1994

Comedy of Redemption in Three Southern Writers.

Carolyn Patricia Gardner

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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Comedy of redemption in three Southern writers

Gardner, Carolyn Patricia, Ph.D.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1994
COMEDY OF REDEMPTION IN THREE SOUTHERN WRITERS

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
Carolyn Patricia Gardner
B.A., Northeast Louisiana University, August 1968
M.A., Northeast Louisiana University, May 1970
August 1994
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With gratitude to those who made possible the completion of this project. We endured.
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ABSTRACT

The present study discusses a theological motif in the works of three Southern writers, Faulkner, Percy, and Toole, with *The Unvanquished*, *The Moviegoer*, and *A Confederacy of Dunces* being the works chosen for examination. The particular nature of religion in a Southern novel is established early. The Southern novelist is concerned not with sin in the abstract but with the existential angst resulting from it and with the hope of redemption. Also, in the Southern novel, there is humor undergirding even the study of existential angst.

God's comedy is the focus of this study of the movement toward redemption in the works of these three authors. The frame of the study is Ralph C. Wood's book *The Comedy of Redemption*. Wood is a Barthian, and the present study is written out of a Barthian world view. Communion is at the heart of each chapter, and even the wine of the ancient beginnings of comedy turns out to be Communion wine, with the real comedy being God's comedy.
INTRODUCTION

The religious motif that runs through Southern literature is initially best understood by how it is unlike that of the New England Puritan tradition. In what Faulkner calls the "iron New England dark," the emphasis seems to be upon sin and judgment. In Southern literature the interest is not in theory—not in the idea of sin—but in the resulting existential angst and the need for redemption. An even more basic contrast between Southern literature and that of the New England Puritan is one of temperament. The contrast is that of the humorless Puritan literature versus a literature undergirded by comedy. It is a comedy best understood by those who have known oppression and have learned not to expect release through ordinary rational means. It is understood by those who have mainly been oppressed by the usual rules and by those who have played by those rules and lost. Thus, it is a form of humor we might expect in the South, a region shaped by black culture, with its history of bondage, as surely as by the often cited lost cause.
In discussing this comedy, the present study will borrow the term "comedy of redemption" from Ralph C. Wood's book by that title and lean heavily upon the book. After acknowledging other forms of comedy, Wood speaks of a comedy that turns upside down the world's usual rules of profit and scorekeeping. In discussing comedy of redemption, Wood says that God "has perpetrated the most outrageous of tricks, a joke to end all jokes . . .," having "thrown over our own calculus of good and evil, which metes out rewards to the righteous and punishments to the wicked." Describing faith as the "supremely comic act," Wood suggests that it invites the believer to abandon scorekeeping and frolic. To be sure it is a particular kind of frolic that Wood describes; it is dancing and singing "before the ark of our redemption . . .," by those who can never scorn "the world's passing parade."²

Wood's book is held together by Barthian theology, which is, above all, a joyful theology of grace. While sharing Calvin's emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, Barthian theology dispenses with the grim doctrine of double predestination--the idea that some are born to be lost. Instead, in Barth's scheme, the division between
those lost and those saved falls away, as Wood observes: "The real focus of God's decision lies not on humanity ... but on the One in whom all are damned for their murderous mistrust, but also the same One in whom all are finally reconciled to the God whom they have slain."³ Wood stresses that single election does not suggest "any mechanistic notion of divine determinism—as if God proceeded with a plan such as Napoleon devised ... before invading Russia."⁴ Instead it means that God's grace is cosmic in scope, as Barth makes clear in his Church Dogmatics:

In the beginning, before time and space as we know them, before there was any reality distinct from God which could be the object of the love of God or the setting of His acts of freedom, God anticipated and determined within Himself (in the power of his love and freedom, of His knowing and willing) that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious toward man, uniting Himself with him.⁵

The result of what Wood calls God's "gracious accord between himself and the world" is freedom to perceive that to which we would otherwise be blind. It is Christians who are, according to Wood, "freed to discern what Barth calls parables of the Kingdom." The church itself, in Barth's system, is something like a parable, not an extension of Christ. "The community is not
Atlas, bearing the burden of the whole world on its shoulders," Barth stresses. Instead the church seeks both to reflect Christ and to recognize that reflection also in the secular world.⁶

It is in an attempt to find secular reflections of divine redemption that Wood discusses Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, John Updike, and Peter DeVries. Wood the Barthian is, understandably, hardest on O'Connor. By both emphasis and temperament she is out of step with the joyful theology of Barth. O'Connor's emphasis is not so much upon God's redeeming grace but as on humanity's acceptance or rejection of that grace. There is never a moment, in O'Connor's scheme, when one is held in absolute safety by a sovereign God. Instead she insists that a person is "so free that with his last breath he can say NO."⁷ It is not surprising that O'Connor's depiction of character would be no gentler than her theology. There is a pitiless intensity to her descriptions; indeed she comes dangerously close to scorning "the world's passing parade"—an attitude Wood says a Christian will not assume.⁸ What Wood refers to as O'Connor's "veritable gallery of the maimed and misshapen" includes "a self-blinded preacher and child-
drowning prophet, a cretinous deaf mute and a one-armed con man, a wooden-legged philosopher and a club-footed delinquent."9

Apparently attempting to be fair, Wood says that O'Connor's goal is to "show freaks and invalids on their way to health and wholeness--indeed, to salvation" after "fearful awakenings to the grace they have tried to deny."10 Even so, "freaks and invalids" are what linger in the reader's mind, and Wood goes on to ask if O'Connor is not actually "dualist in her theology and macabre in her art."11 Wood later refers to O'Connor's "horrifying moments of grace that leave her characters devastated as much as they are renewed and reborn."12

Even so, Wood attests that O'Connor "in the best of her stories . . . seeks not to wound but to heal, not to divide but to unite, not to shout but to jest, not to draw caricatures of damnation and salvation but to limn the subtleties and ironies of grace."13 It is, according to Wood, particularly in stories involving race relations that O'Connor is able to attain this delicate stroke in which foolishness is revealed only so that a "jesting kind of freedom" becomes possible. Rather than writing clichéd stories of Southern racial guilt,
O'Connor writes something more sophisticated—a comedy in which, as Wood notes, "grace . . . makes clowns of us all, liberals no less than reactionaries . . . ."\(^{14}\)

With this happy thought it seems fitting to turn to Percy, the satirist Wood calls "gracious rather than bilious."\(^{15}\) Wood's main focus is The Moviegoer, which is clearly an enactment of the Christian existentialism of Kierkegaard. The present study, in fact, will connect particular passages of Kierkegaard with specific passages of Percy. As if the connections were not already obvious to the reader, Percy goes so far as to refer to "the Danish philosopher."\(^{16}\) Though the task is not difficult, Wood is thorough in showing that The Moviegoer is Kierkegaardian, with Binx finally able to live what Wood calls "the life of faith as comic hope."\(^{17}\)

Wood's use of logic is such that his inclusion next of John Updike seems to fit the discussion of secular parables of the Kingdom. The inclusion, however, reminds one of the shopper who wanders the grocery store aisles until all of the sale items turn out to have a connection--of the scholar who peruses his material until it all somehow supports his thesis. He tells us directly that Updike does not engage in trying to "sting
the world . . . into a reforming act of self-recognition" as do Percy and O'Connor. Instead, according to Wood, Updike deals in irony—the irony of "the human condition as containing, within its own tragic dialectic, the surprise of goodness." Wood uses the term "natural grace" to describe the goodness that Updike's characters find in "the same moral realities that constrict their freedom—marriage and children, social convention and religious duty." Thus, Wood argues that, "The gracious irony evident in Updike's work . . . is that we are not, as we might seem, the playthings of an unknown and arbitrary Fate, but the products of a beneficent order and the recipients of inestimable gifts." Among these gifts is human sexuality with which Updike seems to be obsessed. As Wood notes, "No beast is engrossed with its erotic life as we humans are. Far from being a sign of our mere animality, the human absorption with sex reveals, in Updike's view, that we are created in the image of God." If Wood seems to be the shopper wandering the aisles until all of the sale items connect, we should remember that Wood is a Barthian, convinced that the entire store exists only within God's comedy of
redemption, which is cosmic in scope. Even as Wood seeks to find parables of the Kingdom in the secular, we know that, in one sense, nothing can be truly secular for a Barthian.

Certainly DeVries, trying to dismiss his Calvinistic background and professing that prayer is a mere "comforting exercise in auto-suggestion," is not quite convincing as a secularist. As Wood observes, DeVries's characters "keep backsliding out of their unbelief, stumbling into Zion, lapsing into faith." As if this pattern were not enough, DeVries has his character Peckham pronounce a witticism that seems to embody Barthianism, with its emphasis upon the sovereignty of God. When a streetcorner preacher wants Peckham to make "a decision for Christ," Peckham responds, "Can't he make it for himself?" Apparently not wanting to kidnap DeVries into the fold of parable writers, Wood says that his own intent "is not to suggest that DeVries is an inadvertent apologist for Christian faith." Instead, Wood argues, DeVries "mocks our culture's mockery of God." Even so, Wood goes on to say that "DeVries's kind of laughter constitutes . . . a
comic parable of divine reconciliation, a distant echo of eschatological joy."23

The laughter itself is basic to the religious content that Wood seeks to establish in DeVries's work. As a professed Barthian, I often contend that God calls people to write comedy about the church because somebody has to--and surely no one writes it more effectively than does DeVries. No matter how much he professes unbelief, his work has the mark of the hilarious God, as Wood finally implies:

His entire career may be read, in fact, as a sustained attempt to exorcise the specter of Dutch Calvinism from his life and work. His blessed failure remains, I believe, the real source of his success as a comic writer. The past that haunts DeVries is no mere ethnic narrowness; he is hounded by nothing less than belief in the transcendent and redemptive God. It gives his fiction a clear sense of Christian revelation as a drastic counter-proposal to all secular nostrums . . . .24

By ending with a discussion of the truly hilarious author, Wood establishes a pattern that will be followed in the present study, which will end with John Kennedy Toole. Comedy, of course, is basic to every section of a work that concerns itself finally with God's comedy. In studying this comedy of redemption as it is played out in Southern literature, we will look first at Faulkner. He is chosen
arbitrarily as the prototype of the Southern writer because of his position as Nobel Prize winner and shaper of other Southern writers and because of my own still more arbitrary belief that he was a prophet. Faulkner does not speak in terms of theology or of comedy. Still, the spiritual nature of his work as well as the comic aspect will become apparent, with *The Unvanquished* being the novel under study.

From Faulkner we will move to Walker Percy, with *The Moviegoer* being the primary example by which we will discuss his work. In this book Percy will give a name to what Faulkner has already demonstrated indirectly—a "dazzling trick of grace." And Percy also will provide a story to clothe the theology of "the Danish philosopher." The "dazzling trick of grace" that is central to Percy's work enacts the comedy of redemption already noted in Faulkner as well as the theology of Soren Kierkegaard.

It is in *A Confederacy of Dunces*, the openly hilarious book, that we finally see comic disorder celebrated with hilarious abandon. We should keep in mind that Toole, even more than Faulkner and Percy, gives the impression of hinting more that stating any spiritual of theological intent. If "faith is the assurance of things [unseen but]
hoped for,\textsuperscript{25} then it seems not unfair that the reader is asked to exercise something akin to faith in discerning what is suggested more than stated and suggested as much in the pauses as in the words.
CHAPTER 1

MOTHS ABOVE THE HURRICANE:
RESTORATION IN THE UNVANQUISHED

Though Faulkner does not speak in terms of theology or of comedy, The Unvanquished, as surely as the other two novels under study here, deals with what Ralph C. Wood calls the "comedy of redemption." Faith as Wood describes it—a "supremely comic act" that invites the believer to abandon scorekeeping and to frolic—would necessarily involve a certain willingness to shed ego and travel light. It is a condition reminiscent of and depicted by Faulkner's phrase, "moths . . . above a hurricane" (8).

Despite Faulkner's refusal to speak directly of theological matters, the Christ image is stamped heavily upon the book. Before considering the text, we should stress that we speak of Christ in terms of the pelican image favored by medieval imagery—that of the mother feeding her young on her own blood. It should be further understood that we speak of God not in the idolatrous patriarchal sense common to the nineteenth century. The God we appeal to at once transcends gender and includes both the masculine and the feminine. It becomes evident that thus to deny one gender—to see the
world in a restrictive male image—is to deny one aspect of God. And certainly The Unvanquished, as we will see, depicts a parched time in the wilderness, a time when the feminine is driven out.

The Christ image appears first in Granny, who seems to embody the Eucharist as she spends herself, using the money she gains to feed the people of the neighborhood. While her prayer is presumptuous to say the least, she still resembles a Christ figure when she informs God that she takes upon her soul any sin she has caused Bayard and Ringo to commit. Eventually, however, Granny will cease to be the inclusive figure of the pelican but will, instead, take on the characteristics of the restrictively male environment.

Before there can be any real redemption in the book, there must be a reuniting of the masculine and the feminine as surely as two estranged lovers might be reunited. Thus The Unvanquished is, in the purest sense, a love story. It is not a love story in any erotic sense, but it is a love story just the same. It is a book in which wholeness comes only when the Other is embraced—a book in which the movement is toward restoration rather than mere resolution. Though it is
not the story of a man and a woman, it leads to a release through relinquishment after all of the defenses have been given their due but put aside in the end. It ends, in short, with a peace like that of two lovers who have come together at last.

The point becomes clear as we consider the title itself and ask what has not been vanquished. The question is perhaps more easily answered if we consider what obviously is vanquished by the end of the book. In the first pages there are indications of what will be destroyed and what will be unvanquished even after every attempt by outsiders to cure the South and every attempt by the South to resist being cured by strangers. What will be vanquished is, by any external standards, almost an entire civilization. Recorded histories, such as Charles Reagan Wilson's *Baptized in Blood*, as well as oral tradition handed down in the South, indicate that after the Civil War many prominent Southerners despair and moved to South America, hoping to establish a new civilization. And well they might despair. It was a time when both property and power were taken away, with the vote being denied to anyone who would not swear allegiance to the United States. The ravaged condition

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of the South is still more evident if we listen to the words of those who did not despair. Episcopal Bishop Stephen Elliot, sensing the common sentiment that Reconstruction was a time terrifying in its darkness, said that Christians should not fear the darkness but embrace it, since God would be there too.28

Whether we listen to the existentialist bishop or watch those fleeing to South America or merely recall Southern oral history, we know—or think we know—what is vanquished, even without reading Faulkner's account. In fact, his account closely matches attempts at factual history; but his purpose is not to make history more vivid. The point, as the title suggests, is that something is not vanquished. The point is heightened by contrast when Faulkner shows us what is vanquished along with what is not. Concerning what will be destroyed, Loosh serves as the prophet of doom. In the opening pages, the two children, Bayard and Ringo, have drawn on the ground a map of Vicksburg, with a trench representing the city itself. With one sweep of his hand, Loosh knocks down the chips and says, "There's your Vicksburg" (5). Indeed Vicksburg has fallen, but Loosh is the one who knows before Bayard. At first
Bayard tries to resist believing Loosh but knows any such resistance is "just talking," since "niggers know, they know things" (7). Eventually Bayard and Ringo will begin watching Loosh, so sure are they that he knows things early and will somehow indicate what is about to happen.

Here it will help to consider who Loosh is and what his two functions are. He is, quite simply, the other. Though we are speaking of resolution through a gender metaphor, Loosh, as surely as the feminine principle, is the other in relation to the dominant white male power structure. The technique Melrose Gwin and other feminist critics describe for silencing the feminine voice—either by pretending that nothing was said or by pretending that what was said was crazy or childish and thereby incomprehensible or unworthy of being taken seriously—is precisely the technique applied to slaves who did anything but applaud the power structure. The eventual effect upon the black person or the woman is the same—rage that will knock down with one sweep that which exists and say, in effect, "There's your Vicksburg" (5). Even though Ringo is black, physically, he is more a Sartoris than anything else and eventually
he will be more Sartoris than even Bayard is. Loosh's function in addition to being the bearer of rage is being the bearer of knowledge. In this sense he enacts a pattern in Faulkner—that of knowledge possessed by those who are shut out of the power structure, with those characters sometimes wielding a particular power. Recall, for example, Intruder in the Dust, where an old lady, a child, and a black man are the forces behind an outcome for which a white male attorney is officially responsible. If we go with Bayard's notion that black people "know things," we should not assume that they all know the same things. We should observe Louvinia's reaction to Loosh's faith in General Sherman: "'You black fool!' she said. 'Do you think there's enough Yankees in the whole world to whip the white folks?'"

Perhaps not. But if not, we must ask, what did?

First, let us consider what will be unvanquished even after defeat. The first indication is in an early description of the two children, "born in the same month and . . . fed at the same breast" (7). Their bond was formed with a mother figure, a point worth keeping in mind since the feminine is denied in the parched time at which the book takes place. Bayard and Ringo have, in
fact, "slept together and eaten together for so long" (7) that Granny is "Granny" to Ringo as well as to Bayard. Moreover, there is the image of communal eating—an image to be explored more fully in relation to *A Confederacy of Dunces*, another work in which we will find a Communion motif. The communion image seems hard to deny in relation to Ringo and Bayard, and they reach the point where Bayard suggests that "he wasn't a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn't a white boy anymore, the two of us neither . . . ." Instead, he suggests, they are the "two supreme undefeated"—the unvanquished. He goes on to compare them with "two moths, two feathers riding above a hurricane" (8). It becomes clear that if, as we suggested earlier, Ringo is a Sartoris, then it is without shame. Rather than, in the process, having to become white, Ringo is one of the "two supreme undefeated"—the unvanquished.

Two things are apparent regarding this "undefeat." First, they are undefeated before the South has fallen to the invading Yankee army—as if defeat or "undefeat" is more basic than the war, with either defeat or "undefeat" being possible even before the war has been played out. Second, either a moth or a feather is
light. The suggestion that anyone who would be undefeated must shed ego and travel light is irresistible, especially considering the role of pride in *The Unvanquished*.

The term *pride* is being used in the present study in a special way. Whether one believes that the word has two almost opposing meanings or that the quality itself embodies both the positive and the negative, the term is commonly used to denote a positive quality (when Faulkner speaks of "love and honor and pity and pride and sacrifice,"30) and also a negative quality—arrogance or hubris or, in Judeo-Christian terminology, the sin of pride. The difference between the two connotations is exemplified by what Robert E. Lee says about honor: "A true man of honor feels humbled himself when he cannot help humbling others."31 A true man of arrogance, we assume, feels triumphant when he humbles others. And in these two concepts—that of the man who feels humbled when he must humble others and that of the man who seems to relish humbling or even breaking others—we see the two connotations of the word *pride*. In the negative connotation, that of the person arrogant and intent upon being prominent or "right" or otherwise dominant, we
think of a whole host of Faulkner's villains, such as Thomas Sutpen, with his grand design that ends in "one nigger Sutpen," as Shreve observes.\(^{32}\) (The irony, of course, is that Sutpen creates his grand design out of rage at being humbled by a servant at the door of a mansion.) There are various examples of arrogance begetting rage or arrogance, but none is more sickening than the scene between McEachern and Joe Christmas on the stable floor. McEachern, a Calvinist, would supposedly believe in the sovereignty of God, and yet it is clear that we are watching someone who believes himself to be God. It is methodically, with no sense of emotion, that he beats Joe Christmas, trying to make him repeat the catechism. And we already know the direction in which the child is turned. What we may not have noticed already is that the beating occurs in a place that seems to be a sick parody of the nativity scene, just as much of the book seems to be a twisted inversion of the Christmas story. In *Light in August*, as surely as in *The Unvanquished*, the feminine is trampled or perverted, with Joe Christmas learning, through experience, to fear accepting anything from a woman.
If examples of the negative form of pride abound, we should not get lost in those examples. Faulkner also uses the term pride in a positive context—for example, in "The Bear" when he describes black people learning "humility through suffering and pride through the endurance of suffering." Most often, in fact, the characters who embody this form of pride are black. Faulkner does not always speak directly about their embodiment of these kinds of pride, but still we sense it. Whether it is Dilsey returning from her Easter experience to deal with the crazy Compsons or Molly in "The Fire and the Hearth" enduring the period when the child she suckled becomes a racist, we feel it. Indeed pride is ever present, a given in Faulkner's fiction.

Still we must admit that Faulkner spoke more about the term pride in the negative sense. While Absalom, Absalom! was in progress, he wrote a letter describing "the story . . . of a man who wanted a son through pride, and got too many of them and they destroyed him." Later, in a discussion with the English Club at the University of Virginia, Faulkner indicated that Sutpen's problem was seeking revenge by trying to become "as rich as he was, as big as he was on the outside"
instead of saying, "I'm going to be braver or more compassionate or more honest than he is." And in this quest for revenge, Faulkner pointed out, Sutpen "violated all the rules of decency and honor and pity and compassion." Clearly Sutpen's interest is limited to the external—an idea to which we will return. His quest violates pity and compassion—virtues often associated with the feminine—and sacrifices honor as well. In addition to being sometimes considered a feminine virtue, pity is what W. B. Yeats considered the chief virtue of Christianity.

It is important to note here that Faulkner seems to be saying that pride leads to the loss of honor—a word to which we will return. He uses the terms pride and honor in opposition to one another, or seems to, when we watch community being broken by racial pride in Go Down, Moses. It is in the section entitled "The Fire and the Hearth"—a title suggesting home and warmth and mother—that an idyllic relationship is broken. The two boys, one white and the other black, have been inseparable, "sleeping on the same pallet in the white man's house or in the same bed in the negro's and eating of the same food at the same table in either," with the same black
woman being a mother to both of them. This is certainly communion, if not a eucharistic image. "Then one day the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him." The woman who has suckled both boys does not protest, but she never again serves them at the same table; the pride of the fathers has broken the communion served by the mother. Again pride destroys honor. Pride, in this negative sense of the word, seems also to deal in humiliation, with humiliation begetting pride in the one who is humiliated. Thus, we hear echoes of Robert E. Lee when we read Faulkner's interviews, with his repeated warnings that racial justice would not be brought to pass by humiliating white southerners.

Lee, of course, was discussing honor. And while Faulkner uses the term pride in more than one way, he is consistent in his use of the word honor. For the sake of clarity, the present study will differentiate between the two terms. The negative, egotistical quality will be referred to as the sin of pride, with a term as strong as sin being chosen since the ultimate effect is
a violation of the very order of things, a violation ancient and terrible, making impossible any real community or any personal integration. To begin defining a theological concept such as the sin of pride through an example and then noting the effects rather than defining it by a theory is in keeping with the Hebrew Bible which, as Paul Ricouer observes, "has no abstract word to express sin, but a bundle of concrete expressions." We can discern, therefore, a basic similarity and a difference between sin in the Southern novel and sin in the New England novel. On the one hand, the sin of pride motif can be found in both. On the other hand, the New England Puritan is closer to a monk contemplating his soul, even though the effects of sin are shown in, for example, The Scarlet Letter or The House of Seven Gables. In the Southern novel, the concrete expressions of the sin of pride and the results--the broken community and the acts of violence--are the focus.

If broken community is the product of the sin of pride, then we must ask if community is at least potentially the product of honor. We have already noted Lee's idea that the man of honor dislikes humiliating
another, and we have seen that Faulkner uses terms such as *pity* and *compassion* in conjunction with *honor*. Also, drawing upon Faulkner's remarks about Sutpen, we infer that pride deals in externals—in being "right" before an audience—whereas honor is an internal quality existing in relation to pity and compassion and courage, qualities which, as we have already noted, include both the bravery of a male warrior and the traditional feminine virtues. Thus, honor is at once internal and gender-inclusive, making the bearer of it integrated in a way that the bearer of pride could not be.

It may complicate if not confuse the issue if I insist that Faulkner's novel mirrors the Old South in that not every Southerner held the same code of honor and that almost no one observed the same code all the time. The effects are strikingly similar as each code crosses into "the spectacle of false sacredness," which is Paul Ricouer's definition of vanity. Before considering the effects, however, we should look at the two codes. Wyatt-Brown uses the terms *genteel* and *primitive* to describe them. In layman's terms we might describe the two codes as that of the aristocrat versus that of the redneck. Wyatt-Brown, however, attempts to
trace the primitive, primal code back to Indo-European culture, whereas he attributes the genteel code to a later, Stoic-Christian tradition. Both codes seem, in some sense, admirable. The primal code, with its emphasis upon bravery and protection of one's kin, seems reminiscent of some noble old Anglo-Saxon warrior. But the Christian-Stoic (or genteel) code is even more beguiling, with its emphasis upon magnanimity and courtesy and self-control. While either code emphasizes bravery, we sense in the primitive code a certain egotism—a willingness to take revenge to avoid the shame of defeat—as opposed to the idea that one cannot be dishonored by external circumstances. The primitive code, however, was based upon externals rather than upon anything subtle or internal. According to Wyatt-Brown, the genteel code "became the familiar one, associated with the upper ranks of Southern society from the eighteenth century through the Civil War. The darker, less pleasant aspects of Southern life betokened the continuation of the archaic forms, kept alive by . . . an inhospitable, dangerous world where masters had to rule in fear."
Fear is perhaps the basic condition for this dark code. The suggestion becomes unavoidable when we observe, in The Unvanquished, that this dark code will surface to a greater degree in the bleak days of Reconstruction, when nothing holds. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming" comes to mind:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.44

Certainly the ceremony of innocence is drowned in The Unvanquished, particularly in Drusilla, whom we will consider in detail. She functions as a scapegoat, though we must assume that innocence is drowned in the entire culture; as Erich Neumann points out, the scapegoat carries the projection of the shadow of a people.45 In another way the ceremony is drowned in Bayard, who is on an initiation journey. Bayard, of course, functions as a representative redeemer. The redeemer takes on the dark side but, instead of being driven out like the scapegoat, is embraced. Thus a people can embrace the darkness and no longer need to drive out a scapegoat. But we are far from redemption.
as the characters enter the dark days of reconstruction; first we must watch the time when the "centre cannot hold" and "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed" and--most of all--the "ceremony of innocence is drowned" in Drusilla.

We cannot help noticing further parallels between the darkness Faulkner depicts and "The Second Coming" as the poem continues--particularly when Yeats attributes to the sphinx "A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun." Faulkner often uses the term pity in conjunction with honor, and surely we are entering a time without pity--a time when honor fails and, to quote Yeats, "The darkness drops . . . ." The term pitiless is significant because, as we have already noted, Yeats considered pity to be the great virtue of Christianity. In The Unvanquished, of course, the Christian-Stoic code of honor is pushed aside by a code as primitive as the beast Yeats describes. The Anglo-Saxon warrior seems synonymous with everything macho, to the exclusion of the feminine.

While our interest in the two codes is limited primarily to their embodiment by Southerners, I would argue that, in encounters with Granny, members of the invading Yankee army exhibit aspects of both codes.
Granny seems to manage rather well with members of her own social class, regardless of national affiliation. Whether she provides the Union colonel with ice water while hiding children under her skirt or retrieves the family silver, she does well so long as she deals with an officer and a gentleman. The crude sergeant, on the other hand, addresses her as "Grandma" and seems mainly upset because the children have shot a horse on which bets had been placed. And certainly we see revenge—a quality Wyatt-Brown attributes to primal honor—when the house is burned. John Sartoris has humiliated Yankee soldiers with an elaborate practical joke, leaving them in only their underwear. But somehow we are not laughing when they come and burn the house—the place where Granny, even during a war, roots rose cuttings. We may even say, with Granny, "The bastuds" (86). At any rate they are not gentlemen. Nor are the rednecks who eventually kill her when she ventures into their world and attempts to bargain with them. Clearly the two codes are not exhibited exclusively by Southerners. However, like Wyatt-Brown, I will limit the application to Southerners since the present study, like The Unvanquished, simply is not about Yankees.
In applying the two codes to *The Unvanquished*, we have already acknowledged that either code seems, in some sense, admirable. We have also noted that the primal code, with its emphasis upon bravery and loyalty to kin, is reminiscent of an Anglo-Saxon warrior while the Christian-Stoic code, with its emphasis upon magnanimity and courtesy and self-control, is by far the more beguiling. Who, after all, could not appreciate John Sartoris's Stoicism? Asked how it is possible to fight in the mountains, he replies, "You can't. You just have to" (19). And who could not enjoy Granny's offering ice water to Colonel Dick while hiding two children, these being only the first of her deeds involving courage and courtesy and the nerves of steel necessary not to betray the fact that anything but courtesy is involved? Even slavery is transformed, not into something right but into something different than might be imagined, by bearers of the genteel code, with the primary sin being paternalism. We are somehow inclined to forgive though not condone most wrongs in these genial bearers of the genteel code. The bearer of the primal code, while not lovable, is nonetheless admirable.
Why, then, is either code a serious moral or practical problem? The answer is simple: ultimately either code destroys the bearer of it if ultimate trust is put in the code, the reason being that the code itself finally can be vanquished or at least proven insufficient if not harmful. John Sartoris is a prime example of a man whose code proves to be harmful. He is a man who begins in real decency, with little trace of arrogance—believing, for example, that Ringo is smarter than his own son. John Sartoris is merely defending his family and his native land when he goes to war, periodically coming back, gaunt and ragged, to help build a pig pen or bury the silver. Even during Reconstruction, when he resorts to vigilante law to prevent what is, from a Southern frame of reference, a puppet election, we assume that he thinks he is only shooting carpetbaggers because somebody has to. Again he is defending his native land. Recall, however, Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Presumably it is not addressed to aggressors but to those perpetually poised to react to attack. The result—the "tragedy"—is that "a general and a universal physical fear" has been "so long sustained by now that we can even bear
it," with the question, "When will I be blown up?"
replacing "problems of the spirit."46 Certainly
something has been killed in John Sartoris. After so
many years of being poised for violence that he "can
even stand it," to quote Faulkner's speech, John
Sartoris goads a good man into killing him. Killing
already has become too easy for him, when he shoots the
hill man without waiting to be sure of his intent. As
the book progresses, John Sartoris slips more and more
into the primal rather than the genteel code. There is
the tendency to do so in times when nothing holds, and
little in the South does hold by the end of the book.

Would John Sartoris, then, have remained intact
morally and psychologically had he held fast to the
genteel code? Probably not. Consider the sad case of
Drusilla, once the stereotypical bearer of that code.
For she was once a Southern belle, engaged to be
married--until her fiancee was killed. She is a woman
who has quit sleeping but instead is "keeping a dog
quiet" (114). Her hair is cut short, like that of a
soldier whose hair is cut with a bayonet, and her hands
are hard. She dresses and rides like a man. In short,
she looks and acts like the soldier her name might
suggest, but this is no early feminist wearing a man's clothing because it allows freedom of movement and taking her place in an army that has transcended gender. This is a woman ravaged—perhaps the most victimized figure in *The Unvanquished*. The fact that she has stopped sleeping suggests that her defenses are never down, that she is not a bride secure enough to fall asleep but a warrior, ever alert. Somehow we sense why she does not want to sleep. We know even before she tells us, with bitterness, "you don't even have to sleep alone" since "you don't have to sleep at all" (115).

When she is trying hardest to be the male warrior, she shows that her traditional, nurturing instinct is not gone, merely abused. When she prepares to ride toward the bridge that is about to be mined, she reminds her mother that "those Negroes are not Yankees" and that "at least there will be one person there who is not a Yankee either" (105). She says "one person" rather than "one other person," but clearly her intent is to say that someone should be there with them. This is the same woman who pretends to think that the time when a Southern lady had, among other responsibilities, "Negro slaves to nurse and coddle" was a "stupid" time. The
time she describes, in fact, is a time when her genteel
code held—a time when houses were not burned and
Negroes were not drowned in "homemade Jordan" and,
finally, when young men did not "ride away and get
killed in battles." It is here that she makes the most
poignant statement of all, the one already noted: "You
don't even have to sleep alone, you don't even have to
sleep at all" (115). This entire change did not come
immediately after her fiancée was killed. She was
wearing a Sunday dress, we are told, when the Yankees
came to burn the house and steal the horse that was
given to her by her dead fiancée. That was when she
jumped, bareback, on the horse and whispered, "Kill him,
Bob," and then threatened to shoot the horse rather than
let him be stolen. "So," as her younger brother
recalls, "they burned the house and went away" (103).
She is dressing as a soldier and keeping a dog quiet
instead of sleeping and saying, "Thank God for nothing."
Whether we assume that the dog is the now unchanneled
desire of a young woman whose fiancée has been killed or
her femininity itself, she is psychologically and
spiritually mutilated—a person without the ability to
praise.
It might seem easy to argue that there is little cause for praise when her native land is ravaged and her fiancee is dead. First, though, it is necessary to understand the basic role of religion in the South—and particularly as portrayed in The Unvanquished. The role is somewhat different, of course, for black characters and for members of the white aristocracy. Black characters, on the one hand, treat religion as deliverance from present distress—as when slaves are rushing toward "homemade Jordan" (115)—or as a means of transcending present distress—as when Dilsey returns from church on Easter morning in The Sound and the Fury. White aristocrats, on the other hand, are more likely to emphasize an ethical code, with themselves the maintainers and bearers of it. In a very particular sense, they are engaged in social action; the preacher who takes over Granny's funeral recalls her nurturing activities which were a type of unofficial social work. Granny has her hilarious sessions with God, informing him of her actions and acknowledging the flawed nature of her means but never doubting her responsibility to produce the desired end. The ethical code is being
applied when Bayard finally decides that, if the Bible is saying anything, it is telling us not to kill.

Whether religion is viewed in terms of personal deliverance or of social action, the underlying assumption is that one is finally answerable to God rather than God's being answerable. This assumption, then, implies a deeper one—that God is the perpetual giver, even when present darkness hides the gift. To trust this assumption is finally to follow the advice of Bishop Elliot and embrace the darkness, believing that God is there too—or even to believe that darkness is the place we inevitably are when we seek God (especially if we recall Auden's conclusion to "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," in which he speaks of teaching "the free man how to praise.") The poem's setting is a time of war—when "In the nightmare of the dark / All the dogs of Europe bark," when "the seas of pity lie / Locked and frozen to the eye."

Though Auden refers to World War II, the poem obviously describes the time in which The Unvanquished takes place. It is from "the bottom of the night" that Auden urges the poet to "still persuade us to rejoice." It is not through external circumstances but, "in the desert of the heart" that Auden says to
"let the healing fountain start" and not in a new situation but "in the prison of his days" that he urges the poet to "teach the free man how to praise." And yet Drusilla has lost the ability to praise, instead saying, "Thank God for nothing" (115).

If the ability to praise is an index to psychological and spiritual health, then we are inclined, finally, to look at the characters and say, with the Book of Common Prayer, "There is no health in us." More and more the characters do not merely rely upon their own wits but seem to find in that reliance the closest thing to security. Even Granny, with her hilarious relationship with God, depends more and more upon her own devices. Physically, of course, her own devices eventually get her killed. Bayard and Ringo try to prevent the fatal meeting with Grumby, but Granny practices the bravado that Colonel Dick diagnosed early.

Even so, through much of the novel, Granny is perhaps the most successfully functioning character in both a practical and a psychological sense. (Here the intent is not to minimize Granny's growing problem but to note the irony--that the problem will eventually undo one who seems to function more successfully than most of
the other characters.) It is particularly worth noting that she too—in the days of the mule trading business—comes to look like a person who has stopped sleeping; like Drusilla, Granny resembles a warrior. Here is the change that prevents Granny from ultimately being the character to bear the Christ image. Giving so extravagantly of herself in order to feed the people of the community, she has previously called to mind the inclusive image of the pelican—the Christ symbol favored in medieval metaphor. But now, as she comes to resemble only the warrior, the feminine is being denied in Granny. Already the feminine in Drusilla has been abused and denied, and now the process occurs in Granny as well.

Granny never has exactly embodied the union of the masculine and the feminine—the union that ultimately must be achieved. Instead she carries a hilarious coexistence, though not harmony, of the masculine and the feminine. Granny, of course, is sometimes regarded as a stereotypical example of the Southern lady in old age. Yet anyone who has either lived among Southerners or read Southern Honor knows the depiction is realistic. Anyone with this type of experience does not even
dignify by consideration another stereotype—that of a creature who is mere fluff. The Southern lady, as manifested in Granny, is on the one hand a nurturing figure and a keeper of ritual and propriety and, on the other hand, a fearless person bordering on what Colonel Dick calls "bravado"—a quality we might find in an Anglo-Saxon warrior. As long as the warrior is only one aspect of Granny—as long as she is simultaneously guarding propriety (having over her head a proper parasol during her adventures or forbidding profanity) and being nurturing (trying to make sure the black people get home from what Drusilla has called "homemade Jordan")—she is at once delightful, admirable, and hilarious.

In fact, she is funniest when she violates her own rules without either dismissing the rules or glossing over violations. Once, for example, she and Ringo agree that they should not yet kneel and confess to having first told a lie, that they will probably have to sin some more before getting home. All of this guarding of propriety in a time that is, itself, not proper—like her discussion of sin before the act—is the more comical in combination with the iron quality evident in
Granny. Ringo says more than once, quite aptly, that the Yankees do not know the magnitude of trying to deal with her. Some modern critics seem to emphasize her identifying herself as John Sartoris's mother-in-law, and there is no denying that connecting herself with a public figure will gain for her clout that a private individual would not have. She is also the woman who, according to Ringo, "cide what she want and then kneel down about ten seconds and tell God what she aim to do, and then she git up and do hit. And them that don't like hit can git outer the way or git trompled" (105-106).

Granny, actually, is as tough as Drusilla might have become had the war not broken her too soon—when, in her brokenness, she could only feign toughness by trying to deny her softness. And Granny, with her tough/soft qualities, seems to embody (though certainly not unify) the masculine and the feminine. For this woman who has so long sustained in herself both aspects to come to resemble a warrior—-not the hilarious paradox she has been but only a warrior--is indeed serious.

We have paid particular attention to Granny and to Drusilla because they are two women living in a time
when the feminine is being denied and abused. The ultimate pairing, however, will be that of Granny and John Sartoris versus Bayard and Drusilla--the old order versus the new. John Sartoris is falling into the same type of deterioration as Granny's--that of becoming only a warrior poised for battle. A certain jaded quality takes over John Sartoris, and we know that something has gone amiss. Something in the very order of things has been broken, violated. In both John Sartoris and Granny something has dried up. Gwin's idea that Faulkner writes about femininity in terms of fluidity is apt. As something in the two characters grows parched, something is lost--something ancient and basic, with loss being a constant condition. Paul Ricouer describes sin as "the loss of a bond, of a root, of an ontological ground." Certainly a root is lost, with the inclusive pelican being replaced by the Anglo-Saxon warrior. It is through what remains of it that we feel most that which is lost. Something of John Sartoris's best self is still evident, for example, when Drusilla is being bullied by outraged older women and he, like Louvinia, is kind to her. Thus we know that the jaded quality that comes to dominate him represents a real loss.
In speaking of sin as "loss of a bond, of a root," Ricouer says that "there corresponds, from the side of redemption, the fundamental symbolism of return." The return, as we will see, cannot come through Granny or John Sartoris. They are part of the old order that must pass away. If the idea that the return cannot come through the old order seems to involve a paradox, it is intentional. The return that is essential is not merely a return to the genteel code, the limitations of which we have already observed. A code, finally is not enough. The return necessary is to wholeness. It is a spiritual return more ancient and basic then Southern society, and it will not come through ordinary logic or bravery or goodness. The return will be to the wholeness embodied in the inclusive pelican, and Granny and John Sartoris are not capable of bringing about that return.

Instead it will come through the new order, represented by Drusilla and Bayard. We became aware of the Christ image first in Granny, only to see her lose it as the feminine is stamped out. It is instead in Drusilla and Bayard that first the scapegoat and then
the Christ image, with Drusilla serving as the scapegoat and Bayard serving as the representative redeemer.

Drusilla, of course, would not be the scapegoat if she were able to share in the change we have witnessed in Granny and John Sartoris. Instead she embodies that which is being driven out, the feminine, even when she wears a man's clothing or serves as a warrior. While the community experiences a void as the feminine is driven out, Drusilla is actually the one to suffer. At times her suffering is directly inflicted by the community, particularly when the mean-spirited old women come to imply that she is promiscuous and force her to marry, as if marriage will purify what has not been stained.

Drusilla's experience matches what Rene Girard describes in The Scapegoat. The distinction between a scapegoat and a representative redeemer seems to lie in the attitudes of the one being sacrificed and of the community. The representative redeemer submits willingly, while the scapegoat is drafted. The community attributes guilt to the scapegoat, as in the case of Drusilla, when the old women attribute promiscuity to her. The representative redeemer is

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viewed as an innocent sacrifice, as the term "Lamb of God" suggests. In any sacrifice, as Girard notes, there is a collective victim suffering in the place of the community. The persecutors are naive, unaware of what they are doing, according to Girard. Ultimately, I would contend, the community must renounce naiveté and know what it has done and for whom the representative redeemer has suffered. The scapegoat, however, must bear the displaced sins of a hostile community. Thus Drusilla fits, in every sense, the description of the scapegoat.

The setting of The Unvanquished also fits if we consider Girard's description of the likely occasion for a ritual sacrifice. The event is most likely, he says, "in times of crisis, which weaken normal institutions and favor mob formation." It is important to keep in mind that Girard is not distinguishing between the scapegoat and the representative redeemer, but discussing any ritual sacrifice. In this context he asserts that "ritual cannibalism is simply another form of sacrificial rite." Drusilla, as we have already noted, is being eaten alive. Yet the Banquet--the communion motif upon which the present study hinges--
must ultimately replace the ritual cannibalism as we see it in Drusilla's sad experience. Ultimately the one submitting to the sacrifice must be a volunteer, not a draftee, and the result must be to free, not to destroy.

First, however, Drusilla must play out her role, which has been, from the beginning of the story, to protest the trampling of the feminine. The point becomes obvious if we accept Minrose C. Gwin's suggestion that "the hysteric . . . as feminist scholars are beginning to make us see, 'is the nuclear example of a woman's power to protest.'" Although Drusilla performs mechanically, there is a barely suppressed hysteria when she talks about not needing to sleep alone and later when she offers Bayard the pistols. Always, of course, she is the soldier when hysteria is evident. Whether she is wearing her Sunday dress and whispering, "Kill him, Bob" (102), or dressing like a man and keeping a dog quiet, she is a soldier. We can only assume that she had no reason either to be hysterical or to be a soldier before she was robbed of her more placid life as a Southern belle. The state of being hysterical but always the soldier should, at the very least, put to rest Freud's notion that hysteria is characteristic of
If there is anything passive about Drusilla, it is the soldier mode, in which she shuts off something in herself, or perhaps merely puts it aside, so that nothing actively human will interfere with her ability to mechanically defend what needs defending and stand always on guard. Yet the hysteria—the active protest—is always there, always just beneath the surface.

We might even use Drusilla's case to challenge Freud's entire notion that a feminine fondness for strong male figures indicates a moral and an intellectual limitation. Certainly there is no moral or intellectual growth when Drusilla calls the old order "stupid" and spends her days—and her nights—keeping a dog quiet. Some, of course, might argue that Drusilla the soldier has been crippled by her past as a Southern Lady and is thus ill prepared to be a soldier. In the context of The Unvanquished, however, we should remember that Freud does not limit to ordinary gender relations his discussion of a feminine attachment to a strong male figure. He carries the matter further, suggesting that the moral, intellectual, and cultural
limitations of a woman attached to a strong male figure are characteristic of a Christian attached to God.⁶²

The Unvanquished, after all, depicts a time when soft virtues such as pity are trampled or discarded and each person seems anchorless—a time when the inclusive image of the pelican is replaced by the male warrior. It should be admitted, of course, that Faulkner is not overt in any theological connections and is not going to tell us directly that Drusilla's protest is finally a theological matter. To speak directly of such matters, even with those professedly interested in them, was never his style. Duncan Gray III, son of the minister who performed Faulkner's funeral, notes that Duncan Gray II was "Faulkner's pastor for a time" and knew him as well as any one could know Faulkner, with the clear implication that no one could know him very well.⁶³ Certainly Faulkner is not one to speak directly of theological matters while writing fiction; he is too good a craftsman to do so. As Louis Rubin has noted, writers think not in ideas but in stories.⁶⁴ The lack of overt theological connections in Drusilla's protest proves not that they do not exist but merely that Faulkner is more than a pamphleteer writing propaganda.
Furthermore, think of Faulkner saying at the University of Virginia, "I think that no writing will be too successful without some conception of God."\(^{65}\)

Even those prone to dismiss Faulkner's statement along with the whole concept of theological content in *The Unvanquished* will agree that Drusilla is the incarnation of the violated. The intent here, of course, is not to imply that something is *always* violated if a woman is a soldier but merely to look at the particular circumstances and be aware that something has been violated and that Drusilla embodies that violation for the community. She is, in the Biblical sense, the scapegoat.

As we have suggested earlier, the scapegoat as surely as the representative redeemer is a sacrificial bearer of communal guilt, with the distinction lying in the communal attitude toward the sacrifice. We have also recalled Girard's contention that "ritual cannibalism is simply another form of sacrificial rite"\(^{66}\). If so, then quite a lot comes under the heading of ritual cannibalism. Ultimately it is the Eucharist, a communal feast at which antinomies are resolved and everyone is ultimately taken in. Drusilla, however, is
being eaten alive by a naive mob. When she first appears in the story, she is dressing as a man, since being a man seems less painful than being a woman. Later she is not being allowed even this defense when the band of matrons come to bully her first into wearing a dress and then into marrying John Sartoris. The matrons are acting out what Wyatt-Brown describes as primitive honor, with its concern with externals. Their concern is with the fact that Drusilla has been riding with John Sartoris and his men; apparently they do not distinguish between riding with him while having an affair with him and merely riding with him, since the appearance would be the same either way. In their concern for propriety, these women show absolutely no real pity for Drusilla.

When she realizes what they are suggesting, she finally cries. This woman who did not weep when her fiancee was killed is reduced to crying in Louvinia's arms—not because of what the morality brigade thinks but because of what she fears Louvinia and Bayard may think. Louvinia's response is to hold her as one might hold a misused child and assure her that, "I knows you ain't" (227). John Sartoris is just as gentle when he
stands next to Drusilla, "his hand on her head," and tells her, "They have you beat, Drusilla" (234). And so they have, without pity or even loss of appetite. For all of her theatrics, Aunt Louisa is able to eat more than John Sartoris. In the truest sense Drusilla, obviously, is a scapegoat, bearing the sins but not the pity of the community. While her departure will come later and for a different reason, it is fitting, since the scapegoat must be driven out. Eventually the community must embrace a representative redeemer, but Drusilla's function is to bear without pity the guilt belonging to the very community that shames her.

With Granny and John Sartoris unable to be agents of return and Drusilla serving a different function, there still is Bayard to consider, for he is to be the representative expiator. Lyall H. Powers in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Comedy comes closest to recognizing this fundamental fact of the book. While his vilification of Granny borders on the fantastic in a seeming unwillingness to allow her any action that is true altruism, Powers, like Cleanth Brooks, seems to recognize that The Unvanquished is, finally, Bayard's story. According to Powers, Bayard's task is to take the virtues he has
been taught "in Southern terms" and not overcome them but "transcend them by giving them broader definition."69 Thus, his function is not to defeat the community from which he has sprung. He is one who comes not to destroy the law but to fulfill it—in short, a redeemer.

Bayard is the only logical one to fill the role. He was not, however, born fitting it. He grows "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor [presumably] with God and man."70 In the beginning Bayard is a child playing war with another child and consenting to be General Grant rather than General Pemberton part of the time only because Ringo would otherwise quit playing. Even then, Ringo gets to be General Pemberton only every third time. This scene takes place just before Bayard describes himself and Ringo as "two supreme undefeated like two moths, two feathers riding above a hurricane"(8).

Why, when the boys seem to be constant companions, is only one of them an initiation figure on a journey to maturity, with the final goal being to serve as a representative redeemer? The question is answered on more than one level. From the standpoint of craft, to
paraphrase the father in "The Bear," The Unvanquished had to be about someone. And Bayard is that someone.

A reason more basic than technique, though, accounts for the fact that Bayard, not Ringo, is that someone. While an initiation story might focus on either boy—with Ringo changing in more ways than we see him change if he were the one—only Bayard could serve as a representative redeemer in this particular book. Since the focus has been on the sin of pride as committed by the genteel white Southerners, Ringo can love them but cannot redeem them. It should be acknowledged here that Ringo himself is capable of pride—as when he does not want to dishonor the Sartoris name by forging the name of any Yankee general less important than General Grant. For all practical purposes, Ringo, identifying himself with the Sartoris name, is acting from the position of a genteel white Southerner. Still, since the redemption being considered is that of the genteel white Southerner, the representative redeemer should actually be a member of the group—preferably the son of John Sartoris, the ultimate bearer of Southern honor. John Sartoris, as we have already noted, is tainted and cannot fill the role,
so it falls to his son. It could not fall to a daughter. Since the basic characteristic of the dark time has been a trampling of the feminine—a replacement of the inclusive pelican with the male warrior—a son must be the one to restore harmony. Affairs will not be set right until a male figure takes upon himself the feminine and suffers for the community. It is not enough to draft a scapegoat and attribute guilt to her; shame must be attributed to Drusilla, already the victim of the broken time. Instead a male figure who is the dominant power structure must serve as the representative redeemer, offering himself freely. Thus, we have Bayard doing, finally, what he does, not because he is seeking to be a martyr, but because he is the only one to do it and it is the only thing to do. In short, it is his destiny.

It is the mature Bayard, of course, who shapes and tells the story, in essence creating the other characters as well as his remembered self, recalling his own feelings but relating them at times in the language not of a child but of a poet. As the book nears a close and the character Bayard and the narrator Bayard become closer, though, the language more and more takes on the
rhythm of poetry. When the return to wholeness--Bayard's refusal to extend the violence--is drawing near and being acted out, the rhythm most resembles that of poetry. For Faulkner, who began as a poet, to break into poetry would not be surprising or, if it were randomly placed, significant. The point worth noting is the placement--the fact that the poetry swells at the end of the book. (We should keep in mind also the fact that the fundamental movement of the book is one of return, with the climax being one of restoration more than mere logical resolution.)

The significance of the placement of the poetry becomes clear if we observe two other patterns in Faulkner. The first is one observed by Judith Sansibar--that of writing poetry for the women he loved, even after he was writing fiction. Clearly for Faulkner, poetry was the medium of intimacy. The other pattern is one more easily felt than proven--but felt just the same in both his fiction and his interviews. It involves a somewhat mischievous holding back, with a contrived bluntness serving as a mask. While we would guard against "psychologizing" to the degree Louis Daniel Brodsky does in his essay "Faulkner's Life Mask,"
it would be hard for anyone addicted to Faulkner lore to dispute the idea that Faulkner affected various masks in everyday life. While I contend that Brodsky is extravagant in his claim that Faulkner's masks were shaped by a fear that a writer is a "vegetable" and that masks born of this fear shaped the writing, I would concur that masking does, indeed, carry into the writing, particularly in the contrived bluntness already mentioned. This quality makes the interviews entertaining, as when Faulkner says, for example, that he never sees his own movies since they are shown at suppertime or that he likes Virginians because they are so busy being snobs that they leave him alone. Entertaining as this manner is, it serves as a distancing device—not a final evasion, but a holding back for the time being.

In The Unvanquished, until the work approaches resolution, there is a similar bluntness, a sense that enormous power behind the voice is being restrained for the time being—as if Faulkner does not allow Bayard the narrator to speak poetry while Bayard the character is still in the broken time. It is when Bayard the character is beginning his fundamental movement of
return and the reader shares the sense of completion—like two lovers coming together at last—that Bayard the narrator speaks in the rhythm of poetry. It is clear that to speak in that rhythm during the frustration of separation would have been to use it falsely and create a gap between style and content, especially if we recall Faulkner's pattern of using poetry for love-making.

Already we have come through the broken time, with the broken rhythm. The character telling the story is whole, however, choosing to recount his journey to avenge Granny's death before telling us about his decision not to avenge his father's death. Bayard does have to say that no lack of courage stops him from avenging this second death since he has already avengeed Granny's or that avenging hers gave him enough taste of violence. Nor does he have to say that avenging death has empowered him not to avenge his father's. We already know that the brave adult grows out of the brave child, who was brave in a different way but brave just the same. Bayard is, of course, brave, both in tracking and killing Granny's murderer and in refusing to shoot the man his father has goaded into killing him.
It is finally in this act of non-violence that Bayard does justice to the inclusive image of the pelican. While Granny has had the masculine and the feminine hilariously co-existing in her personality, it is Bayard who is finally able to unify the two, with an act of non-violence being at once nurturing and courageous. His willingness to sacrifice his own life in order not to take life is nurturing as surely as is some overtly feminine form of nurturing such as a mother feeding an infant from her own breast or an unborn child through her own blood. Obviously Bayard is courageous in his ability to be nurturing at the cost of his own life. It is only when the nurturing and the courage are united that there can be any real peace. Just as nurturing is usually considered a feminine attribute, courage--the quality of a warrior--is often linked with masculinity. Thus, only when the masculine and the feminine--courage and nurturing--are at last united can there be any real wholeness. While Granny has carried the two in a comical co-existence until she is destroyed and we no longer laugh, Bayard unites the two.

Bayard does not, of course, speak in such terms. Instead he speaks out of the theological perspective
that is his heritage: "If there was anything in the Book, anything of hope and peace for His blind and bewildered spawn which He had chosen above all others to offer immortality, Thou shalt not kill must be it" (249). In so doing, and in going still further and applying what he surmises, Bayard becomes a representative expiator for his people.

In repudiating violence born of sheer pride—the violence that is expected of him—he is not repudiating his entire Southern heritage. No matter that he is expected to avenge his father's death. Bayard has been taught the principles of courage and magnanimity, and he is enacting those principles even if his teachers have turned out to be flawed. He is, in fact, the one carrying out the "moral housecleaning" which his father discussed just before his death, adding, "I am tired of killing men, no matter what the necessity nor the end. Tomorrow, when I go to town to meet Ben Redmond, I shall be unarmed" (226). The son, also, goes unarmed. He knows, after his father is buried, that "he was there, he would always be there" (291). We assume that his values will always be there, in some sense, but we can
claim, with Lyall H. Powers, that Bayard has been able to "transcend them by giving them broader definition."75

Drusilla is the one that must validate the claim, however. Any symbolic expiation or any ability to transcend and broaden a code seems somehow hollow if there is no healing for one who has suffered under that code. It would make an orderly story to say that through Bayard's representative act Drusilla is vicariously restored, but redemption does not mean that the effects of sin will no longer exist; Drusilla can never become a person who has not been damaged. It is a soldier who leaves in Bayard's room the verbena that will fill "the room, the dusk, the evening with that odor which she said you could smell alone above the smell of horses." Yet it is important, for her and for him and from the standpoint of redemption, that she validate the claim. Still she does not linger. It is as if she is a ghost of the war, never again to be unmarred and yet satisfied and free to go. Granny, another Southern lady turned soldier and violated in the process, has earlier been avenged through an act of violence. But Drusilla, that other ghost of the war, is instead set free through an act of non-violence.
To our question of what is unvanquished, we have already suggested an answer while discussing Bayard's function of not destroying but making whole that from which he has sprung. Now we must recall that early clue: "Maybe he wasn't a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn't a white boy anymore, the two of us neither, not even people any longer: the two supreme undefeated like two moths, two feathers riding above a hurricane" (8). The metaphor would not hold, of course, if there were only one moth. For this freedom is not a solitary venture but a communal one, with every act of love as opposed to egotism, every act of magnanimity as opposed to the will to defeat, being played out within the context of a community. Thus, as the novel ends, we remember the two moths floating above a hurricane and know that only love remains.
A COMMUNAL AFFAIR: REDEMPTION IN THE MOVIEGOER

Caught under Faulkner's spell, we did not ask how Bayard Sartoris, almost a hobbit figure, could rise to his destiny as representative expiator. Nor did we ask a still more basic question—how any human being, mired in pride, is capable of shedding ego and traveling light, how any member of soiled humanity can even accept redemption. Instead we were content to watch the process.

It is Walker Percy who provides an answer to these questions: A "dazzling trick of grace" (206). He does not use the phrase until the end of The Moviegoer, but the "dazzling trick of grace" has been set in motion when the story begins, even though Binx Bolling is not yet aware of it. Binx is aware of the "possibility of a search" (7), but he does not see the seriousness of the word "possibility." Nor will the reader who is not also a student of Kierkegaard. Without Kierkegaard, in fact, the reader is unlikely to appreciate fully a basic connection between The Unvanquished and The Moviegoer. Only after studying the Dane's discussion of despair does one begin to understand the "habitual disposition"
that Lonnie observes in Binx or even that Binx is the one in whom Lonnie observes it. Moreover, only after identifying the disorder of which Lonnie speaks do we fully appreciate his role as a representative expiator. Lonnie is not even given the last line of the book. Instead the novel ends with the reader observing the effects of that role, with eyes still blinking from the dazzling trick of grace.

Though our primary emphasis will be upon The Moviegoer, it is not the only novel in which Percy depicts humanity as too lost even to name the condition, much less escape it through personal decision. The mired condition is depicted also in Lancelot, with the inscription from Dante's Purgatorio: "He sank so low that all means for his salvation were gone, except showing him the lost people. For this I visited the region of the dead." The concern here is not merely for the character but also for the reader, who participates in the journey by entering the book. The reader is visiting the region of the dead, with the narrator of that region--the one who sees most clearly--being a psychiatric patient. A motif in Percy in particular and in the present study as well is that of the afflicted
seer, the seemingly crazy person who sees more clearly than the supposedly sane character. Confessing to some figure—perhaps a created visitor and the reader both at once—Lancelot says, "Yet you prefer to look at the cemetery" (8). And so we do. It seems impossible to read this pronouncement and not feel the hint of Kierkegaard, though the presence is less overt than in The Moviegoer. There are echoes of Binx Bolling with his Little Way when Lancelot looks out the window of a cell and finds comfort in a scene of "triumphant mediocrity" (24). Binx, with his awareness of the possibility of a search, is called to mind when Lancelot says, "I was sitting in my pigeonnier as snug as could be, the day very much like today" before going on to say, "there was something odd about the day" (24-25).

He does not tell us why there is something odd about the day. He could not, since we must always fail in any attempt to explain logically why the sense of something odd or the sudden awareness of the possibility of a search comes upon a Percy character. The awareness is a gift—a "dazzling trick of grace." Just as surely we must return to Kierkegaard, though Percy waits until the end of The Moviegoer to refer to "the Danish
philosopher" (208) and refers to him not at all in the other novels. Still the connections are there and must be appreciated in any serious study of Percy.

"The Danish philosopher" is felt also in a theme Percy introduces— that of deliverance coming not through a decision on the part of the protagonist and not through the usual rules of probability. The theme, particularly as introduced by Percy, is best appreciated by drawing connection between *The Moviegoer* and *The Sickness Unto Death*. Connections are everywhere. Kierkegaard compares people with houses and concludes that "most people prefer to live in the basement," as does Binx Bolling. William Rodney Allen observes that Binx first appears with Kate when "he finds her, symbolically, in the basement."

Binx's Little Way comes to mind when Kierkegaard describes the person who busies himself with prudent endeavors that make life comfortable. Binx, with his *Consumer Reports*, is leading "the most ordinary life imaginable" (6). It is a life "without the old longings" (6), fitting Kierkegaard's description of unconscious despair— a life Kierkegaard describes as being "as exchangeable as a coin of the realm." Thus
Binx busies himself selling stocks and bonds and, we presume, himself. He is enacting the inscription from The Sickness Unto Death: "the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being in despair." Certainly one who is unaware of being in despair cannot set out on a conscious mission to eradicate that despair. Redemption, instead, must come from outside the sufferer. What must take place is, quite simply, a miracle—or, as Percy says, a "dazzling trick of grace."

Kierkegaard's discussion of miracles coincides with Binx's experience. Kierkegaard describes one who knows that help is "impossible" and yet, in "the next instance," receives it. Binx, as we have already noted, is not even aware of his own despair, much less being able to seek help. In fact, he begins by telling us, "this morning, for the first time in years, there occurred to me the possibility of a search" (7). The key word, for any student of Kierkegaard, is "possibility." This sense of possibility, coming to Binx out of the blue, is what Kierkegaard describes as the believer's "ever-sure antidote to despair... since for God everything is possible at any moment."
Kierkegaard goes on to suggest a contradiction in that "in human terms the undoing is certain" and yet "still there is possibility." In the discussion that follows, he sets up contrasts that we will recognize between Binx's Little Way and the Way. Kierkegaard uses the term "petty bourgeoisie" rather than "Little Way," but describes a life "absorbed in the probable"--which is what a stockbroker's profession is all about. The alternative, of course, is to deal not in the probable but in the possible. On the morning that The Moviegoer begins, Binx has become mysteriously--miraculously--aware of the possible.

It is not for trivial purposes that Binx has been granted this awareness. He recalls the last time he was aware of the search ("I came to myself under a chindolea bush," (7)) suggesting the pilgrim Dante, coming to himself in a dark wood. Binx's role as pilgrim suggests the medieval idea that the Christian is an exile whose origin and destiny is God. It is in a Jewish motif, however, that the idea is played out in The Moviegoer. Describing himself as "Jewish by instinct," Binx says, "We share the same exile." Deciding that he actually is "more Jewish" than his Jewish friends, who seem more at
home than he is, Binx concludes, "I accept my exile" (77).

It may be presumptuous, initially, for a young stockbroker with a rather safe life to compare himself with a Jewish exile. Yet the tradition of Jewish mysticism will turn out to be basic to the book. Ironic as it seems for Jewish mysticism to be in a Catholic novel, the Jewish Cabalistic movement is more Christian in hope than many of the Christians we read. Hans Küng, in his book entitled Judaism, refers to the Cabalistic movement as embodying the "great myth of exile and redemption."

As we have already noted, according to Paul Ricouer, "the fundamental movement of redemption is return." Clearly the Cabalistic Jew, waiting in exile, is a fitting vehicle for what will turn out to be an apocalyptic novel. The Jewish apocalyptic tradition, according to Küng, is defined as an "unveiling" of divine mysteries. It is in the person of Lonnie that those mysteries are worked out in The Moviegoer. Lonnie, as we will see, serves as a Christ figure, and when the boy is dying, Kate compares him with a victim of Dachau. Thus, it is in the person of Lonnie that the Jewish and the Christian threads become one.
As surely as Lonnie connects the Jewish and the Christian elements, Binx connects the Jewish and the Kierkegaardian elements. Binx, as we have observed, is the embodiment of the Kierkegaardian figure who despairs without being aware of his despair. Yet, grandiose as he may sound in comparing himself with Jews, Binx is a conscious exile. He lives in Gentilly, which is, at the time of the story, a lower-middle-class suburb of New Orleans. The area is quite apart from his aunt's neighborhood, which seems to embody the distinctly New Orleans culture in its most aristocratic form. Gentilly, by comparison, is a Waste Land.

Binx, living in the Waste Land, might be compared with the Magi traveling across the desert to a birth, though he does not know what he seeks. The sense of wonder that he finally gains might be compared with the sense of wonder basic to the story of the Magi and their destination. Finally, like the Magi, Binx is not a fixed resident but a traveler bearing gifts across a desert, though he does not know that he bears gifts. We cannot dismiss Binx's words: "We share the same exile" (77).
Historically the Jewish people, those set apart by a love of Law, have been driven out by less abstract peoples. Jewish people have, in fact, been a nation of desert scholars. Certainly Binx Bolling, living in a desert, is surrounded by people who settle for whatever pleasures a steady job will finance. As surely as those other desert scholars await a Messiah, Binx will end in a perpetual advent, even though the Ash Wednesday symbol is stamped heavily upon the book.

In this sense Percy does, indeed, achieve his goal of "starting where Faulkner left off, of starting with the Quentin Compson who didn't commit suicide."87 Percy, as we have noted, ends instead with a perpetual advent. It is not enough to speak only of birth. Instead there is an antinomy resolved, which is to say that Ash Wednesday and Advent turn out to be inseparable and continuously present in the recreated Binx Bolling at the end of the book. To understand the change in Binx or to understand Lonnie's function in the book, Northrop Frye's discussion of atonement and his description of apocalypse help greatly. Even one who grew up on the Christian concept of atonement in terms of "at-one-ment" may well see, for the first time, the
drama of the idea when Frye contrasts it with the old Roman sacrificial rituals. The old rituals, according to Frye, consisted of human beings standing "in front of an invisible but objective power making conciliatory gestures of ritual and moral obligation to him," with the ritual merely expressing human helplessness. But Christian atonement, Frye asserts, instead involves God standing behind humanity as a hidden source of infinite energy—indeed the source of whatever energy a person has. The "at-one-ment" which we have just mentioned is the key here, with the result being what Frye calls "a channel of communication between the divine and the human that is now open." Thus humanity is not groveling before God, but rather, empowered by the relationship. It is in this context of empowerment that Lonnie and Binx play out their roles as redeemed and redeeming beings. In this context, also, we see the significance of Binx's birthday falling on Ash Wednesday.

If we draw upon Frye's definition of sin as "trying to block the activity of God," then Binx certainly does relinquish something—his own pride, as we will see. Even so Binx is empowered, with relinquishment and
empowerment being inseparable. That which takes place in the recreated Binx is better understood by recalling Frye's discussion of apocalypse. Like the Jewish mystics already mentioned, Frye speaks in terms of truth being unveiled. Originally, Frye suggests, apocalypse involved "a removal of curtains of forgetfulness in the mind."91 Things were hidden, not because of any obstruction in the external world, but by a veil in the mind itself. "In modern times," Frye suggests, "perhaps what blocks truth and the emerging revelation is not forgetting but repression."92 In either scenario, something is being not found for the first time but recovered, causing us to think of Ricouer's idea that "the fundamental movement of redemption is return."93 And the return will not involve final closure, with creativity ceasing.

Frye notes how fittingly the Bible itself ends with the book of Revelation, a particularly open-ended book. He suggests, in fact, that "a second apocalypse that begins in the reader's mind as soon as he has finished reading" should follow the "panoramic apocalypse," found in the book of Revelation. It is in the second vision that Frye says "the creator-creature, divine-human
antithetical tension has ceased to exist, and the sense of the transcendent person and the split of subject and object no longer limit our vision." Frye's discussion of the book of Revelation is not about a "firework show that would be put on for the benefit of the faithful, starting perhaps next Tuesday." Instead, he suggests that, for the author of Revelation, "all these incredible wonders are the inner meaning of, more accurately, the inner form of everything that is happening now." What we have already referred to as the "panoramic apocalypse"--the surrealistic scenes in the book on Revelation--is treated by Frye as a kind of psychological inner portrait of humanity, a "projection of the subjective 'knowledge of good and evil' acquired at the fall." And the final judgment, in Frye's system, is the time when that portrait, which operated "wholly within the framework of law," will pall away, being replaced by the second vision, which we have already discussed. The second vision, of course, is made possible by the atonement we have considered in terms of God and humanity being reunited and humanity empowered. Thus, the Ash Wednesday image and the perpetual advent in which we last observe Binx cannot be separated.
This theological orientation sheds light on the way Percy tells the story in *The Moviegoer*. It is through Binx Bolling, of course. We have already dealt with one created autobiography, that of Bayard Sartoris, but *The Moviegoer* is different. Faulkner has Bayard shaping a story out of events which have already taken place—the customary approach for one writing autobiography. Ordinarily autobiography involves "X" the narrator and "X" the character, just as biography of third person fiction has a speaker and a character. In the case of *The Moviegoer*, however, we have only the "I" speaking in the present tense. Instead of looking back and shaping a story out of the tedium—a story more dramatic than events at the time would have seemed to warrant—we enter the tedium, with no road signs, and feel as lost and as hopeless as the speaker.

In asking why Percy chooses this technique, it would be easy to suggest that he is providing a sense of immediacy. Being immediately lost in the malaise, however, would seem less exciting than hearing a story that was shaped in retrospect. Instead we must wonder if Percy is addressing a culture so long lost in the everydayness that it no longer believes in stories. A
everydayness that it no longer believes in stories. A story, after all, involves order. To create a story is to shape meaning out of chaos. For those who have lost even the power to believe, with certainty, in the possibility of order, Percy does not tell a conventional story. Instead, the use of the present tense "I" becomes a means of joining the reader in a world that is "without form and void." When we realize that we are dealing with a situation in which stories are no longer heard, no longer believed, then it becomes obvious that the separation of which Bonhoeffer speaks has indeed "made us sick." For the story—the shared experience—is perhaps the most basic bond of community. Clearly Percy is writing for a situation—not a community but a situation—in which "there is no health in us."

Why this situation exists is given similar answers from different sources. Cleanth Brooks observes that the lack of commonly held values accounts for the fact that the best poetry of our time is lyric rather than epic. Making the idea more specific and applying it to fiction, Peter S. Hawkins says that we live in a time when the Judeo-Christian mind-set, which assumes "a genuine continuity between the events of Scripture and
the ongoing activity of God," is not a commonly held frame of reference. It is, he argues, a time when "a kind of storytelling that flourished in the West for more than a millennium" no longer works—in short, a time without a commonly held myth. Such a time is lacking not just in flavor but also in security, if we agree with Herbert N. Schneidau that myths "do for the group some of the things that dreams do for the individual"—making accessible that which might otherwise destroy. It is in this perilous and flavorless time that Percy must somehow tell his story.

Thus, if we accept or at least entertain the premise that Percy writes for an audience no longer even capable of sharing a story, we avoid charging Percy with a flaw in technique. Instead, the flaw becomes a tool necessary for the situation—namely, the flaw of beginning with an idea rather than a story. As Louis Rubin has observed, a writer thinks "not as any kind of abstract or philosophical realization but in stories." Faulkner, for example, is always spinning a tale in which an idea is sensed but could not be proven to exist. In Percy's case, however, it would seem that the idea came first, with a story later clothing it. Still
The Unvanquished and The Moviegoer, as we will see, are welded finally to the same idea—that of shedding ego and traveling light.

This basic theme is not the only similarity between the two books, despite the difference in the way the stories are told by each author. The inclusive pelican will again be felt, with nurturing and courage being united as surely in The Moviegoer as in The Unvanquished, with a communion motif basic in each book. One novel takes place when a war has been lost, and the other involves a time when a war has been won but the people are lost just the same; in either work, the people are losing their way. Each narrator is guided by an afflicted young woman as surely as each novel depicts those outside the white male power structure being bearers of knowledge. Again, the two codes, the genteel Stoic and the Anglo-Saxon, appear in each narrative; and in each case, a code is insufficient. Finally, an old versus new dichotomy occurs in both books. Just as redemption in The Unvanquished will not come through Bayard and Drusilla, in The Moviegoer it will not come through Aunt Emily or Uncle Jules or Mrs. Smith but through Binx and Lonnie and Kate.
This dichotomy illumines, first of all, the characters who will not play a part in redemption. Aunt Emily, who clearly embodies the Genteel-Stoic tradition, speaks of her world's demise. She is being the Stoic, carrying her lot with dignity, even as she laments decline: "The world I knew has come crashing down around my ears. The things we hold dear are reviled and spat upon" (45). She nods toward Prytania, a street in the old, genteel part of New Orleans, and continues: "It is an interesting age you will live in--though I can't say I'm sorry to miss it. But it should be quite a sight, the going under of the evening land. That's us all right. And I can tell you, my young friend, it is evening. It is very late" (45). Nonetheless, she is the Stoic in her assessment of what Binx should do in decline. To her, he reflects, the matter is clear: "My duty in life is simple." It is obvious even before Binx says what that duty will be--to study medicine and serve his fellowman, but not to think he can banish darkness. Instead, as Aunt Emily proclaims, "A man must go down fighting. That is the victory. To do anything less is to be less than a man" (45). Thus we have an image of the old Stoic dying on his sword. Even her husband she
sees as a modern day Cato. No matter that we, instead, accept Binx's word that Jules Cutrer is a "canny Cajun straight from Bayou Lafourche" (41). Aunt Emily's view characterizes not her husband but herself; her view of those she loves is tinted by the Stoicism that informs her life. And it is not enough.

Nor is the orientation of Jules Cutrer or the older Smiths--an approach that will turn out to be, in some ways, the Anglo-Saxon code in decline. Both the idealistic Aunt Emily and the seemingly more materialistic, pragmatic characters fail because of an absence; either approach carries some merit but simply offers no basis for redemption. It is important to keep in mind the fact that the contrast is between an idealistic stoicism that proves finally ineffectual and a good natured pragmatism firmly rooted in the material world, even though Uncle Jules and the Smiths are nominally Catholic. Binx tells us, in fact, that Uncle Jules is "an exemplary Catholic." Yet Binx wonders "why he takes the trouble," since "the world he lives in, the City of Man, is so pleasant that the City of God must hold little in store for him" (25).
The Smiths seem equally rooted in the City of Man. They are a pleasant lot, eating crabs on a porch, but the material world seems to be all they have. Are we seeing the Anglo-Saxon code, with its emphasis upon externals, degenerated into a bland materialism, without the emphasis upon courage? Certainly the material, the bland and pleasant, has been all Mrs. Smith has been willing to trust since the death of her son Duval: "Losing Duval, her favorite, confirmed her in her election of the ordinary. After Duval's death she has wanted everything colloquial and easy, even God" (125). If she is indeed the embodiment of the Anglo-Saxon code in decline, bearing a name as generically Anglo-Saxon as Smith, then we must acknowledge that the rules did not work for her. The lord, after all, was supposed to give his warriors protection in return for service, but the Lord has not protected Mrs. Smith from the loss of her son. Rather than denying God's existence, she has stopped trusting him; in describing her, Binx uses the term "radical mistrust" and employs phrases such as "old and sly Eve herself" (125). The Smith family attends Mass, but Binx describes their manner as "heroic unreligiousness" (141). If they do embody the Anglo-
Saxon code in decline, then it seems ironic that the term "heroic" is mentioned not in connection with serving a lord but, rather, in a lack of allegiance to the Lord.

They do not make a show of their unreligiousness, of course; they carry it out quietly. Binx comments that "the Smiths, except for Lonnie, would never dream of speaking of religion--raising the subject provokes in them the acutest embarrassment: Eyes are averted, throats are cleared, and there occurs a murmuring for a minute or two until the subject can be changed" (140). So the subject is left to Lonnie, who emerges as a Christ-figure. Kate and Binx also turn out to be instruments of redemption, but it is Lonnie who speaks directly of the matter. In referring to Lonnie as a Christ-figure, we should keep in mind what Northrop Frye says about sacrifice: "The original motive behind human sacrifice was doubtless a do ut des bargain: I give that you may give."104 Certainly it is in this sense that Lonnie gives himself for Binx, and Lonnie does give himself for his brother. When Lonnie first appears, he is planning to fast during Lent so as to "conquer an habitual disposition" (143). Though Lonnie says that
his own envy of his dead brother is the "habitual disposition," we think of Binx's habitual disposition to despair. Binx does, at least indirectly, turn out to be the reason Lonnie is fasting. If it were not for Binx, we assume, Lonnie might indeed "concentrate on the Eucharist" (144) instead of fasting. But when Binx makes the suggestion, Lonnie answers, "I am still offering my communion for you" (145). Earlier Binx has told us that Lonnie "has the gift of believing that he can offer his own sufferings in reparation for men's indifference for the pierced heart of Jesus" (120). It is not surprising, then, that Lonnie offers his communion for Binx. Before Lonnie dies, though, he says he has "conquered an habitual disposition" (209). We cannot be sure which one Lonnie refers to, even though Binx is being cured of his habitual disposition toward despair.

Kate's function, on the other hand, is that of an angel. To call her such is to shock those who consider Percy a misogynist. (One such example is Joyce Carol Oates in her Lancelot section of Walker Percy.) Still we cannot overlook Kate's frequent role as bearer of knowledge. Northrop Frye finds "a special connection
between angelic messengers and verbal communication." Percy is not clumsy or clichéd in his creation of an angel. Instead of making her wise and other-worldly as Dante's Beatrice, Percy creates a disturbed young woman who appears to be less functioning than Binx—a young woman who is, herself, in need of deliverance. This is a pattern that we will later observe in A Confederacy of Dunces.

In a condition of exile, Kate, like Binx, is unable to live within either side of her family. As surely as Binx, she has family connections with both the genteel Stoic and the comfortable bourgeoisie and is uncomfortable with both. Earlier she transferred her affection from her father to her stepmother. Now Kate has swung back to her father and is creating for him a T.V. room. It is a fitting symbol for Jules Cutrer, especially since the story takes place in the fifties. At that time television had not had time to fail; it was, instead, considered an exciting and progressive piece of technological magic—another tribute to human ability to exploit scientific principles. However disappointing T.V. is going to turn out to be, Uncle Jules is not disappointed. Since he is so firmly rooted
in the material world, it is easy to imagine his excitement over the new invention. Kate's stepmother, of course, is not impressed by "progress" but, instead, speaks with Stoic dignity of a world crumbling about her. Binx hopes that Kate does not attempt another swing.

Binx himself is not even swinging; instead he is in Gentilly drifting. While he appears to be better functioning than Kate, she tells him early, "You're like me, but worse. Much worse." And he is. Before considering why, we must observe Kate in her role as a fragile and neurotic bearer of knowledge. As surely as Faulkner's "niggers" with their seemingly intuitive knowledge to which Bayard refers, Kate is disenfranchised—not as a racial minority but as a woman and, more significantly, as one who seems to be highly unstable if not half crazy. She seems, in fact, almost hysterical. In light of Minrose C. Gwin's assertion that hysteria is a woman's act of protest, Binx is, indeed, "much worse." He is, after all, not even protesting, while Kate is. Certainly she is bearing knowledge. A relatively powerless person, gifted with intuition or some other way of knowing outside the
rational rules of the male power structure, is basic to both Faulkner and Percy. The idea of knowing but not in the usual way will turn out to be at the heart of The Moviegoer.

Inversions are also basic to Percy's novel, with Kate embodying inversions. Besides being the seemingly unstable seer, Kate is in what almost amounts to a costume when they set out journey. Thick mascara would not ordinarily pass for a costume, but Kate is playing a kind of game, presenting herself as a sex object. The journey has been foreshadowed by her bus ride and by Binx's awareness of the possibility of a search. It is together, however, that they finally must make the journey. Ironically, it is during Mardi Gras that reality comes, when Kate is in playful disguise.

Gradually Percy has shown us that the "normal" people are all crazy or, as Binx says, "dead," while Binx's salvation comes through a disturbed woman wearing a disguise. This is a pattern common to all three authors under study. There is Kate briefly playing at being a sex object, Drusilla disguising herself with male clothing, and Myrna of A Confederacy of Dunces wearing what amounts to a costume to signify social protest.
Kate, however, is the only one of the three young women to come in costume during a season of costumes, when everyone is supposed to know that a game is being played.

Certainly the game Kate plays is subtle, with thick mascara going unnoticed by anyone not familiar with her usual style. For Kate, though, wearing thick mascara is a kind of game, as surely as when she jokingly slaps her ample bottom. Binx, of course, considers it too wonderful to be the subject of a joke. Binx, after all, is the man who employs Marsha and Sharon, and speaks reverently about the female body. He is like Kate only worse. Both of them are aware of the possibility of a search. Binx is the one who vocalizes the idea, but Kate is the one restoring a house, trying to find a place to live. The fact that she is not building but restoring a house is significant, considering that the fundamental movement of the book is return, to paraphrase Ricouer's notion that the fundamental movement of redemption is return. Kate's attempt to restore the house seems not to be successful, but still the attempt suggests the nature of her journey. Her unsuccess causes us to look forward to A Confederacy of
Dunces, in which Ignatius Reilly is incapable of saving himself.

In still other ways Kate acts out the displacement that she and Binx embody, though she does not speak of being Jewish. Once she compares her estrangement to being on the wrong planet, "as if you had landed on Mars and therefore had no way of knowing that a Martian is mortally offended by a question and so every time you asked what was wrong, it only grew worse for you?" (99) Kate, regardless of being unstable, does ask the question, with actions if not with words. Binx, on the other hand, says, "I accept my exile" (77). While Kate is visibly manic-depressive and perhaps suicidal, Binx makes money, stalks sex objects, and goes to the movies --without satisfaction. The contrast between his docility and her hysteria becomes meaningful in light of Gwin's assertion that hysteria is a woman's form of protest.

It must be said, too, that Binx's Little Way is practical but not sane. The "normal" people are all "crazy" as surely as Faulkner's Drusilla seems half mad but lives in a world that has gone mad and as surely as a general craziness informs the people around Ignatius
Reilly. Percy's "normal" people—the landlady who "has lived in New Orleans all her life and knows no one" (65) or Eddie Lovell, the artificially hearty money-maker/good citizen—all embody a particular sadness or, as Binx finally says, a loss. As surely as the Little Way is not enough, Aunt Emily, the genteel Stoic, plays piano music that Binx describes as "sweet and piping of the nineteenth century, as good as it can be but not good enough" (40). Either approach is simply insufficient. Always there remains Binx's malaise, which he finally describes as "the pain of loss," adding, "The world is lost to you, the world and the people in it" (106).

Binx's story is about regaining the lost world and the people in it. If Binx is to come out of the malaise, his return must be to community, and the return itself must be communal. This communal redemption is better understood by a brief reflection on the problem behind the exile. Previously we have used Ricouer's definition of vanity as the "spectacle of false sacredness" and have spoken of redemption in terms of exchanging pride for community or of shedding ego and traveling light. It is difficult, initially, to find
anything Binx Bolling treats as sacred or to identify in him any real degree of pride. Indeed it would seem that the absolute absence of the sacred would account for the staleness of his existence. There is a strong case, however, to suggest that Binx is surrounded by failed attempts at false sacredness. What is left of the Stoic-Christian philosophy, which we discussed first in relation to *The Unvanquished*, is not Stoic-Christian but merely stoic. The Little Way, in which Binx makes money and employs playmates, is just as ineffectual as the remains of the Stoic-Christian philosophy. Kate, similarly, has swung from her Stoic step-mother to her father, who seems like an inhabitant of the Little Way. Again, neither alternative works. Instead, Binx and Kate call to mind Bonhoeffer's insistence that "we must endure the unutterable separation . . . until it makes us sick" (120), and surely it has made Binx and Kate sick.

How, though, has pride been involved for either Binx or Kate? The answer, ironically, is that it only becomes obvious that pride has been present as they lay it down, exchanging pride for love—shedding ego and traveling light at last. This irony is basic to the
story, since it is not the story of some particularly notorious sinner, but a tale of late twentieth century humanity.

In the Epilogue, Binx's redemption can be sensed as much as witnessed. The tone becomes lyrical for the first time, calling to mind *The Unvanquished*, which takes on the rhythm of poetry when community has been restored. Community certainly has been restored as *The Moviegoer* ends, as surely as Binx says, in his indirect fashion, that the journey has been of a religious nature. Noting his own shyness in discussing religious matters, he says, "Reticence, therefore, hardly having a place in a document of this kind, it seems as good a time as any to make an end" (208).

Reticence, obviously, is not what Binx's new life is all about. While he does not speak much about that new life, he goes on to show the change in himself. Frye's observation about a sacrifice—giving so that the recipient may give—applies here. Lonnie has offered his communion (body and blood) for Binx, who is now cured of his "habitual disposition" toward despair and is giving himself for others. The change is evident in his voice—no longer the affectedly world-weary voice
but one with that quiet self-forgetfulness that is humility. Rather than withholding himself, he is being attentive to everyone around him. The change begins before Lonnie's actual death, so Lonnie, as well as the brothers and sisters he is leaving behind, Kate, and Aunt Emily all seem to be in Binx's care. It is fitting that Lonnie lingers long enough to be included, giving us some idea of the communal, reciprocal nature of the type of giving that is taking place.

The change in Binx is discussed by many people, including his creator. Percy says that Binx bewilders Aunt Emily by skipping the ethical sphere (the one in which she is comfortable) and jumps "from the aesthetic clear across the ethical to the religious." Instead of being so analytical as Percy, Patricia Lewis Poteat focuses on details of the change, noting that the changed Binx is no longer manic but quiet, though not in a passive way. It is the quietness of "a man who stands ready to hear the newsbearer whenever and wherever he appears, one no longer torn between his island home and his home across the sea but one who waits and watches patiently, confident that the news will come one day." What Poteat is describing, of course, is a man living in
Advent. She goes on to say that "the faith signified by this posture" does not allow Binx to "withdraw to the desert to await the Lord's coming." Binx is, instead, "called to work in the vineyard, loving, nurturing, and supporting Kate, Aunt Emily, his half brothers and sisters." Poteat aptly notes that the important thing is not the choice to attend medical school; what matters is his perception that his vocation is to "hand people along and be handed along in turn." This last point, the calling to "hand people along and be handed along in turn," specifically recalls Frye on sacrifice.

This redemption, this gift, is to be exercised in the commonplace. Binx does not perform any feats that seem heroic in the usual sense or withdraw to live as a mystic. Instead he is performing mundane tasks that might seem either too painful or too boring to the unawakened person. He attends to small details for his aunt and does not find such matters too trivial for his attention when a family crisis is in progress. But in the crisis—the death of Lonnie—Binx deals in practical matters, such as caring for the younger children, and does so with that particular type of detachment that compassion requires. The only difference is that Binx
has attained the state of the penitent black man who
"believes that God himself is present here at the corner
of Elysian Fields and Bons Enfants" (206). With that
view of the world, nothing can ever be dull again, and
no task can seem too small to deserve one's entire
person. Thus, Binx lays pride aside.

He has, of course, come out of the desert of
Gentilly. In a practical sense he is going to medical
school as his aunt suggested, and he has married Kate as
his mother predicted. Yet he is not doing exactly what
either of them really meant, for in different ways the
two of them simply wanted him to get on with things.
His mother favored the unquestioning Middle-America and
his aunt wanted him to watch bravely "the evening land,"
but they both wanted him somehow to ignore or banish his
own angst and get on with things. Instead, like the
black man outside that church on Ash Wednesday, Binx can
get on with things. To the two reasons that the black
man is there—"the complex business of coming up in the
world" and the belief that "God himself is present"—
Binx adds his own theory. He asks if perhaps "he is
here for both reasons: through some dim dazzling trick
of grace, coming for the one and receiving the other as
God's own importunate bonus?" (206) We are sure that it is as an "importunate bonus" that Binx is finally able to get on with things.

But what about Kate? As the tale ends she is still mutilating the flesh on her finger, and she does not demonstrate that particular detachment born of generosity that is now evident in Binx. While he is able to detach himself from his own feelings of pity or helplessness enough to care for his relatives, Kate seems to cringe as she watches the pain of the Smith family. Finally, what some might find truly disturbing in Kate is the implication that she exists only in relation to Binx, "While I am on the streetcar--are you going to be thinking of me?" (211) Clearly he is taking care of her. This is the man who once kept various sex objects, and now he is taking care of a woman as a human being. The point here is not so much Kate's state as Binx's ability to care for her in that state. Kate and Binx have been linked throughout the book, however, and the only honest approach is to address the questions concerning her.

I would suggest that Kate, when the book ends, is still a frail human being but a healthier one than
previously. Though she mutilates her flesh, she also "has fattened up." She cringes when she sees the Smith family, but it is no longer her own inner state that is undoing her; instead she is feeling pity for others, even if that pity has not yet been shaped into action. She is still in need of deliverance when the book ends. Kate is changing, but Percy is not asking us to believe she is anything but a frail human being, living out any change in the present order. The first act of turning on her part is one that seems tenuous most of all to Kate herself. It would be foolish, finally, to deny her dependency upon Binx—her implication that she exists only in relation to him. And yet Binx himself has discovered that he exists only in relation to God and, with that knowledge, is able to live in relation to others. In a child-like manner, Kate is seeking community. She shows an ironic wisdom in yielding to her dependency, especially if we recall what Frederick Buechner has to say on the subject of strength and weakness:

To do for yourself the best that you have it in you to do— to grit your teeth and clench your fists in order to survive the world at its harshest and worst— is, by that very act, to be unable to let something be done for you that is more wonderful still. The trouble
with steeling yourself against the harshness of reality is that the same steel that secures your life against being destroyed secures your life also against being opened up and transformed by the holy power that life itself comes from.\textsuperscript{110}

Indeed we sense that we have heard Binx's story and that it ends with Kate's story's beginning. It is fitting, of course, that in a community the stories would intermingle and be hard to separate. Redemption is, after all, a communal affair. The religious nature of Binx's journey becomes obvious as the novel ends, but Percy has posted, all along the way, signs suggesting the nature of the journey. The connection between Binx's coming to himself under a chindolea bush and Dante has been noted already, and the train ride to Chicago might be compared with Dante's journey through hell. Finally, in the Epilogue, Percy again reminds us of Dante: "So ended my thirtieth year to heaven, as the poet called it" (207). Like Dante Binx comes away with a new knowledge—not knowledge in the usual sense but knowledge just the same.

The only certainty about how it comes is that it does not come through his own doing. Binx's behavior shows that he is not rational enough to work out his own salvation; just prior to asking Kate to marry him, he
was coveting a new sex object, and whatever good comes into his life seems almost by chance—or, as he will eventually claim, by a "dazzling trick of grace."
CHAPTER 3

MIDST GREAT LAUGHTER:
SAYING GRACE IN A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES

A Confederacy of Dunces is somewhat like an account of one of the Three Stooges stumbling into heaven—and it could not be otherwise. Toole's book is a Christian comedy. Before we even attempt to define Christian comedy, recall the ultimate comedy out of which Christian comedy as a literary genre springs. I refer to the "comedy of redemption" discussed in Ralph C. Wood's book by that title. At the beginning of the present study we considered Wood's idea that God, in Christ's death and resurrection, "has perpetrated the most outrageous of tricks, a joke to end all jokes," with faith being a "supremely comic act." This outrageous divine joke, according to Wood, makes possible laughter that "moves painfully past a great mound of misery, and yet finally around a corner which, because God in Christ has turned it, the world shall never turn again."111

It is only within the sound of that laughter that Christian comedy can be defined as a literary genre. It will be defined, within the context of the present study, by certain basic characteristics. It is a work

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that is comic in the classic sense that, as opposed to tragedy, it celebrates disorder, with the disorder being finally redeemed in a happy ending. It is, in fact, a Rabelaisian kind of comedy, with the rogue and the redeemer being finally united. While Wood uses terms such as ribald, Rabelais asserts, in his Prologue to Tiers Livre, that the source of his art is wine.  

Walter Kaiser, in his book Praisers of Folly, argues rather convincingly that the wine from which Rabelais draws his comedy turns out to be communion wine.

Christian comedy is further defined by the conspicuous absence of a hero capable of bringing about the ending necessary for comedy but, instead, leads the reader somehow to suspect but not definitively know that the resolution is an act of Providence as opposed to chance. At times the character may be so incompetent as to make us recall the medieval concept that fools are under the special protection of God.  

The concept seems relevant to Christian comedy in general and to Toole's title in particular. Christian comedy, of course, is not laughing at fools; the laughter involved is of an inclusive nature, with author and reader laughing with the character.
In *A Confederacy of Dunces*, this laughter is finally celebrated fully. Yet the present study has been moving toward it all along. In each of the three books under study, resolution comes, but not through an assertive act of a hero—at least not assertive in any ordinary sense. Instead, in each book, we see a young man—accompanied in some sense by an afflicted young woman—lay down pride. The act of laying down pride rather than conquering suggests disorder in terms of the world's sense of order and disorder. What we see, however, is the only order finally satisfying.

Despite the common thread in the three books, it is, as we have noted, in *A Confederacy of Dunces* that disorder is finally celebrated with hilarious abandon. We would have little difficulty labeling the book as a prototype of Christian comedy—Christian comedy of the absurd, in fact. Eventually absurdity will yield to what Freud considered to be true wit, but only after absurdity has played itself out rather than being wiped away. For in this book deliverance springs out of absurdity, with all things—however ridiculous—ultimately working together for good in the life of Ignatius Reilly. Here we come to the second
characteristic—that comedy must end happily, with the disorder being redeemed. The other criteria—a resolution that makes us suspect Providence and laughter that is ultimately inclusive—are such that, like faith, they cannot be proven in relation to this book but are felt just the same. Perhaps more provable is the idea that the book conspicuously lacks a hero capable of bringing about the happy ending.

The point becomes obvious if we consider the basic plot and the character of Ignatius Reilly. When the book begins he is a thirty-year-old Tulane graduate who has never held a job but, instead, spends his days in some comfortable womb—the back seat of his mother's car, the bath tub at her house, his own room, or a movie theatre. When his mother backs her car into a post holding up a French Quarter balcony, labor begins—both literally and symbolically. What we observe is the beginning of Ignatius's being forced out of the womb as well as his being forced to work. It is at the suggestion of a priest that Mrs. Reilly sends her son out to look for work. We then get to watch him in a job at Levy Pants and in a position as a hot dog vendor. Everywhere he goes, of course, he creates chaos. His
attempt to lead a riot at Levy Pants is a case in point. Later, using a wiener as lure, he tries to shove a stray cat into the wagon to take home. Then, when the cat refuses the bait, he puts the hot dog back into his wagon, violating health department rules. Consider, finally, the letter he writes—the letter that appears to be the end of Levy Pants, with Gus Levy's name forged.

Yet, when the book ends, solutions are appearing for practically everybody, and appearing in the most outrageous ways. Gus, for example, is finally freed not only of a potential lawsuit but also of his father's intimidating ghost; for the first time Mr. Levy will be able to live as an adult. Miss Trixie, at last, is able to retire. With Ignatius headed for New York, Mrs. Reilly will presumably be able to marry the "old man" and, as she says, "be treated nice before I die" (374). The characters are beginning to relate to one another. Mrs. Reilly craves affection, not just a provider. Gus Levy, in the episode at the Reilly house, looks at Ignatius with genuine concern and wants to protect him. A few minutes later Mr. Levy is treating Miss Trixie with real kindness. Ignatius remains the focus, of
course, his first mature relationship apparently beginning in the last scene.

It must be admitted, of course, that the working definition of Christian comedy being offered here is an arbitrary and restricted one that is best applied to the modern age, which is to say the Renaissance and beyond. Ignatius—a ridiculous figure and yet a ridiculous figure worth saving—is modern in that he is a laughable pilgrim. We could imagine him playing the lead role if Monty Python's Flying Circus should perform a parody of Dante's Divine Comedy. While Dante has his Beatrice to lead him, Ignatius must rely upon Myrna, who is as funny and as lost as he is. Yet, if this laughable modern pilgrim does, in fact, parody the medieval Dante, the parody is ultimately gentler than a Monty Python performance, and also more fitting. As Walter Kaiser has noted, the Renaissance fool came on the scene as medieval hierarchy crumbled. In this book, as we will see, medieval hierarchy does crumble, with grace coming through a confederacy of dunces.

Here, of course, Binx Bolling, another modern pilgrim in the company of an afflicted young woman, comes to mind, as well as Bayard Sartoris, needing the
blessing of Drusilla, another afflicted young woman.
Both of these young men function, as the present study
has already observed, amidst collapsed systems. Binx,
we noted, makes direct references to Dante.

Faulkner, of course, does not use the language of
theology—even if all three young men are on modern
spiritual journeys. Even though Percy and Toole
generally speak only indirectly about grace, Percy does,
finally, refer to a "dazzling trick of grace" (206). Still,
in The Moviegoer and even more in A Confederacy
of Dunces, there is a sense of hinting more than
stating. A more direct approach would be unlikely to be
effective in a modern novel. As the present study
suggested early, if faith is "the assurance of things"
unseen but hoped for, then it seems not unfair that the
reader is asked to exercise something analogous to faith
in discerning what is suggested more than stated and
suggested as much in the pauses as in the words. It is
in this same indirect fashion that, when each book ends,
the young man in question is depicted as being really
only at the beginning of a journey. As Lacan asserts,
"Psychoanalysis may accompany the patient to the
ecstatic limit of the 'thou art that,' in which is
revealed to him his moral destiny," but it is beyond the practitioner "to bring him to the point where the real journey begins." This remark by Lacan seems particularly ironic as we look into Toole's novel which, like Percy's and Faulkner's, was written in an age that worships the power of psychology in a manner akin to ancestor worship or any other form of devotion that would usually seem irrational to the present century.

Perhaps our first clue that the central problem of *A Confederacy of Dunces* is spiritual rather than psychological lies in the name Ignatius Reilly. A name could hardly be more Catholic—an Irish surname and a saint's name for a given name. With his constant talk of order, however, he fails to consider the priestly order, much less emulate a saint. For Ignatius Reilly to carry the name of two saints—St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Ignatius of Antioch—seems ironic. While St. Ignatius of Antioch entreated friends not to save him when he was being fed to the lions, Ignatius Reilly is constantly holding himself back and worrying about his "valve."

Though the connections begin in irony, we soon realize that St. Ignatius of Antioch foreshadows what
Ignatius Reilly must become. St. Ignatius spoke of his spiritual birth as "abortion," and we are struck by the violent nature of the image. Ignatius Reilly, we recall, will also be delivered violently—delivered literally from being institutionalized and delivered symbolically from the womb. St. Ignatius of Antioch was a man out of step with his century—not even treated as well as the apostle Paul in similar situations, since St. Ignatius was not a Roman citizen. At first it seems merely ironic that Ignatius Reilly, with his lengthy indictment against the present century, sees himself as someone persecuted, as St. Ignatius really was. Eventually the connection must turn prophetic; Ignatius Reilly must stop indicting others and give himself as surely as St. Ignatius gave himself. Equally prophetic is St. Ignatius's frequent discussion of the Eucharist, which will become finally the controlling metaphor of Toole's book. In fact, it is in a food image that we will find both the symptom of sickness and the hope of cure. The cure will not be merely an individual matter but a communal one, as the communion metaphor suggests.

The problem, of course, is also a communal one, with Ignatius serving as a representative. The
narrative is mobbed with characters who would rather indict the present century than live existentially and sacrificially in it. Granted, the other characters are not pompous enough to refer to the attitude as an "indictment of the present century," but still it is there. Sometimes we see an active attack, as when the dogmatic old man is obsessed with hunting "Communiss." More often the attitude is less aggressive, expressed by a certain holding back on the part of the characters, a free-floating belief that everybody else is intent upon greed if not cheating in a world where there is not enough to go around. There never will be until these characters attend the banquet, with Ignatius serving as their representative as well as an individual.

Before considering healing, however, we should ask exactly what Ignatius is evading. What destiny, in terms of career and relationship to the world, is he avoiding? Apparently he is resisting the vocation of an academic. Although he is not gainfully employed as such, still he is an academic. If we consider his past experiences, his attitudes (particularly what attracts him to the role he is resisting), his intellectual life,
or even his costume, it becomes clear that Ignatius is an academic, regardless of how much he resists the role. Toole, of course, is having fun with the situation. His description of the costume Ignatius wears to an interview at Louisiana State University is a parody of academic garb. The object of the parody may not be initially obvious when we read the description:

Ignatius himself was dressed comfortably and sensibly. The hunting cap prevented head colds. The voluminous tweed trousers were durable and permitted unusually free locomotion. Their pleats and nooks contained pockets of warm, stale air that soothed Ignatius. The plaid flannel shirt made a jacket unnecessary . . . (13).

Academics typically are uncomfortable with flashy or ostentatious clothing and wear what is supposed to look like clothing for a weekend in the country—perhaps the country in Britain. Not every academic dresses in this manner, of course, and we certainly should acknowledge the academic who views dress as a form not of professional but individual expression. Still the tweedy look is more common at a university than, for example, at a bank or a washeteria. Ignatius, of course, does not get the look "right." Despite his tweed and his plaid flannel, we look at him and decide that the academic fashion-setters did not mean that.
While the look he attains is not L. L. Bean, his tweed and his plaid are suggestive of a fox hunt or an English department. He carries to the logical—and ridiculous—conclusion the practical, no-frills comfort that academics seem eager to achieve. Toole's description, with its emphasis upon durability and freedom of movement, seems to parody an advertisement in the L. L. Bean catalogue. We are sure that Ignatius is not what L. L. Bean or the English Department had in mind. Yet we are sure of what he attempts when we read not only the physical description of the clothing but also the idea that it "suggested a rich inner life" (13). Here is the academic willing to endure tweed in the semi-tropical climate of New Orleans if the garb will suggest a "rich inner life."

His inner life will indeed be one factor in our calling him an academic, but first let us consider his past experiences. We should be aware, however, that attitudes finally will define him as academic more clearly and basically than experience. And attitude and experience connect in the reader seems to be directed always back to one particular experience—the time Ignatius spent at Tulane, using his Grandmother Reilly's
insurance money to get a classical education. The fact that we are directed back to this experience rather than, for example, the paper route he once had, suggests the importance that the university is to hold for Ignatius. Regardless of how funny we find him, we assume that he was academically qualified, or Tulane would not have first accepted him and then tolerated him. Later, spending his days filling Big Chief notebooks with his indictment of the present century, he is at once embodying and serving as a parody of the academic's role as cultural critic even though that role, in Ignatius, is sadly distorted and useless. Even the self-absorbed tone of the writing would seem to parody the introspective academic who lapses easily into self-pity or self-absorption, without the balancing contact that a less self-absorbed person would have with external reality. The Big Chief notebooks, of course, are suggestive of an elementary school student, as if Ignatius is frozen in his collegiate days rather than going on to share whatever he gained there. Regardless of how much Toole laughs at his character, however, Ignatius has the academic's particular disenfranchisement from the purely mundane. He carries on his
person a book that only academics are likely to read, and even his type of errand—going to Canal Street to pick up a lute string—might seem to parody the eccentric academic whose choice of leisure activity is at odds with the culture. Leisure activity, by ordinary standards, seems to be a major activity for Ignatius.

We are aware of only one attempt by Ignatius, excluding forced labor, to gain meaningful work, and that is academic work. We assume that even a place as open to diversity as Louisiana State University found him startling. In recalling the interview, Ignatius speaks with condescension, appearing to believe that the department head interviewing him was the one on trial. At a glance it might seem that Toole is merely having some fun with a brand of egotism sometimes found around universities—the arrogance of the person with affected detachment and too much awareness of his own intellect. There is more involved here than arrogance, however. It becomes clear that Ignatius wanted, all along, to avoid work and was making sure he was not offered work: "I couldn't possibly take the job. When I saw the chairman of the Medieval Culture Department, my hands began breaking out in small white bumps. He was a totally
soulless man" (23). One seldom hears of an academic rejecting work because the department head is "soulless," though the situation may be more common than we think. Still, some form of interaction would be necessary to demonstrate to the candidate that the head of the hiring committee of the department head was, in fact, soulless.

Ignatius, on the other hand, seems to sense the problem with his first glimpse of the interviewer. Having to reject any offer because the Medieval Culture Department is headed by someone soulless is only a back-up measure, however. Ignatius has already used his costume to try to ward off work. Though he claims to be "appalled" that the man would mention the lack of a tie and make "some smirky remark about [his] lumber jacket" (23), Ignatius appears to be having just the effect he wants. He is not, after all, a stranger to the academic world, so it is not naivety causing him to wear a hunting jacket to an interview. If we doubt that his avoidance of work is calculated, other comments Ignatius makes convince us of the contrary. Early in the novel he tells his mother, "It is inconceivable that I should get a job. I am very busy with my work at the moment"
His work, of course, is writing his "lengthy indictment of the present century" in Big Chief notebooks. In the same conversation he doubts "very seriously whether anyone will hire [him]" and goes on to say, "Employers sense in me a denial of their values." In the same conversation, though, he says that the "misguided trip to Baton Rouge" instilled in him "a mental block against working" (63). The block, we assume, was well in place at the time of the interview. Besides coming in a hunting jacket and deciding why he could not accept a possible offer, Ignatius backed up his performance with a screaming fit in the men's room. His hunting jacket was indeed stolen from the door of the stall where he was seated, but a candidate seriously hoping to be hired would be unwise to sit on a toilet and scream in protest--especially in a men's room that seems to be in close proximity to the department head's office. It would be hard, we assume, to top a screaming fit in the men's room, so Ignatius fled "as soon as [he] could" (24).

The method to his antics does not make the performance any less entertaining, of course--a performance that continues all the way back to New
Orleans, with Ignatius borrowing a jacket from the "selfless" taxi driver. "By the time we arrived here," Ignatius recalls, "he was quite depressed about losing his license and had grown rather surly. He also appeared to be developing a bad cold, judging by the frequency of his sneezes. After all, we were on the highway for almost two hours" (24). The distance between Baton Rouge and New Orleans is only eighty miles, but Ignatius insisted that the taxi driver travel so slowly that he lost his chauffeur's license and took nearly two hours to arrive.

Obviously it has been impossible to discuss experience without bringing attitude into the same discussion. Attitude, as we have noted, is finally what most defines Ignatius as an academic. Before considering the attitudes that define him as such and that draw him to the university, we should observe what he believes an academic to be. If we ourselves were to define the term academic, we might not describe exactly what Ignatius has in mind. Lost in his medievalism, he seems to assume that an academic is a contemplative. (It may not even have been laziness alone causing him, in his Tulane teaching assistant days, to hurl the
ungraded papers at his students; the students, rather than having first claim on him, would have seemed to be mere nuisances, interfering with his contemplation.) In the present century--the one we see Ignatius busy indicting--the term academic is likely to embody at once the active and the contemplative, with the academic feeling a definite responsibility to nurture and challenge the larger community, either directly or through students. In failing to appreciate this harmony of the active and the contemplative, Ignatius is forfeiting a particular order, even as he discusses the need to find order. Ultimately he must embody the active and the contemplative as surely as Bayard Sartoris must embody the masculine and the feminine.

However misguided he is, we still sense that Ignatius expects to find form and order in the academic mindset; he places his trust not, for example, in the stock market, but in the university. His allegiance seems clear when he carries on his person a scholarly book as if it were a Bible. His allegiance is still more obvious when he tries to inflict academic standards in places as unlikely as a French Quarter bar (insisting that his mother define her terms) or imagining something
academic where it does not exist (viewing his hot dog apron as an academic gown). The fact remains that his protests are always against some form of intellectual disgrace, whether he is popping popcorn bags in movies or leaving notes signed "Zorro" to Dr. Talc. Zorro, of course, is a figure of punishment, impersonal behind his mask and adamant in his refusal to tolerate injustice.

It is significant that Ignatius protests not some more obvious problem in New Orleans— at least some problem more obvious to the average citizen— but a professor's behavior. Certainly Dr. Talc is an academic. The mindset is evident in various ways. His neglect concerning grading term papers enacts, at a higher level of the medieval hierarchy that the university embodies, the same behavior Ignatius displays with freshman themes. In either case, we see a contemplative who thinks life outside the university is basically unimportant— for example, when Dr. Talc considers a story of real crime in the French Quarter an amusing story but thinks his being attacked by a mere hot dog vendor is, as Ignatius himself might say, an affront to taste and decency. The charge that he, Talc, has been "misleading and perverting the youth" (353) is
seen as a serious charge that, if worse comes to worst, will be noted by those above him in the hierarchy, whereas the newspaper story about pornographers really "misleading and perverting the youth" is treated as amusing escape reading. While egotism accounts in part for what Talc considers important, the fact remains that whatever happens within the university seems more important to him than anything on the outside. Lazy though he appears to be, he does have the attitudes of an academic—and the appearance of one. His "expensive tweed sleeve" (245) suggests that he is able to "get right" what Ignatius attempts—the attire of one dressed for a fox hunt or an English Department. Attitude, temperament, and appearance all suggest an academic, and this is the man whom Ignatius attacks. A person's ultimate values are made obvious by the placement both of ultimate trust and of involvement sufficient to protest what needs to be protested. Judging by this standard, Ignatius has the attitudes of an academic.

It should be admitted, of course, that there are some basic contradictions in his attitude. He does not attribute natural authority to Dr. Talc, and yet Ignatius shows, in many ways, that he buys into the
hierarchial system. We note the attitude when he tells a young gay man, "I must come to lecture to you people so that you will be set upon the correct path" (266). After recommending medieval literature, he says that the Renaissance and the Enlightenment are "most dangerous propaganda" (266-67). Clearly he favors hierarchy and authority, even if he does not appear to pay respect to it as embodied by Dr. Talc. Promoting Batman as a good piece of current literature, Ignatius says admiringly that Batman is "rigid" (267). Batman, we should recall, is accompanied by a lackey and gets to impose justice from above--another example of academic-style hierarchy.

In defining Ignatius as an academic, we should keep in mind, finally, his intellectual life. It is important to remember that he is being satirized for his habits, not his thoughts. If we compare habits and thought, we will find that his ideas make him a potentially good academic and his habits prevent him from being a good one. The life itself makes us prone to dismiss the notebooks. Upon scrutinizing them, however, we find them both insightful and prophetic. In the middle of a hilarious description of Myrna, he observes, "Myrna was, you see, terribly engaged in her
society; I, on the other hand, older and wiser, was terribly dis-engaged" (137). Ignatius has diagnosed not only their psychological states but also the basis for their both being terribly funny when he describes them as "terribly engaged" and "terribly dis-engaged." What he does not yet realize is that they are terribly--and wonderfully--bound, as surely as the active and the contemplative must be embodied in the scholar.

Insightful as some of Ignatius's observations are, we cannot accept his description of himself as "wise." Actually, he is a fool, and he must become a fool in a different sense. The term fool had two meanings in the sixteenth century. It was a term of contempt for the competent man who acted foolishly but it was also a term of praise for the gentle idiot who perceived with a child's innocence. In this second sense we think of the scriptural admonition to "become as a little child." This beguiling fool, according to Enid Welsford, really came into his own as medieval hierarchy was collapsing. What we finally see in Toole's book is grace coming not through a hierarchy of scholars but in a confederacy of dunces--protected not by wisdom of position but by grace. Long before Ignatius knows it,
he is preparing to make the journey, to become the innocent fool capable of the journey.

It is inevitable, of course, that he would recognize Dr. Talc as a fool in the bad sense of the word. In a note signed, "Zorro," Ignatius refers to Dr. Talc as "you deluded fool" and as "the total ass you really are." And so he is. We have just seen Talc's "total ignorance" of his subject demonstrated. He has just been ransacking his desk for notes to use the next morning in class since "his reputation for sophistication and glibness would not save him in the face of his being unable to remember absolutely anything about Lear and Arthur aside from the fact that the former had some children" (140). Melodramatic as the note sounds, Ignatius is demonstrating the essential ability of the true academic to realize that the emperor has on nothing, as well as the true academic's insistence upon proclaiming that discovery. Anyone who has made the discovery concerning the emperor and has declared as much can never be one of the fold again; Ignatius has set in motion the journey, unconsciously but inevitably. Yet he remains a laughable figure.
With Ignatius's identity as an academic established through various criteria, consider now how he eludes the role. Already we have circled the reasons why, particularly for the present century, he is not a successful or respectable academic. He is severely limited by three related issues. He is limited first by a lack of discipline and by the fact that he is a fool—and not as yet in the good sense of the word. He is still more limited by the fact that, as his mother says, he "learned everything except how to be a human being" (375).

Although this third limitation will turn out to be the most serious and basic, the other two and the ironic emphasis Ignatius places upon Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy deserve consideration first. Though the course of the novel will convince us that Toole believes in the concept of Fortune Boethius describes, we get the definite impression that Ignatius follows an earlier concept of Fortune. While Boethius has "Christianized" the concept, earlier treatments involved a goddess who seemed capricious at worst and chaotic at best. Ignatius, despite the book he carries around, seems to follow the earlier doctrine; speaking of where Fortuna
may spin him next, he resembles a person discussing where a hurricane may strike next. At any rate Ignatius shares none of Boethius's attempts to be free of the Wheel of Fortune, no longer seeking favor from Fortune. Instead Ignatius rejoices each time he thinks the Wheel may be spinning in his favor.

Ironically, what he attributes to the Wheel of Fortune is sometimes the result of some lie he has just told, as when he tells the Levys he has just been committed to Mandeville. The irony, of course, is that he is in danger of being committed at the very time he lies about being taken away in an armored car. As we will observe in some detail, he has a curious way of speaking the truth when he seems to be least capable of or inclined toward doing so. For the moment, though, note the irony of Ignatius's interest in Boethius. Besides being a slave to Fortune, Ignatius makes a mockery of Boethius's warnings against bodily pleasure. Think, for example, of Ignatius' inability even to stop eating hot dogs. His lack of discipline alone would keep him from being a successful academic. Not only his dependence upon bodily pleasure but also his utter attachment to the Wheel of Fortune convince us that
Ignatius lacks that particular discipline of the academic, the discipline to remain focused upon a particular study, often fittingly called a "discipline," while the Wheel of Fortune spins insanely.

Another problem, Ignatius's being a fool, turns out to be closely related to his most serious one, the fact that he has "learned everything except how to be a human being" (375). Both conditions are characterized by vanity and the resulting isolation. We might say, in fact, that he spends his days being a fool instead of being a related human being. We can better appreciate the waste involved if we consider the proper role of an academic--especially in the present century. Ideally the academic should be both nurturing and exacting, enriching the culture and yet constantly demanding that it entertain ideas that are more significant than comfortable. In this dual role of nurturing and demanding, the academic resembles, finally, a good parent. No matter that the general public may dismiss academic thought as nonsense; the work is for them as surely as Tonio Kruger writes "for the blond and the blue-eyed." The sad alternative is for the academic to forsake this role--to forsake the nurturing or the
exacting or perhaps both and merely play at being clever. He or she may then write only for other academics, not caring if the writing has anything to do with anything as long as it is clever. However, Ignatius does not write even for those within his sphere, much less attempt to write for them anything that is more than just clever. Instead he spends his days writing a "lengthy indictment against our century" (18), not even trying to publish the material. In this sense he functions as one in a womb. While Ignatius provides an extreme example, the academic who forsakes the role is prone to indict rather than lead, assuming a grand manner that is at once urbane and superior, while carrying out what he perceives to be major social protest. In reality the protest, in such a case, amounts to little more than popping an empty popcorn bag in a movie theatre, which is one of Ignatius's accomplishments.

In many ways we see Ignatius forsake his role, choosing to manipulate rather than to relate, choosing to be a scornful fool rather than a caring human being. Always vanity is at the heart of his behavior. In many ways, too, we see him act out his belief that he is his
own master, accountable to no one. He recalls proudly
the day he threw ungraded papers at his riotous students
who had come to protest his indifference. What he
really asserts, of course, is the notion that he is not
accountable to anyone— that he is his own master. We
are reminded of Ricouer's suggestion that sin is not,
finally, an infraction of some rule but a "pretension of
man to be master of his own life." Clearly Ignatius
is treating as sacred his own intellect instead of using
it to serve, not despise, humanity. According to
Ricouer, the Hebrew Bible "has no abstract word to
express sin, but a bundle of concrete expressions." Neither does Ignatius. There is nothing abstract about
his acting out of the sin of pride. The irony, of
course, is that his own spectacle of false sacredness is
hilarious even as he treats himself solemnly. The
effect, while never solemn, is both serious and
hilarious.

Habitually his acting out of the sin of pride takes
the form of treating other people as mere conveniences
to be used, with his own ego or his own body being of
foremost concern. The pattern is particularly clear in
connection with women. So intent is Ignatius upon

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maintaining his condition—that of being fed in a womb—that he is apt to want to force every woman he meets to function as a womb. We see him always ready to manipulate his mother through mother-guilt, and he tries to invest Miss Trixie with the qualities of a wise mother. Both women, it would seem, are basically exhausted and ready for some peace and quiet or even some nurturing of their own. We think of Mrs. Reilly wanting someone to "treat her nice" (375) or of Miss Trixie demanding a ham. Ignatius, however, is not one to let reality intrude upon fantasy, particularly where women are concerned; rather than admit that either one of these women might want to be fed literally or symbolically, he insists that they remain always nurturing, even if he has to shame his mother into compliance and invest Miss Trixie with qualities that are not there.

This need on his part would explain his neutering of the two women. By neutering I refer to the common cultural phenomenon described by Elissa Melamed in *Mirror Mirror*—the attempt to defeminize older women, pretending that they probably have no sexual feelings or, if they do, that such feelings are at once obscene
and ridiculous. But they are, Melamed suggests, allowed to be Betty Crocker. What Melamed actually describes, of course, is a mother; Betty Crocker, obviously, is always feeding people, and her oven would seem to be a rather obvious womb symbol. The suggestion that a woman could be at once maternal and desexed, though certainly contradictory, is not a problem to the phenomenon of neutering, since the phenomenon is not rational. At any rate Ignatius is willing to neuter both his mother and Miss Trixie in order to guard the womb.

If women are going to be forced always to function as wombs, we should not be surprised to see father figures killed off; a father, after all, would suggest competition for the place in the mother's womb. Toole, as we will see, participates in both the neutering of women and the killing off of father figures. For the moment, though, concentrate only upon how Ignatius's treatment of fathers serves to diminish them—frequently through conversations that he skillfully manipulates. Literally he is acting out a type of behavior that Martha Wolfenstein discusses in a Freudian context—that of a child making a fool of an authority figure.
We see the behavior first when Ignatius is waiting outside D. H. Holmes. Patrolman Mancuso asks, "You got any identification, mister?" (15) Ignatius is unable to provide any and produces, instead, a street scene. Like a child without a name, he seems unable to answer a simple question. In the mob scene that follows, the old man, the "communiss" hunter, says of Ignatius, "He's waiting for his momma" (17). And so he is. Yet he is also skillfully manipulating the scene, spontaneous as it seems. We know he is a performer when he turns to his mother, who has fallen into the scene and joined his theatrics, and says, "You don't have to overdo it, Mother" (19).

Later we see him handle Mr. Clyde with similar finesse. When Mr. Clyde attempts to discuss a complaint from the Board of Health, he is drawn into a conversation in which Ignatius refers to the cat he fed from his cart as "an animal with some taste and decency." Ignatius, not the cat, is called to account for the fact that he offered the cat a hot dog and then returned it to his cart. He asserts, however, that "this cat hasn't been given a chance" (220). Finally, we hear him on the phone telling Gus Levy that "Mr. Reilly" has been
committed to Mandeville. Asked if he can have visitors, Ignatius answers, "By all means. Drive out and take him some cookies" (313). The result, of course, is to make fools of the Levys, who take him at his word. Indeed the Levys resemble two clowns in a circus car, with Gus driving the little car and his wife, with her painted face and yellow hair, holding the cookies.

The game Ignatius plays— that of being a fetus— could not take place, of course, without his mother playing at being pregnant with a fetus or responsible for a small child. Mrs. Reilly is supplying Ignatius with sweets as if he were her little boy and washing his oversized underwear as if they were still diapers. Early she refers to him as "a child to support" (51), and the "child" has just that afternoon sucked the jelly out of the doughnuts, leaving the edges. Even if the game requires the participation of Mrs. Reilly, Ignatius clearly controls the game; not allowing her to show any of the "strong" virtues of motherhood, he manipulates her through guilt. The charade that is played— that of a mother with a small child— actually makes a mockery of motherhood. In this connection, we observe that the cakes she supplies are store-bought. Rather than being
a convenience only, the store-bought cakes are indicative of the plastic quality of anything nurturing in the book—as plastic, in fact, as the Lady of the Television attached with a suction cup to Santa's T.V. In using Mrs. Reilly as an example, my intent is not to attack her. She is, herself, much like an abandoned child, terrified at the prospect of raising over a thousand dollars, and retreating regularly to a bottle of muscatel in the oven. The fact that the muscatel can be stored in the oven suggests how rarely the latter is used for baking. Thus the characters collaborate to enact a sad parody of relatedness.

The result, of course, is absolute isolation. It is most evident of all in Ignatius, but the characters surrounding him enact it also. Still he remains the focus. Recalling Bonhoeffer's phrase, "the unutterable agony of separation," we know that Ignatius exemplifies it. We have watched him isolate himself from the characters in the story. The indictment against "our present century" shows the extent to which Ignatius has carried the separation. It has, as Bonhoeffer would suggest, made him sick. Clearly he is not capable of healing himself. As the aborted riot at Levy Pants
would suggest, his ability to shape meaning out of meaninglessness is non-existent; the healing must come from outside of himself.

It might be easy to despair of his ever accepting healing if we observe Ignatius in the womb. It takes many forms, of course. We think of Ignatius in his bathtub or on the back seat of his mother's car. Even New Orleans functions as a womb, with Ignatius afraid to leave it and travel as far as Louisiana State University. Though less obviously, the academic world, the movie theatre, and even the medieval period all function as wombs for him. We are struck most of all by the unconscious nature of his selfishness—like that of a real fetus. The inability to be grateful is basic to his problem of pride and also a symptom of it. The result is that he is seemingly incapable of a mature relationship or of turning from his own pride.

Perhaps it is necessary to assume that even the act of turning, should it occur, would be a gift. At any rate it is clear that, on some level, Ignatius always knows that he must leave the womb. To do so, in his context, is to embrace the darkness. Recall, for example, his account of the journey to Baton Rouge and
his attitude toward the area outside of New Orleans. Think also of his assertion that he may one day make the journey with Myrna if he is well enough.

Before considering healing, we must observe Toole's attitude toward Ignatius and the book as a whole. Layers of ridicule are evident, with Toole sneering at the community that is laughing at Ignatius. Ultimately this attitude will make Toole's humor inclusive rather than divisive, with the humor itself an agent of healing. First, though, consider specific examples of Toole's layered approach. An obvious example is his treatment of women. On one level he ridicules Ignatius in his relation with women, and yet Toole himself seems to laugh at them through the way he characterizes them. In the "catch-22" of neutering, Mrs. Levy is a target of humor because she is middle-aged and yet tries to look glamorous, but Miss Trixie is ridiculed for being old and not giving "a damn" about being desirable. She comes in for even more mockery from her creator when, under Mrs. Levy's guidance, Miss Trixie begins to treat herself as a desirable woman. Even the term "desirable," of course, relates to male sexuality, with the woman supposedly meeting that desire. Thus Toole
has her speaking not of her own desire but of her ability to fulfill a man's desire. The attitude toward women as sex objects and toward older women in particular is most obvious and most cruel when Ignatius loses patience and shouts at Miss Trixie, "Go dangle your withered parts over the toilet!" (153) Certainly Toole is presenting him as being cruel in this scene, and yet the entire scene, including the cruelty, is created so as to evoke laughter, though certainly not innocent or joyful laughter.

It could not be otherwise. To have the story told by anyone with compassion concerning gender would be to violate what we know of Toole's view and of experience in the present order. Both A Confederacy of Dunces and Toole's early novel, The Neon Bible, involve a lack of healthy food or sex. The treatment in the earlier book is humorless and brittle, and yet the void is the same. In The Neon Bible, which seems to be a portrait of impotence and hell, food, sex, and religion are depicted as disgusting rather than serving as vehicles of relatedness. In A Confederacy of Dunces, the unrelatedness is made bearable by humor. The humor is on two levels: the humor with which we view Ignatius
Reilly, as opposed to David of The Neon Bible, and the humor that underlies any apocalyptic work, as A Confederacy of Dunces turns out to be. This second kind of humor involves an awareness of an ironic if not absurd balance of one poised between the present order and something beyond it.

In both senses The Neon Bible is humorless, and yet we have already noted the basic similarities between the two books. In each novel, there is a main character who seems either troubled of ineffectual in sexual matters. In David's case there is poignant innocence when the girl leads him to an isolated spot and he decides he is supposed to kiss her. Here the intent is not to suggest anything boring or incompetent about two teenagers stopping at a kiss but, rather, to suggest that David is less initiated than the girl who leads him to the isolated spot. In A Confederacy of Dunces, Ignatius tries to hold off Myrna's advances, and she says that she has tried to "clarify" his "sexual inclinations" (188-89). His inclination, of course, is toward Kleenex and a rubber glove. She goes on to say that she wants to help him attain contentment "through satisfying,
natural orgasm" (189), and later she warns him that he could "become a screaming queen" (315).

If Toole's characters consistently seem to be blocked, there is no indication that experience offered the author any real success at reaching another human being. Even his death involved a frustrated, in fact rejected, attempt to communicate. While popular wisdom has it that Toole killed himself because he could not get published, we must dismiss the idea in light of W. Kenneth Holditch's introduction to *The Neon Bible*, which states that, in the months before his death, Toole was being encouraged by an editor at Simon & Schuster. Obviously we must ask why an author would despair while having his work taken seriously by an editor. Surely the clue to the suicide was in a note addressed to Toole's parents and destroyed by his mother. We can only speculate about the specific message, but we do know that Mrs. Toole was nearly destroyed—until she convinced herself and the public that a failure to publish accounted for Toole's sadness. The energy with which Mrs. Toole promoted this theory suggests a secret she hoped to conceal—a secret in the note. Thus we conclude that even Toole's death involves both the
secret of the note and his mother's refusal to let it be heard. Indeed her theatrics so closely resemble the way Ignatius Reilly imagines his mother acting if he died that it becomes difficult entirely to separate Toole and his characters, or at least Toole's experience and the experiences of his characters. Those experiences always involve unrelatedness, with sexual perversion or ineffectuality serving as a vehicle for that unrelatedness. Thus, it becomes clear that, if form and content are to be one, *A Confederacy of Dunces* should be told from the viewpoint of someone without compassion concerning gender—someone capable of saying, "Go dangle your withered parts over the toilet!" (153)

It is only near the end of *A Confederacy of Dunces*—a time of anticipating things not seen but hoped for—that we sense anything related to innocence or kindness concerning gender. It is important to note that we do not actually observe food or sex experienced in a healthy form. What we do have is the anticipation of relatedness, with *A Confederacy of Dunces* emerging as an apocalyptic book. Even the anticipation, however, changes the voice of the speaker. In the last scene of the novel, the narrative voice loses entirely the basic
unfairness with which Ignatius himself treats women. By that time, too, Ignatius loses some measure of his callousness toward women; it is as if Toole at once ridicules Ignatius and plays the part with him, with both Ignatius and the narrator finally freed.

If Toole participates with Ignatius in the practice of neutering, then it seems that, just as surely, both Toole and Ignatius kill off the father figures. Male figures in this book are usually ineffectual (like Mr. Levy) or absent (like Ignatius's father, recalled by Ignatius as insignificant, even before he was absent). Again Toole is introducing, in more subtle form, a theme depicted in stark and humorless detail in *The Neon Bible*, where the father not only is killed but also leaves behind a garden where his seed will not bear fruit. In *A Confederacy of Dunces*, this failure of fathers is depicted in more diffuse and sophisticated detail. In addition to fathers being absent or ineffectual in this second novel, they are further diminished by conversation that Ignatius skillfully manipulates. We have already noted several examples—the conversation with Patrolman Mancuso, the encounter with Mr. Clyde, who is concerned about sanitation, and
the conversation with Mr. Levy, who is anxious about the possibility of a law suit caused by Ignatius's antics. Always Ignatius makes a fool of the authority figure. In each case Toole creates the scene so as to evoke laughter as surely as he does in the examples of female neutering. Thus, even though Ignatius is created as a comic figure, Toole seems to play the part with him.

To say that Toole treats Ignatius as a comic figure is not to suggest that the author means for Ignatius to deserve all of the scorn heaped upon him by other characters. Funny as he is, other characters, with their anti-intellectual bias, are equally absurd. Watching their treatment of Ignatius, we remember Dickinson musing that "you're straightway dangerous / and handled with a chain" as a result of dissent.127 Everything about Ignatius is a dissent; his costume alone makes him a walking dissent among the lower class New Orleanians who surround him. The definite impression is created that they are troubled not by his real psychological, practical, and spiritual problems so much as his standing out in the crowd. Toole is ridiculing them even as they ridicule Ignatius. Indeed his "birth," his escape from the womb as the narrative
ends, is achieved not because of them but in spite of them, since he barely escapes their reaction—an attempt to put him away permanently in a womb not of his choosing. Here we must pause and ask if the same characters would react much differently to any academic who did not have the protection of being on the payroll of some university. Certainly there is a basic difference in the way he is treated by the anti-intellectual lower-class New Orleanians and the way he is treated by Toole. The satire is ultimately gentle, with Toole laughing not at but with Ignatius.

When we turn at last to the idea of healing in the novel, there is a food metaphor that suggests both the symptom of sickness and the hope of cure. It is in a communal banquet—at the feast—that all things are finally united, though Toole does not tell us so directly. As Bakhtin points out, a communal feast is an expression of connectedness. It is natural to think of a particular feast—the Eucharist—in this Catholic novel. And it is a Catholic novel. The scent of Roman Catholicism, little heeded but still present, is always there, with the plastic Virgin of the T.V. serving as both a mockery and a reminder of what is neglected. In
the last scene, the book becomes catholic in the sense of being universal—inclusive. It is in both senses that we imagine a feast where antinomies are resolved and hunger is satisfied—where Myrna's letters, with their overtones of a Pauline epistle mixed with straight Freudian theory, are united with Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy. Moreover, in the image of the feast, we imagine Ignatius exchanging the womb for community.

Always the characters seek the feast, though they do not recognize the nature of their hunger. For Bakhtin, as we have noted, a feast must be communal. Here instead, characters, not knowing what they seek, engage in solitary consumption. When Ignatius Reilly eats, it is always alone, whether he devours hot dogs he should sell, sucks the jelly out of doughnuts, or "scarfs" popcorn in a movie. Though they are less conspicuous, other characters are also engaged in solitary consumption—for example, Mrs. Reilly, with her bottle of muscatel stored in the oven. The muscatel is a sad parody of Communion wine. Mrs. Reilly, instead of attending the feast, is drinking in isolation. There are even lonelier scenes, however, when these people are in company but dining alone. Santa eats from the potato
salad and then licks the serving spoon clean to deceive her guests. A few minutes later Mrs. Reilly does the same thing, but never does the assembled company share a meal.

We should note here that sex, like food, is experienced in isolation, whether it is Ignatius with his Kleenex or Mrs. Levy with her board. So closely related are food and sex that we can almost believe we are reading about sleazy sex when we read the account of Santa's potato salad, which becomes more disgusting as each solitary diner eats with the same spoon from the serving bowl. They soil the food, not only separately but secretly.

Ultimately, we know, they all must attend the banquet. The Kleenex, the potato salad, and all of the other examples of solitary consumption or unconnected sex will remain empty if not repulsive. For what is needed is a banquet. Bakhtin's insistence upon the communal feast as a basic expression of connectedness makes the point inescapable. Moreover, "there is an ancient tie," Bakhtin writes, "between the feast and the spoken word." And if there is not an ancient tie between sex and the word, written or spoken, there
should be. Clearly both feasting and sex are expressions of connectedness and are easily linked as symbols. In this Catholic novel, as we have noted, we readily think of a particular feast—the Eucharist—in which even sexual antinomies are at last resolved, with Christ (the bridegroom of the church) offering a sacrament rich in maternal images. Unlike Toole's characters, the participants do not participate in secret. Instead the feast is communal, with those present called to be responsive to all humanity. It is thus, in this image, finally, that Ignatius can exchange the womb for community.

It is in the last scene, as we have suggested, that the book becomes catholic in the sense of inclusive. In the company of Myrna Minkoff, the Jewish radical, Ignatius leaves the womb at last. We must at least suspect that, when they enter U.S. 11, they are headed for the feast.

We should not assume, however, that Myrna and Ignatius are absolutely changed at the end of the novel. They have come together, at least initially, for selfish reasons—she to have a new cause and he to avoid confinement. Certainly she is still as funny as he is,
with her glasses worn not to correct a problem in vision but to demonstrate her seriousness. Moreover, their ability to irritate each other is unchanged. Greeting him in a "slightly hostile voice," she yells, "'Ignatius, are you in that dump?'" and goes on to tell him that she knows he is, because she can hear him stomping, and to "'open up these crummy shutters'" (397). His initial reaction when he sees her outside is one of anger, but he hides it, since she is his means of escape and he intends to use her. He then spins elaborate lies, which she believes, and hurries her out before the ambulance can arrive and, also, before lying on his bed can give her any ideas. By the time they are in the car, they are having one of their usual exchanges: "'Shut up and get us out of here'" and "'Are you going to bug me like this?'" (404) Clearly they are still themselves.

We seem to be listening to Toole, not Ignatius, when we read on the last page, "Now that Fortuna had saved him from one cycle, where would she spin him now? The new cycle would be so different from anything he had ever known" (405). In this new cycle, we sense, he will not be allowed to live as a fetus. Even Myrna is now
engaged in a relationship that will be more demanding—and perhaps in that sense more humanizing—than her former causes. The focus, of course, is Ignatius, who questions whether or not he can travel all the way to New York in the fetal position. We certainly hope not. Indeed the last paragraph gives us reason to hope that Ignatius is amazingly—however unwillingly—approaching what Luther calls "Christian freedom" and Ricouer says "is to belong existentially to the order of the Resurrection." Ricouer expresses the condition in two categories that "explicitly tie freedom to hope: the category of 'in spite of' and that of 'how much more.' They are the obverse and reverse of each other, just as are, with Luther, 'freedom from' and 'freedom for.'" 

Such spiritual claims for a person like Ignatius Reilly obviously need considerable support. First we should consider the problem of plausibility—whether or not the various plot threads could really be resolved through such a seemingly implausible chain of events. Here the question should be turned around to ask first if solutions in life often come through events that are anything but ridiculous and then whether this particular book would lend itself to solutions that were not
absurd. The fact that the events are perfectly comical is in keeping with the rest of the book. An exit that grew out of sensible events or suggestions by people healthy in any psychological or spiritual sense would be unexpected and unconvincing. The idea of sending Ignatius to a mental institution is first suggested by Santa, who has frequently said that he should be punched in the nose or otherwise physically abused.

In fact, the absurdity that has made the entire book a delight intensifies as we approach the final episode. Even in all of its peculiar absurdity, it causes us to recall what Ignatius has said all along about Fortuna and to wonder if the outrageous Ignatius, in his misguided fashion, has been speaking wisdom all along. Certainly we are not being asked to believe that Ignatius has suddenly and freely decided to leave the womb in which he has lived; instead he is being forced out by circumstances--by Fortune, even though Ignatius has consistently misunderstood that role. Just as consistently, as we have observed, he has failed in any attempt to shape meaning out of nothing, leaving us convinced that meaning would have to come from outside Ignatius. We must also suspect that, in a curious way,
no effort goes unrewarded and no prayer goes unheard. Even when there seems to be no surface connection between cause and effect, when deliverance comes, we still must ask if it would have come unsought. When it does come, the foolish unrelated pieces form a whole at last. The fact that the rescue itself is hilarious in A Confederacy of Dunces makes the deliverance, in a curious way, better. For ultimately, the plot seems to suggest, grace comes not when the everyday is swept away; instead grace appears within the mundane and deliverance seems to evolve out of the ordinary.

If it is indeed grace and deliverance we are witnessing, then the fact that Ignatius has been an undisciplined fool would clearly distinguish him from the hero who prevails through his own skill or virtue. Yet some might question the whole idea that Ignatius is about to leave the womb. He has, after all, assumed the fetal position. Myrna is, after all, a potential mother figure—someone he might attempt to exploit as he has his own mother. We have no guarantee that such will not be the case. Somehow it would not be fitting to discuss grace or deliverance in a context of guarantees; if faith is the assurance of things not seen but hoped for,
it would be inappropriate at best to speak with too much certainty about what will become of Ignatius.

Still, we should consider a detail basic to his absurd escape with antic Myrna. Here we witness the first act of gratitude in the entire book. Previously we have seen characters exploiting one another, with Ignatius being the primary exploiter. Even the frequent use of the objective pronoun ("I think I'll have me another Dixie" (30)), while typical of lower class New Orleans dialect, is also indicative of a certain self-centered quality. Nobody seems to appreciate anyone—until that moment when Ignatius stares "gratefully at the back of Myrna's head" (405). Indeed, the essence of Myrna's comical quality is the fact that she is an earnest child with no sense of humor, so it is significant that the pigtail swings "innocently" as Ignatius stares "gratefully" (405). It is fitting that innocence and gratitude should appear, each for the first time, together and that gratitude, a condition necessary for spiritual salvation, would be the note on which the novel ends.

If we insist upon asking how gratitude could suddenly appear in Ignatius—well, that too is probably
a gift. Like Auden's free man who is taught to praise ("In the prison of his days / Teach the free man how to praise"\textsuperscript{133}), Ignatius amazingly has this gift. Though Auden writes about the death of a great poet, not the birth of a comical academic who had been fleeing his role, the parallels are striking. Ignatius, as we have noted in many ways, is "silly like us," to borrow Auden's phrase. Here the qualifying phrase "like us" is basic, since Toole's comedy is ultimately inclusive rather than hostile. And certainly "mad Ireland," which "hurt" Yeats "into poetry" could not be madder than the environment in which Ignatius lives and from which he retreats to his notebooks, though "yourself" is the most important thing Auden says Yeats survived and the most important problem Ignatius transcends. Finally, a time in which "the living nations wait, / Each sequestered in its hate" describes the cold war, during which Toole wrote, as surely as it does the pre-World War II period in which Auden speaks, with either scene being one in which "the seas of pity lie / Locked and frozen in each eye." It is this parched scene that Auden envisions what can only be a gift:

\begin{quote}
In the deserts of the heart 
Let the healing fountain start,
\end{quote}
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.\textsuperscript{132}

Ignatius, amazingly, has this gift. He himself considers it ironic. This is the first time he has viewed himself with anything close to humor. To do so is fitting.

For any salvation, we are led to assume, comes not with solemnity but during "great laughter."\textsuperscript{133} Ignatius, like Binx Bolling, is no longer able to scorn "the world's passing parade."\textsuperscript{134} Like Binx Bolling and Bayard Sartoris, Ignatius is now caught up in "a surprise beyond all surprises,"\textsuperscript{135} for each of the three characters finds resolution that is actually a beginning, but not in the ordinary way. Indeed, peace comes for each one after we see "thrown over our own calculus of good and evil, which metes out rewards to the righteous and punishments to the wicked."\textsuperscript{136} No matter that The Unvanquished is not ordinarily considered a comedy. Each book ends with a willingness to abandon scorekeeping--to shed ego and travel light. The incongruity with the usual order of things is comical--joyously so. We are reminded, in fact, of the "gracious imbalance" that makes possible the "comedy of redemption."\textsuperscript{137} Finally under the influence of that
comedy--"midst great laughter"--we watch Bayard, Binx, and Ignatius set out on their journeys.
EPILOGUE

The Eucharist is what unites the three novels under study, though it is mentioned only by Percy. The sacrament re-members the broken body of Christ as those present partake of the feast and become part of that body. The body, already broken by humanity's estrangement, is restored in the self-sacrifice of the Eucharist, where all things are finally taken in. The application of the sacrament to the three novels becomes more fitting if we consider the scripture surrounding the Biblical accounts of the Eucharist. The gospels do not include the often quoted line, "Do this in remembrance of me." It appears in I Corinthians 1:11 and follows a discussion of human estrangement. The writer of I Corinthians has heard stories of factions and adds, "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk" (I Corinthians 1:17-21). The estrangement being described appears in all three novels, and in Toole's there is the solitary consumption and the bottle of muscatel in the oven.
Toole, as we have noted, never shows people feasting. Instead he writes an apocalyptic book, anticipating a time when everyone will be taken in, with antinomies resolved. Toole, of course, was not taken in. I find significance in a book such as *A Confederacy of Dunces*—an apocalyptic story of the feast—being written by a man who took his own life, not by one who had a place in the present order. Everyone has, in some sense, been kept out, and so the book turns out to be, like the Eucharist, for everyone. And Toole, of course, writes out of his person, so that reader, author, and text form a fellowship—a communion.
NOTES


3 Wood, 36-37.

4 Wood, 37.


6 Wood, 68.


8 Wood, 32.

9 Wood, 97.

10 Wood, 97.

11 Wood, 97.

12 Wood, 105.

13 Wood, 132.

14 Wood, 113.

15 Wood, 158.


17 Wood, 173.

152
Wood, 178.
Wood, 178-79.
Wood, 179.
Wood, 230.
Wood, 284.
Wood, 278.
Hebrews 11:1 RSV.


Wilson, 62.


Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 111.


35 Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959) 34.


37 Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, III.


40 Ricouer, 75.

41 Wyatt-Brown, 34.

42 Wyatt-Brown, 33.

43 Wyatt-Brown, 34.


46 Faulkner, "On Receiving the Nobel Prize," 362.

47 The name is the feminine form of Drusus, the name of a Roman general, according to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1957 ed.


51 Gwin, 122-52.

52 Ricouer, 22.

53 Ricouer, 22.


55 Girard, 117.

56 Girard, 8.

57 Girard, 12.

58 Girard, 227.

59 Gwin, 59.


61 Van Herik, 192.

62 Van Herik, 192.


64 Louis Rubin, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, interview by Gardner, Auburn, Alabama, telephone, 1 July 1990.

65 Gwynn and Blotner, 42.

66 Girard, 227.

67 Powers, 125-42.

69 Powers, 139.
70 Luke 2:52 RSV.
73 Gwynn and Blotner, 285.
74 Gwynn and Blotner, 12.
75 Powers, 139.
78 Kierkegaard, 63-65.
79 Kierkegaard, 64.
80 Kierkegaard, 70.
81 Kierkegaard, 70.
82 Kierkegaard, 70.
83 Kierkegaard, 71.
84 Hans Küng, Judaism (New York: Crossroads, 1992) 177.
85 Ricouer, 22.
86 Küng, 177.

Frye, 134.

Frye, 130.

Frye, 135.

Frye, 135.

Frye, 135.

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Frye, 137.

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The Book of Common Prayer, 50.

Cleanth Brooks, visiting lecturer at seminar taught by Professor Fred Hobson, Louisiana State University, 7 April 1987.


Hawkins, 1.


Louis D. Rubin, personal correspondence to Gardner, 1 July 1990.

Frye, 182.

106 Frye, 182.


109 Poteat, 69.


111 Wood, 79.


113 Kaiser, 124.

114 Kaiser, 8.


118 Welsford, 22.

119 Kaiser, 11.


121 Ricouer, 75.

122 Ricouer, 71.

124 Melamed, 95.


129 Bakhtin, 283.


131 Auden, 742–43.

132 Auden, 742–743.

133 Buechner, 109.

134 Wood, 32.

135 Wood, 32.

136 Wood, 32.

137 Wood, 32.
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VITA

Patricia Gardner was born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1947 and spent her formative years in a house reputedly built by carpetbaggers. In that time before television, she listened to family legends, many of them involving quiet Southern ladies confronting evil. These stories led to a fascination with Faulkner.

She always meant to attend Ole Miss just to be near his house. Circumstances were such that, instead, all of her degrees were earned in Louisiana, and she has no regrets. Her teaching initiation experience was in the Irish Channel of New Orleans, but she was determined, from the outset, to become a college professor. Unceasingly she prepared intellectually, while working many places and nurturing her children. Her other commitment—to publish fiction—has also been constant. Both of these goals were enriched by years of diverse experience, with nothing being finally lost. The opportunity to begin doctoral study at Louisiana State University eventually came, and she has taught at three universities—LSU, Auburn, and Tuskegee. Presently she is working on a textbook for writing classes. She is married to Professor Ben Roper and moves in academic
circles so quietly that the past, which is a source of her fiction and the means of assimilating her study, is not drowned.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Carolyn Patricia Gardner

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: Comedy of Redemption in Three Southern Writers

Approved:

[Signatures]

Co-Chairs

[Signatures]

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination: May 13, 1994