a trip out of the city, Haze sees a gray boulder beside the road. "White letters on the boulder said, WOE TO THE BLASPHEMER AND WHOREMONGER! WILL HELL SWALLOW YOU UP?" (38). Haze spends several minutes pondering the sign's question, a question of special significance for Haze (and O'Connor's apostate readership whom he represents within Wise Blood's narrative world) considering his involvement in the Church Without Christ and with Leora Watts. He especially studies "the two words at the bottom of the sign. They said in smaller letters, 'Jesus Saves.'" Haze reacts with anger and declares, "I don't believe in anything" (39). The Church Without Christ espouses the belief that there are no longer signs from God, if there ever were any, so Haze returns to Taulkinham unaware that Christ is preparing an unmistakable message that He will reveal in the sky to the recalcitrant young man from Eastrod.
Hazel's Church Without Christ receives a less than enthusiastic reception in Taulkinham; no one listens to Haze because the citizens of Taulkinham already belong to the Church Without Christ. As the preacher/con-man Asa Hawkes realizes, no one really listens to the city's numerous street-preachers, and in fact, Hawkes makes his living not by preaching falsely but by not preaching at all. Taulkinham's residents give him nickels for keeping quiet. Therefore, Haze's inability to find converts results from the fact that he's already preaching to the converted. In the folk idiom of the white South, he is preaching "to the choir." Haze is only able to attract disciples after he stumbles upon the term "new jesus," but Hazel's followers do not realize that he coined the term as a repudiation of the white South's emphasis upon sin and salvation. None of the people who hear Haze's messages about the radical isolation of humanity in a universe without some type of deity are moved to any type of anguish or existential revelation or liberation; instead, Hazel's metaphor for a fully mortal paradigm for human emulation becomes a money-making scheme for Hoover Shoats and a social opportunity for the very lonely Enoch Emery.

Hoover Shoats's greedy instincts tell him that the "new jesus" Hazel heralds is a profitable opportunity. Shoats hopes to bring the same mind-numbing banality and profit-motive to the Church Without Christ's ministry that
he brought to the radio show he hosted, "Soulsease, a quarter hour of Mood, Melody, and Mentality" (80). What Shoats does not realize is that Hazel’s street-corner ravings are sincere wrestlings with God, the expression of what O’Connor calls in her introduction to the novel, "many wills conflicting in one man." The Church Without Christ’s doctrines are expressions of only one of Haze’s many wills. Unlike Shoats, Hazel is not motivated by avarice, living monastically both before and after his conversion; rather, since Hazel is what O’Connor labels a Christian malgré lui, the new jesus, which is for him, "just a way to say something," functions as another unsatisfactory substitute for the true Jesus, the "ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of [Hazel’s] mind" (WR "Author’s Introduction" 2). Enoch takes Hazel’s call for a "new jesus" quite literally and delivers the central artifact of his vague spiritual longing, the shrunken mummy from the zoo, to Hazel. Hazel’s new jesus, the "something to take the place of Jesus, something that would speak plain," is "one that is all man, without blood to waste...that don’t look like any other man" (72). This new jesus perfectly fulfills Enoch’s religiosity because the mummy represents what O’Connor viewed as the antithesis of Haze’s quest for the resurrected and redemptive Jesus.

Hazel’s eventual confrontation with an otherworldly Jesus is facilitated by three events, or encounters: his
destroying the dust-filled new jesus; his killing of the false prophet, Solace Layfield; and the patrolman's pushing his car over the embankment. In the first of these encounters, Enoch thinks he is rendering a great service to his animalistic deity by uniting the mummy he venerates with Hazel whom he supposes to be a great prophet of his secular god, a sort of John the Baptist whose lone voice in the wilderness of Taulkinham is preparing the way for this physical, unregenerate god. Yet what causes Hazel to reject this new jesus is what O'Connor once called his own type of "wise blood" (Habit 350), a blood, unlike Enoch's, which intuitively recognizes that the shriveled mummy is not the realization of the spiritual quest he has been pursuing throughout the novel. Having never been anything more than "all man" and possessing no blood to spare for humanity's redemption, this new jesus serves no spiritually redemptive purpose for O'Connor. Hazel recognizes this when his vision is made hyper-acute by putting on his mother's Bible-reading glasses and viewing the tableau of Sabbath cradling the shrunken mummy, an intertextual parody of the Catholic iconography of Madonna and Holy Child: she holds the shrivelled little corpse "in the crook of her arm,...fitted exactly into the hollow of her shoulder" (94-5). Hazel responds to this blasphemous mother and child with great violence—he throws the new jesus against a wall, "and the trash inside sprayed out like dust" (96).
He then throws the skin out the back door into the rain. Harold Fickett concludes that "Haze...recognizes that he has indeed been presented with a new jesus--a jesus shrunken to the size to which Hazel's unbelief would tailor him; a jesus that is a continuing sign of our mortality, that lives on in a mummified eternity only to proclaim the impossibility of resurrection" (43). O'Connor says much the same thing in a letter to "A" dated July 23, 1960: "That Haze rejects the mummy suggests everything. What he has been looking for with body and soul throughout the book is suddenly presented to him and he sees it has to be rejected, he sees it ain't really what he's been looking for" (Habit 404).

O'Connor's claim that Haze is redeemed because he is finally able to truly see the new jesus underscores the previously mentioned intertextual link to the New Testament's profuse sight imagery. As Dorothy Walters contends, "Each iteration of sight imagery [in Wise Blood] is resonant with biblical echoes: 'Now we see as through a glass darkly... If thy right eye offend thee... An eye for an eye...' and above all, 'They have eyes and see not...' (44). This momentary insight of Hazel's does not accomplish his redemption; rather, it is merely a step in

15"A" is the designation given by Sally Fitzgerald in her editing of O'Connor's correspondence to a woman who first wrote to O'Connor in 1955. "A" wished to remain anonymous in O'Connor's collected letters. She and O'Connor wrote to each other from 1955 until O'Connor's death in 1964.
the process of clearing away the log-sized mote of personal pride which prevents him from recognizing his need for a redemptive encounter with Jesus.

The second event preparing Hazel for his conversion—paradoxical as it may sound—is his killing of his narrative twin, Solace Layfield. Layfield is Hazel’s textual double: when Hoover Shoats realizes that Hazel will not compromise his Church Without Christ for monetary gain, he simply hires a Hazel look-alike to help him work his scam. The second necessary step in Hazel’s movement toward conversion begins when he strips away the pious costume of his double:

[Layfield] began to run in earnest. He tore off his shirt and unbuckled his belt and ran out of the trousers. He began grabbing for his feet as if he would take off his shoes too, but before he could get at them, the Essex knocked him flat and ran over him. Haze drove about twenty feet and stopped the car and then began to back it. He backed it over the body and then stopped and got out.

Earlier, a woman in the crowd asked Hazel if he and Shoats’s "True Prophet" were twins, and Hazel foreshadows his impending murder of Layfield when he replies, "If you don’t hunt it down and kill it, it’ll hunt you down, and kill you" (85). This comment does not so much reveal Hazel’s murderous tendencies as it does his realization, at least on what O’Connor considered his intuitive or "blood" level, that he must rid his own self of its disbelieving
elements. Or to put it another way, within the anagogical mode of interpretation favored by *Wise Blood* and the Southern white church, Hazel's violence is not so much a murder of Layfield as it is a violent exorcism of the sinful elements within himself which obstruct his view of the redeeming Christ. Anagogy displaces the moral concerns of the here and now. For example, Hazel's questioning of Solace is at least as applicable to his own situation as it is to Layfield's condition, especially when he asks, "What do you get up on top of a car and say you don't believe in what you do believe in for?" (104). In the terms of O'Connor's moral universe, Hazel functions as Layfield's instrument of grace because, as the consumptive false prophet lies beneath the Essex, he confesses his sinful nature before Jesus and dies asking for His forgiveness: "'Jesus hep me,' the man wheezed" (105). 16

The final step of Hazel's preparation for conversion is accomplished when the patrolman destroys Hazel's car. While Haze claims that not even a lightning bolt could stop his Essex, he does not reckon on the mysterious patrolman who polices the outer limits of Haze's apostasy and prohibits him from getting too far in his attempts to run

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16This scene from *Wise Blood* is particularly reminiscent of several O'Connor short stories where murder and mayhem serve as the agents of God's grace, bringing the victims to some saving knowledge of Christ. The Misfit, from "A Good Man is Hard to Find," is probably the best known and most often studied example of this tendency in O'Connor's work.
away from God. This point is reinforced by another road-sign that Hazel deliberately tries not to read—"Jesus Died for YOU" (106)—just moments before the policeman pulls him over. The officer pushes his car over an embankment, destroying his vehicle and its ability to allow him to run from God:

Haze stood for a few minutes, looking over at the scene. His face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing and on beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space. His knees bent under him and he sat down on the edge of the embankment with his feet hanging over.

Hazel finally has his powerful encounter with the mystery of Jesus's redemptive grace.

This scene secures the intertextual bond between Hazel and Paul:17 both men violently experience God's grace as

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17An important distinction, however, should be made between Saul/Paul and Hazel. While both men bicker with Christianity, their motives could not be farther apart. Theologian Martin Hengel observes that Saul/Paul persecuted the early Christian community "in the firm conviction that in so doing he was acting according to God's law and will, in zeal for this law" (65). The newly founded cult of Jesus was highly critical of the Mosaic law, leading to the eventual stoning of one of the church's most influential leaders, Stephen (Acts 7:55-60). Saul held the cloaks of the men who stoned Stephen, and seemingly spurred on by this action, he began to persecute the early church in Jerusalem and surrounding areas, imprisoning believers (Acts 8). Haze, on the contrary, denigrates Christianity not because he sees himself as fulfilling God's law but because he wants to deny that there is even a God. To escape the character of Jesus who gestures for "him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on the water and not know it," (10) Haze first decides to avoid Jesus by avoiding sin and then by denying
it descends upon them as they travel isolated country roads to preach their individual messages against the Gospel. Immediately following his encounter with the risen Christ, Haze rushes back to the city to blind himself with the mixture of quick-lime and water, and the blindness of Saul and Hazel functions as the bridge between their old selves and their new ones. Saul’s blindness, the scales which cover his eyes, is God’s chastening tool, and after his rebirth as the apostle Paul, he continually suffered from a "thorn in the flesh" which kept him humble before God. Hazel likewise disciplines his flesh with the metal thorns of three strands of barbed wire wrapped around his chest (Giannone 13). These harsh measures do effect a redemption for Haze at the conclusion of Wise Blood, eventually converting him into a beam of redemptive light. Haze finally recognizes the truth behind Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 18:9 that it is better "to enter into life with one eye [or, in Hazel’s case, with no eyes] rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." Hazel’s blinding does not occur like Paul’s, as a direct result of his encounter with Christ. Rather, Haze blinds himself with two consequences: first, he eliminates the distractions which have so long kept him from surrendering to the pursuing Jesus; secondly, he gains a more intense spiritual vision which allows him to see what he is now running toward and the very existence of sin.
not running from. As Mrs. Flood notices after Hazel rubs quicklime and water into his eyes, his face, and his eyes in particular, reveal a "peculiar pushing look, as if [he] were going forward after something [he] could just distinguish in the distance" (110-11).

Once Hazel has blinded himself, he begins his journey "backwards to Bethlehem" (113), drawing toward a spiritual union with Christ as he approaches death. Hazel’s journey has truly come full-circle now, with his end fully recognizable in his beginning. *Wise Blood* opens and closes with the *memento mori* images of death in life that Hazel’s surrender to Christ fully embodies: O’Connor describes the "plain and insistent" (3) outline of a skull under Hazel’s skin on the novel’s first page, and on its last, the same *memento mori* fuses with the description of Hazel’s eyes, his hyper-acute organ of spiritual sight: "The outline of a skull was plain under his skin and the deep burned eye sockets seemed to lead into the dark tunnel where he had disappeared" (120). Hazel’s self-blinding, which bestows upon him a theological "tunnel-vision," and his other penitential acts lead to a union with Jesus as he becomes the "pin point of light" that Mrs. Flood had detected in his sightless eyes. It is this dark tunnel that leads him back to Bethlehem and his soul-saving encounter with Christ. The grim reminder of humanity’s mortality embodied in the readily detectable skull of Hazel Motes, both at the
beginning and conclusion of *Wise Blood*, reminds the reader of the deadly earnest with which O'Connor has depicted the wrestling of her young street preacher with the soul-hungry Jesus. Without a doubt, the stakes of Hazel's contest between his own belief and unbelief are, because of O'Connor's strident Christianity, still the same--his immortal soul.

O'Connor witnessed the diminishing of Christian faith in twentieth-century America and, closer to home, in her native South, and was exasperated by the proliferation of social scientists, pop psychologists and various other "innerlekchuls," as she liked to call them, because she saw their positivistic teachings and ideas regarding humanity's eventual perfection as undermining Christian faith. Thomas Schaub makes a similar insight when he asserts that "throughout [her] fiction, it isn't too hard to see that...these violent conversions [of characters like Hazel Motes from *Wise Blood*] are meant to operate as much against the liberal reader as against the central character" (123).18 *Wise Blood* is O'Connor's project of evangelism,

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18Schaub's *American Fiction in the Cold War* does a remarkable job of placing O'Connor's fiction within the context of Cold War liberalism and its rhetoric, arguing that "the premises of O'Connor's work were remarkably consistent with those of the very audience she imagined withering under her attack" (125). The common premises that Schaub detects between her fiction and the discourse of modern American liberalism are a belief in human imperfection, the presence of evil, and a "necessity to recognize the limitations of human control and aspiration" (124). Despite this common ground, O'Connor often saw herself as being at odds with
and Hazel's blindness is her metaphor for the occlusion of humanity's spiritual sight. But the text of *Wise Blood* itself might be said to possess a blind-spot; O'Connor is so intent upon demonstrating the machinations of Christian grace that the Southern white church's great blind spot of racial injustice is replicated in *Wise Blood*.

these "liberal readers," hesitant of making tactical alliances with those who did not share her uncompromising Christian faith.
Works Cited in Chapter Five


CHAPTER SIX:
"I TAKE MY TEXT AND I TAKE MY TIME":
THE PROMISE OF INTERTEXTUAL READING (BIBLICAL OR OTHERWISE)
FOR SOUTHERN STUDIES

[We shall often find that not only the best, but the
most individual parts of [a writer's] work may be
those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert
their immortality most vigorously.

--T. S. Eliot

Sources of a literary text, allusions, quotations,
references, epigraph and so on, result in a
retextualization, the creation of an essentially new
text out of the old since the old text is
resemanticized or changed in function through its
placement in the new text, the text that surrounds it,
and because of the difference in the reading community
coming upon the text in a new context.

--Leonard Orr

Alan Nadel maintains that "literary allusions...are a
covert form of literary criticism, in that they force us to
reconsider the alluded-to text and request us to alter our
understanding of it" (650). And therein lies possibly the
greatest benefit (and responsibility) of an intertextual
criticism, to continually adjust and refine our perceptions
of literary texts, to read and re-read with a new vision.
The Bible has often been viewed by the white South as a
transparent text, that is, a work whose readily detectable
concerns with sin and salvation would be apparent to anyone
who opened its covers. Considering the Bible and its
attendant institutions as functioning intertexts within the
works of black and white Southern authors causes us to
"reconsider" and "alter our understanding" of key aspects
of the South’s black and white religiosities: within the context of Southern race relations, who is allowed to interpret the Scriptures and in what manner?

To answer these questions, an intertextual reader must function, to use Udo Hebel’s phrase, as a "text archeologist"—one who looks beneath the focused text’s levels of signification to recover its intertexts’ "evocative potential" (140). It has been argued throughout this project that this "evocative potential" is most fully realized when intertexts are not conceived narrowly as only one literary work borrowing from another but as appropriations, tropes, parodies, criticisms, or endorsements of text-like webs of social signification as well.

Conceived in this way, the project of intertextual reading and criticism seems to offer great promise as an interpretive tool, encouraging students of literature to expand the field of their inquiries by considering literary texts in relation to one another and in relation to the historical/cultural contexts in which they participate. This critical practice is more radical than some critics of intertextuality, such as Thaïs Morgan, have maintained. In "The Space of Intertextuality," she argues,

Like the methodology of source, influence, and biography which it replaces, the location of intertexts, intratexts, and autotexts takes place within a circumscribed field and literature that overlaps significantly with the canon or tradition
proposed by early modern critics such as Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot. In effect, "the best that is known and thought in the world" is redefined as that set of texts on which the greatest number of intertexts converge. 272

Morgan concludes that "intertextuality is finally a conservative theory and practice" (272), and she seems genuinely concerned that intertextual projects will simply lead to a reification of current reading canons and course syllabi.

Yet what could do more to stimulate investigations into previously neglected areas of study than a critical practice committed to bringing to light a text's relationships with its unacknowledged or hidden predecessors and the cultural milieu in which they all participate? What Morgan seems to overlook is intertextuality's critical thrust. Literary works "are never mere 'memories,' they rewrite what they remember" (Jenny 37). Consider the authors studied in this project, for instance: Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright all quite conspicuously "rewrite" key biblical passages as each wrestles with the white South's intertwined gospel of race and religion. *Light in August* re-voices stories of Ham's supposed curse and Christ's passion to reveal the communal sanctioning of Christmas's racially motivated lynching; *Moses, Man of the Mountain* recasts the Exodus story of Israelite liberation to exhort African-Americans to construct a community which does not replicate the racial
violence of the white South's religion; and Uncle Tom's Children, "Bright and Morning Star" in particular, revoices the Bible's apocalyptic passages to encourage an increased, collective political commitment from black church congregations. Even O'Connor who, at first glance does not seem to rewrite the Bible, engages in an intertextual practice which is sanctioned by the white South's dominant religiosity, and this dominant mode of biblical interpretation is founded upon selected passages that are emphasized over others. By carefully excavating the many layers of Wise Blood's biblical intertexts, the careful text archeologist finds that O'Connor is employing a type of exhortative intertextuality which highlights how her revered appropriations of the Bible serve as an appeal to a venerated work in an effort to lend credence to and authorize the assumptions of Southern evangelical Christianity.

Intertextual reading releases the literary study of a focal text from an isolation which detaches it from the cultural, historical matrix which shaped that particular work and which it helped to shape. For Southern studies in particular, intertextual reading can provide a framework for discussing the South's distinctive culture and its impact upon the region's literature along with a structure for examining the largely overlooked interactions between Southern black and white writers. Readers of Southern
literature might then, like their literary predecessors, Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon from *Absalom, Absalom!*, be able to create a narrative from "the rag-tag and bob-ends of old stories."
Works Cited in Chapter Six


VITA

Timothy Paul Caron, despite an outstanding final season in the Cenla Civitan Baseball Youth League, was never selected in any rounds of the professional baseball draft. The gritty, gutty, hard-hitting, but broken-hearted, fifteen year old catcher was forced to admit that he had given the best years of his life to pursuing a dream that was never fulfilled—he would never play in the Big Show. Caron sought solace from his books. The time once spent in the batting cage was now spent in the Rapides Parish Library.

His bookish proclivities increased throughout high school, and he came to realize that he could actually get a college degree if he read enough books. Then he realized he could get a graduate degree if he read some more books. Then he realized that he could get a doctoral degree if he would read even more books. Sadly, neither books nor baseball have prepared Tim Caron to become a contributing member of society.
Candidate: Timothy Paul Caron

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: "Rag-Tag and Bob-Ends of Old Stories": Biblical Intertextuality in Faulkner, Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

EXAMINATION COMMITTEE:

March 25, 1994