

Flannery O'Connor and Mid-Century America

by

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Abstract

Though the fiction of Flannery O'Connor has most often been studied from theological or psychological perspectives, her work is deeply entrenched in, and reflective of, the culture of the mid-twentieth-century United States. This dissertation argues that O'Connor's work makes purposeful use of the cultural issues of the mid-twentieth century, particularly in regards to the Cold War, and that O'Connor's novels and short stories are small scale representations of larger national and global concerns. The first chapter examines a pivotal scene of O'Connor's 1960 novel *The Violent Bear It Away* and argues that O'Connor uses the stereotypical characterization of a homosexual man in order to feed on mid-century American homophobia. The second chapter explores the relationship between fear of integration in the American South and fear of Communism in O'Connor's short stories that focus on race. The third and final chapter focuses on the struggle between faith and reason in O'Connor's fiction and argues that these struggles depict a similar struggle between science and religion at mid-century. With a particular focus on the culture of the Cold War, these chapters elucidate the ways in which O'Connor's fiction encompasses and utilizes the concerns of mid-century Americans.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>CW</i>	<i>Collected Works</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>The Complete Stories</i>
<i>HB</i>	<i>The Habit of Being</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Mystery and Manners</i>
<i>PJ</i>	<i>A Prayer Journal</i>
<i>VBA</i>	<i>The Violent Bear It Away</i>

Introduction

Atomic Bomb on the Oconee River: Flannery O'Connor's Small Worlds

In the fall of 1960, Robert Donner, an interviewer for the Catholic magazine *The Sign*, visited Milledgeville, Georgia. In town at the same time were several other reporters; these had come in hopes of talking with Barbara Powers, “the wife of the U-2 pilot” Francis Gary Powers, “who was shot down [. . .] over Russia and convicted of espionage.” Donner, however, was in Milledgeville for a different reason. “I had come to see Flannery O’Connor,” he writes, “one of the most highly regarded of younger American writers” (qtd. in Magee 44). While the presence of the two women in the same small Southern town was a coincidence, the event is a historical intersection between a figure whose connection to the Cold War was obvious and another figure whose fiction is intrinsically tied to the Cold War and the mid-century events that surrounded it. Ralph C. Wood writes of O’Connor that, though she was “safely situated in a Georgia hilltop farmhouse, seemingly sequestered from the terrors of history,” she was still very aware of the events of the world outside Milledgeville (1). Not only was O’Connor aware of global and national events, but she was greatly concerned with the impact of those issues on her country and her region. I argue that the global events and American concerns of the mid-twentieth century distinctly shaped O’Connor’s very focused Southern narratives.

O’Connor’s work is often studied from a theological or psychological perspective, and many scholars of her fiction focus on the Christian intentions in her writing. The result is that her very complicated observations and critiques of twentieth-century culture are pushed to the side. Even when she is studied as a Southern writer, a focus on the events of her life—her years spent with her mother on a farm in a rural Georgia, her

devout Catholicism, the scarcity of romantic partnership in her life, her struggle with lupus, her very early death—creates the impression of O'Connor as a solitary, eccentric writer who lived apart from the rest of the world. Among those who do study the significance of American culture in O'Connor's fiction, race is a frequent topic of interest, particularly to critics such as Sarah Gordon and John N. Duvall. Scholars such as Katherine H. Prown¹ and others have explored issues of gender in O'Connor's work, while Jeffrey J. Folks² has recently discussed O'Connor's politics. There are also larger studies of the cultural context and cultural implications of O'Connor's work, including Avis Hewitt and Robert Donahoo's collection of essays, *Flannery O'Connor in the Age of Terrorism*, and Jon Lance Bacon's book *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture*. But while more cultural studies of O'Connor's fiction are now becoming a part of the conversation, some of the most troubling aspects of her fiction remain so, even after years of discourse about her work. I argue that these problematic aspects of O'Connor's fiction are indicative of the conflicts and issues of mid-century America and that O'Connor's novels and short stories offer small scale representations of the national and global issues that shaped much of the mid-twentieth century.

O'Connor's Southern characters and settings exemplify the realities of mid-century Americans in the South, particularly the rural South. But readings that focus on her fiction's Southern-ness often exclude larger issues in the United States or the globe. O'Connor herself stated:

¹ *Revising Flannery O'Connor: Southern Literary Culture and the Problem of Female Authorship*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2001. Print.

² *Heartland of the Imagination: Conservative Values in American Literature from Poe to O'Connor to Haruf*. Jefferson, NC: 2012. Print.

As a fiction writer who is a Southerner, I use the idiom and the manners of the country I know, but I don't consider that I write *about* the South. So far as I am concerned as a novelist, a bomb on Hiroshima affects my judgment of life in rural Georgia, and this is not the result of taking a relative view and judging one thing by another, but of taking an absolute view and judging all things together; for a view taken in light of the absolute will include a good deal more than one taken merely in the light provided by a house-to-house survey. (*MM* 133-34)

O'Connor has long been considered, and studied as, a Southern writer, but much of the culture that impacted her fiction is that of the entire United States or of the globe. My aim in these chapters is to show the ways in which O'Connor's fiction is impacted by such specific events as the "bomb on Hiroshima" and by the attitudes of mid-century Americans.

My work elucidates the ways in which O'Connor's work is directly impacted by the Cold War, and I focus specifically on issues of homophobia, issues of race, and the relationship between science and religion at mid-century. While the Cold War is a topic that seems removed from O'Connor's stories of strange Southerners and backwoods prophets, it is in fact of enormous consequence in her fiction. O'Connor's own life was impacted by the Cold War before she completed her first novel. She was involved in activity connected to the Red Scare during her stay at the artists' colony of Yaddo in New York, writing in February of 1949, "We have been very upset at Yaddo lately and all the guests are leaving in a group Tuesday—the revolution" (*HB* 11). Sally Fitzgerald explains that the incident O'Connor mentions is about journalist Agnes Smedley, "who

by all accounts made no attempt to disguise the fact that she was a Communist Party member in good standing” (Fitzgerald, *HB* 11). Robert Lowell led a group of four Yaddo residents in meeting with the board of directors and calling for the removal of Elizabeth Ames as head of Yaddo. Biographer Brad Gooch writes of this series of events that “its least likely participant was Flannery O’Connor, ever silent, and keeping a canny distance. Yet the combination of Lowell’s mesmerizing personality, some annoyance with Mrs. Ames’s autocratic style, and a simple view of Communism as evil, all led her to take part” (168). Though O’Connor’s participation was limited, Fitzgerald asserts that the event “left a deep impression on her” (*HB* 12).

After the incident at Yaddo, Gooch writes that Helen Greene, O’Connor’s former “history professor remembers Flannery agitatedly stopping by her office in Parks Hall during the spring visit, asking reproachfully, ‘Why didn’t you teach me about Communism?’” (176). Dr. Green told O’Connor that “her major in social studies had included a great deal on the subject and that she had probably made an A on it, or surely a B+” (qtd. in Gooch 176). Gooch writes that O’Connor was “shrill, and apocalyptic, in her damning of Communism” (176). O’Connor’s personal views of Communism during the mid-century were aligned with the majority of Americans. As Wood observes, “While O’Connor joined the 1950s liberal critique of American materialism, she was not deluded about the genuine threat posed by Communism.” In fact, she “refused to sell her work to Czech and Polish publishers in 1956, vowing to keep it out of ‘Russian-occupied territory’ for fear that it might be used for propaganda purposes” (16-17). O’Connor’s Catholicism is also of note, as, in 1949, Pope Pius XII “excommunicated Catholics who

voluntarily ‘profess, defend, and spread’ Communist tenets, which were described as ‘materialistic and anti-Christian’” (Whitfield 91-92).

O’Connor’s awareness of, and occasional participation in, events at mid-century concerning Communism and the Red Scare are only biographical instances that support what I argue are strong influences on her fiction. “Although strategists and foreign policy experts feared that the Soviet Union might gain the military might and territorial expansion to achieve world domination,” Elaine Tyler May writes, “many leaders, pundits, and observers worried that the real dangers to America were internal ones: racial strife, emancipated women, class conflict, and familial disruption” (9). The worries at home during the Cold War were as real as the ones abroad and, just as many feared that the implications of Communism would indirectly impact the United States in a negative way, much of O’Connor’s work shows that impact on the characters of her fiction. Bacon argues that O’Connor did not write about the actual conflict between the United States and the U.S.S.R., but about “the cultural effects of the political narrative” (*Cold War Culture* 3). I study O’Connor’s fiction not as pieces that are *about* the Cold War, but as works that portray in brief, specific instances the cultural environment of the Cold War and the great changes to mid-century culture that were brought about by that environment. “As U.S.-Soviet relations deteriorated,” Jessica Wang writes, “the ideology of anticommunism began to dominate American politics. Communism became a bogeyman and a scapegoat for a host of deeper conflict” (2). These conflicts, exacerbated by the Cold War during the mid-century, are the subjects of my chapters.

O’Connor’s fiction is intensely regional, but although her focus is usually the rural South, her work does not neglect the rest of the country; rather, the focus of most of her

fiction is on the impact of global and national events and attitudes on the particular region and people of the South. O'Connor explains:

But there's a certain grain of stupidity that the writer of fiction can hardly do without, and this is the quality of having to stare, of not getting the point at once. The longer you look at one object, the more of the world you see in it; and it's well to remember that the serious fiction writer always writes about the whole world, no matter how limited his particular scene. For him, the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima affects life on the Oconee River, and there's not anything he can do about it. (*MM* 77)

O'Connor's fiction encompasses mid-century culture in the South and beyond it, but she portrays the events of the world by writing about how that culture impacts a few characters at a time.

Chapter I

Boys Beware: *The Violent Bear It Away* and Mid-Century American Homophobia

In 1961, Sid Davis released the social guidance film *Boys Beware*, which presents four cases, presumably fictional, of young boys who are preyed upon by homosexual men. The film begins with the story of Jimmy Barnes, a boy who hitchhikes after baseball practice and is picked up by a man named Ralph. Ralph and Jimmy become friends and begin spending more time together. Then, one day while they are fishing, Ralph shows Jimmy pornography. During this section, Ralph is described with the following narration: “What Jimmy didn’t know is that Ralph was sick – a sickness that is not visible like smallpox, but no less dangerous and contagious – a sickness of the mind. You see, Ralph was a homosexual, a person who demands an intimate relationship with members of their own sex.” Ralph then coerces Jimmy into a sexual relationship. Following this section of the film, the narrator tells a series of tales featuring more aggressive sexual predators in a segment introduced with the statement, “But all homosexuals are not passive. Some resort to violence, as in the case of Mike Merrick.” Once Mike gets in a stranger’s car, the film indicates that the boy is murdered by a homosexual man, as the narrator concludes that he “probably never realized until too late that he was riding in the shadow of death. But sometime that evening, Mike Merrick traded his life for a newspaper headline.” Mike is blindsided by the violence of this man, who had previously been very nice to him, prompting the narrator’s commentary that “the companionship, the praise, the friendly attitude dispelled any misgivings Mike might have had about going with a stranger.” *Boys Beware* then includes two more stories,

another of a man who kidnaps a boy in his car, and one of a man loitering at a public restroom. The boy of the last scene, Bobby, who has ventured away from his friends, senses danger and goes back to join them, evading what is presented as certain assault, if not also murder, as the narrator tells viewers, “Bobby had made a wise decision. It may have saved his life” (*Boys Beware*).

A novel published in 1960 tells a similar story. A fourteen-year old boy is walking down a country road when he is offered an unsolicited ride by a man dressed in a lavender shirt who is driving a lavender and cream car. As they drive, the man asks the boy questions about his family and where he lives. The stranger offers the boy marijuana, which he refuses, and alcohol, which the boy accepts. When the boy eventually passes out, the man pulls over, carries the boy into the woods, and rapes him. This narrative, so similar to that of Davis’s scare tactic film, is a pivotal scene of Flannery O’Connor’s second and final novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*.

The Violent Bear It Away is the story of Francis Marion Tarwater, who lives in the rural South with his great uncle, Old Tarwater, a self-proclaimed prophet who raises the boy for the same vocation. When Old Tarwater dies, Tarwater rejects his call to prophecy and travels to the city to stay with his uncle, Rayber, a single father, and Bishop, his mentally handicapped son. While Rayber takes Tarwater in and attempts to undo the religious teachings of his great-uncle, Tarwater struggles with his great-uncle’s claim that his first mission as a prophet is to baptize Bishop. Tarwater eventually decides to drown Bishop instead of baptizing him, though he says the words of baptism as he murders the child. He then goes back to claim his great-uncle’s land and, on his way there, is sexually assaulted by the stranger in lavender. After the rape, Tarwater accepts his call to

prophecy and, at the novel's end, the boy heads to the city to "WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY" (O'Connor, *VBA* 242).

Tarwater's rape is a horror story that brings to life many mid-twentieth century Americans' fear of homosexuality. O'Connor describes the stranger in *The Violent Bear It Away* as "a pale, lean, old-looking young man with deep hollows under his cheekbones. He had on a lavender shirt and a thin black suit and a panama hat" (*VBA* 227). The man also drives a lavender and cream-colored car, has lavender eyes, and carries a lavender handkerchief. The abundance of lavender in this scene reveals to the mid-twentieth century audience, as soon as this man appears, that he is homosexual. As David K. Johnson notes, "lavender was the color commonly associated with homosexuality" (216). O'Connor uses the color repeatedly in association with the rapist, who is commonly understood by critics as a physical incarnation of the devil. This personification of evil in the novel is problematic for many readers, particularly modern critics who desire to deflect any suggestion that O'Connor was homophobic or that the novel participates in the homophobic panic of the mid-twentieth century. The result of this is that, while interpretations of the devil's purpose in the novel are well-explored, the fact that the devil is a homosexual man remains a lingering question in O'Connor criticism. O'Connor's characterization of the rapist draws not only on mid-century stereotypes but also on mid-century convictions—that homosexuality is evil—and anxieties. In this chapter, however, I argue that O'Connor's interest is not in perpetuating these widespread beliefs and fears or in challenging them but in directing them to her own purposes.

Tarwater's rape has often been studied as a turning point in the novel, as a catalyst for Tarwater's realization of his vocation, and as an act that forces Tarwater into a physical confrontation with real evil. These arguments are supported by O'Connor herself, who stated, "In my stories a reader will find that the devil accomplishes a good deal of groundwork that seems to be necessary before grace is effective. Tarwater's final vision could not have been brought off if he hadn't met the man in the lavender and cream-colored car" (*MM* 117). Use of the phrase "homosexual rape" is not rare in criticism of the novel, but actual homosexuality is rarely mentioned in the treatment of this character. When it is, the focus is swiftly turned back to the implications the rape has on the broad scope of the novel. Sarah Gordon claims, "the homosexual rape of young Tarwater in *The Violent Bear It Away* marks the turning point for Tarwater's conversion" (213). Frederick Asals uses the phrase "homosexual rapist" when describing incarnations of evil in the novel (169). Many critics, in fact, use these phrases, or use the word "homosexual" to describe the rapist, but these terms are most often used to indicate that this rape is perpetrated by a male and that the victim is another male; the word is rarely mentioned in terms of the implications of a homosexual character representing the devil. Robert Coles's assertion that Tarwater's rape is "a deftly handled and very funny roadside seduction scene" (144) is the most troubling critical claim made about the story³, but even arguments much more compelling than Coles's either struggle to address the issue of the rapist's homosexuality or they choose not to address it. A recent collection of essays, edited by Susan Srigley, for example, is dedicated solely to this particular novel, but the few references to Tarwater's rape are mostly theological

³ The stranger is friendly to Tarwater, but the boy is unconscious when he is carried into the woods, and his reaction after the assault indicated that he is devastated and terrified by what has happened to him.

readings, with the exception of one psychological approach⁴. Though the events surrounding the rape and the results of Tarwater's encounter with the rapist are carefully explicated in various ways throughout criticism of the novel, the rape itself and the characterization of the rapist remain a critical puzzle, and this is the gap I seek to address by considering cultural context.

Critics such as Wood address O'Connor's Catholicism and its potential impact on a homosexual character and a homosexual rapist, but apart from examining O'Connor's own intellectual and religious ideas about homosexuality or her own friendships with people who were homosexual, little attention is given to the context of the time frame in which O'Connor created this character who is such a stark stereotype of the very figure that many Americans feared. But none of the arguments launched in defense of O'Connor negate the fact that she chose stereotypical homosexuality to represent evil in her novel. My own goal is not to assess O'Connor's personal attitude toward homosexuality, but rather to understand how and why she uses this plot and the use for which she employs it. Attempts to study this novel while sparing its author from the charge that she participates in the demonization of homosexuality create more critical questions than they answer; it is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to create a reading of the devil in lavender that is not offensive to modern sensibilities or that does not paint O'Connor as having actively participated in mid-century homophobia when she crafted this character. But this does not change the way the character is portrayed or the stereotypes in which this character participates. In a culture in which "pervert" was a term synonymous with "homosexual,"

⁴ Srigley, Susan, ed. *Dark Faith: New Essays on Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2012. Print.

and in which pedophilia and sexual assault were often synonymous with homosexuality, O'Connor's novel literally demonizes a homosexual man.

While few critics address the concept of homosexuality in the novel, fewer still discuss O'Connor's prominent use of the color lavender in association with the rapist. It is plausible that many readers view the use of lavender merely as a tool to confirm that what happens to Tarwater is in fact a sexual assault, since the rape is not narrated, but implied. In fact, more attention is paid to descriptions of the color lavender in association with the rapist than to the rape itself. Once Tarwater is unconscious, the assault happens quickly and without a witness. But if the color were read as marking the stranger as homosexual in order to identify what happens to Tarwater in the woods, is it likely that more critics would make note of that fact. Instead, the color is generally used in criticism only as a descriptor for the rapist, not in discussion of the color itself. It seems, in fact, that the scene of Tarwater's assault would be universally understood as rape even if the color lavender were not present. O'Connor writes that Tarwater

leaned his head against the glass and his heavy lids closed. After a few minutes the stranger reached over and pushed his shoulder but he did not stir. The man then began to drive faster. He drove about five miles, speeding, before he espied a turnoff into a dirt road [...] He was breathing rapidly and sweating. He got out and ran around the car and Tarwater fell out of it like a loosely-filled sack. The man picked him up and carried him into the woods. (*VBA* 231)

Once the rapist carries Tarwater into the woods, however, the narrator stays by the road. O'Connor continues,

Nothing passed on the dirt road and the sun continued to move with a brilliant blandness on its way. The woods were silent except for an occasional trill or caw. The air itself might have been drugged. Now and then a large silent floating bird would glide into the treetops and after a moment rise again. In about an hour, the stranger emerged alone and look furtively about him [...] He got quickly into his car and sped away.

(O'Connor, *VBA* 231)

The stranger drugs Tarwater, carries him into the woods, is gone for an hour, and returns with souvenirs (Tarwater's hat and corkscrew bottle opener), looking as though he had "refreshed himself on blood" (231). When Tarwater awakens, he is naked except for his shoes. "When Tarwater woke up, [...] He saw first his thin white legs stretching in front of him," O'Connor writes. "He was propped up against a log that lay across a small open space between two very tall trees. His hands were loosely tied with a lavender handkerchief which his friend had thought of as an exchange for the hat. His clothes were piled neatly by his side. Only his shoes were on him" (*VBA* 231-2).

Tarwater's reaction is also intense enough to reveal that he has certainly been violated. After Tarwater awakens, O'Connor writes, "The boy's mouth twisted open and to the side as if it were going to displace itself permanently [...] His expression seemed to contract until it reached some point beyond rage or pain. Then a loud dry cry tore out of him" (*VBA* 232). As Ralph C. Wood points out, "Although O'Connor does not directly depict the pedophilic rape, her narrator makes clear that it is not only a sexual but also a demonic and vampiric act" (243). O'Connor continues that Tarwater "began to tear savagely at the lavender handkerchief until he had shredded it off. Then he got into his

clothes so quickly that when he finished he had half of them on backwards and did not notice. He stood starting down at the spot where the displaced leaves showed him to have lain.” After this, Tarwater sets fire to the area, burning the scene of his assault and “burning every spot the stranger could have touched” (232). Though the rape itself is not narrated, the aftermath of the assault is, and Tarwater’s reactions make clear what has happened in the woods, also making clear how distressed he is by his experience. Therefore, while the color lavender is associated with homosexuality, it is not necessary to aid the reader’s understanding of what has taken place, leaving the question of why O’Connor saturated this character with the color lavender.

When the color is discussed in criticism, it is almost always used as a way to identify the rapist, who has no name, or it is mentioned in passing. Ralph C. Wood emphasizes the color when he points out that the rapist “drives a lavender car, wears a lavender shirt, carries a lavender handkerchief, and has lavender eyes,” but Wood never makes another statement as to why he finds the use of the color important enough to list the uses of it (242-3). Wood seems to imply that the heavy use of lavender is meant to create a stereotypical appearance of a homosexual man, as he writes that the rapist is “a deliberate caricature” (243). But in the world of O’Connor’s fiction, in which caricatures are the norm and exaggerated characteristics are abundant, the identification of the rapist as a man covered in and surrounded by the color lavender draws attention to something significant beyond the realm of physical description. In *The Violent Bear It Away*, O’Connor’s use of the color lavender allows her not only to depict the rapist as a homosexual, but, more importantly, it enables her to give the audience an immediate signal that he should be feared. The stranger in lavender is the devil and, though he has

been identifiable throughout the novel in his non-corporeal form, when he appears in the flesh, O'Connor uses the cultural climate of the 1950s and 1960s to depict someone audiences would find immediately recognizable as a fearful figure, one they believed to possess the unquestionable capacity to perform acts of evil: a homosexual.

Because my research is rooted in an understanding of the cultural climate of the mid-twentieth century, the reading of Tarwater's rape must be rooted there, as well. Wood writes that, "though safely situated in a Georgia hilltop farmhouse, seemingly sequestered from the terrors of history, O'Connor detected the demonry that was everywhere in the air" (1). Though often perceived as having been removed from much of mainstream American culture, O'Connor was just the opposite, remaining thoroughly engaged in the culture of her society, both in rural Georgia and in the rest of the country. Gary Ciuba, in a reading of Tarwater's rape that is not theological, but rather psychological, interprets the character of the rapist by reading him as one reads the psyche of perpetrators of sexual assault. Citing James Gilligan, Ciuba asserts that, "a man's rape of another man is meant as a profoundly symbolic act of shame. Insecure about his own manhood, the predator views sexual violence as a way to assert his power and unsex his victim (179-81)" ("Not His Son" 79). Though Ciuba then refers to the stranger as a pedophile, he does not mention homosexuality, lending to an understanding of his critique as one rooted in modern ideas of sexual assault that assert that sexual orientation is not a factor in rape. A man who rapes another man is not necessarily gay; he is instead, as Ciuba mentions, concerned with masculinity, power, and dominance. While this modern understanding of rape is, of course, accurate and reasonable, as opposed to a mid-century understanding of male-male rape as a homosexual activity,

reading the rape in *The Violent Bear It Away* in such a way is too lenient on the novel. The portrayal of the stranger does little, if anything, to indicate that he is concerned with his masculinity. In fact, the opposite is true. The color lavender is abundantly displayed, noting the character's sexual orientation as well as his adherence to feminine appearance. Marshall Bruce Gentry writes that, "the rapist [...] is a stereotype of effeminacy" ("Gender" 67). The rapist is not portrayed as being at all concerned with masculinity; rather, he is portrayed as a stereotypical, effeminate "lavender lad," and impressing a modern day reading of sexual assault on this passage makes a cultural reading of *The Violent Bear It Away* problematic. As Richard Giannone notes, "O'Connor's presentation of rape draws less on the modern understanding of rape as a political crime (with its attendant sympathy for the victim) and more on the timeless spiritual effects of this notorious weapon of degradation" (*Hermit Novelist* 162). Just as a reading of the scene for its implications on the rest of the novel must not incorporate modern understandings of rape, a reading of the characterization of the rapist should not rely on modern ideas, either.

Johnson makes similar comments pertaining to a modern reading of homosexuality. He writes that, "imposing present-day notions of sexuality—particularly the notion that persons are essentially born either heterosexual or homosexual—back onto this period further distorts our understanding" (Johnson 12). So it is, too, with a reflective look at O'Connor's writing of *The Violent Bear It Away*. A reading of the novel that incorporates modern, academic views of homosexuality distorts the characterization of O'Connor's devil. This is a character crafted purposefully to participate in the culture in which the novel was written and published, but reading the character in that way leaves

little room for O'Connor or the novel to be considered tolerant or understanding or accepting of homosexuality.

The critics who do address the rape in *The Violent Bear It Away* often attempt to create distance between mid-century readings of sexual assault and modern notions of rape and the victims of rape. This occurs when P. Travis Kroeker writes of Tarwater's rape as "a mercy that burns" but quickly follows with the statement, "I am not suggesting, of course, that the violent rape is a humanly mediated divine act, but here O'Connor herself provides us an interesting account." Kroeker then lists two of O'Connor's own statements about Tarwater's "violation," substituting her words for his own and thereby enabling himself to situate the rape as a "divine act" while simultaneously stating that, "of course," he would never use such a phrase to describe the rape of a fourteen-year-old boy (145). His use of O'Connor's words in place of his own is understandable, as writing about a pedophilic sexual assault as an act of divine intervention for the greater good of the main character is horrifying and offensive at best. Yet this is the very conclusion many critics of O'Connor draw about the novel and, therefore, writing about it becomes very problematic, particularly for modern audiences and modern critics. Biographer Brad Gooch notes of the stranger in lavender that, "in [O'Connor's] extreme theology, this pederast Satan triggers grace" (309). Because so many critics seek to explain this moment of grace, but do not wish to address the fact that the moment is brought about by the rape of a fourteen-year-old boy and the demonization of homosexuality, the criticism usually either leaves homosexuality out of the discussion or defends O'Connor's writing by using her own words from letters and lectures.

Scholars who do address the portrayal of the rapist as a homosexual man are usually quick to defend O'Connor to modern readers so that the novel is not read as a demonization of homosexuality and O'Connor herself is not perceived as homophobic. The choice to defend O'Connor also enables scholars to avoid discussing the problematic nature of reading Tarwater's rape as one of O'Connor's moments of opportunity for redemption. While Kroeker replaces his own words with O'Connor's in order to soften his assertion that the rape is an act of grace, Wood defends O'Connor herself, writing that the rapist is "a deliberate caricature" and, therefore, "is hardly her realistic portrayal of homosexuals—several of whom O'Connor counted as close friends [...] As a single woman who had several lesbian friends, O'Connor had no desire to demonize homosexuality" (243-4). Writing that, "the Devil is a devouring sodomite decked in mauve," Wood recognizes that the devil is portrayed as a homosexual man, but he claims that this "deliberate caricature" is meant to make the rape violent enough to affect Tarwater. He agrees with the popular conclusion that the rape is necessary for Tarwater's conversion, arguing that, "only such a crude sodomizing can bring the recalcitrant Tarwater to his senses," at the same time that he defends O'Connor against accusations of homophobia (243). He writes:

If she had sought to depict the typical homosexual as a satanic pederast, O'Connor would have dressed the rapist in conventional clothes, made him a faithful church member, perhaps even a priest or husband, then had him carefully seduce the boy into an experience of alleged 'spiritual intimacy.' She does the exact opposite, resorting to the ancient Christian

conviction that evil grotesquely no less than subtly mocks and apes the good. (243)

While Wood accurately observes the idea many mid-century Americans had of homosexual men who were sneakily difficult to identify, such as Ralph in *Boys Beware*, O'Connor's caricature still participates in many stereotypes about homosexual men, most importantly that they are *pedophilic* sexual predators. Her choice to make the rapist a caricature does not negate her use of homosexuality as representative of the devil. It is important to note that I do not argue whether or not O'Connor herself was homophobic or participatory in mid-century homophobia; rather, I argue that she *uses* mid-century homophobia in the character of the devil in *The Violent Bear It Away*. Her own beliefs about and comments on homosexuality provide evidence of her participation in the culture and her awareness of how well homophobia would work to spark fear in her readers.

O'Connor's friendships with homosexual women, though they complicate a reading of the author's ideas, also do not negate the use of homophobia in her fiction. In *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, John D'Emilio writes that it was believed, in the mid-century, that "lesbians were organizing cells in high schools and colleges to prey upon the young; they infiltrated the WACS and the WAVES, where they seduced the pliant and 'raped' the unwilling" (44). O'Connor was very familiar with the WAVES, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services, as Georgia State College for Women was one of four schools chosen for on-site training, with as many as fifteen thousand of them present on campus at GSCW between 1943 and 1945 (Gooch 97). O'Connor found a large source for comedy in these WAVES and was very aware of their

presence on campus, even using it as inspiration for the cartoons she produced while at college. As Gooch writes in his biography of O'Connor, "Mary Flannery skipped the patriotism and went straight for the comedy; in the Waves, she found her most reliable cartoon topic" (98). Of any alleged lesbianism present in the WAVES, D'Emilio writes that, as punishment,

the military generally bypassed the court martial proceedings required for a dishonorable discharge and instead used administrative mechanisms that terminated members as 'undesirable.' This route eliminated the need to substantiate charges with hard facts [...] Though technically less serious than a bad conduct separation, the undesirable label carried similar punitive effects after discharge. Homosexuals and lesbians who left the military under these conditions carried a burden that one study called "a life stigma." (45)

Incidents such as this one eventually hit close to home for O'Connor, as this is very likely what happened to her close friend Betty Hester.

A large number of the letters collected after O'Connor's death and published in the volume *The Habit of Being* were written to Betty Hester, a friend known at the time the letters were published as "A" in order to protect her privacy. The two had a close friendship, begun and maintained mainly through letters. During their correspondence, O'Connor eventually learned of what Hester called her "'history of horror.'" After a difficult childhood and adolescence, Hester had joined the military and related to O'Connor that, in Germany, "she was dishonorably discharged from the military for sexual indiscretion, having been intimately involved with another woman" (Gooch 281).

As Gooch notes, “such incidents concerning lesbians were treated with special virulence in the Cold War period” and “introductory lectures warned newly enlisted women about ‘confirmed’ lesbians, and encouraged informing on them” (281). O’Connor’s response to Hester’s confession is easily read as a defense of O’Connor’s tolerance of homosexuality. She wrote: “I can’t write you fast enough and tell you that it doesn’t make the slightest bit of difference in my opinion of you, which is the same as it was, and that is: based solidly on complete respect” (quoted in Gooch, 281-82). O’Connor’s awareness of the suffering of her friend at the hand of Communist witch-hunting in regards to homosexuality may well play a part in her decisions about the crafting of the character of the homosexual man in *The Violent Bear It Away*. This correspondence with Hester took place in 1956 and is likely to have left an impression on O’Connor as a way in which the cultural climate of the mid-century had negatively affected someone she cared about. Though O’Connor’s biography is not as useful in terms of her characterization of homosexuality or her intent or lack thereof of demonizing it, it does place her portrayal in context and provides evidence that, despite the critical view of O’Connor as a secluded writer on her Georgia farm at Andalusia, she was very much a participant in mid-century culture and was well aware of the cultural climate in regards to homosexuality.

Wood also defends O’Connor’s devout Catholicism in regards to homosexuality, explaining that, “the church catholic has regarded it as one sin among many, and far from the most egregious” (244). He explains that “O’Connor regarded homoerotic yearnings as sinless unless acted upon. Like all other inherited conditions that tempt us to transgression, abnormal sexual proclivities must be resisted, disciplined, mortified” (249). O’Connor’s letter to Betty Hester after Hester’s confession indicates this view.

O'Connor wrote to Hester, "Where you are wrong is in saying that you *are* a history of horror. The meaning of the Redemption is precisely that we do not have to *be* our history" (emphasis O'Connor's, quoted in Gooch 282). Although O'Connor suggested to Hester "that they not tell Regina [O'Connor's mother] as 'she wouldn't understand,'" the women's close friendship continued until O'Connor's death (Gooch 282).

Wood's explanations of O'Connor's friendships and her religious beliefs are accurate but with all of this taken into consideration, O'Connor's own views of homosexuality are complicated, at best. She had friends who were lesbians and she did not judge Betty Hester for her past sexual relationships. In fact, when Hester offered to discontinue their friendship to avoid O'Connor's involvement in any scandal, O'Connor replied, "I'm obscure enough. Nobody knows or cares who I see. If it created any tension in you that I don't understand, then use your own judgment, but understand that from my point of view, you are always wanted" (quoted in Gooch 282). O'Connor was very sympathetic to the situation of her friend and her friend's pain must have made her personally aware of the effects of the persecution of homosexual people in the military. Her portrayal of the rapist in *The Violent Bear It Away*, however, is straightforward in its stereotyping and demonization. O'Connor's personal relationships provide evidence for her own acquaintance with the public fear of homosexuality, but they do not keep her from using that fear in the creation of the novel's devil.

Hester's friendship with O'Connor has been the subject of scrutiny, and O'Connor's own sexuality has been questioned, as well, as she never married and had few romantic encounters during her lifetime. Jean Cash writes that, "rumors about O'Connor's possible lesbianism have long circulated in Milledgeville, fueled by jealousy

and desire to spice small-town lives with salacious gossip” (27).⁵ Cash also mentions O’Connor’s relationship with Betty Hester, as well as her friendship with Maryat Lee, a woman who was bisexual and professed a romantic interest in O’Connor that, though received politely, was not reciprocated. Another mention of lesbianism in O’Connor’s letters is in a letter to Betty Hester about another of O’Connor’s friends, referred to as “B.” O’Connor writes, “The last letter she wrote to me she said she had ‘lost her homosexuality,’ and was trying to be an artist. She is much absorbed with writing plays. As to the homosexuality I don’t know if that is really a trouble of hers or if she is just like the rest of those arty people in the Village, who feel that all kinds of experimentation is necessary to discovering life and whatnot” (*HB* 202). Here, O’Connor is obviously friends with B, though it does not seem to be a close friendship. O’Connor’s language about the woman’s homosexuality makes it unclear whether O’Connor views lesbianism as a “trouble” or whether her friend has trouble with her sexuality. Either way, the effect of O’Connor’s commentary on “those arty people in the Village” may be dismissive of homosexuality, but it does not seem critical of it. In fact, O’Connor’s tone indicates that she is more critical of the “arty”-ness of the people in the Village than of their sexuality. Despite her friendships with lesbians, however, O’Connor wrote the following to Beverly Brunson in 1954: “As for lesbianism I regard that as any other form of uncleanness. Purity is the twentieth centuries [*sic*] dirty word but it is the most mysterious of the virtues and not to be discussed in a light fashion even with ones [*sic*] own and surely not with strangers” (*CW* 925). While O’Connor’s own opinions about homosexuality seem mixed and perhaps limited to action rather than inclination, O’Connor’s relationships

⁵ Even Cash assumes that lesbianism would be a slanderous accusation, as these rumors were “fueled by jealousy,” implying that being a lesbian would be a very negative thing in Milledgeville. Even in a modern article about O’Connor’s life, the rumors of O’Connor’s possible lesbianism are categorized as insulting.

with these women do point to evidence of her intense involvement in and awareness of the cultural perception of homosexuality in the 1950s. No matter her personal feelings and beliefs about homosexuality or about her friends, however, *The Violent Bear It Away* does demonize homosexuality, quite purposefully, and there is far more similarity between the rapist and the characters of *Boys Beware* than between the rapist and a modern understanding of perpetrators of sexual assault or pedophilia.

Boys Beware exemplifies public opinion of homosexuality in the mid-century and depicts situations that are strongly parallel to the rape passage of *The Violent Bear It Away*. *Boys Beware* does not seek to warn all children and young people of the realistic dangers of pedophiles and perpetrators of sexual assault—significantly, no females are warned of anything in this film, as the title suggests—but warns young males of the danger of homosexuals, thereby equating male homosexuality with pedophilia and sexual assault. Davis created the film in cooperation with the Inglewood Police Department and school district and, as its title indicates, *Boys Beware* is a series of cautionary tales about young boys who are preyed upon by homosexual men. Megan Stemm-Wade writes that the genre of the “social hygiene film,” which she also refers to as the social guidance film, was “shown in countless American classrooms from 1946 through the 1970s” (611). While most of these films focused on proper social behavior such as dating and etiquette, Davis made a series of films warning the public of dangers that could befall children and teenagers, and *Boys Beware* was one of these. In Davis’s obituary in the *New York Times* in 2006, Margalit Fox writes that Davis’s “cautionary movies [...] sought to terrify an entire generation of young people into straitlaced middle-class obedience” and that “every transgression—a swig from a bottle, a drag on a cigarette—leads to swift and

certain doom, usually in under a half-hour.” *Boys Beware* focuses mainly on the delinquency of adults and what young boys should do to thwart the attempts of homosexual men to assault them⁶.

Boys Beware echoes public opinion of the decade before its production, a time period in which J. Edgar Hoover, then director of the FBI, made the statement, “The sex offender has replaced the kidnapper as a threat to the peace of mind of the parents of America” (quoted in Johnson 56). *Boys Beware* rides the wave of this mid-century “moral panic,” as Johnson calls it (56). The film seeks to warn young boys of the tricky nature and intense danger of homosexual men and is narrated by Lieutenant Williams, who describes himself as “a police officer attached to the juvenile division.” The sentiments of Lt. Williams throughout the film echo those of a mid-century Washington police officer who stated, “Parents may think their boys are safe from being molested as long as they stay away from certain parks and restaurants where perverts are known to loiter [...] But the real danger may be in a boy’s own neighborhood” (Johnson 57). At the same time that the concept of the nuclear family was being lauded in American society, that same safe environment was threatened by the invasion of sexual predators. *Boys Beware*, in fact, takes place in very pleasant, well-groomed neighborhoods, parks, and towns, all close to the homes of the boys the film features. The fear already long present for parents in the mid-century becomes real in Davis’s film, which not only reinforces stereotypes like the ones present in O’Connor’s novel and in mid-century

⁶ Fox writes that *Boys Beware* has “aged strikingly badly” (Fox). Indeed, the film is easily found on internet websites that mock its dated views of homosexuality, are shocked at its treatment of gay men and the language used to describe them, and find the claims made in the film so outlandish and offensive that the film is unbelievable for many modern viewers. For the mid-century audience, however, the events of the film were believed to be very realistic.

culture, but also presents those stereotypes as fact, solidifying all of the audience's fears and suspicions about homosexual men.

In the opening sequence of *Boys Beware*, the description of Ralph is a concise statement that is indicative of a host of negative stereotypes that shaped mid-century perception of homosexuality. "What Jimmy didn't know," the narrator says, "is that Ralph was sick—a sickness that was not visible like smallpox, but no less dangerous and contagious—a sickness of the mind. You see, Ralph was a homosexual, a person who demands an intimate relationship with members of their own sex." This brief description includes a number of signifiers of danger that not only solidified the preconceived notions of homosexuality held by a mid-century audience, but also made them real in this cinematic tale of horror about what could allegedly happen to any young boy who did not know how to recognize homosexuality.

The film first identifies homosexuality as a sickness, a statement that aligned with the American Psychiatric Association's 1952 definition in "its first official catalog of mental disorders," *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I)*. In this first version of the *DSM*, "homosexuality was listed among the sociopathic personality disturbances" (Miller 225). In 1968, the APA revised its catalog and released *DSM-II*, in which "homosexuality was moved to the category of 'other non-psychotic mental disorders,' where it was classified along with fetishism, pedophilia, transvestism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, sadism, and masochism" (225). It was not until December 15, 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association made "the landmark decision that 'homosexuality [...] by itself does not constitute a mental disorder'" (232). Davis's film relies on information that was supported by the leading psychiatrists of the day and by

DSM-I and, though Davis's film worked hard to push the idea of homosexuality as a disease on the public, it only reinforced the same ideas that were already in place, greatly due to the definition of homosexuality used by medical professionals.

O'Connor herself may have also attributed homosexuality to illness, as she once referred to it as a "condition." On May 5, 1956, in a letter to Better Hester, O'Connor wrote of a young man who had been sending her things to read. She wrote that his first two letters had been "sane," but that the last two she had received were not. They were "full of abuse, obscenity [*sic*], real hate" (*HB* 155). She continues, "I wrote him that since there was nothing I could do for him, I saw no reason to keep up the correspondence. The letters were filthy but terribly pathetic as well. There's nothing you can do for such people but pray for them. The boy is homosexual and apparently schizophrenic (sp?) [*sic*] to boot and he tried to make you feel personally responsible for both conditions in him" (156). O'Connor's reason for discontinuing her correspondence with the young man was the nature of his letters, but her description of him is one of the instances in which O'Connor herself addresses the concept of homosexuality. Because she describes it as a condition and connects it with the boy's supposed schizophrenia, it is likely that she, too, accepted the popular scientific view of the 1950s that homosexuality was comparable to a mental illness.

Boys Beware goes beyond the APA's definition of the sickness of homosexuality, however, claiming that it is infectious and contagious and that, by associating with Ralph, Jimmy is susceptible to catching the sickness of homosexuality himself. This idea was perhaps ironically compounded by the work of Alfred C. Kinsey, the biologist and zoologist who presented the "first significant challenge to the 'gay is sick' orthodoxy"

with his two books – *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) (Miller 225). The Kinsey Reports, Neil Miller asserts, “demolished conventional thinking about sex, revealing a variety of sexual practices, including homosexuality, to be far more widespread than sex researchers and the general public had ever imagined” (225-26). Miller writes that John Cheever “wrote in his journal that 1948—the year *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was published—was ‘the year everybody in the United States was worried about homosexuality’” (228). At the same time that prominent psychiatrists insisted that homosexuality was a sickness, and even claimed to be able to cure it, the Kinsey Reports presented homosexuality as much more prevalent in society than most Americans believed it was. This combination resulted in ideas like Davis’s, that homosexuality was a contagious sickness with the potential to pervade and pervert American society. In the mid-century, John D’Emilio writes, “homosexuality became an epidemic infecting the nation, actively spread by communists to sap the strength of the next generation” (44). Johnson also notes this, writing, “Police cautioned that homosexuality was a learned behavior, easily acquired by malleable children. ‘This form of depravity is developed by association of children with perverts, rather than being born with the defect, as it is popularly supposed,’ one officer argued” (57). The same is true of the fear created by *Boys Beware*. The boys of the film are not only susceptible to being assaulted, but also by associating with homosexual men, they place themselves in danger of becoming homosexual, and therefore mentally ill and dangerous, themselves.

Boys Beware also identifies homosexuality as a dangerous sickness, one comparable to smallpox. Smallpox was not eradicated until 1979, so it was still present

and frightening to mid-century audiences. In fact, the fear of smallpox was tied in some ways to the fear of Communism felt during the Cold War era. D. A. Henderson writes that, “the Soviet Union’s sophisticated, clandestine biological weapons program developed rapidly after World War II” and that “Soviet policy makers considered the smallpox virus to be the ideal weapon for inflicting large numbers of civilian casualties” (272). This association with fear of a Soviet Union biological weapon attack only adds to the fearful implications of smallpox. In 1958, however, the USSR became the other major country beside the United States to launch a program to eradicate smallpox (Henderson 61). So while there was fear of smallpox being used against the United States by the Soviet Union’s biological weapons program, scientists were also working at mid-century to eradicate the disease.

The specific mention of smallpox in *Boys Beware*, therefore, carries multiple implications as a contagion, as an association with foreign attack, and as something that society sought to eliminate entirely. In the same way scientists worked to eradicate smallpox, many members of society worked in the mid-century to eradicate homosexuality. Apart from the hunt for homosexuality that took place in the federal government during the period of McCarthyism, which I discuss later in this chapter, numerous campaigns were launched, particularly in the late 1940s and the 1950s, to rid society of homosexuality. Government and law enforcement officials launched initiatives to rid cities of homosexuality, targeting gay bars, parks, and neighborhoods known for homosexual populations.⁷ Targeting the infected was their primary means of eradicating the spread of the disease of homosexuality, which Davis’s narrator clearly warns of when

⁷ Campaigns to eliminate homosexuality by law enforcement are covered at length in two particularly thorough sources: Neil Miller’s *Out of the Past* and David K. Johnson’s *The Lavender Scare*.

he implies that homosexuality is even worse than smallpox because, while it is “no less dangerous or contagious,” it cannot be seen and therefore those who are infected with it are able to hide it while they spread it. Campaigns to arrest homosexuals cropped up around the country in the middle of the twentieth century and often resulted in the arrest and harassment of many gay and lesbian Americans⁸. The mentality that homosexual men were sexual criminals was not uncommon, nor was the notion that association with homosexuals could cause one to “turn” gay. Johnson writes that the term “sexual psychopath” was often used for homosexuals, feeding the idea that “homosexuals were sick, could not control themselves, and needed to recruit new members to their ranks” (56-7).

The narration of *Boys Beware* also defines a homosexual as “a person who demands an intimate relationship with members of their own sex.” The word “demands” here indicates sexual assault. There is no implication in the film that homosexual men might choose to find consenting sexual partners; there is only the stated fact that homosexual men seek to force young boys into same-sex relationships—that they intend to rape them or, at the very least, coerce them into sex. According to the film, by definition, a homosexual man is a person to be greatly feared, as he is a mentally ill, contagious, dangerous, predator who seeks to force others into homosexual relationships. It is of note, also, that the story of Ralph and Jimmy has fearful implications for young boys in addition to sexual assault; once Jimmy tells his parents about what has been happening, Ralph is arrested but Jimmy is also in trouble and is placed on probation. In

⁸ Neil Miller writes of one such campaign in 1955 in Sioux City, Iowa when “some 20 gay and bisexual men were rounded up and committed to the Mount Pleasant state mental hospital ‘until cured’ in the wake of the brutal sexual murders of an eight-year boy and an eighteen-month-old girl” (249). Though none of the men were ever found to be connected to the murders, they were treated as criminals because of their sexuality, and this is not the only such event that took place at mid-century.

the film, even being a victim can place someone like Jimmy in trouble with the authorities because he was involved in homosexual activity. A Washington police officer of the time cautioned parents, “you may have a son in his teens who suddenly becomes quite affluent ... Under questioning, he finally confesses that he is receiving money from some man for permitting acts of perversion” (qtd. in Johnson 57). The consequences of homosexuality in the film are dire for both victim and perpetrator, as even the victim becomes a perpetrator, as well, because he didn’t spot Ralph for what he was earlier. As Lt. Williams states, “You see, Jimmy hadn’t recognized Ralph’s approach soon enough. When Ralph first asked Jimmy to go fishing alone, he should have discussed it with his parents or teacher” (*Boys Beware*). Jimmy is at fault in this film not only for participating in homosexual activity with Ralph, but also for not recognizing Ralph’s tricks, sinister motives, and signs of mental illness. Following this section of the film, the narrator tells a series of tales of more aggressive sexual predators, beginning with the story of Mike, who is murdered after he gets a ride from a stranger. *Boys Beware* includes two more stories, another of a man who kidnaps a boy in his car, and one of a man loitering at a public restroom who follows a young boy⁹. The boy senses danger and goes back to join his friends, evading what is presented as certain assault and/or death.

It is during this period of homosexual panic that O’Connor wrote *The Violent Bear It Away*. O’Connor’s caricature makes the rapist of the novel not only instantly identifiable as a homosexual man, but also as a person who is to be greatly feared by the public—a person with a mental illness who is capable not only of spreading that disease

⁹ It is in this section that Lt. Williams narrates that, “public restrooms can often be a hangout for the homosexual” (*Boys Beware*). The repeated use of the phrase “the homosexual” places homosexual men as other than “normal” people and further demonizes them, making them fearful menaces of society whose goal is to prey on young boys.

but also of committing acts of horrific sexual violence and, in this case, that is exactly what the character does. This portrayal in O'Connor's novel is easily read as buying into and reinforcing the stereotypes present in mid-century America but it is more solidly a utilization of those stereotypes to tap into the fear instilled in society through public statements such as those made in *Boys Beware*. Like Jimmy and Mike in the film, young Tarwater accepts a ride from a man he initially doesn't fear. O'Connor writes that Tarwater had not waved down the car "but when he saw it stop, he began to run forward. By the time he reached it, the driver had leaned over and opened the door. It was a lavender and cream colored car. The boy scrambled in without looking at the driver and closed the door and they drove on" (O'Connor, *VBA* 227). Unlike Jimmy and Mike, Tarwater's feelings quickly change, but this is due to his recognition of the stranger as a physical representation of the previously non-corporeal devil that has influenced him throughout the novel. But Tarwater's discomfort dissipates as the stranger asks him questions and offers him alcohol. Once Tarwater loses consciousness, the stranger rapes him. This story is very similar to the stories of *Boys Beware*. A young boy is not afraid to accept a ride from a stranger, the stranger is very nice to him, and then the stranger sexually assaults him, or, in the case of Mike in the film, also murders him.

O'Connor's use of such stereotypical fears of mid-century American society places Tarwater in the very situation that the population of the country imagined and the same situation portrayed in Davis's film. *Boys Beware* begins with the observation of a young boy hitchhiking on the side of the road. The narrator says, "That looks innocent enough, doesn't it? Lots of young people hitchhike. Seems like a good way to get from one place to another. But sometimes there are dangers involved that never meet the eye"

(*Boys Beware*). From the moment Tarwater gets in the car, mid-century fears of homosexuality have been brought into play, as this young boy accepts a ride from a stranger, especially a stranger in a lavender car. The perceived threat of homosexuality plays out further after the rape, when Tarwater awakens to find himself naked except for his shoes and, O'Connor writes, his hands "loosely tied with a lavender handkerchief." Beyond the significance of its color, here the handkerchief takes on a new threat, as it is "loosely tied" and therefore unlikely to have been a physical restraint; in fact, O'Connor writes that the rapist thought of it as "an exchange" for taking Tarwater's hat as a souvenir (VBA 232). Instead of actually being used to restrain Tarwater, the handkerchief represents the ability of a homosexual man to prey on a boy who previously did not fear him, reinforcing how wrong Tarwater was to trust this man and how dangerous a stereotypically effeminate, lavender-clad man can be.

Tarwater has also ignored the same sorts of warnings that *Boys Beware* gives young boys. O'Connor writes that Tarwater's great uncle had told him, "You are the kind of boy [...] that the devil is always going to be offering to assist, to give you a smoke or a drink or a ride, and to ask you your bidnis. You had better mind how you take up with strangers" (VBA 58). Indeed, this stranger offers Tarwater a smoke, gives him alcohol, gives him a ride, and asks him his business before he assaults him in the woods. The stranger asks Tarwater, "Live around here?" and "Going somewhere?" (227). The man also asks where Tarwater's parents live and, after being told the boy has no parents, O'Connor writes, "Got no folks, huh?" the man said again. "What road do you live on?" (229). The stranger's questions about Tarwater's life precede him giving him liquor and offering him drugs. The narrator of *Boys Beware* describes Ralph, saying, "The stranger

was a good listener, too, and it only seemed minutes before they pulled up in front of Jimmy's house." The facts of Tarwater's assault are strikingly similar to his great uncle's warning and to the facts of the assaults in Davis's film, displaying O'Connor's use of the common American understanding of the horror story of homosexual predators.

Boys Beware ends with the warning, "One may never know when the homosexual is about. He may appear normal and it may be too late when you discover he is mentally ill." This section of narration produces even greater fear by instructing the audience on the difficulties of identifying homosexuality. O'Connor's presentation of the rapist does not create such a mystery, but rather identifies homosexuality by color and by stereotypical action. While viewers of *Boys Beware* may have been afraid that they would be unable to identify a homosexual were they to encounter one, O'Connor's audience is unlikely to be surprised in this way. Tarwater, of course, does not embody the same sort of cultural understandings of which many of the viewers of *Boys Beware* were well versed. He is from the backwoods of Tennessee, has never been to school, and has presumably never encountered a homosexual person or even, possibly, the concept of homosexuality. Raised alone by his great-uncle, Tarwater exists outside the realm of any sort of standard mid-century society, even those of the rural South.

Tarwater's naiveté is made evident by his first visit to the city. Though he claims to have been there before, when he was born, he has no memory of being anywhere other than Powderhead and the surrounding rural area, and so his amazement at the city and the people is clear. O'Connor writes that, "before coming he had read facts in the almanac and he knew that there were 75,000 people here who were seeing him for the first time. He wanted to stop and shake hands with each of them and say his name was F. M.

Tarwater.” Tarwater’s ideas of shaking hands with everyone in the city are quickly proven unrealistic, as he observes that “Several people bumped into him and this contact that should have made an acquaintance for life, made nothing because the hulks shoved on with ducked heads and muttered apologies that he would have accepted if they had waited” (O’Connor, *VBA* 26). Tarwater’s experience in the city proves that not only does he know very little about other people, but he has very trusting and friendly expectations from strangers. *Boys Beware* warns, “The decision is always yours and your whole future may depend on making the right one. So no matter where you meet a stranger, be careful if they are too friendly, if they try to win your confidence too quickly, and if they become overly personal.” Tarwater’s inability to recognize homosexuality plays out in his trusting acceptance of the ride from the stranger in the lavender car. While a mid-century audience certainly recognized the stereotypical markers of the rapist, such as those utilized by O’Connor with the man in lavender, Tarwater is unable to do so and therefore is left vulnerable to the devil, creating anxiety for mid-century readers who believe they recognize what Tarwater does not. By describing the rapist as she does, O’Connor utilizes this fear to make the villain of her novel all the more villainous, relying on the prejudicial stereotypes of witch-hunting mid-century America in order to force her audience to fear this character before he commits any act of violence.

O’Connor’s use of a caricature and stereotype does not go unnoticed; Brad Gooch writes, for “the novel’s notoriously perverse penultimate scene,” that, “O’Connor chose a stock character” to be “the embodiment of the devil himself.” He continues arguing that by, “giving Tarwater a lift back to Powderhead, Tennessee, is a homosexual predator whom she first imagined for *Wise Blood*, but dispensed with.” Gooch discusses this stock

character further, writing that Sally and Robert Fitzgerald asked O'Connor about "the broadly stereotypical character in a lavender shirt and Panama hat, who rapes the teenage Tarwater in the woods" (309). O'Connor's reply was, "I saw one of those [characters in book] one time with yellow hair and black eyelashes—you can't look any more perverted than that" (*HB* 329). O'Connor's decision to create a stereotype is not in question, though her purpose for that and the function of this stereotype in the novel is less straightforward. Though she chooses a stock character, she uses the plot of a homosexual predator who rapes a young boy to feed on the homophobic panic of the mid-century and to make her devil terrifying and dangerous from the moment he physically appears. She wanted to make the character look as "perverted" as possible, which is made clear by her use of a physical description of the devil in her novel that is the same as the person she had seen once who she thought looked as "perverted" as a person could.

O'Connor doesn't merely create a stereotypical homosexual man who turns out to be a sexual predator, but she takes things so far that this character is, in the novel, literally the devil. The rapist is a physical incarnation of the "stranger" or "friend" who has accompanied Tarwater non-corporeally throughout the novel, made flesh in this scene as he makes Tarwater victim to an act of horrific violence. This is commonly understood in O'Connor criticism and O'Connor herself confirmed this in a letter to John Hawkes in 1959 in which she wrote, "I certainly do mean Tarwater's friend to be the Devil" (*HB* 367). So the rapist is quite literally made to be Satan incarnate. In 1959, after seeing the jacket cover for the novel¹⁰, O'Connor wrote to her editor that she had a letter from

¹⁰ This jacket cover significantly featured the color lavender. As O'Connor described it in a letter, "On an evil red-lavender background, the face of Francis Marion Tarwater in black wool hat peers out through some clay-colored corn. Very suggestive of the School of Southern Degeneracy, but it could be worse" (*HB* 363).

someone wanting to know the significance of Tarwater's rape. She writes, "He said he was afraid he did not get the religious symbolism on account of his own ignorance. But if the modern reader is so far de-Christianized that he doesn't recognize the Devil when he sees him, I fear for the reception of the book" (*HB* 361). O'Connor was very concerned with her audience's ability to recognize the devil in *The Violent Bear It Away*, a fact that certainly points to her attempt to make the devil as easily recognizable as possible, raising the question I have been addressing as to why homosexuality equates recognition as Satan. She crafted the character from early in the novel to represent evil and therefore she chose the most recognizable factors she could to ensure her audience would fear this character—she made the devil a homosexual.

Thus the word "demonization" takes on literal meaning in *The Violent Bear It Away*, despite Wood's assertion that "O'Connor had no desire to demonize homosexuality" (244). O'Connor herself argues that the novel cannot be understood without thinking of it in religious terms. In 1962, she wrote the following in a letter:

I sympathize with your friend's feeling of repulsion at the episode of Tarwater and the man in the lavender and cream-colored car. It was a very necessary action to the meaning of the book, however, and one which I would not have used if I hadn't been obliged to. I think the reason he doesn't understand it is because he doesn't really understand the ending [...] It can only be understood in religious terms. The man who gives him the lift is the personification of the voice, the stranger who has been counseling him all along; in other words, he is the devil, and it takes this action of the devil's to make Tarwater see for the first time what evil is.

He accepts the devil's liquor and he reaps what the devil has to give.

Without this experience of evil, his acceptance of his vocation in the end would be merely a dishonest manipulation by me. Those who see and feel what the devil is turn to God. Tarwater learned the hard way but he has a hard head. (quoted in Giannone, *The Mystery of Love* 255-56)

The fact that the rapist is the devil lends easily to critics' ability to focus on theological readings of Tarwater's journey and his path to prophecy after the rape, and O'Connor's very clear explanation in this letter, and in other letters, solidifies those claims. But the fact remains that the devil is represented as a homosexual man who fits mid-century stereotypes and is a sexual predator who falls into the same category as the men in the film *Boys Beware*. O'Connor not only gives the reader a stereotype of a homosexual man, an already fearful figure by the time the book was published, but she presents this figure in lavender as Satan himself.

The association of lavender for a mid-century audience also encompassed a period of time in which the United States government systematically persecuted homosexuals. Following World War II, the government of the United States facilitated an intense driving force in the creation of the homosexual panic of the 1950s—the Lavender Scare. Used in products of mid-century culture, the color lavender not only denotes homosexuality, but also invokes larger social anxieties connected with the American fear of Communism. The term “Lavender Scare,” used recently by David K. Johnson in his book *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*, describes a period of time accompanying McCarthyism during which ninety-one people were fired by the United States government because they were

deemed security risks due to their supposed homosexuality. Johnson writes, “I label the hysteria over homosexuals in the government the Lavender Scare to demonstrate its parallels with the second Red Scare. In 1950s culture, lavender was the color commonly associated with homosexuality, as evidenced in references to ‘lavender lads’¹¹ in the State Department” (216). Lavender was not only commonly associated with homosexuality and used as a representative symbol of gays and lesbians, but the color also morphed in use during the 1950s to connote a homosexual person’s susceptibility to blackmail by Communists. As Johnson explains, “Homosexuals were considered security risks because they could allegedly be blackmailed into revealing state secrets” (101). Homosexuality became associated not only with perversion, crime, and sickness, but also with Communism and treason.

On February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy made a speech at “a Lincoln’s Birthday dinner address to an audience of 275 Republican women in Wheeling, West Virginia” where he waved a piece of paper halfway through the speech and said, “I have here in my hand a list of 205 that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping the policy of the State Department.” Later, McCarthy changed the number to 57 but would name only [four]. He also later stated that the paper was actually a laundry list and that he “was startled by the national attention that his charges gained” (Miller 234). The Wheeling speech began the period of time commonly referred to as the Red Scare, in which Americans were interrogated for suspicion of having Communist sympathies. As

¹¹ Johnson also mentions lavender lads when he mentions in his examples that, “Headlines warning of ‘Perverts Fleeing State Dept.’ peppered newspapers throughout the country. While members of Congress held hearings to determine how to ‘eradicate this menace,’ jokes circulated about the ‘lavender lads’ in the State Department” (18).

D'Emilio writes, "The homosexual menace continued as a theme of American political culture throughout the McCarthy era" (43). This is a theme that permeated all of American culture, not just the political arena.

McCarthy's instigation of the Red Scare quickly sparked the beginning of the Lavender Scare. Miller writes that

less than three weeks after the Wheeler speech, Undersecretary of State John Peurifoy testified before a Senate committee investigating the loyalty of government workers. He was asked how many State Department employees had resigned while under investigation for being security risks since 1947. 'Ninety one persons in the shady category,' Peurifoy answered. 'Most of these were homosexuals.' (234-35)

Peurifoy's testimony provided the fuel for a concrete reason to hate homosexuality. By June of 1950, "the full Senate bowed to mounting pressure and authorized an investigation into the alleged employment of homosexuals 'and other moral perverts' in government" (D'Emilio 42). This action by the United States government justified the actions of the rest of the American public in their endeavors to seek out and persecute those they determined were homosexual.

In 1951, Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer published *Washington Confidential*, a book that Miller writes "sold more than 150,000 copies in its first three weeks of publication, landing in the number one spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list" (236). The book was focused on exposing alleged secrets of the activities of government employees in Washington. Miller explains that "during the early Cold War years, as the political and social atmosphere changed to one of anxiety and paranoia," the gay men and lesbians

who had experienced pleasant lives in Washington up this point, “became easy targets.” *Washington Confidential*, he continues, “threw all these ideas together into a highly inflammatory stew” (235-6). The book features a chapter titled “Garden of Pansies” that focuses on homosexual activity in Washington and uses a myriad of derogatory terms to describe homosexual people, specifically homosexual men. The book claims that “more than 90 twisted twerps in trousers had been swished out of the State Department,” and that the authors have gathered data by talking with homosexual people in Washington. They describe their method, stating, “The only way to get authoritative data on fairies is from other fairies” (Lait 90). They claim to have discovered where the gay men of Washington gather, and use words to describe them such as “deviates,” “queens,” “homos,” and “degenerates” (90-92).

After exposing the types of places in which they claim homosexual men hang out, and describing various practices they believe them to engage in, Lait and Mortimer provide a graph that is “a breakdown of occupations in one group of 543 perverts who were arrested.” The authors follow with a statement that,

With more than 6,000 fairies in government offices, you may be concerned about the security of the country. Fairies are no more disloyal than the normal. But homosexuals are vulnerable, they can be blackmailed or influenced by sex more deeply than conventional citizens [...] Foreign chancelleries long ago learned that homos were of value in espionage work. The German Roehm, and later Goering, established divisions of such in the Foreign Office. That was aped by Soviet Russia, which has a flourishing desk now in Moscow. According to Congressman Miller, who

made a comprehensive study of the subject, young students are indoctrinated and given a course in homosexuality, then taught to infiltrate in perverted circles in other countries. Congressman Miller said: ‘These espionage agents have found it rather easy to send their homosexuals here and contact their kind in sensitive departments of our Government. Blackmail and many other schemes are used to gather secret information.’

(Lait 95-6)

With a bestseller such as this on the market in the 1950s, written by two men who claimed to have inside information about Washington and its occupants, it is clear that the homosexual panic of the mid-century was backed not only by government action, but by a purportedly non-fiction book that audiences would have believed gave them evidence they could hold in their own hands.

Washington Confidential aligns with rumors that spread during the mid-century “that Adolf Hitler had compiled a list of homosexuals throughout the world who could be enlisted for espionage, sabotage, or terrorism” and that this list “was said to have fallen into Stalin’s hands in 1945 and some believed that Communists were updating it and using it” (Miller 235). Rumors such as this one fueled the terror of Communism felt by the American public and gave them a target for their otherwise displaced rage and fear. This rage was fully supported by and, in many ways, instigated by the American government. In *The Violent Bear It Away*, the association between the color lavender and Communism made clear for contemporary readers the extra threat associated with the rapist beyond his homosexuality and his desire to prey on young Tarwater. O’Connor’s

work encompasses America's fear of Communism and its fear of homosexuality in one character.

Though the Lavender Scare began in the late 1940s, it was still very present at the time O'Connor's novel was published. During the year of the novel's publication, 1960, Johnson writes:

Bernon Mitchell and William Martin, both analysts with the National Security Agency, defected to the Soviet Union for political reasons. The press erroneously dubbed them a homosexual 'love team' who feel victim to Soviet blackmail." The magazine *Top Secret* ran a story with the headline 'Behind the Scandal of Those Two Traitors: How the Reds Blackmail Homosexuals Into Spying For Them!'

Above the headline in *Top Secret*, the type reads, 'The F.B.I. knew those two code experts were fruity fellows, but nothing was done about it until the boys had already minced off to Moscow. How many more pansies do we have, in strategic positions, whose perverted pursuits in hotel rooms have been caught on cameras by cunning Commie agents, to be used as blackmail bait to make the homos turn against their homeland?' (Johnson). Under a photograph of the two men is the identifying text, "William H. Martin (left) and Bernon F. Mitchell, the two lavender lads who were code experts for the U.S. before becoming turncoats and flitting off to Russia" (Johnson). O'Connor's "lavender lad" is a threat to the American way of life, not only because he is a homosexual but because homosexuality was also closely associated during this period with a threat to national security. The Lavender Scare links homosexuality to Communism, creating an environment prime for panic.

This threat was one that was quickly labeled in the mid-century and one of the words most synonymous with homosexual at the time was the word “pervert.” The word is interchangeable with the word “homosexual” in the mid-century and was another contributing factor to large misconceptions and the spread of fear of homosexual people. The word, most often used as a noun to label homosexuals, by its very definition renders the object of its label as having something “wrong” with him or her. This is in keeping with the standard definitions of homosexuality that were prevalent at the time, such as the listing of homosexuality in the APA’s *DSM-I*. The widespread use of the word only further contributed to negative connotations for homosexuality and negative labels for people who are homosexual. This, in turn, led to a cycle in which hatred and fear caused the prevalence of the word and the word caused more hatred and more fear. At the time of Lavender Scare, Miller writes, “Suddenly, another domestic enemy had emerged—homosexuals or ‘perverts’ or ‘deviates’ in the language of the ‘50s (even the headline of the stately *New York Times* used the word *perverts*, just as the newspaper referred to Communists as ‘Reds.’)” (234-5). The word was not only common, but acceptable, lending an air of certainty and rightness to its use, particularly when trusted sources like *The New York Times* ran headlines using such language. And, despite the fact that many of the warnings about homosexuality came from law enforcement and political figures, the media was just as participatory in the demonization of homosexuality.

Homosexuality was frequently the subject of public discussions in the media. As Johnson observes,

The lack of attention to antigay campaigns by historians cannot be attributed to a lack of public discussion at the time. There is a common

assumption that sexual issues were not discussed in newspapers and other popular media outlets in the 1950s [...] Though some media outlets were reticent to discuss the topic directly and took refuge in euphemism and innuendo, the 1950s generally witnessed a tremendous upsurge in publicity about “sexual perverts.” (5)

Though homosexuality was banned from discussion or reference in film due to the Hays Code, which I discuss later, such regulations didn't apply to magazines and newspapers. Therefore, American mid-century society was saturated with derogatory words and language about homosexuality, making the use of such words not only acceptable in society but expected.

This choice of words also provided the public with an easily recognizable label for the entity they feared. “In one of the many debates on the Senate floor [in 1950],” Johnson writes, “Senator Kenneth Wherry (R-Nebraska) asked his colleagues, ‘Can [you] think of a person who could be more dangerous to the United States of American than a pervert?’” (2). The homophobic panic of the mid-century was cultivated largely in part by the language and actions of government and law enforcement. “In a culture that was largely hostile toward and ignorant about homosexuality,” Miller argues, “dire warning about perverts in Washington helped create an atmosphere of persecution and purge nationwide” (247-8). Indeed, persecution and purging were common in the middle decades of the century, resulting not only in the Lavender Scare in the government, but in many localized campaigns by law enforcement officials intent upon forcefully eliminating homosexuals from their communities. In 1947, for example, “the U.S. Park Police, which had jurisdiction over most of the parkland in the District of Columbia,

inaugurated what it called a ‘Pervert Elimination Campaign’—an unprecedented federal program that mandated the harassment and arrest of men in known gay cruising areas.” The program resulted in hundreds of arrests and charges, with even more men held for questioning without being arrested. The information gathered from arrests and questioning was placed in a “pervert file” (Johnson 59).

O’Connor herself used the word “pervert” to describe the rapist of *The Violent Bear It Away*. In November of 1959, she wrote, “I had meant for Meeks and the pervert at the end to take on the form of Tarwater’s Friend” (HB 359). The use of the word by O’Connor points to her unquestionable opinion of the nature of the stranger: he is the devil and he is a pervert, having literally turned away from the moral right in the novel. Tarwater has also turned away from the moral right, though, as many critics have noted, it is after his rape that he returns to his path to prophecy. In readings like this, he becomes a convert because of the pervert and the sense of “turning” words in this section of O’Connor’s novel indicates her strong ideas about which way humans turn or should turn. Her use of the word, however, indicates the same sort of common use employed by most Americans in the mid-century: as a label for the homosexual character. Tarwater is converted, a fact brought to attention by many O’Connor scholars, and the fact that this conversion is brought about by the act of a “pervert” makes Tarwater’s “turning point,” as it is so often called, literal.

While Tarwater’s conversion is for a life of Christian prophecy, however, there was ample fear at mid-century of being “turned” gay by other homosexuals. O’Connor plays on this fear when she introduces alcohol to the passage in which Tarwater is assaulted by the man in lavender. Apart from its connotation with strangers, such as Old

Tarwater's warning that the devil would convince the boy to drink and smoke, and the association that passage has with situations such as those in *Boys Beware* in which young boys are corrupted by homosexual men, alcohol was also associated with homosexuality in adults. Tarwater's experience initially echoes the same types of warnings placed by Davis's film, though the boy is quick to ignore what he calls his great-uncle's "idiot restrictions." When Tarwater first opens the liquor bottle in the stranger's car, O'Connor writes,

The boy grasped the bottle and began to pull at the cork, and simultaneously there came into his head all his great-uncle's warnings about poisonous liquor, all his idiot restrictions about riding with strangers. The essence of all the old man's foolishness flooded his mind like a rising tide of irritation. He grasped the bottle more firmly and pulled at the cork [...] The stranger was driving slowly, watching him. He lifted the bottle to his lips and took a long swallow. The liquid had a deep barely concealed bitterness that he had not expected and it appeared to be thicker than any whiskey he had ever had before. It burned his throat savagely and his thirst raged anew so that he was obliged to take another and fuller swallow. The second was worse than the first and he perceived that the stranger was watching him with what might be a leer. (VBA 229-30)

The presence of alcohol in this section reflects the myth circulating in the 1950s that alcoholism could turn straight men gay. "Even when used to describe alcoholics and the loquacious," Johnson writes, "the term 'security risk' still invoked the specter of homosexuality. In 1950s public discourse, both alcoholism and loquaciousness were traits

closely associated with same-sex desire” (8). Johnson also includes a quote from a 1950 *Time* magazine article, noting, “Alcohol plays an important role in the problem of sexual deviations’ [...] because it released repressed desires” (9).

Although neither Tarwater nor the stranger could easily be described as loquacious, the stranger utilizes alcohol in his assault of Tarwater and, significantly, Tarwater’s first experience with his friend, the devil, takes place while Tarwater is drunk on moonshine from his uncle’s still. The first line of the novel is, “Francis Marion Tarwater’s uncle had been dead for only half a day when the boy got too drunk to finish digging his grave” (O’Connor, *VBA* 3). Shortly after the stranger first appears, before he has a physical appearance and is only a voice in Tarwater’s head, the stranger asks Tarwater, “Do you smoke?” (37). While Tarwater is drinking from the still, O’Connor writes of the voice of the stranger speaking to Tarwater, “After a minute he said in a softer tone as the boy took a long swallow from the black jug, well, a little won’t interfere. Moderation never hurt no one. A burning arm slid down Tarwater’s throat as if the devil were already reaching inside him to finger his soul” (45). Alcohol in *The Violent Bear It Away* is the initial gateway through which the devil makes himself acquainted with Tarwater and becomes his companion and eventual friend, and it is involved in Tarwater’s sexual assault by the stranger in lavender.

Johnson provides the useful example of the popular Charles Jackson novel (and subsequent 1945 film) *The Lost Weekend*, writing that the “connection [between homosexuality and alcohol] was popularized by” the two and noting that, “when recognized [...] as a [...] homosexual, the protagonist claims he is merely ‘the potential confederate that was every alcoholic’” (9). Even before taking the corporeal form of the

rapist, the devil in *The Violent Bear It Away* is associated with alcohol and it is the alcohol that eventually makes Tarwater more susceptible to the rapist's assault, just as the public believed that alcohol could make anyone susceptible to homosexuality. To make the devil truly terrifying, O'Connor needed to characterize him not only as a frightening figure from his physical appearance, but a frightening figure in his actions, intentions, and mentality. "A book that presents us with the comically sinister wiles of a recognizable devil and an unmistakable manifestation of God's purposes," Asals writes, "*The Violent Bear It Away* reveals the divine to be at least as terrifying as the demonic" (193). While the action of sexual assault is indisputably terrifying, O'Connor's devil plays directly into multiple fears felt simultaneously by mid-century Americans. The devil is a homosexual, he is a perpetrator of sexual assault, he encourages the violent murder of a child, he uses illegal drugs, he drinks, he is represented by a color that associations him with Communism, and he is able to influence others to be like him.

Halfway through the time period during which O'Connor was writing *The Violent Bear It Away*, while she was visiting New York City in 1955, Catherine Carver "procured two of the most coveted tickets of the season, to Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*" (Gooch 262). Though the play won the Pulitzer Prize that year, O'Connor was not impressed. In a letter to Elizabeth McKee on June 29 of that year, O'Connor wrote, "I didn't like Tennessee Williams's play. I thought I could do that good myself. However, on reflection I guess it is wise to doubt that" (HB 88). In December, O'Connor wrote to Betty Hester, "Mr. Truman Capote makes me plumb sick, as does Mr. Tenn. Williams" (HB 121). O'Connor's second comment on Williams is interesting in its link to another homosexual writer of the mid-century, Truman Capote. Brad Gooch notes this sentiment

of being made “plumb sick” in writing that, “Ted Spivey, too, quickly became mindful of what he called her ‘revulsion at the frankly sexual in literature.’ She was devastating on the subject of Thomas Wolfe, or of critical praise for *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (‘pious slop’), as well as the openly homosexual writings of Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote” (319). O’Connor also disliked Williams’s *Baby Doll*, calling it “a dirty little piece of trash” (HB 192). As Gooch points out, though, her disdain for these works seems rooted more in her distaste for blatant sexuality in literature than in a particular criticism of homosexuality.

Edward Buscombe writes that, “Tennessee Williams’s work in the theatre was not only successful, but also scandalous. His plays dramatized sexuality in ways that often shocked, even outraged, middle America. By and large, the core of the Broadway audience was not middle America but rather a more sophisticated urban audience who were receptive to work that broke boundaries” (86). O’Connor was privy to a 1955 New York viewing of an uncensored *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, a very different experience than those that film-viewing audiences had in 1958 when the adaptation was subject to the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, more commonly known as the Hays Code, which prohibited certain portrayals of sexuality. Despite the fact that homosexuality is never specifically mentioned in the Hays Code, it was implied by the language of the code, which states, “The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing” (“The Motion Picture Production Code”). While there are more specific rules to clarify this statement, homosexuality is not mentioned, yet the Code is cited as the reason for the removal of any homosexuality from the film adaptation of *Cat on a Hot*

Tin Roof. As Buscombe explains, “Homosexuality was another subject prescribed by the Code, with the result that Brick’s reluctance to bed the patently desirable Maggie is something of a mystery in the film version” (87).

Despite O’Connor’s detestation for Williams’s work, his writing has a particular similarity with her own fiction in its treatment of homosexual hysteria, particularly in his treatment of the widespread fear of homosexuality he addresses in his 1954 short story “Hard Candy.” It is the story of Mr. Krupper, an elderly man who once owned a candy shop and who now spends his time going to an old movie theater, where he trades quarters and candy for sexual favors from young boys in the audience. This interaction, however, is never blatantly described by Williams, but rather strongly implied, much in the same way O’Connor chooses to write Tarwater’s rape. What is most noticeable about “Hard Candy” is Williams’s treatment of the audience itself and his acknowledgement of the audience’s preconceived notions of homosexuality. Williams writes:

In the course of this story, and very soon now, it will be necessary to make some disclosures about Mr. Krupper of a nature too coarse to be dealt with very directly in a work of such brevity. The grossly naturalistic details of a life, contained in the enormously wide context of that life, are softened and qualified by it, but when you attempt to set those details down in a tale, some measure of obscurity or indirection is called for to provide the same, or even approximate, softening effect that existence in time gives to those gross elements in the life itself. When I say that there was a certain mystery in the life of Mr. Krupper, I am beginning approach those things

in the only way possible without a head-on violence that would disgust and destroy and which would actually falsify the story. (106)

Here, Williams addresses readers directly about their preconceived notions of homosexuality and their fears of homosexual predators. Despite the plot of the story, which is in fact about an elderly man who coerces young boys into sexual acts, “Williams,” Robert J. Corber writes, “does not want the reader to come to the reductive conclusion that Mr. Krupper is a dirty old man who preys on innocent young boys, even though there is ample reason for the reader to do so” (107-8). Williams doesn’t directly approach Mr. Krupper’s “clandestine sexual activities,” as Corber calls them, because that would, as Williams writes, “disgust and destroy and [...] would actually falsify the story” (Corber 107, Williams 106). This, Corber asserts, would “[misrepresent] the mysterious Mr. Krupper” (107). The way in which Williams addresses the audience (as well as the fact that he addresses them at all) calls attention to the homosexual panic of mid-century America and its presence in fiction contemporary to that of Flannery O’Connor.

Williams wants to deflect social anxiety so that the focus is on the old man, not on stereotypical fear. “Rather than repudiating his sexual practices or showing that they were not typical of the gay male community,” Corber writes, “Williams attributed to Mr. Krupper a complexity that made it difficult for the reader to see him as a stereotype” (114). Williams does not write to a few select homophobic audience members, but rather assumes that all the readers of this story will believe the same stereotypes about homosexuality and that they will accept those stereotypes as factual. The American

public feared single homosexual men who would prey on young boys and Williams writes a story that, as Corber points out, is easily read as just such a tale.

In its factual presentation, “Hard Candy” bears similarity to *Boys Beware*. Both present tales of seemingly harmless older homosexual men who seek out young boys and coerce them into sexual relationships. As noted in the story of Jimmy in Davis’s film, “Ralph was generous and took Jimmy many interesting places and did many nice things for him. He bought presents and even gave him money. But payments were expected in return.” The boys of “Hard Candy” are in the exact same situation. Mr. Krupper begins by holding out a piece of candy to the young boy in the movie theater. After the boy eats that piece, Mr. Krupper offers him more. Eventually, Williams writes, “Mr. Krupper makes a bold move. He reaches into the pocket opposite to the one containing the bag of hard candy and scoops out all that remains of the quarters, about six altogether, and jostles them ever so slightly together in his fist so they tinkle a bit. This is all he does” (119). After an intermission, Mr. Krupper holds the coins out in his hand and waits and, “at the very moment when his hand is about to withdraw from contact with the hand of the youth, that hand turns about, revolves to bring the palm upward. The coins descend, softly, with a slight tinkle, and Mr. Krupper knows that the contract is sealed between them” (119-20). Mr. Krupper’s contract is similar to the claim made by the police officer cited earlier who claimed that young boys who suddenly have more money may be exhibiting signs of having been corrupted by a homosexual (Johnson 57).

The difference in perception between *Boys Beware* and “Hard Candy” is in Williams’s acknowledgment of their similarities. Corber quotes Tennessee Williams as saying, “You still want to know why I don’t write a gay play? I don’t find it necessary. I

could express what I wanted to express through other means. I would be narrowing my audience a great deal. I wish to have a broad audience because the major thrust of my work is not sexual orientation, it's social. I'm not about to limit myself to writing about gay people" (107). "Hard Candy" is by no means a gay short story, nor is it intended for solely a gay audience, or even a gay-friendly audience; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Williams addresses the audience and their fears of homosexuality, and he even participates in the cultural stereotype that spawned this fear by asking that it be set aside. Williams does not condemn his audience for being afraid of Mr. Krupper or for categorizing him or his actions as distasteful, disgusting, or immoral. O'Connor assumes very similar things about her audience in *The Violent Bear It Away*, but while Williams asks his audience to set aside their fears and judgments in order to experience his short story, O'Connor's novel asks the audience to acknowledge their fears fully in order to recognize the evil of this character and to share in the terror of Tarwater's horrific experience in the woods.

Despite critical attempts to distance O'Connor from the homophobia that ran rampant through the mid-twentieth century, her portrayal of the rapist of *The Violent Bear It Away* cannot be ignored. Reading the novel as it is situated in mid-century not only makes possible an understanding of the characterization of the novel's rapist, but it also elucidates the ways in which homosexuality was viewed both as a threat to the general public and as a threat to the security of the United States during the Cold War. O'Connor's portrayal of homosexuality in *The Violent Bear It Away* may be limited to one boy and one man on a country backroad, but she encompasses in that single scene an

entire nation's homophobia and the ways in which that fear was exacerbated by the Cold War.

Chapter II

“a certain situation in the Southern states & indeed in all the world:” Race and the Cold War in O’Connor’s Short Stories

In 1956, Herbert Ravenel Sass wrote, “It is the deep conviction of nearly all white Southerners in the states which have large Negro populations that the mingling or integration of white and Negro children in the South’s primary schools would open the gates to miscegenation and widespread racial amalgamation” (1-2). Sass’s pamphlet for the Citizens’ Council of Mississippi, titled “Mixed Schools and Mixed Blood,” was also printed as an article in *Atlantic Monthly*, and was written at a time of intersection between fear of integration and fear of Communism in the mid-twentieth century South. Concern about miscegenation was a strong persuasive element for many white Southerners, and segregationists used a platform of anti-Communism to further their agenda, spreading the notion that to be anti-Communist, and therefore patriotic and American, was to be supportive of segregation and opposed to miscegenation. For many white Southerners, this loyalty extended even further. To be a segregationist, against any type of integration but particularly miscegenation, was to be a supporter of Southern identity. Jon Lance Bacon writes that in *Black Monday*, a 1956 pamphlet by Tom P. Brady, Brady claimed that, “U.S. Communists adopted their ‘plan to abolish segregation’ after the failure of an earlier plot ‘to destroy the South’” (*Cold War Culture* 94). During this period of racial conflict and Cold War fear, Flannery O’Connor was at work on fiction that reveals not only Southern anxiety about race, but also O’Connor’s own intense fear of a loss of the identity of her native South, both fears that reflect American anxiety about Communism.

Despite the intense social unrest that accompanied matters of desegregation, O'Connor still viewed the matter of race as topical, writing, "The topical is poison. I got away with it in 'Everything That Rises' but only because I say a plague on everybody's house as far as the race business goes'" (*HB* 537). While O'Connor's own comments on race are complicated, which I discuss later in this chapter, her fictional treatment of race relations in the South reveals a great deal about both the South's fight to retain its regional identity, and the nation's fight to resist Communism. In a 1961 letter, O'Connor wrote, "I have also written and sold to *New World Writing* a story called 'Everything That Rises Must Converge,' which is a physical proposition that I found in Pèrre Teilhard [*sic*] and am applying to a certain situation in the Southern states & indeed in all the world" (*HB* 438). This "certain situation" indeed applied to the South and to the nation, a fact highlighted by O'Connor's stories, which examine larger regional, national, and global issues by studying a few characters at a time.

Through examination of O'Connor's fiction, this chapter elucidates how the South's fixed categories of social rank were displaced by the changing social and economic status of blacks in the mid-twentieth century, and how the United States' fear of Communism intensified Southern fear of integration and miscegenation. I focus specifically on four of O'Connor's short stories that deal intensely with issues of race: "The Displaced Person" "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "Revelation," and "Judgment Day." The South, deeply entrenched in its rigid views of cultural location and social place, divided those locations not only by economic status and inherited social rank, but also by race. The lines that defined these distinctions were blurred by integration, and by the fear of race mixing, which whites feared would further disrupt

social order. The chaos that ensued became a defining feature of the mid-twentieth century. Many white Southerners felt they were being invaded by unwanted changes, and this chapter highlights the parallels in O'Connor's fiction between that fear and the nation's fear of the invasion of Communism. I argue that the focus of racial issues in these short stories is the displacement of white Southerners during the mid-century—a displacement that is most often cultural displacement due to the changing environment of Southern society as the South became integrated. Though these characters mostly remain in the South (Tanner of "Judgment Day" is the exception, which I discuss later in the chapter), they are all plagued by an inability to locate themselves in the changing society of the mid-century South, and the cause of their displacement is their unwillingness to make room for the changing social equality between races at mid-century.

Part of the maintenance of Southern social structure was achieved by a strict adherence to a code of exclusively white reproduction. O'Connor's 1954 short story "The Displaced Person" focuses not only on the anxiety caused by the presence of a foreigner in the rural South, but also on the anxiety created by the potential for race mixing. I argue that "The Displaced Person" portrays a Southern fear of miscegenation that is strongly influenced by American fear of Communism and that the story reveals the ways in which Cold War fear further complicated racial tensions in the mid-twentieth century South. "The Displaced Person" is centered around Mr. Guizac, a man whose family has fled the displaced persons camps of Poland after World War II and come to live and work in the American South on the farm of Mrs. McIntyre. Though the imagery of the story is tied closely to the Holocaust, the Guizacs also bring with them an anxiety associated with Communism. The Guizacs' homeland was likely under Soviet control after World War II,

as, Lynne Taylor explains, “for the vast majority of the Polish displaced persons in the camps around the world, [...] their former homes now fell within the borders of the U.S.S.R.” (101). O’Connor was aware of this, as Poland was one of the countries in which, because of her own anti-Communism, she would not publish her work (Wood 17). Therefore, in “The Displaced Person,” Mr. Guizac’s appearance on the farm is accompanied by the threat of Communist influence. This potential influence, however, does not play out in Mr. Guizac’s direct association with Communism or in his political tendencies. Rather, it plays out in the Southern social taboo of miscegenation, which the characters of O’Connor’s story view as a threat to their way of life. Many white Southerners viewed desegregation not only as a loss of Southern identity but also as a loss of the white racial purity of future generations. Sass argues that, “integrationists have chosen the Southern schools as their primary target,” and writes, “The South is now the great bulwark against intermarriage” (11). His concern with the amalgamation of races is particular to the South’s regional identity, and was a concern of many white Southerners in the mid-century.

O’Connor was also deeply concerned with a loss of Southern regional identity. In 1957, she wrote, “The anguish that most of us [Southern writers] have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that every day we are getting more and more like the rest of the country, that we are being forced out not only of our many sins, but of our few virtues” (*MM* 28-9). O’Connor’s concern about the impending amalgamation of the South’s culture with that of the rest of the country is part of her own writing process and, while Southern segregation and racism are perhaps among the

“many sins” to which she refers, she believed that the South could keep race relations civilized by adhering to a system of manners (*MM* 29). In 1963, O’Connor told an interviewer, “It requires considerable grace for two races to live together, particularly when the population is divided about 50-50 between them and when they have our particular history. It can’t be done without a code of manners based on mutual charity” (*MM* 233). O’Connor’s idea of manners, like the behavior of her characters, is particular to the South, and to her belief that integration could not be performed the same way in the South as it could in the North. For her, these manners or codes were a part of Southern regional identity. The same year, when asked by an interviewer what she thought “integration [was] doing to the culture of [her] native South,” O’Connor replied, “I don’t think it’s doing anything to it. White people and colored people are used to milling around together in the South, and this integration only means that they are going to be milling around together in a few more places. No basic attitudes are being changed” (qtd. in Magee 102). “The Displaced Person” reveals the truth of O’Connor’s idea that, for many mid-century Southerners, “no basic attitudes [were] being changed,” as the foundational beliefs of the story’s characters are not only upheld throughout the story, but, when the characters’ anxiety about potential change reaches its climax, those beliefs are upheld at the cost of a man’s life.

Mr. Guizac is the best worker Mrs. McIntyre has ever employed, yet his suggestion that his white cousin marry Sulk, a black worker on the farm, causes Mrs. McIntyre’s opinion of him to change so drastically that, as a result of her desire to get rid of the man who has disrupted the Southern racial and social order of her farm, she plays a silent and passive role in his death. In a passage after the discovery of Mr. Guizac’s

intention to marry his white cousin to Sulk, O'Connor writes, "The Pole worked as fiercely as ever and seemed to have no inkling that he was about to be fired. Mrs. McIntyre saw jobs done in a short time that she had thought would never get done at all. Still she was resolved to get rid of him" (CS 228). Despite his excellent work, the Displaced Person presents too great a threat to the codes of the South and to anti-Communist America. Bacon argues that the pastoral setting of "The Displaced Person" is disrupted by ideas of desegregation because the McIntyre farm "founded its social structure on racial division" (*Cold War Culture* 88). When Mr. Guizac disrupts this structure, bringing with him the threat of Communism, he is viewed as a foreigner who must be removed, even if that removal means his death.

In "The Displaced Person," the United States' fear of invasion by Communists trickles down to the Southern fear of invasion by its own country and from there to the specific Southerners on the farm in O'Connor's story who fear Mr. Guizac and his foreign ideas about race. The connection between these fears is noted by Jeff Woods, who writes that, "the southern red scare was in many ways a byproduct of the region's massive resistance to integration. Its proponents' main goal was to discredit the civil rights movement by associating it with the nation's greatest enemy, Communism" (5). By linking Communism to integration, the racism of the South was able to continue to flourish under the banner of the preservation of Southern identity. It was the concern, as Woods writes,

Of many white southerners in the 1950s and 1960s that the forces of Communism and integration had signed a devil's pact to destroy the region's way of life. Rallying to defend Dixie against the perceived threat,

southern segregationists and anti-Communists led a huge legal, political, and public-relations effort to expose and eliminate the Communist and integrationist enemy. These efforts amounted to a southern red scare. (1-2)

Convinced that Southern identity and social structure were contingent on the continuation of segregation, white Southerners staunchly defended the region's segregationist policies and attitudes. The South, still influenced by memories of the Civil War and Reconstruction, viewed desegregation as an attack on Southern social structure and Southern identity. George Lewis argues that Southern memories of the Civil War exacerbated the anxiety of mid-century white Southerners who feared another invasion by the North. Many of them believed in segregation as a means of keeping the South the South. "Whereas Americans as a whole were fearful of a communist invasion in the postwar world, for example," he writes, "only southerners could tie those fears to memories of an actual invasion that had shaped their identity and permanently scarred their psyche: the period of Reconstruction at the end of the Civil War" (11-12). Fighting to retain their identity and autonomy, white Southerners rejected what they viewed as the invasion of integration as vehemently as the rest of the country rejected the possibility of invasion by Communism. Bacon writes that, "by the 1950s, the scenario of Northern invasion and Southern defensiveness had become associated with the international conflict that concerned Northerners and Southerners alike [...] The scenario, in short, now reflected Cold War anxiety over foreign totalitarianism" (*Cold War Culture* 90).

In his anti-miscegenation pamphlet, Sass claimed that a new Reconstruction was being forced on the South, and that the recent events of the Holocaust (events closely tied to the Guizacs in O'Connor's story), made racial segregation an unfavorable idea for

those who wanted to distance themselves from the horrific acts committed by the Nazis. In an attempt to deflect such ideas, Sass argues that integration is similar to the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War and that support for it would be bolstered by the fact that many viewed “race distinctions” as similar to the genocide committed by Hitler and the Nazis. He is angered by the persuasive claim of some mid-century Americans that integrating the races in the United States would prevent non-whites from joining the ranks of Communism or convince them to convert to democracy (7). Like many other white Southerners of the time, Sass feared the invasion of ideas that originated outside the South and viewed these invasions, just as Americans viewed Communist invasion, as a hostile takeover.

Fear of race mixing became a heightened concern in regards to the integration of schools in the South, a fact made evident in Sass’s article, in which he points to school integration as a sure sign of future generations with mixed racial heritage. The point of Sass’s article, in fact, is that school segregation should be maintained precisely in order to prevent miscegenation. Lewis points to the segregationist belief that, “close contact between young, vulnerable children of different races [...] could only lead to interracial sex, miscegenation, and an end to the ‘purity’ of the white race” (39). Sass expresses his fear of this, writing, “A very few years of thoroughly integrated schools would produce large numbers of indoctrinated young Southerners free from all ‘prejudice’ against mixed matings” (11). Race mixing, a long-present fear of many white Southerners, became a major component of segregationists’ arguments against school integration. Lewis also asserts that segregationists believed “that the South was the last repository of the ‘pure’ white race,” and therefore “southerners developed a pathological fear of miscegenation,

and of the damage that they believed interracial sex and marriage would cause to white southern society” (16).

Such rhetoric is also found in the arguments of Leander Perez, a judge, district attorney, and Citizens’ Council leader from Louisiana who claimed that Jews used the NAACP, Woods writes, “to promote racial strife through integration and intermarriage. Miscegenation, Perez maintained, would lead to a mongrelized, lazy race that lacked the ability to resist international bolshevism” (qtd. in Woods 56). Perez also used Cold War fear to aid his argument against *Brown v. Board of Education*. Woods writes that, “Perez considered the *Brown* decision ‘Communist trash’ and the NAACP a ‘Communist-front infested hybrid organization’” (56). The integration of schools was viewed by many white Southerners as the first step in the Communist creation of an amalgamated race that would eradicate American whiteness.

In “The Displaced Person,” miscegenation is the sole reason that Mr. Guizac is transformed in Mrs. McIntyre’s eyes from the most valuable employee she has ever had to one whose presence is a burden. She does not mind much if her black workers steal, nor does she fire her white employees for being lazy or “poor white trash,” but she is so disturbed by Mr. Guizac’s unrealized intention to marry his white cousin to a black man that she fails to take action to prevent his death (O’Connor, *CS* 202). Marshall Bruce Gentry notes that the story features “the explicit promotion of miscegenation by a heroic, arguably Christlike character” (“Flannery O’Connor as Miscegenationist” 192). Indeed, Mr. Guizac is portrayed as honest, hard-working, kind, and certainly not racist. Upon first meeting the farm’s black workers, Sulk and Astor, Mrs. Shortley observes that Mr. Guizac “shook their hands, like he didn’t know the difference, like he might have been as

black as them” (CS 207). Mrs. McIntyre also notices Mr. Guizac’s ignorance to the way race is perceived in the South. When he reports to her that Sulk has stolen a turkey, O’Connor writes, “Mrs. McIntyre told him to go put the turkey back and then she was a long time explaining to the Pole that all Negroes would steal” (CS 202). This incident makes clear not only Mrs. McIntyre’s own racist generalizations, but also her desire to teach Mr. Guizac about the racial codes of the South, something she believes he must learn in order to be a functioning member of this farm community. As John N. Duvall notes, although his skin is white, “Guizac clearly does not know how to act white according to the codes of the South” (71).

Mr. Guizac’s lack of racial code knowledge contributes to Mrs. Shortley’s view of him as non-white from the first time she sees him, when she notes that he treats Astor and Sulk “like he might have been as black as them” (CS 207). It is significant that she doesn’t notice that Mr. Guizac views Astor and Sulk as if they were as white as he, but rather that he views himself as being as black as the two farmhands. Mr. Guizac’s lack of racism aids the labeling of him as non-white, just as it prevents him from functioning in the same racist manner as the other white people on the farm. His naiveté about racist Southern codes is similar to the perception of white children held by segregationist Sass when he writes of a condition of “racial preference,” which he claims is a learned racism adopted by white children that will be lost if Southern schools are integrated (11). He writes that, in integrated schools, “the adolescent and therefore defenseless mind would there be exposed to brain-washing which it would not know how to refute” (11). Mr. Guizac, a man neither raised nor educated in the American South, does not function the same way as the Southerners around him. Because Mrs. McIntyre, Mrs. Shortley, and the

others on and around the farm demonstrate behavior and beliefs that agree with Sass's assertion that learned racism is a positive factor in Southern society, Mr. Guizac's lack of racism becomes problematic for him.

Because Mr. Guizac is foreign, and because his inability to be white in the same way as his employer and co-workers leaves him vulnerable to being labeled as non-white, the Southerners of the McIntyre farm, especially Mrs. Shortley, find it problematic to classify him. For Mrs. McIntyre, this only becomes a problem when Mr. Guizac reveals his lack of white Southern-ness by promoting miscegenation, but Mrs. Shortley views him as foreign and alien before he even arrives. She equates his foreignness with an inability to recognize common things, such as the difference in colors, asking Mrs. McIntyre as they hang mismatched curtains for the Guizacs, "You reckon they'll know what colors even is?" (CS 196). Mrs. Shortley's question proves to be more prophecy than speculation, as Mr. Guizac is indeed unable to recognize colors in the same way the Southerners of the farm are, though the colors he cannot recognize are those of race, not curtains. "Mrs. Shortley," Alan C. Taylor writes, "associates the possibility of the immigrants' ignorance of color with documentary footage from a liberated Nazi concentration camp—a Holocaust vision of corporeal fragmentation which inspires a confused fear of disease or pollution" (72). Of Mrs. Shortley's memory of the Holocaust newsreel, O'Connor writes, "This was the kind of thing that was happening every day in Europe where they had not advanced as in this country, and watching from her vantage point, Mrs. Shortley had the sudden intuition that the Gobblehooks, like rats with typhoid fleas, could have carried all those murderous ways over the water with them directly to this place" (CS 196). Mrs. Shortley expresses the same view as many Americans of the

mid-century, that the immoral and evil ways of other countries, namely Communist countries, would spread to America like a contagion. Bacon notes that, while Mrs. Shortley links the Displaced Person not with the Soviet Union but with America's World War II enemy, Nazi Germany, she does "[think] in terms drawn from the Cold War rhetoric of disease" (*Cold War Culture* 18). Desegregation and race mixing were seen as symptoms of this contagious illness, and when Mr. Guizac brings miscegenation onto the farm, he spreads dangerous, Communist ways. Because he is foreign, Taylor notes, Mr. Guizac "may corrupt the purity of the white race in which [Mrs. Shortley] claims membership" (A. Taylor 74). Americans were afraid of the influence of foreignness in the mid-century, as "the newly organized American Communist movement," John E. Haynes writes, "was made up largely of immigrants, non-citizens, and non-English speaking, reinforcing the image of communism as a foreign import" (7). The Guizacs belong to all of these categories and this does not escape the notice of the people on Mrs. McIntyre's farm, particularly Mrs. Shortley. In "The Displaced Person," integration and miscegenation are literally imported from Europe, just as many mid-century Americans feared Communism would be.

But the Guizacs are displaced, and do not really belong to Poland any more than they belong to the Southern farm on which they find themselves. This is a fact that Mrs. Shortley initially acknowledges, explaining to Sulk and Astor that being displaced persons "means they ain't where they were born at and there's nowhere for them to go—like if you was run out of here and wouldn't nobody have you" (*CS* 199). The black hired hands note that the Guizacs, despite Mrs. Shortley's assertion that they have nowhere to go, are now in fact on the farm, an astute observation that Mrs. Shortley dismisses as "the

illogic of Negro-thinking,” a thing that “always irked” her (CS 199). Mrs. Shortley sees a distinct difference between the Guizacs’ being where they are and their being where they belong. On the McIntyre farm, the Guizacs are displaced physically and culturally. As she speaks to Astor and Sulk, Mrs. Shortley says, “They ain’t where they belong to be at [...] They belong to be back over yonder where everything is still like they been used to.” Everything in Poland is not, of course, “like they been used to,” as Duvall notes (CS 199; Duvall 69).

But, despite her ignorance of the Guizacs’ origins or the current conditions of their homeland, Mrs. Shortley’s belief that the Guizacs don’t belong in the United States was a belief shared by many Americans who thought that Communism would spread once people from European countries were introduced permanently into American culture. Brady makes this clear in *Black Monday* when he lays blame to “Communist-minded immigrants” and calls for “rigid restrictions” for immigration (qtd. in Bacon, *Cold War Culture* 98). Brady’s ideas are echoed by Mrs. Shortley, who, O’Connor writes, “thought there ought to be a law against them. There was no reason they couldn’t stay over there and take the places of some of the people who had been killed in their wars and butcherings” (CS 205). Mrs. Shortley is afraid of Mr. Guizac because of his difference and because of his origins. “The Displaced Person,” Bacon suggests, “underscores the suggestion of an alien reality by making the invader a foreigner, a European who barely speaks English” (*Cold War Culture* 8). Mrs. Shortley has made clear her belief that being unable to speak English is equated with being unable to speak at all. In her conversation with Mrs. McIntyre before the arrival of the Guizacs, Mrs. Shortley says, “They can’t talk” (CS 196). The Guizacs can, of course, talk, though they

do not all speak English, but for Mrs. Shortley, being unable to communicate in the same way she does means being unable to communicate altogether, making the Guizacs completely alien to her.

Mrs. Shortley's fear of the foreigner manifests in her fear of foreign language, her association of the Guizacs with the evils of the Holocaust (despite the fact that they are casualties of it¹²), and, most significantly, the evil she believes accompanies the foreigners' inability to adhere to the racial code of the South, which is, for her, the social norm. Before her death, Mrs. Shortley expresses her belief that the priest who brought the Guizacs to the farm is a representation of evil. When Mrs. McIntyre calls Mr. Guizac her "salvation," Mrs. Shortley says, "I would suspicion salvation got from the devil" (*CS* 203). Though it is the priest who Mrs. Shortley believes is the devil, it is Mr. Guizac, the man the priest brought to the farm, who scares her. Rather than feel sympathy for the Guizacs and others like them, Mrs. Shortley fears them because of the foreign influence they bring to the farm. "Every time Mr. Guizac smiled," O'Connor writes, "Europe stretched out in Mrs. Shortley's imagination, mysterious and evil, the devil's experiment station" (*CS* 205).

The other members of the farm community feel the threat of the foreigner, as well. Mr. Shortley tells Mrs. McIntyre of Mrs. Shortley's death, stating, "I figure that Pole killed her" and continuing, "She seen through him from the first. She known he come from the devil" (*CS* 227). Mr. Shortley also compares the Displaced Person to a German soldier in World War II, finding similarity between Mr. Guizac and "the face of

¹² Duvall notes this, writing that, "the victims of the Holocaust (the Guizacs) become the perpetrators of displacement" (67).

one man who had thrown a hand-grenade at him and [...] had had little round eye-glasses exactly like Mr. Guizac's" (227). The comparison of Mr. Guizac to a German soldier supports Mrs. Shortley's association of the Guizacs with the Holocaust, though Mr. Shortley sees Mr. Guizac as a German, telling Mrs. McIntyre, "It ain't a great deal of difference in them two kinds" (227). Mr. Shortley complicates his own comparison by asserting that there is little difference between the Displaced Person, a man who happily supports miscegenation, and a German soldier, a man fighting for a cause that supported genocide. Mr. Guizac has also been displaced because of the German army, but all of this is of no concern to any characters in the story, as the association between miscegenation and Communism is far more important to them than Mr. Shortley's confused comparisons.

Mr. Guizac's foreignness is problematic for him in multiple ways on the farm, but most notably because it prevents him from knowing how his idea to promote an interracial marriage will be perceived by his employer. His assumption that the marriage of his white cousin and a black farm worker is acceptable makes evident not only his ignorance to the Southern code of race, but also his own inclinations about racism. Just as he treats the black workers no differently from himself upon meeting them, he also views interracial marriage in the same way he views intra-racial marriage. Taylor observes that, "as a Pole who experienced the Nazi invasion in 1939, Guizac would have seen first-hand how truly destructive Nazi racial thinking was, an experience which may have resulted in a powerful disinclination to consider race purity or superiority in his dealings with his new countrymen in America" (A. Taylor 76). As Mr. Guizac tells Mrs. McIntyre of his cousin, "She no care black" (CS 223). Mr. Guizac doesn't care about Sulk's race, either,

and his motivation is clearly to remove his cousin from the horrible experience of the displaced persons camp, where she has been for three years. Both of her parents are dead and a marriage to Sulk, because of his willingness to pay for her passage to America, allows her to escape the dire situation in which she is living. Sulk also tells Mrs. McIntyre, “She don’t care who she mah she so glad to get away from there” (220). But Mr. Guizac has demonstrated a misunderstanding of Southern racial codes, as well as little intention of participating in the racist ones that he does observe or understand. “While the marriage between Sulk and his cousin is a marriage of convenience surely,” Taylor writes, “it is also reasonable to assume that Guizac’s profoundly traumatic experience with a violent ideology of race purity and superiority left him intolerant of systems of racial apartheid and more than willing to embrace such a union without regard to race or color” (A. Taylor 77).

Mrs. McIntyre realizes that Mr. Guizac’s belief that there is nothing wrong with his desire to marry his cousin to Sulk may be the result of his foreignness. She tells him, “that nigger cannot have a white wife from Europe. You can’t talk to a nigger that way. You’ll excite him and besides it can’t be done. Maybe it can be done in Poland but it can’t be done here and you’ll have to stop” (CS 222). While she acknowledges that things may be different in Mr. Guizac’s country, she is firm in her assertion that not only are things not done that way in the American South, but that they “can’t be done” that way (CS 222). Mrs. McIntyre’s reason is not that the cousin is a “child,” only sixteen years old, nor that the marriage is arranged between two people who have not met, or even that a man plans to exchange money (for the cousin’s passage) for a young wife, but rather that one person is white and the other black (CS 222). Mrs. McIntyre completely ignores

the plight of a teenage orphan stranded in a Polish displaced persons camp; for Mrs. McIntyre, upholding the racial codes of the South is of far greater importance than feeling any sympathy for Mr. Guizac's cousin, whether she marries Sulk or not. In fact, Mrs. McIntyre's sympathy for the Guizac cousin is based solely on her idea of the "poor innocent child" being married to what she calls a "half-witted thieving black stinking nigger" (CS 222). For Mrs. McIntyre, life in a displaced persons camp is greatly preferable to life in America with one's family if that American life means being married to a black man. Her only recognition of the girl's circumstance is her statement, "I am not responsible for the world's misery," a statement that is "an afterthought" to her outrage at the proposal by a foreigner that an interracial couple live on her farm (CS 223).

The additional implications for Mrs. McIntyre of a foreign-designed interracial marriage are that they also indicate Communist sympathies on her farm. "It did not escape the notice of southerners in the twentieth century, "Lewis notes, "that the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) had no objection to interracial sex" (16). Mr. Guizac, also, has no objection to interracial sex; Mrs. McIntyre, and the other members of her farm and community, however, view this marriage as not only unacceptable but impossible. As Mrs. McIntyre tells the Displaced Person, "Your cousin [. . .] cannot come over here and marry one of my Negroes" (CS 223). Mrs. McIntyre reflects the way in which "the Southern racial regime views such a relationship as intolerable and impossible," Taylor writes (A. Taylor 76). The idea of interracial marriage is an impossibility for Mrs. McIntyre, and the fact that a foreigner brings it with him to Cold War fearful mid-century America links his ideas, which are essentially integrationist ideas, to his foreignness.

Even the black men on the farm acknowledge the taboo of miscegenation, though they do so in a different way from the whites. When Mrs. McIntyre confronts Sulk about the photograph, Sulk says, “I don’t reckon she goin to come nohow” (CS 220). Mrs. McIntyre then promises to get Sulk his money back, and he never says another word about the marriage. Sulk is even one of the three participants in the silent observation of the Displaced Person’s death. Astor, too, recognizes and conforms to white codes regarding miscegenation. When Mrs. McIntyre talks to Astor about the Displaced Person, he vaguely refers to the marriage arrangement between Sulk and Mr. Guizac’s cousin, saying, “It warn’t like it was what he should ought or oughtn’t [. . .] It was like what nobody else don’t do” (216). While Astor doesn’t say that the Displaced Person is doing something wrong, he confirms that Mr. Guizac is doing something outside that which is socially acceptable. Astor recognizes that miscegenation, though unacceptable on the farm, is acceptable to Mr. Guizac because of his foreignness, saying to Mrs. McIntyre, “In Pole it ain’t like it is here [. . .] They got different ways of doing” (CS 216). He also criticizes Mrs. McIntyre’s decision to hire the Displaced Person, referencing Mrs. McIntyre’s dead husband, a judge, in stating, “Judge say the devil he know is better than the devil he don’t” (CS 217). Astor doesn’t like the Pole’s presence on the farm and he uses Mr. Guizac’s foreignness and his breaking of the Southern racial rules as fuel for expressing his disapproval to Mrs. McIntyre.

Mrs. Shortley is also aware of the racial codes of the South, and keeps her information about Mr. Guizac’s violation of those codes to herself, as a comforting secret that confirms her suspicions of Mr. Guizac’s evil foreignness. O’Connor writes, “Mrs. Shortley had a secret herself. She knew something the Displaced Person was doing that

would floor Mrs. McIntyre” (CS 208). Mrs. Shortley knows that Mr. Guizac’s intention to marry his white cousin to a black man will change Mrs. McIntyre’s positive opinion of the Displaced Person, an assumption that is, of course, entirely accurate. Mrs. Shortley, however, has disapproved of Mr. Guizac much longer than the other Southerners of the story. Though she is dead by the time Mrs. McIntyre learns of Mr. Guizac’s plan, Mrs. Shortley not only knows about his plan, but already associates him with miscegenation based on her ideas and visions about wholeness. Mrs. Shortley associates a lack of wholeness with miscegenation in the sense that, for her, to be whole is to be white. This concept is central to Mrs. Shortley’s memory of mismatched body parts and her prophecy about the lack of wholeness for future generations. Lewis writes, “in the mind-set of the white supremacist South, blood in some way denoted racial essence, and the presence of as much as ‘one drop’ of nonwhite blood in an individual’s genealogy therefore excluded any claim to whiteness” (16). Mrs. Shortley’s vision of a lack of wholeness likewise reflects fear of miscegenation, as she has this vision shortly after learning of Mr. Guizac’s attempt to marry his white cousin to a black man. In the throes of her vision, Mrs. Shortley says, “The children of wicked nations will be butchered. [...] Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain whole? Who?” (CS 210).

Mrs. Shortley views the Displaced Person as the harbinger of wickedness to the McIntyre farm and therefore her vision of children being unwhole directly reflects her anxiety at the prospect of invading Displaced Persons bringing with them interracial marriage. The immigrants of Communist-influenced countries will bear “the children of wicked nations” and they will do so by mixing them with non-white races, resulting in

what Mrs. Shortley views as unwhole products of miscegenation. For Mrs. Shortley, only those who are not influenced by “wicked nations” and those who do not participate in the fragmented mixing of races, will “remain whole.” Of the priest, whom Mrs. Shortley views as the instigator in bringing more Polish people to the farm, and therefore to the country as well, she says he has “come to destroy” (CS 210). The priest not only destroys the wholeness of racial structure on the farm, but he also threatens to destroy the what Mrs. Shortley views as the Southern racial wholeness of white purity. By bringing the foreign Displaced Person, Mrs. Shortley believes, the priest has also brought the destruction of the farm, the white race, the Southern social order, and the identity and safety of Mrs. Shortley and other white American Southerners like her.

Mrs. Shortley is not the only person on the farm who perceives unwholeness in Mr. Guizac. Mrs. McIntyre, once she has learned of his intention to promote miscegenation on her farm, also begins to see Mr. Guizac as fragmented. Not only does she see him as a “monster,” but, as O’Connor writes, “His whole face looked as if it might have been patched together out of several others” (CS 222). As Taylor writes, Mr. Guizac, once Mrs. McIntyre begins to view him differently, has an “apparently miscegenated body” (A. Taylor 78). When the Displaced Person begins to represent miscegenation, his own appearance loses its visible whiteness and takes on the appearance of having been “patched together out of several others,” making it unwhole (CS 222). This is the same as Mrs. Shortley’s vision of the bodies of the Holocaust and the lack of wholeness that is brought by “wicked nations” (CS 210). Not only does Mr. Guizac represent race mixing, but he also represents foreign nations that seek to corrupt and destroy the American way of life. “Anticipating the *Brown* decision,” Lewis writes,

“the Citizens Grass Roots Crusade of South Carolina argued in January 1954 that there was a devilish scheme afoot” on the part of the American government to support miscegenation (39). In “Reds Plot American Disintegration,” the group argued that this plan intended to “dilute and degenerate the best American stock by interbreeding it with human strains from lower intellectual, moral, and spiritual levels” (qtd. in Lewis 39).

Mrs. McIntyre sees a “devilish” intent in Mr. Guizac, something that she never notices before she learns of his plan to promote miscegenation on her farm. Once she learns of it, Mr. Guizac becomes a “monster” and Mrs. McIntyre uses a string of racist descriptors for Sulk in her admonishment of the displaced person. She says to him, “Mr. Guizac! You would bring this poor innocent child over here and try to marry her to a half-witted thieving black stinking nigger! What kind of a monster are you!” (CS 222). Her perception of Sulk indicates her agreement with the Citizens Grass Roots Crusade, as she believes that he is of low intellect and low morals. Her extreme reaction to the discovery of Mr. Guizac’s plan, as well as her assertion that the white cousin is a “poor innocent child,” indicates that she strongly agrees with the rhetoric of the time that condemned miscegenation as the dilution of the white race (CS 222). It is of note in this passage that Mrs. McIntyre now views Mr. Guizac as non-white, but his cousin, an “innocent child” and therefore not a perpetrator of this proposed interracial relationship, retains her whiteness for Mrs. McIntyre. Mr. Guizac, however, becomes a patchwork monster whose very appearance indicates the mixing of races. In chiding Mr. Guizac for his actions, Mrs. McIntyre also expresses the difference she perceives between white people and Sulk. She tells Mr. Guizac that she cannot believe he would marry his cousin “to something like that” (223). The “something like that,” is Sulk, who, because he is

black and involved in a discussion about mixing races, has been reduced from man to object, just as Mr. Guizac has been reduced from man to monster (223).

Mr. Shortley's negative opinion of Mr. Guizac becomes problematic for Mrs. McIntyre when he begins to tell others about the Displaced Person, all the while judging Mrs. McIntyre for continuing to employ Mr. Guizac. "Mrs. McIntyre," O'Connor writes, "found that everybody in town knew Mr. Shortley's version of her business and that everyone was critical of her conduct. She began to understand that she had a moral obligation to fire the Pole and that she was shirking it because she found it hard to do" (233). Mrs. McIntyre's "moral obligation," she believes, is to rid the town of this man who brings foreign influence, the threat of Communism, and, most importantly to members of her white Southern community, the threat of race mixing. When Mr. Shortley expresses that, "it would give him some satisfaction to see the Pole leave the place," Mrs. McIntyre "[confesses]," to him, O'Connor writes, "that she should have been content with the help she had in the first place and not have been reaching into other parts of the world for it" (227). By hiring Mr. Guizac instead of continuing to rely on the mediocre-at-best help she has in other Southerners she has hired, Mrs. McIntyre feels she has betrayed her fellow Southern Americans. She believes, based on the community's fear of foreigners and miscegenation, that she should have chosen American Southern loyalty over employee quality. This belief coincides with the segregationist argument that to be Communist is to be un-American and that to be American is to be opposed to integration.

This is a belief asserted by Sass, who claims that, "the founders of the future United States maintained their practice of non-amalgamation rigorously." He also claims that, "it is nonsense to say that racial discrimination, the necessary consequence of race

preference, is ‘un-American.’ Actually it is perhaps the most distinctly American thing there is [...] Today when racial discrimination of any kind or degree is instantly denounced as both sinful and stupid, few stop to reflect that this nation is built solidly upon it” (5). The Red Scare made it essential for those who didn’t wish to be viewed as Communist to make sure they were viewed as American, and those who sought to connect Communism to integration propagated miscegenation as more than just a Southern taboo; they also presented it as an act that flew in the face of all that was patriotic and American.

Mrs. McIntyre chooses to uphold the “southern nationalism” that Woods observes “had at its core a regional desire to protect the ‘southern way of life’ from outside threats” (2). In “The Displaced Person,” the elimination of this threat comes not from Mrs. McIntyre’s firing of the Displaced Person, but rather from his accidental death—an accident that could have been prevented had Mrs. McIntyre, Sulk, or Mr. Shortley warned him of the tractor. O’Connor writes, “Later she remembered that she had seen the Negro jump silently out of the way as if a spring in the earth had released him and that she had seen Mr. Shortley turn his head with incredible slowness and stare silently over his shoulder and that she had started to shout to the Displaced Person but that she had not” (CS 234). All three observers see the impending disaster but all three remain silent. They are complacent in the death of Mr. Guizac, a death that relieves them of the burden of a foreigner who has done nothing wrong technically but whose foreign presence on the farm is perceived as a violation of and a threat to their way of life. As Bacon writes, the story “ends with the destruction of the foreign invader” (*Cold War Culture* 13). Because

Mr. Guizac represents a foreign invading presence for the racially coded South, his association with Cold War anxiety is already present when he arrives on the farm.

It is Mr. Guizac's acceptance and promotion of interracial marriage, however, that causes him to be viewed as too foreign to be a member of Mrs. McIntyre's farm community. Though initially enthusiastic about his presence on the farm, Mrs. McIntyre finds Mr. Guizac's encouragement of miscegenation impossible to reconcile with the codes of a mid-century South preoccupied with desegregation and its connection to Communism. Mr. Guizac's presence on the farm, in fact, results in the displacement of the Southern farm workers. The society of their farm, built solidly upon an understanding of hierarchy based on race and economic status, is disrupted by the Guizacs, particularly by Mr. Guizac's introduction of miscegenation to the farm community. Though the Guizacs are the characters of O'Connor's story who have been physically displaced, the Southerners of the story find themselves culturally displaced in their own region, and their rejection of this change causes Mr. Guizac's death.

O'Connor called race a "topical" matter that was not as significant as the other themes that ran beneath the surface of her work (qtd. in Magee 109). But her treatment of race, not only in "The Displaced Person," but also in other stories, reveals that the race concerns she deemed topical were deeply connected to other anxieties and fears of mid-century American culture, in the South and out of it. In a 1963 interview with *Atlanta Magazine*, she was asked, "Will today's social crisis produce a new literature?" (qtd. in Magee 102). O'Connor later revealed in a letter that the interviewer had originally asked her about the "*race* crisis," and commented that changing the word "race" to "social" in

the magazine yielded the result that “none of it makes much sense [emphasis O’Connor’s]” (*HB* 537). To the interviewer, O’Connor replied:

To suggest such is, I think, to romanticize the race business to a ridiculous degree and to exaggerate out of all proportion the present crisis for literature [. . .] The Negro will in the matter of a few years have his constitutional rights and we will all then see that the business of getting along with each other is much the same as it always has been, even though new manners are called for. The fiction writer is interested in individuals, not races; he knows that good and evil are not apportioned along racial lines and when he deals with topical matters, if he is any good, he sees the long run through the short run. (qtd. in Magee 109)

O’Connor may have viewed race issues as topical matters, but her stories indicate that race concerns in the South reflect intense anxiety about the Cold War and about the changing nature of Southern cultural identity. When the rigid cultural codes of the South began to change, many white Southerners felt displaced in their own hometowns. No matter how topical O’Connor thought race issues in the South were in her fiction, the impact of the Civil Rights movement in conjunction with fear of Communism in the mid-century South makes these matters central to her characters’ beliefs, fears, and actions.

The fear of alliance between Civil Rights and Communism was not entirely unfounded, although it was often exaggerated by segregationists. “Communists and radicals did work for the civil rights movement,” Woods writes, many of them “[hoping] to bring the fight for racial justice under the larger umbrella of class struggle” (8). When

the Great Depression damaged the Southern economy, Woods notes, “the denunciation of capitalism and the promise of a socialist utopia devoid of poverty and discrimination were potentially appealing messages to blacks.” During this time, “Communists gained members among the destitute in textile towns while the *Southern Worker*, the party’s regional mouthpiece published in Birmingham, promised hope for oppressed working classes, including blacks” (21). The response to this in Birmingham was for “[l]ocal enclaves of the Ku Klux Klan” to use “anticommunism to destabilize the internal working-class alliances that threatened the white power structure” (Lewis 86). Sometime between 1930 and 1939¹³, the KKK printed and posted a flyer reading:

NEGROES BEWARE/DO NOT ATTEND COMMUNIST MEETINGS/ Paid organizers
for the communists are only trying to get negroes in trouble. Alabama is a
good place for good negroes to live in, but it is a bad place for negroes
who believe in SOCIAL EQUALITY./ The Ku Klux Klan Is Watching You./
TAKE HEED/ Tell the Communist leaders to leave. Report all communist
meetings to the/Ku Klux Klan/Post Office Box 651, Birmingham,
Alabama./ Communism will not [be]¹⁴ tolerated/ KU KLUX KLAN RIDES
AGAIN. (“Negroes Beware”)

The Klan’s assertion that the “SOCIAL EQUALITY” promoted by these alleged Communist meetings is unacceptable in Alabama is made clear in a way that censures black

¹³ The Alabama Textual Materials Archives does not provide an exact date for the flyer, but labels the poster’s time period as between 1930 and 1939. A report on Communist activity in Birmingham from the same archives mentions that, before a Communist meeting in October of 1932, “the Ku Klux Klan staged a demonstration on the downtown streets at midnight, posting placards announcing that ‘The Klan Rides Again’ to stamp out Communists” (“Correspondence”).

¹⁴ The image of the flyer in the Alabama Textual Materials Archives has a tear between the words “not” and “tolerated.” I make the assumption that the missing word is “be.” Between this sentence and the sentence “KU KLUX KLAN RIDES AGAIN” are multiple cartoon images of a Klan member in a robe and hood, holding a burning torch while riding a rearing horse, also in robe and hood.

Alabamians who are considering Communism while also professing an urge to protect “good negroes” from the Communists who are “only trying to get negroes in trouble” (“Negroes Beware”). The Klan’s portrayed protective nature of Birmingham blacks is a ploy not only to align themselves with the concerns of Alabama’s black residents, but to also encourage blacks to turn in Communist leaders.

Reports of such meetings were met with action by the KKK in an attempt to fight Communism while also fighting an organization that sought social equality, and therefore economic equality, for blacks in Birmingham. Another document, a set of correspondence from 1932 between Brigadier General J. C. Persons of the Alabama National Guard and Governor Benjamin Miller, further elucidates the official position of government officials on the Communist activity in Birmingham. Persons wrote to Governor Miller with an enclosed report from Lieutenant Ralph E. Hurst from the Military Intelligence Reserve Corps. The report, written on October 19, 1932, carries the subject line “COMMUNIST AGITATION” and discusses various Communist meetings and activities in Birmingham. After some Communist “agents” were arrested¹⁵, the report states that, “Reports and correspondence taken from the arrested agents reveal that they have been instructed to concentrate on Negroes in the South, but lately they have been appealing to the lower classes of white unemployed” (“Correspondence” 2). The report also provides details of Communist meetings, during which the report claims Communists told those gathered that “the United States was preparing for war, particularly war against Russia, and that instead of fighting workers of another country

¹⁵ The report states, “Police have for months arrested these agents but the most applicable charge—that of vagrancy—will not stand because they show proof that they are employed by the I.L.D. As a result, the police can do nothing more than finger print and photograph them for records and turn them loose” (“Correspondence” 2).

they must fight the capitalists of their own. Both whites and blacks were urged to unite to go out and take food or whatever their families needed” (3). Hurst claims that the leaders of the meeting told those who attended “that Negroes raised the whites, that black nurses nursed white babies when their mothers would not give them the time. The whites are no better than the blacks, [a speaker] asserted” (4). The report also states that the second Communist meeting mentioned in the report was affected by a presence of sixty Ku Klux Klan members and by the flyers the Klan had distributed before the meeting. Lieutenant Hurst closes his report as follows:

The Communist agents are playing a shrewd game of capitalizing on unemployment and adverse conditions. You are familiar with these conditions and will appreciate that those who are desperate will rally under almost any banner that holds forth any hope. I have attempted to neither over-state nor underestimate the situation here. My candid opinion is that unless more relief facilities than are now in prospect are made available here this Winter that there is a likelihood of some disorders and attendant violence. (“Correspondence” 5)

The tone of this report indicates not only the fear of Communism felt by white Southerners, but also the extreme distaste for the Communists who sought to recruit Southern blacks and therefore disrupt the social order of the South, particularly in Birmingham. The Ku Klux Klan, the epitome of racial violence, is viewed in the report as a large help, able to break up a Communist meeting when the Birmingham police and officials were unable to prevent it. The report’s focus on what those who attended the

meetings were told also indicates the anxiety felt by white Southerners who viewed any talk of social equality as extremely dangerous for the South.

These events in Birmingham and the association between lower class blacks and Communism in the 1930s fueled fears that Communism was the means by which blacks would bridge the class gap between themselves and whites. Segregationists worked to discredit the Civil Rights Movement by associating it with Communism, believing in “[t]he long-held racist assumption that African Americans were easily duped into supporting un-American causes” and that “black and red cooperation” was “among the greatest threats to domestic tranquility” (Woods 48). This fear was due in part to the widespread belief in a connection between the NAACP and Communism. The NAACP had been at work “dismantling Jim Crow and the white power structure while inspiring middle-class blacks, and some working-class blacks, to join the struggle,” and “[b]y the 1950s the group had attracted the full attention of segregationists. Southern reactionaries charged that Communists had infiltrated the group and were beginning to control its movements” (Woods 49). This led to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover’s investigation of the NAACP. When the FBI kept a close watch on the organization during the a 1956 civil rights conference, Hoover’s conclusion was “that the NAACP remained strongly anti-communist,” but he believed that the NAACP was, along with the White Citizens’ Council and the Nation of Islam, a contributor to “growing tension in the South that could at any time erupt into violence” and that Communism was “gaining converts amid this racial strife” (Woods 90). In 1957, after a few years of Hoover’s reports on “red and black cooperation,” Hoover spoke to the cabinet about protests which were led by what he claimed were “some overzealous but ill-advised leaders of the NAACP and by the

Communist party, which seeks to use incidents to further the so-called class struggle” (qtd. in Woods, 91). By this time, the FBI and Hoover had done major damage to the reputation of the Civil Rights movement in regards to how the American government viewed its association with Communism. “For many cabinet members,” Woods writes, “Hoover had successfully linked a national consensus concerning the threat of Communism to the more problematic one concerning the threat of the civil rights movement to American and particularly southern institutions” (91). Hoover continued this campaign to link Communism to Civil Rights, and fueled the Southern red scare by “[providing] a general model and specific guidance to local and state law-enforcement officials conducting red and black investigations” (92).

Among the many government campaigns to link Communism to Civil Rights was “[t]he Louisiana Joint Legislative Committee to Maintain Segregation, an official arm of Louisiana legislature,” which “brought in some professional ex-Communist witnesses to testify, falsely, that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was secretly Communist controlled” (Haynes 186). The belief in the link between Communism and desegregation was also strongly propagated by the Citizen’s Council, a group that included “[m]any of the South’s most prominent political and economic leaders” and that “used every mode of communication it could muster to charge that reds had infiltrated the civil rights movement” (Woods 143). After all of this, those who worked for the Civil Rights movement began “to understand that if they did not want to encumber their already difficult task, they would have to purge Communist influences

and hope that this would redeem the struggle for black equality in the eyes of the public¹⁶” (48).

The close ties between class equality and Communism made integration an easy target for segregationists who could claim that more economic and social equality between the races was indicative of Communism in American society. After the *Brown* decision, Mississippi Senator James Eastland claimed that the decision was “an attempt ‘to graft into organic law of the land the teachings, preaching, and social doctrines [of] Karl Marx . . . What other explanation could there be except that a majority of [the Supreme] Court is being influenced by some secret, but very powerful Communist or pro-Communist influence?’” (qtd. in Haynes, 186). Eastland expressed the sentiment that the drastic change brought about by the integration of the schools was inexplicable except by the influence of some outside force that promoted a society completely unlike that of the United States. “Although *Brown* itself applied only to segregation in schools,” Lewis explains, “its seminal importance rested upon its dismantling of the separate-but-equal premise: the South was left with no constitutional basis from which to protect any form of social, political, or economic segregation” (30). This was more than an integration of schools; it was, for many white Southerners, a destruction of their way of life, their social system, and their class system, and therefore, their entire region. One teacher expressed

¹⁶ In his 1932 report about Communist meetings in Birmingham, Hurst calls the NAACP “a reputable Negro organization” and discusses its resolve to remain separate from the Communists of Birmingham. He also mentions that the NAACP was met with adversity from the I.L.D. when NAACP members arrived in Birmingham “to handle an appeal of the Scottsboro cases” (“Correspondence” 3). The report also mentions that a speaker at a Communist meeting made “remarks about the N.A.A.C.P. trying to get the Scottsboro Negroes lynched” (3). The Scottsboro case references it that of nine black teenagers in Scottsboro, Alabama, who were accused of rape in 1931. After the boys were sentenced to death, Richard Wormser writes, “The Communist Party USA took charge of the case.” The report by Hurst chronicles the NAACP’s struggle to get involved, stating that the NAACP representatives “refused outright to associate themselves in any way with Communism and retired even while Walter White, of New York, secretary of the N.A.A.C.P. appealed to the Communists to quit the case” (“Correspondence” 3).

that belief, stating that, “‘the destructive outside forces’ that had unleashed the decision upon the region would ‘bring forth the deterioration of our Grand Old South’” (qtd. in Lewis 40). The "Grand Old South" is a cultural location itself; despite attempts to retain it after the Civil War, the South as a region as and as a culture are, in many ways, different things.

The changing cultural location of the South displaced many white Southerners in the same way Americans feared that their own culture would be destroyed by Communism. Because Communism represented a dismantling of capitalism and democracy in America, the idea of a merging of classes between the races easily linked racial fears to political fears. As Haynes writes,

Communist ideology was incompatible with the values held by most Americans. Americans have always held a variety of political views, but most support private property, take immense pride in their individualism, and glory in political democracy. Soviet communism, in contrast, abolished private property, instituted the collective, not the individual, as the basis of society, and established a one-party dictatorship that ruthlessly suppressed dissent. (7)

American emphasis on individuality and personal value, often defined by race and class, allowed no room for a society in which personal property became public, divisions of class disappeared, and races became equal. Lewis writes that, “atheistic, egalitarian communism was, in many ways, the antithesis of those values of the white South” (173). For those who believed they saw their own sources of superiority disappearing, and their

own social status changing with the changing policies on segregation, the parallel between a Communist-invaded America and a forcibly-integrated South became more and more visible.

In *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, O'Connor's second collection of short stories, published posthumously in 1964, O'Connor again tackles global concerns by narrowing her focus to a newly-integrated Atlanta bus in the collection's title story. The story covers the brief period of time during which Julian, a young man living with his mother in Atlanta, escorts her on the bus on their way to her YMCA "reducing class," which is meant to help her lose weight in order to lower her blood pressure (CS 405). The story ends soon after the pair arrive at their bus stop. But despite the short amount of time that passes in the story, it is a story that encompasses a great deal of anxiety in the American South about integration, and that also reflects the nation's concern with communism, though this time the race mixing with which the characters are concerned is mainly a merger of social rank, and the white characters of the story are displaced without ever leaving the region in which they live.

Julian's mother, who is never identified by name in the story, is frequently preoccupied with her family's former high social rank and economic status, though her current circumstances, and those throughout Julian's life, are quite different. They live together in an apartment in a part of town that "had been a fashionable neighborhood forty years ago," leading Julian's mother to "[persist] in thinking they did well to have an apartment in it" (CS 406). Julian, an aspiring but unsuccessful writer, sells typewriters for a living and his mother is so concerned with money that she expresses her desire to return a new hat so that she can instead use the money to pay their gas bill. O'Connor writes

that Julian's mother has had to sacrifice a great deal throughout her life in order to give Julian advantages, such as her own teeth going "unfilled so that his could be straightened" (411). Julian's mother values class highly, but neither she nor her son belong to a high social rank; she simply remains a part of that class by her own belief, which is based in heritage and race. She also belongs to a class that is, until the night of the bus ride, respected by the racial codes and rules of Southern society. But Julian's mother is displaced by a changing culture that no longer adheres to the old codes of social rank and race superiority.

Although "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is a story far more concerned with the racial division of class than with miscegenation, O'Connor does include a section of the story in which Julian fantasizes about the various ways in which he could shock his mother into learning a lesson about her racist tendencies. While he envisions making friends with a black lawyer or professor, or taking his mother to be treated by a black doctor, the fantasy that is "the ultimate horror" involves his romantic involvement with a woman of black heritage (CS 414). O'Connor writes that Julian imagines that "[h]e brought home a suspiciously Negroid woman" (414). Even Julian's fantasy woman is not a black woman, but rather one who looks "suspiciously" as if she were of mixed race herself. This is certainly enough to scandalize his mother, who previously expressed to him, "The ones I feel sorry for [. . .] are the ones that are half white. They're tragic" (408). This woman, "tragic" in his mother's opinion, also presents the potential to mix his mother's cherished white bloodline with black heritage. Julian imagines telling his mother, "Prepare yourself [. . .] There is nothing you can do about it. This is the woman I've chosen. She's intelligent, dignified, even good, and she's suffered and she hasn't

thought it *fun*. Now persecute us, go ahead and persecute us. Drive her out of here, but remember, you're driving me too" (414). The potential for mixing his mother's heritage with that of a woman of mixed racial heritage is "the ultimate horror" for her, partially because it mixes her blood not only with black lineage but also with a family that is not of the same social rank and economic status as the one from which she is so proud to have come. "The Cold War climate," Lewis writes, "reinforced the widespread belief in the South that communist forces were actively encouraging miscegenation in order to benefit from the social chaos that would inevitably follow" (48). Part of that chaos would be the merging of classes, leaving the South without a definable system by which white Southerners, particularly those like Julian's mother whose class is based in once-held, and not current, economic status, could uphold their superiority. In this sense, many whites were displaced in the South of the mid-century as their own self-determined location—a cultural location, not a geographic one—became vastly different than that which they had experienced for decades.

The anxiety of displacement was present throughout the country as many feared the classless homogeneity of Communism, and it was even more prevalent among white Southerners who feared that their entire social structure was crumbling in the face of integration. "Not surprisingly," Woods writes, "a conservative white-power elite led the southern red scare. Threatened by political and social changes that would undermine their power, white political and economic leaders looked to the scare to preserve the status quo" (6). While Julian's mother does not fall into the category of a high economic class, the fact that her family once belonged to this class feeds her belief that she knows who she is, as she is fond of saying. When, to prove to her that her class is not how she

perceives it, Julian asks his mother to examine their formerly fashionable neighborhood, which is now run-down and in a lower income part of the city, she replies, “You remain what you are” (CS 408).

Part of Julian’s mother’s belief in her family’s status stems from the fact that her ancestors were slave owners. In defense of her statement that she remains who she is no matter her current economic situation, she tells Julian, “Your great-grandfather had a plantation and two hundred slaves” (O’Connor, CS 408). She uses the fact that her grandfather was a slave owner to bolster her own status in the middle of the Civil Rights-torn South. When Julian tells her, “There are no more slaves,” she quickly moves to what Julian thinks of as “that topic” (408). “They were better off when they were,” Julian’s mother replies, “It’s ridiculous. It’s simply not realistic. They should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence” (408). Julian’s mother, who has frequently made this argument to her son, claims to agree with Civil Rights in terms of equality for blacks in the South, but only if that equality does not interfere with her own location in society. What Julian’s mother fears is that black people will rise to a social status equal to or higher than that of white people, crossing onto what she believes is her “side of the fence.” She uses the metaphor of a physical location to indicate the cultural and social differences between races; she and other whites of privileged upbringing are located on one side, and black people are located on the other. When Southern blacks begin to cross into her area of social standing, Julian’s mother finds herself without a location that is familiar to her.

This scenario was the same for many white Southerners. No matter their economic or social status, many Southern whites relied on the distinct lines between the

racism, and they relied on them not only for individual identity, but also for regional identity. Harry S. Ashmore, in his 1958 book *An Epitaph for Dixie*, claims that, “[w]hen black Southerners completed their transition ‘from second- to first-class citizenship,’ Bacon writes, “the South would no longer be special.” Ashmore writes, “The transition can be accomplished only at the expense of the qualities that made the South distinctive, and cast it in the remarkable role it has played in the history of the Republic” (qtd. in Bacon, *Cold War Culture* 88-9). While Julian’s mother may not be as concerned with the South’s role in the history of the United States, she is concerned with retaining her place in society, something that she can only do if the racial hierarchy of the South remains intact. She says, “With the world in the mess it’s in, [. . .] it’s a wonder we can enjoy anything. I tell you, the bottom rail is on the top” (O’Connor, *CS* 407). Again, she uses the language of location to indicate her displeasure at the changes made by integration. Seeing black people gaining economic class status, particularly while her family has lost it, has turned Julian’s mother’s world upside down. The incidents on the bus further prove to her that race equality is changing, and therefore class distinctions will change with it, leaving her without the social location on which she has relied throughout her life, even as her financial circumstances have changed.

The blurry lines of social rank and economic status between the two races is made apparent in “Everything That Rises Must Converge” in the hats worn by Julian’s mother and the black woman on the bus. While Julian’s mother feels that the hat, an item that she cannot really afford, does belong to a woman of her rank, the hat is also worn by a black woman, a fact that makes visible the lack of class division between the two women, regardless of race. As Julian tells his mother late in the story, “That was your black

double” (CS 419). Both women, despite the difference in their races, can afford the same hat; in fact, the black woman may have been better able to afford it than Julian’s mother.

Julian’s realization that the two women are wearing the same hat is objectionable not only to Julian’s mother, but also to the black woman. Julian, O’Connor writes, “was conscious of a kind of bristling next to him, muted growling like that of an angry cat” (CS 416). The black woman also wishes to distinguish herself from the older white woman, who, she rightly assumes, thinks herself superior to her because of her race. In “Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O’Connor,” Alice Walker recalls telling her own mother the story of “Everything That Rises Must Converge.” When she tells her mother of the two women on the bus wearing the same hat, Walker’s mother says, “Black folks have money to buy foolish things with too, now,” to which Walker replies, “O’Connor’s point exactly! Everything that rises, must converge” (75). Julian’s mother is forced to recognize that black people can buy the same things she can, and that they are no longer automatically located below her in Southern society because of their race.

The very title of “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” based on a line from theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, indicates, as Walker observes, that it is impossible for things to rise without merging. It is impossible for Julian’s mother’s idea of blacks rising “on their own side of the fence” to occur, a fact she discovers when she is assaulted by a black woman wearing a hat identical to her own (CS 408). She “believes,” Leanne E. Smith writes, that “she is living to uphold traditions that cannot exist in a post-integration society” (47). This is part of her identity; she is a white Southerner from a previously affluent family and therefore her social rank remains high even though her economic class status is low. “But the end of segregation,” Bacon writes, “as dramatized by

O'Connor, also means the loss of individual identity. 'Everything That Rises' features a debate on the question of individual identity in a setting representative of the perceived threat to Southern regional identity—an integrated bus" (*Cold War Culture* 104). Julian's mother's identity is located in a different place at mid-century than she believes it to be. And while Julian's mother asserts her identity, "conten[ding] that 'who you are' remains constant, despite economic hardship," Bacon adds, Julian "discredits any identity based on past social status" (*Cold War Culture* 105). Julian, despite his hypocrisy, represents the intellectual liberal who, in the case of "Everything That Rises," is representative of the kind of invading, neutral, identity-void presence that many white Southerners feared would destroy the South, and that Americans feared would make them vulnerable to homogenous, classless Communism.

The fear of cultural displacement due to racial equality in the South is a theme central to multiple O'Connor characters. In another short story from O'Connor's last collection, Mrs. Turpin of "Revelation" imagines what she would choose if forced by God to be either "white-trash" or "a nigger." While desperate to be neither, if forced to choose, Mrs. Turpin chooses to be "a nigger [. . .] but that don't mean a trashy one." She wants to be "a neat clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black." Because she values class so highly, Mrs. Turpin chooses to be black but respectable over being white but "white-trash," but she is still incensed at the thought of being black at all. The locations of various types of people on the social ladder of the South is so important to Mrs. Turpin that she often "[occupies] herself at night naming the classes of people" (*CS* 491). Her classifications are based on differences between races, and also on differences between economic class and heritage. She orders the races and classes as follows:

On the bottom of the heap were most colored people, not the kind she would have been if she had been one, but most of them; then next to them—not above, just away from—were the white-trash; then above them were the home-owners, and above them the home-and-land owners, to which she and Claud belonged. Above she and Claud were people with a lot of money and much bigger houses and much more land. (CS 491)

But while Mrs. Turpin's initial categorizations are based on money, she soon finds this method of division tricky, as it doesn't account for wealthy heritage (which she calls "good blood"), behavior that is "common," or, significantly, race.

But here the complexity of it would begin to bear in on her, for some of the people with a lot of money were common and ought to be below she and Claud and some of the people who had good blood had lost their money and had to rent and then there were colored people who owned their homes and land as well. There was a colored dentist in town who had two red Lincolns and a swimming pool and a farm with registered white-face cattle on it. (CS 491-2)

Mrs. Turpin certainly finds the amalgamation of races in terms of economic class and land ownership problematic, as she refuses to place black "home-and-land owners" in the same category as herself and her husband. She is obviously frustrated about where to place the black dentist, and his many possessions are a source of confusion and resentment.

Mrs. Turpin also has a vision at the end of the story in which the classes have been reversed. This vision terrifies and angers her and causes her to scream at God, at one point challenging him to “Put that bottom rail on top. There’ll still be a top and bottom!” (O’Connor, *CS* 507). Echoing Julian’s mother’s statement that integration has resulted in “the bottom rail” being “on the top,” Mrs. Turpin taunts God with, and takes comfort in, the fact that, even if the ladder were upended, it would still have a top and a bottom, giving order to the classes even if that order is backwards (407). Mrs. Turpin is concerned with social location; when locations are changed, the classes are displaced, and this is what Mrs. Turpin fears more than anything, as it would result in her own displacement. Even her anger at God is based in her belief in social location, as she screams, “Who do you think you are?” (507). In the throes of her rage, Mrs. Turpin demands that even the higher power in which she so strongly believes classify himself and place that class in relation to her own in order to prove superiority. Mrs. Turpin’s fear is not just of a blurring of the lines that define social rank and economic class between the races, but of an inversion of class similar to that caused by Communism in which the ownership of private property and the concept of class division were demonized.

Mrs. Turpin’s conversation with the other white people in the doctor’s office waiting room demonstrates that, in any economic class to which a white Southerner belonged, he or she still found the division of social rank by race more important than division by economic status. Despite Mrs. Turpin’s assertion that she would rather be a “respectable” black woman than “white-trash,” and the fact that her thoughts are harshly critical of the “white trash” people in the waiting room, her discussion with the other white people at the doctor’s office is rife with racism, including her profession of a fear

of miscegenation. In an incredibly racist and ignorant discussion about why sending all the black people to Africa is not a viable option, one of Mrs. Turpin's reasons that they would refuse to go is centered on her belief that it is the goal of blacks to produce offspring with whites. Black people, she claims, are "going to stay here where they can go to New York and marry white folks and improve their color. That's what they all want to do, every one of them, improve their color" (O'Connor, CS 496). Mrs. Turpin first attributes the possibility of race mixing to New York, not to anywhere in the South, confirming the idea that to introduce race mixing to the South would be to change the region's cultural location. Mrs. Turpin believes that, in order to "marry white folks," black people must leave the South entirely, essentially displacing themselves. Her next assumption is that all black people want to produce children with white people in order to make their skin as light as possible. The word "improve" here is significant, as it denotes the clear assumption in the South that lighter skin was preferable to dark skin, and the lighter the better. Mrs. Turpin believes that black people want to change their physical location in order to elevate their social location.

Mrs. Turpin also professes her belief that black people must be carefully handled in order for them to be kept happy enough to continue performing the function they serve in her own life. She tells the others in the waiting room, "It's good weather for cotton if you can get the niggers to pick it [. . .] but niggers don't want to pick cotton any more. You can't get the white folks to pick it and now you can't get the niggers—because they got to be right up there with the white folks" (O'Connor, CS 493). Not only is Mrs. Turpin critical of black people's desire to share the same social and culture location as white people, but she also reveals another reason she is afraid of social equality. For the

characters of “Revelation,” picking cotton is below the class of all white people, and if black people become equal to white people, Mrs. Turpin and Claud will have no one to pick their cotton, a job that neither of them has any plans to do, but one that they need done in order for their farm to prosper.

To get black people to work in the Turpins’ fields, Mrs. Turpin believes that fake friendliness is necessary. “I sure am tired of buttering up niggers” she says, “but you got to love em if you want em to work for you. When they come in the morning, I run out and I say, ‘Hi yawl this morning?’ and when Claud drives them off to the field I just wave to beat the band and they just wave back” (O’Connor, *CS* 494). Mrs. Turpin believes her charade is necessary to keep the black people working the farm because, without it, they would know that she places them below she and Claud on the social ladder, and then they would refuse to work for the Turpins. She feels the impending change of social and economic class, but for her, and for other white Southerners like her, that change is an invasion and it forces her to redefine her own location in Southern society.

Mrs. Turpin’s problem is the same as that of Julian’s mother; she fears desegregation will cause her to lose her current location in Southern society. Neither of the women is wealthy, particularly Julian’s mother, but each woman feels she occupies a high place in society because of the type of woman she is. For Julian’s mother, this type is based in her family heritage and the wealth and social status that her family once held. Because she belongs to this family, she believes that she is superior to most of those around her, despite her own economic circumstances. Mrs. Turpin’s type is based in two main beliefs. First, she believes that she is of higher status because she and Claud own

both their homes and land, and second, she believes that her social circumstances exclude her from the category she calls "trash." Despite the fact that neither Mrs. Turpin nor Julian's mother are part of the "conservative white-power elite" that "led the southern red scare," they do fall into the category of supporters of that same cause. As Woods notes, "the scare could not have existed without popular support. White working-class southerners needed little convincing from elites that Communism and integration were part of a unified threat to the region and to the nation. They overwhelmingly supported both segregation and anti-Communism" (6). The idea of Communist invasion linked to class equality between blacks and whites was a concept that many white Southerners latched onto easily, as many of them "equated dramatic social reform, particularly in race relations, with the conspiratorial designs of outsiders," Woods writes (48). Mrs. Turpin's belief that Northerners—outsiders to Southerners—will abide the mixing of races in ways that most Southerners will not is an example of this type of foreignness that many of O'Connor's white characters fear is encroaching upon the South and therefore displacing them in their own region.

In "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Julian's mother discusses with her fellow white travelers on the bus that there are no black invaders to their territory. After Julian and his mother board the bus, O'Connor writes, "Everybody was white. 'I see we have the bus to ourselves,' she said." One of the other white passengers, of lower social class than Julian's mother, but nonetheless of a higher social status than any black passengers would be, even the well-dressed, presumably successful black man who later boards the bus, comments, "For a change [. . .] I come on the other day and they were thick as fleas—up front and all through." The "they" here is never identified more

specifically than the pronoun; all the white passengers understand who “they” are. “They” are outsiders to this white territory; this bus, currently void of any black passengers, is a temporary safe zone from the invasion of integration. Even though Julian’s mother enters the bus “with a little smile, as if she were going into a drawing room where everyone had been waiting for her,” an act that demonstrates her belief in her social superiority to the others on the bus, she still commiserates with them about integration (O’Connor, *CS* 410). These people may not be her equals, she believes, but their whiteness unites them all. It is the invasion of this white safe zone that brings to light Julian’s mother’s inability to adapt to her changing location in society.

Julian’s mother’s attempt to remain in the social system of the past leads her to make a mistake that is based in a mid-century form of noblesse oblige. When she attempts to give the black child on the bus a penny, an action that she views as a kind and affectionate act between someone of her class and a young black child, the merging of classes fuels the black child’s mother’s anger. With “her face frozen in frustrated rage,” the black woman shouts at Julian’s mother, “He don’t take nobody’s pennies,” and hits Julian’s mother with her purse, knocking her to the ground and causing her to have a stroke (O’Connor, *CS* 418). Before he realizes what has happened to his mother, Julian tells her, “Don’t think that was just an uppity Negro woman [. . .] That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies” (419). While Julian’s words demonstrate his falsified view of himself as a progressive integrationist, and the words are meant to drive home Julian’s cruelty toward his mother, they also ring true for this white woman who has tried to retain her place in a cultural climate that no longer adheres to the rules it once did. Wood writes that the black woman is “[b]linded

by a racial rage that is unable to distinguish a kindly from a condescending gesture” (117). The event is complicated by the fact that Julian’s mother believes her gesture to be kindly because of her class, but it is condescending precisely because she views race as a class separator. While Julian’s mother is unaware of how her gesture will be perceived, because she is blind to the class changes in the culture around her, that ignorance makes the gesture no less rooted in class and race superiority.

Julian’s mother’s fear of losing her identity and her place in society, and her ignorance about her gesture, are the same things that make her a sympathetic character. Already, despite her obsession with the concept of identity, she has little identity of her own, as O’Connor notably does not even give her a name, but rather identifies her throughout the story only as Julian’s mother. At the same time that readers recognize the horror of the racist and classist act she commits, they also recognize the sadness of her inability to adjust to a new society that does not divide class and race in the same ways as it previously has, a sadness that causes Alice Walker to call her a “pathetic creature” and that caused Walker’s mother to comment of Julian’s mother, “Poor *thing* [emphasis Walker’s]” (75). Julian’s mother has lost her place in society, and her desire to return to a temporal home and not a physical one highlights her displacement in the face of an integrated South. After Julian’s mother’s assault, she speaks the word “Home” to him twice as she walks away from him. She then asks for her grandfather to come for her, and then for the black nurse from her childhood (O’Connor, CS 419-20). Julian's mother's desire to go home is a plea for the cultural location of her past.

The ending of “Everything That Rises Must Converge” encompasses O’Connor’s view of the necessity of manners in the transition toward racial equality in the South, and

indicates the type of ending that is possible for a character who stays behind as the rest of society evolves. The same fate befalls Tanner in O'Connor's "Judgment Day." The last story of *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, "Judgment Day" is a reworking of one of O'Connor's very first short stories, "The Geranium," written when she was in graduate school at Iowa. In "Judgment Day," Tanner, like Mrs. Turpin and Julian's mother, sees a distinct difference between whites and blacks, both in the ways they should treat each other and in their locations in society. Economic privilege does nothing to change Tanner's mind about where blacks and whites fall on a hierarchal scale. Wood echoes O'Connor's affinity for the concept of manners when he writes that the story "shows how a fundamental respect and regard can prevail between peoples who are otherwise divided by race and experience: a black man and his white 'superior' come to live together in lifelong amity" (4). But while the two may have a lifelong friendship, that friendship is by no means one of social equality. When Tanner first meets this lifelong friend, a black man named Coleman, many years earlier, Tanner is in charge of six black workers at a saw mill and his opinion of those workers is that "[t]hey were as sorry a crew as he had worked, the kind that on Monday they didn't show up. What was in the air had reached them. They thought there was a new Lincoln elected who was going to abolish work" (O'Connor, *CS* 536-7). What is "in the air" is a social change toward racial equality. Viewing this change as an invasion, Tanner believes that his workers view the Civil Rights movement as something that will allow them to stop working entirely, a viewpoint that also highlights his racist ideas about the work ethic of black people.

Tanner also apparently believes that the black workers view President John F. Kennedy as the "new Lincoln." O'Connor was at work on "Judgment Day" in 1964, a

few months after Kennedy's June 11, 1963 speech that included what Mary L. Dudziak calls "an impassioned plea for civil rights reform before a nationwide television audience." In his speech, Kennedy stated,

We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no second-class citizens except Negroes; that we have no class or cast [*sic*] system, no ghettos, no master race except with respect to Negroes. (qtd. in Dudziak, 179-80)

Kennedy's mention of class systems in regards to race is accurate, as many white Americans, particularly white Southerners, wished to retain class a division that was also based in racial division. Lewis writes that white Southerners were threatened three-fold, by "an increasingly hostile federal administration, an increasingly organized civil rights movement, and the ever-present menace of communism," leading one of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s aides to claim in 1963 "that KKK no longer stood for the Ku Klux Klan. 'It now means,' he said, 'Khrushchev, Kennedy, and King'" (29).

Kennedy's speech highlights a global perception of the United States that had plagued anti-Communists for years—the view that the country that fought hardest against Communism was in fact a country that was deeply segregated and deeply divided on issues of racial equality. Long before Kennedy's words in 1963, the integration crisis of Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 caused the United States to fear that segregation was fuel for Communist propaganda. "The Soviet Union's extensive use of Little Rock in anti-

American propaganda—often simply republishing facts disseminated by U.S. news sources—reinforced the concern,” Dudziak writes, “that Little Rock redounded to the benefit of America’s opponents in the battle for the hearts and minds of peoples around the world” (121). The criticism of the situation in light of its aid to Communist persuasion was so intense that the magazine *Confidential* ran a headline reading, “The Commies Trained Gov. Faubus of Arkansas” (qtd. in Dudziak, 124). But the desegregation of schools was also a bolster for the segregationists who claimed that *Brown* was part of a Communist plot. “In the years immediately following *Brown*,” Woods writes, “the southern red scare reached full strength as part of the region’s massive-resistance campaign against integration. Conservative white southerners found anti-Communist legislation and litigation particularly useful in harassing the civil rights movement” (49). The confusing claims from both sides of the integration debate in regards to Communism did nothing to dissuade segregationists who consistently aligned Communism with integration. “For a few crucial years in the late 1950s,” Woods continues, “the southern red scare grew as massive resisters relied on anti-Communist laws to bully the civil rights movement” (49). And so, even in 1963, Kennedy’s call to race equality parallels the fear of many segregationists who saw racial and social equality as Communist ideas that would infiltrate the country and forever alter the region of the South.

This culture to which many white Southerners clung so desperately was one built on a system in which blacks and whites both obeyed the rules of racial division, though adherence to them was often enforced by violent, racist acts such as those of the Ku Klux Klan and lynch mobs. For many, the classlessness of Communism was easy to connect

to the proposed classless-ness in a speech like Kennedy's, in which he called for the destruction of the idea of blacks as second-class citizens. The South was a region built, not just socially but also economically, on the concept of blacks as second-class citizens. In the 1960s, when "Judgment Day" was written, ideas about class and race were becoming more and more connected. "Systemic segregation and disenfranchisement over so many years," Dudziak writes, "had affected labor patterns, causing race and class in America to be correlated" (242). And for many Americans, this meant that keeping the classes segregated was the same thing as keeping the races segregated. While the Cold War was in some ways an aid to civil rights, particularly in terms of the concern of American politicians about the world's view of the U.S. during the mid-century, the Cold War also "limited the field of vision to formal equality, to opening the doors of opportunity, and away from a broader critique of American economic and political system," Dudziak writes. "Racism might be an international embarrassment. Class-based inequality, however, was a feature of capitalism, an economic system Americans were proud of" (252). Class division was not something Americans were willing to give up, and, for many white Southerners, it was impossible to separate class from race. As Julian's mother, Mrs. Turpin, and Tanner prove, part of being located in a higher class was being white, no matter one's economic situation.

Tanner's location in society is complicated by his move to New York City. Tanner is physically displaced when he refuses to live any longer in a new South in which he must work for a black man, which I discuss later in this chapter, but he is also culturally displaced, both at home in the South and in New York. Some of this displacement occurs because of Tanner's understanding of black/white friendships. Part of the system of class

and race that coded the South was the relationship between white people and black people that resulted in friendships, though these friendships were generally unequal and based on the same Southern racial hierarchy as all other race relations. Coleman is Tanner's friend according to these Southern codes, though Tanner's opinion about the inequality of the races is unquestionable. When the two first meet, Tanner feels the need to talk to Coleman because Coleman, who is not working for the saw mill, lies around on the outskirts of the work area and Tanner thinks that this influences the workers to work less. After whittling a pair of eyeglasses for Coleman (which are only frames, without lenses), Tanner asks him what he sees. Coleman replies that he sees a man, and when Tanner asks if this man is white or black, and Coleman says white, Tanner tells him, "Well, you treat him like he was white." This simple statement enforces, in their first conversation, that Tanner expects to be treated as a superior by Coleman, based on nothing but his race. Once Tanner enforces his superiority over Coleman, O'Connor writes, "he had not got rid of Coleman since. You make a monkey out of one of them and he jumps on your back and stays there for life" (O'Connor, *CS* 539). Despite his rigid ideas about how black men and white men should interact, and the respect he feels he is due from black people because he is white, Tanner's only real companion for a large portion of his life is Coleman, and this works for Tanner because their unequal relationship adheres, in terms of superiority and authority, to the Southern rules of race relations and manners.

Tanner is an example of a particular type of Southerner who, unlike Mrs. Turpin, has real affection for at least one black person. Tanner's affection is limited, however, and he makes sure that his own location in society is always higher than Coleman's. The

two men's inequality is shown when Coleman addresses Tanner as "boss" in a postcard to New York; but their friendship is made evident by the fact that Tanner plans to have his body shipped to Coleman if he dies before he makes it back to the South (O'Connor, *CS* 542, 531). Tanner's affection for Coleman is similar to Julian's mother's affection for her black nurse, Caroline, the second person after her Grandpa who she wants to "come get [her]" after her stroke (420). Julian's mother seeks the comfort that Caroline can provide when she is assaulted by the black woman at the bus stop. "She calls out for Caroline," Wood writes, "the black nurse from her childhood, perhaps remembering her as one who gave her the unqualified love that her own son had refused to grant" (117). Julian's mother remembers compassion and caretaking when she remembers Caroline, of whom she speaks earlier in the story, saying, "I remember the old darky who was my nurse, Caroline. There was no better person in the world. I've always had a great respect for my colored friends [. . .] I'd do anything in the world for them" (O'Connor, *CS* 409). Julian's mother believes that her friendship with and love for Caroline is real, despite the fact that the system in which that friendship exists is one that keeps Caroline subordinate to all white people and that there are actually some things she would not do for her black friends—namely supporting a racial equality that causes her own cultural displacement. Julian's mother is an example of a woman who believes that manners are the best way to keep race relations civilized, a view she promotes in her statement that black people "should rise yes, but on their own side of the fence" (408).

O'Connor's own view, that the South relies on a certain set of manners in order to regulate race relations, plays out multiple times in her stories, particularly in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and "Judgment Day," when the destruction of Southern

manners about race result in dire consequences for two white characters. "It cannot be denied," however, Wood writes,

that even the best Southern manners kept black people in a state of subjection. Among Southerners of wealth and rank, the codes and customs served to oil the machinery of daily life, exacting sure and often severe penalties for those who violate them. But when Southern social etiquette crossed the lines of race and class, it often worked to preserve the hierarchy of position and privilege: the hegemony of rich over poor, of whites over blacks—even of the unworthiest of whites over the worthiest of blacks. (129)

Julian's mother cannot comprehend a world in which this system doesn't prevail, and therefore her belief in her love for Caroline is one that makes sense to her, as the same type of love made sense to a great many white Southerners who were raised by black caregivers and servants.

In "Judgment Day," Tanner also seeks the comfort of a black friend in the face of a society that does not adhere to the Southern rules by which he has lived his entire life. Tanner wants Coleman's companionship after his stroke, when he is lonely and affronted by a mixing of blacks and whites in a way he doesn't understand. Tanner's relationship with Coleman is acceptable to him because, while it is a longtime and close friendship, it is a relationship built on the Southern codes of superiority and place in society. Coleman lives in the same shack with Tanner, which they built together, but the black man sleeps on the floor at the foot of Tanner's bed. Tanner even believes Coleman would not like the

North, nor would he be able to function in this type of society with different racial codes, and he tries to spare his friend the kind of unhappiness that has made him prefer dying on a train to staying in New York any longer. In the note he pins to himself in case he dies on his way home to the South, Tanner writes that his body should be shipped collect to Coleman. After telling Coleman to keep whatever money the sale of Tanner's belongings yield after paying for the body's shipment and burial, he adds the postscript: "STAY WHERE YOU ARE. DON'T LET THEM TALK YOU INTO COMING UP HERE. IT'S NO KIND OF PLACE." Tanner purposefully writes this warning to his friend, despite that fact that he had to use "the energy he had conserved" the day before by allowing his daughter to "dress him" and that "[i]t had taken him the better part of thirty minutes to write the paper; the script was wavery but decipherable with patience. He controlled one hand by holding the other on top of it" (O'Connor, *CS* 531). Despite the difficulty due to his stroke, Tanner writes more than is necessary because he wants to keep his friend from experiencing what he has experienced as pain and misery in the North.

"Many Southerners," Bacon notes, "saw no contradiction between interracial friendship and a racial hierarchy. The prospect of reduced social intimacy in a racially integrated society even bothered some Southern integrationists" (*Cold War Culture* 107). Tanner also perceives "reduced social intimacy" in New York, and it is a large problem for him in "Judgment Day." He doesn't seek out anyone else in the apartment building, or attempt to befriend anyone else in New York City, but he purposefully, on multiple occasions, attempts to befriend the black man who has moved in next door. He seeks the same type of friendship that he had with Coleman and thinks that this man, because he is black and, Tanner assumes, Southern, "would like to talk to someone who understood

him." Tanner believes he understands this man because he thinks the man is "a South Alabama nigger" and therefore the type of black man that Tanner will not only understand, but also be able to befriend (O'Connor, *CS* 543). Tanner wants to go fishing with the man, saying to him, with "considerable hope," "I thought you might know somewhere around here we could find us a pond, Preacher" (544). But Tanner, a displaced Southerner in multiple ways, misunderstands the racial codes of New York City and therefore the type of interaction that is understood in the South is a source of great resentment and rage for the black man Tanner meets in the apartment building. While Tanner has spent years with Coleman, this man wants nothing to do with him and reads Tanner's attempts at friendship as racism. He tells Tanner, "I don't take no crap [. . .] off no wool-hat red-neck son-of-a-bitch peckerwood old bastard like you." Tanner's response to this rant, and to the man's proclamation that he is an atheist¹⁷, is "And you ain't black [. . .] and I ain't white" (545). For Tanner, the differences between this black man and the black men he has known in the South are so impossible to believe that they are as unreal to Tanner as the notion that the men's races do not exist. This invasion of Tanner's sensibilities and his understanding of race, combined with the physical assault he suffers from the black actor after this statement, causes Tanner to have his first stroke and to become determined to get home to the South, dead or alive.

Ironically, Tanner is in the North precisely because of his rigid views of class in relation to race. Though he has no problem living with Coleman, because he has been the one to "make a monkey out of" Coleman, he will not stay in the South because there he

¹⁷ This man's atheism ties him to Communism in a way that many mid-century readers might understand. During the Cold War, Communism was often described as "godless," and Americans who were atheist were at risk of being labeled un-American, as I discuss in Chapter III.

would be forced to work a still for Dr. Foley, the man who owns the land on which Coleman and Tanner are squatting. Foley “was only part black. The rest was Indian and white,” O’Connor writes (CS 535). But Tanner and the narrator, in Tanner’s voice, refer to Foley as a “nigger” throughout the short story, making plain the mid-century Southern understanding that to have any black heritage was to be black. Foley is a “nigger” to Tanner, no matter his actual heritage; but because of his mixed race, Foley “embodies a racial order that is turning ‘upside down’ as a result of integration,” Bacon writes (*Cold War Culture* 106). His race combined with his status as a landowner and businessman (even if some of his business is questionable¹⁸) is a threat to Tanner’s and other white Southerners’ way of life. “You make a monkey out of one of them and he jumps on your back and stays there for life,” O’Connor writes, “but let one make a monkey out of you and all you can do is kill him or disappear. And he was not going to hell for killing a nigger” (539). Tanner thinks his only options are to either leave the South or to murder Dr. Foley, but he does not see Dr. Foley, because he is black, as worthy of any period of Tanner’s life spent in prison.

And so, rather than become a worker for someone who he believes is located below him, Tanner leaves the region where he has lived his entire life, disappearing into a society with rules completely unlike those he knows. “He insists,” Wood writes, “on maintaining his racial superiority, knowing that, in the still-segregated South, color distinction brings honor that neither money nor property can purchase” (135). Foley occupies a social location previously reserved in the South for whites only. Tanner tells him, “I don’t have to work for you [. . .] The governmint [*sic*] ain’t got around yet to

¹⁸ Foley, O’Connor writes, “was everything to the niggers—druggist and undertaker and general counsel and real estate man and sometimes he got the evil eye off them and sometimes he put it on” (CS 535).

forcing the white folks to work for the colored,” but Foley replies, “The day coming [. . .] when the white folks IS going to be working for the colored and you might well git ahead of the crowd.” Tanner’s realization that the social rules and class structure of the North are vastly different from those of the South, even though the South’s are changing, leads him to think that, had he known what it was like in the North, “he would have run the still for the nigger. He would have been a nigger’s white nigger any day” (O’Connor, CS 540). Here, the word "nigger" has two different definitions for Tanner. The word is no longer solely a pejorative term for a black person, but it also indicates a person who works for someone else; the role of working under another person is reserved, for Tanner, for only black people. Tanner uses both meanings of the word “nigger” in the same sentence. The concept of working for someone else as a divider between social locations is also very important to Tanner, just as his racial superiority is. His class superiority is determined by who works for whom and by the fact that he, according to his daughter, “never worked for nobody in his life but himself and had people—other people—working for him.” When Foley insists that Tanner work for him, the idea of the new space in Southern society that Tanner would have to occupy is too much for him. Just as Americans feared a Communist society in which superiority is not determined by class, Tanner fears a society in which superiority is not defined by race. A black man becoming his boss is a complete reversal of the class system, and the race system, that Tanner has been proud of his entire life. When the daughter speaks to her husband about Tanner, she also indicates a difference in the term “nigger,” in her case a regional distinction between black people in the South and those in the North. Her Northern husband claims to have “worked a nigger or two myself,” to which she retorts, “Those were just nawthun niggers

you worked [. . .] It takes brains to work a real nigger. You got to know how to handle them” (532). According to Tanner's Southern daughter, only Southern black people are "real nigger[s]" and they are more difficult to "handle" than Northern black people. This is presented as a source of pride, not only in her father, but in her Southern heritage and the type of black person who lives in the South who, though described as more difficult, is also "real" and therefore better.

There are multiple dividers at work in “Judgment Day:” Northern and Southern whites, Northern and Southern black workers, blacks and whites, and those who work for others and those who have others work for them. It is a system that Tanner’s daughter understands and even takes pride in. Hearing her defend her father, her region, and her class-dividing beliefs to her Northern husband, Tanner feels “[o]ne of the very occasional feelings of warmth” for her. “Every now and then,” O’Connor writes, “she said something that might make you think she had a little sense stored away somewhere for safe keeping” (CS 535-33). But Tanner’s daughter is able to live in a society that doesn’t adhere to these rules, while Tanner is not. In a comment on the difference in race relations between North and South, this time about how she thought the South was more accustomed to such things, O’Connor wrote to Richard Stern, “It’s just like Cudden Ross says all us niggers and white folks over here are just getting along grand—at least in Georgia and Mississippi. I hear things are not so good in Chicago and Brooklyn but you wouldn’t expect them to know what to do with theirself there” (qtd. in Wood, 97). O’Connor, of course, omits the many violent acts against black people throughout the history of the South, and the intensity of violence and injustice against blacks in her own lifetime, but her statement echoes Tanner’s and his daughter's idea that Southerners are

more equipped to handle dealings between races than Northerners. For Tanner, this is due to a system of rules and manners that keeps the hierarchy of race and class intact, as long as it is adhered to by both races.

Tanner's desperation to leave New York stems from his first encounter with the black actor who lives next door. His astonishment at finding out that blacks and whites can live in the same building is quickly overcome by his desire to befriend this man. His daughter, well aware of Tanner's longtime friendship with Coleman, recognizes Tanner's plans without him speaking of them to her. "You keep away from them," she tells him. "Don't you go over there trying to get friendly with him. They ain't the same around here and I don't want any trouble with niggers, you hear me? If you have to live next to them, just you mind your business and they'll mind theirs [. . .] Up here everybody minds their own business and everybody gets along." The daughter knows that Tanner will want to befriend the black man, and she also knows the vast differences in race relation manners and rules between the North and the South. Her statement that "[t]hey ain't the same around here" is her way of telling her father that black people in the North do not conform to the same codes of conduct as those in the South and that, in this region, his violation of the Northern codes will result in "trouble." But Tanner pays no attention to her, and tells her, "I was getting along with niggers before you were born" (O'Connor, *CS* 543). Tanner thinks that his way of "getting along," which is based in Southern race and class hierarchy, will work just as well as it always has for him. He not only ignores the warnings of his daughter, but he goes out of his way to try and meet the black man who lives next door in the hopes that he will find a friend and ally to commiserate with him about the foreign North.

But the black actor does not want to be friends with Tanner and he responds with anger to Tanner's attempts at friendship that, in the North, without the accompaniment of the Southern code of race and class superiority, are offensive. This man lives next door to Tanner, in an apartment building that only has two apartments per floor. The man is Tanner's economic equal—presumably even his superior, as Tanner himself has little to no money. The same fate befalls Julian, another white character who tries to befriend black men on the Atlanta bus system, but Julian's failure is due not to his misunderstanding of Southern racial codes, but to his strange and hypocritical attempts to validate his self-perceived enlightened sensibilities. He has no real desire to make friends with black people; he merely wants to do so in order to feel that he is located in a place that is morally and intellectually superior to the segregationist Southerners around him. In fact, one of Julian's attempts to make friends only solidifies the merger of social rank between whites and blacks, as one man gives Julian some lottery tickets—evidence that Julian is lower class than some of the "better types" of black people he tries to befriend. He chooses his future black friends based on his own ideas of class. "He had tried," O'Connor writes, "to strike up an acquaintance on the bus with some of the better types, the ones that looked like professors or ministers or lawyers" (CS 141).

But the evolving status of class location works against Julian's ideas, also, as the black men aren't interested in being friends with him and no longer adhere to a social code that requires them to pretend that they are. The black man on the bus is suitable to Julian because, as Schroeder writes,

[h]is suit and newspaper connote a professional and social status far different from that of the African-American farm workers or city dwellers

of [O'Connor's] other stories. He displays dignity in his effort to maintain his privacy. He refuses to take offense at or even acknowledge racist reactions to his presence. And most of all, he expects the right to sit where he wants and to be left alone. (80)

The black man on the bus wants nothing to do with Julian's attempts to display his liberalism or his tolerance. The man is likely more successful and of a higher economic status than Julian, but his race causes Julian to categorize him in a lower class than himself, just as his mother does to all black people. Julian's attempts at friendship with these men are condescending, and his hypocrisy is no better than his mother's; he, too, rejects the changes of social location, though he does so in different ways.

In "Judgment Day," as well as in "Everything That Rise Must Converge," the representations of the two black characters who are physically violent toward the white characters embody the fear of many white Southerners that social equality would result in a complete affront to and assault of their way of life, essentially displacing them from Southern culture. For these two characters who cannot determine their own places in a society that is not built on a class system determined by race, but rather on a class system in which blacks and whites can fall into the same class, the assault is literal. Julian's mother is struck in the head by the large pocketbook of a black woman, an act of violence that causes her to have a stroke. As Bacon comments, the story "encourages the reader to sympathize with Julian's mother. More precisely, it discourages the reader from gloating, as Julian gloats, over 'the lesson she had had'" (*Cold War Culture* 109). Both Julian's mother and Tanner are forcibly displaced in their own cultures (and another foreign culture as well, in Tanner's case), and are lost. Tanner is physically assaulted and pushed

into his apartment by the black actor, an act that also causes the first of Tanner's two strokes. His second stroke occurs on the stairwell of his apartment in a scene in which the black actor and his wife can quite easily be read as murderers, as they not only ignore his need for medical attention, but they stuff his body into the stairwell rungs and leave him for dead.

Tanner and Julian's mother may be racist and unlikeable characters, but the story paints the black characters as almost-villains or, in the case of "Judgment Day," as sinister, violent, and cold-hearted. "The purse-wielding black furiosa in 'Everything That Rises Must Converge' and the murderous black actor in 'Judgment Day,'" Wood writes, "are also filled [. . .] with a racial rage that causes them to commit deadly violence against guileless if not guiltless whites" (142-3). Alice Walker also speaks to this anger, writing that O'Connor's reworking of "The Geranium" into "Judgment Day" reflects her awareness of the Civil Rights Movement. "The quality added," Walker writes, "is rage, and, in this instance, O'Connor waited until she saw it *exhibited* by black people before she recorded it" (emphasis Walker's, 77). While the reasoning behind the black man's rage is believable, the stark facts of the story are that he physically assaults an old man, causing him to have a stroke, then later finds that same man in a life-threatening situation and, rather than helping him or calling for help, contributes to the man's death by stuffing him into a stair rail and leaving him there to die. While O'Connor has often been questioned in terms of her views about race, a question that certainly begs attention in light of her own views and language in her letters, the portrayals of the black characters of "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and "Judgment Day" are not better, and in

many cases are much worse, than the portrayals of the characters who need of a moment of grace (Julian, Julian's mother, and Tanner).

O'Connor's insistence that race is a "topical" issue in her stories, even in stories that center on integration, is a clearer concept in light of the ways in which she portrays the effects of integration, not on black characters, but on white characters. In her stories, "racial justice receives less attention than the impact of integration on white Southerners—its effect," Bacon writes, "in terms of individual and regional identity" (*Cold War Culture* 109). Tanner wants to go home to the South, even if going home means that he does so as a corpse. Julian's mother also wants to go home, though she wants to go home to the past. She seeks a home that no longer exists, one in which her white Southern location has not been invaded by changes she does not accept. Tanner seeks a region in which his ideas about identity and class hierarchy are still intact, though Foley has indicated that this region is close to disappearing. Both characters are displaced, as are Mrs. Turpin and the Southerners of the McIntyre farm. "The present state of the South," O'Connor stated, "is one wherein nothing can be taken for granted, one in which our identity is obscured and in doubt. In the past, the things that have seemed to many to make us ourselves have been very obvious things, but now no amount of nostalgia can make us believe they will characterize us much longer" (*MM* 57). O'Connor's thinly veiled reference here is that racial segregation has been a defining characteristic of the South, but that mid-century movements of racial equality were changing all of that, and therefore the threat of the South's loss of identity was very real.

O'Connor may be suggesting that segregation should not be the defining characteristic of the South, and therefore regional identity must be kept in other ways.

But her statement that segregation has been the identifying feature thus far is clear, and her desire for the South to retain its identity is also clear. While O'Connor did not necessarily advocate for segregationist policies, she did warn Southerners that their regional identity was at stake—that their cultural location could be lost. Her fears are realized in the losses of her white characters, who cannot keep their identities or their locations in society because they are based in racial segregation. Julian's mother is a woman whose social views and social identity cannot evolve as quickly as the society in which she lives. She "has," as Bacon asserts, "lost her identity, according to Julian, because she can no longer expect blacks to concede her superiority" (*Cold War Culture* 105). Julian, intent upon making the assault a lesson his mother will learn about her racism, tells her, "You needn't act as if the world had come to an end [. . .] because it hasn't. From now on you've got to live in a new world and face a few realities for a change. Buck up [. . .] it won't kill you" (O'Connor, *CS* 419). But her world has come to an end, and it may well kill her. Race no longer dictates class, and this idea is irreconcilable with Julian's mother's world, just as it is irreconcilable with Tanner's. Tanner is abruptly removed from his own society due to his fear of that society's change, and when he cannot adjust to the new society in which he lives, he dies trying to escape it. Mrs. Turpin of "Revelation," too, is greatly disturbed by a vision of a hierarchy that has been turned upside down and that no longer relies on the Southern qualifications of race and class superiority. And the Southerners of the McIntyre farm, both white and black, contribute to or cause the death of Mr. Guizac because of their fear of losing their own cultural place to a foreigner who has been displaced and therefore invaded and threatened to change their own home with his differences.

While O'Connor's personal views on segregation vary, she placed high value on Southern manners and the ways in which those manners dictated how blacks and whites interacted with and treated each other. In 1963, she stated:

Formality preserves that individual privacy which everybody needs and, in these times, is always in danger of losing. It's particularly necessary to have in order to protect the rights of both races. When you have a code of manners based on charity, then when the charity fails—as it is going to do constantly—you've got those manners there to preserve each race from small intrusions upon the other. The uneducated Southern Negro is not the clown he's made out to be. He's a man of very elaborate manners and great formality which he uses superbly for his own protection and to insure his own privacy. (qtd. in Magee 104)

The problem for O'Connor's characters, and for white Southerners who clung to their methods of social placement, is that the Southern system of race manners was one that, even when it belonged to whites who did not engage in horrific violence against blacks, was often intensely racist and resulted in a multitude of inequalities and injustices. When this system of manners was mixed with Southern politics, the result was an absolute view of white superiority. As Woods states, "White supremacy framed the South's concept of democracy and controlled its patriotic impulse" (3). The correlation between Communism and integration therefore resulted in even more persuasive elements of segregation for a South already reluctant to consider changing.

As for the privacy which O'Connor believed was due black people, it was her goal to afford it to all of her black characters, as after her initial writing experiments at Iowa, she stopped trying to write black characters from their own perspectives, preferring instead to leave the black characters to their actions alone rather than portray unrealistic and presumptive versions of their lives, thoughts, and motivations. Her stories encompass the narrative views of her white characters. The black characters are seen and heard, and often greatly impact the stories that surround them, but the stories do exactly that—they surround them, but do not speak for them. Margaret Earley Whitt writes that O'Connor created her black characters "with nobility. She had promised after her earlier failed attempt with one of her thesis stories, 'Wildcat,' that she would never again try to get inside the heads of her black characters [. . .] As readers, we know only what we hear black characters say aloud, never what they think" (62). Indeed, O'Connor's narrative voice, after the stories written when she was at Iowa, does not include the thoughts or motivations of her black characters. While a single story might encompass the thoughts of multiple white characters, none of the short stories from the two published collections, nor either of her two novels, provide insight to the minds of the black characters.

This is an authorial choice that was respected by Alice Walker, who famously found herself confused by her own appreciation and love for and her resentment of Flannery O'Connor. Walker writes:

That [O'Connor] retained a certain distance (only, however, in her later, mature work) from the inner workings of her black characters seems to me all to her credit, since, by deliberately limiting her treatment of them to cover their observable demeanor and actions, she leaves them free, in the

reader's imagination, to inhabit another landscape, another life, than the one she creates for them. This is a kind of grace many writers do not have when dealing with representatives of an oppressed people within a story, and their insistence on knowing everything, on being God, in fact, has burdened us with more stereotypes than we can every hope to shed. (76)

Walker's respect for O'Connor's choices about the location of black characters in her fiction reflects O'Connor's own desire to steer away from writing from the viewpoint of a consciousness and existence she did not understand. O'Connor also reserves the punishment so characteristic of her fiction for only her white characters. And "[o]nly four blacks come under O'Connor's authorial censure," Wood writes, "whereas virtually all of her white characters receive severe condemnation for their sins." Among these four, Wood counts the two black workers of Mrs. McIntyre's farm¹⁹, the black woman of "Everything That Rises Must Converge," and the black actor of "Judgment Day" (142). Even these characters however, are judged by O'Connor only in that they are not without fault; but none of O'Connor's characters are without fault, a direct result of her intense belief in original sin and the necessity of redemption for everyone.

None of even these black characters, however, are censured in the same way many of O'Connor's white characters are, and none of them are subjected to death, illness, tragedy, or the author's trademark acts of violence. It is perhaps O'Connor's

¹⁹ Wood includes both Astor and Sulk of "The Displaced Person" by placing both men at the scene of Mr. Guizac's death when he writes, "They keep silent when they could have saved him, as murderous self-interest proves to have no racial boundaries." While Astor dislikes Mr. Guizac, and may, as Wood writes, "conspire [. . .] to get rid of him" by expressing that disapproval to Mrs. McIntyre, Astor is not present when Mr. Guizac is run over by the tractor; only Sulk is a conspirator in the silence that precedes the Displaced Person's death. Because of this, I argue that Astor should actually be excluded from this list of black characters who Wood writes "come under O'Connor's authorial censure" (142).

treatment of the fear of cultural displacement in the South, a fear aligned with her own fear of the loss of regional identity, that results in these stories being the ones that cast at least partially villainous light on their black characters. O'Connor herself spoke to her choice to leave the consciousness of her black characters unwritten when asked in a 1960 interview, "Why don't Negroes feature more prominently in your stories?" O'Connor's reply was, "I don't understand them the way I do white people. I don't feel capable of entering the mind of a Negro. In my stories they're seen from the outside. The Negro in the South is quite isolated; he has to exist by himself. In the South segregation is segregation" (qtd. in Magee 59).

It is difficult to discuss O'Connor's stories that deal so intensely with race without considering the content of the large body of letters she left behind that also deal with the subject. She repeatedly uses the word "nigger" in her letters, a fact that has troubled many scholars of her work and that has also led some to launch defenses of her language and of her personal politics. Ralph C. Wood defends O'Connor in the same sentence in which he acknowledges her frequent use of a racial slur that cannot even be easily defended by the time and culture in which she wrote her letters. "Though Flannery O'Connor was no racist," he writes, "her frequent recourse to the demeaning term 'nigger' is troubling. Southern whites of her social class and Christian conviction did not regularly resort to the word" (99). Even Wood, one of the most loyal defenders of O'Connor's character, writes that her

liberal use of the term can disclose an illiberal numbness to the evils that blacks suffered in the segregated South. The lynchings and castrations and murders are the obvious horrors that O'Connor never mentions. Nor do we

hear about the lesser evils or racial discrimination—in schooling and voting, in employment and medical care, in restaurants and hotels, in housing and loans and almost everything else. We do hear a good deal of complaint, by contrast, about Northern journalists who regarded court-ordered desegregation as the only interesting Southern question. (99)

O'Connor does appear to be more interested in the North's invading opinions about the South than in the racial violence and injustice that was taking place in the mid-century. But her unpublished letters, particularly those to her liberal friend Maryat Lee, complicate questions of O'Connor's view of race even further. "O'Connor was convinced that time and history would resolve the race question as instant solutions would not," Wood writes. When paraphrasing one of the many mentions of race in her letters to Lee²⁰, Wood writes that O'Connor's "own impatient response to the integration crisis—she confessed to Mary Lee that only the Lord kept her from making it public—was to urge that the 'niggers' be sent back to Africa" (Wood 99). Wood points out that O'Connor later used this same concept as the idea of one of the white trash characters of "Revelation," indicating that O'Connor judged this sentiment, and its ignorance and racism, harshly. Even so, O'Connor's letters indicate that she was perhaps more concerned with her own cultural location than with the physical location of blacks.

The correspondence between O'Connor and Lee is difficult to place in context, as the two had a joking relationship in which O'Connor frequently seemed to enjoy provoking Lee, her very good friend who was a liberal integrationist. "O'Connor

²⁰ O'Connor's unpublished letters, many of which are housed at the O'Connor Collection at Georgia College, cannot be quoted without the permission of O'Connor's estate. The result is that many scholars are urged to paraphrase these letters rather than seek permission to quote them.

immensely enjoyed Lee's playfulness and warmth," Sarah Gordon writes, "and found in the relationship a means by which she was able to deal with one of the most troubling issues of the time, the civil rights movement" ("Maryat" 26). In his defense of her, Wood admits that O'Connor had "unsavory opinions" that "must not be sanitized" and "ugly racial sentiments" that are "vexing," though he asserts that she never committed any "racist actions" (100). Gordon has a different approach, writing that, "O'Connor's letters in response to Maryat Lee may be baffling or disappointing in their conservatism, much of which is couched in (what one hopes is) a parody of racist vernacular" ("Maryat" 31). It is difficult to know whether O'Connor used racist language to goad Maryat Lee or to joke with her, but she does use the language in other scenarios, as well, including her published letters in *The Habit of Being*, and letters to and discussions with people other than Lee. But there are also instances of other sentiments, including, for example, the story of O'Connor's observation of racism on a segregated bus. In 1957, she wrote to Betty Hester, "I should ride the bus more often. I used to when I went to school in Iowa, as I rode the train from Atl. and the bus from M'ville, but no more. Once I heard the driver say to the rear occupants, 'All right, all you stove-pipe blonds, git on back there.' At which moment I became an integrationist" (*HB* 253).

O'Connor claimed that her own thoughts about segregation were divided, writing, "I hope that to be of two minds about some things is not to be neutral" (qtd. in Gordon, *Obedient* 237). Gordon asserts that this letter reveals an "ambivalence" that was "typical of O'Connor and many of her white southern contemporaries, who wanted to be dissociated from the headlined racism surrounding school segregation, but, at the same time, feared those outsiders whose commitment to social justice in the South was

threatening and more than a little irritating to them” (*Obedient* 237). O’Connor felt, as intensely as any other Southerner, if not more so, the threat to Southern culture posed by the invading North. In 1963, O’Connor read Eudora Welty’s short story “Where Is the Voice Coming From,” which was written as a fictionalized version of the assassination of Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi. On August 13 of that year, O’Connor wrote to Ashley Brown, “Thanks a lot for the story of Eudora Welty’s. Nobody else could have got away with it or made it work but her I think. I want to read it again” (*HB* 533). But on September 1, O’Connor wrote to her close friend Betty Hester, “You are right about the Welty story. It’s the kind of story that the more you think about it the less satisfactory it gets. What I hate most is its being in the *New Yorker* and all the stupid Yankee liberals smacking their lips over typical life in the dear old dirty Southland” (537). O’Connor’s problem with the story is more about her dissatisfaction with how Northerners would perceive it than with the story itself.

While she may not have been a segregationist, O’Connor was certainly invested in keeping the regional identity of the South intact and frequently spoke and wrote about, in her fiction and nonfiction, her concerns about Northern interference with Southern manners and ways of life. She works those concerns into her fiction, creating characters who feel the same encroachment on their own places in this culture. She herself was afraid of a region of lost Southerners, displaced in their own homeland as victims of an invading Northern cultural force. As Bacon notes, “in her correspondence, O’Connor always seemed less concerned with the question of racial justice than with the question of regional identity” (*Cold War Culture* 108). In many ways, she was “of two minds” in her

fiction, as she censures black characters and white characters alike, and criticizes racism as she criticizes those who are hypocritical in their desire to be non-racist.

The loss of regional identity and of a cultural home terrifies O'Connor's characters and causes them great distress or, in some cases, death. Tanner views New York as "no kind of place" (O'Connor, *CS* 531). He believes it to be, Wood writes, "not humanely habitable because there are no self-imposed deterrents, no manners" (140). In the South, Tanner knows exactly how to perform these manners, and the other people with whom he interacts know exactly how to do the same. Once things start to change in race relations, however, Tanner is no longer sure what to do. In the North, there is no identity and there are no manners, at least not any that Tanner understands. His life in the South, and the social rank bestowed upon him because of his race, have left him unequipped to survive in a society that does not adhere to those same rules. Manners may be a large portion of O'Connor's point in "Judgment Day," as the story does beg sympathy for Tanner and condemn the black man who essentially murders him for what the reader knows were friendly intentions, but they are Tanner's brand of friendly intentions, which rely on a system of racial inequality. When Tanner attempts to force these manners onto a system unlike the system of the South, the results are disastrous. Tanner calls New York a "no-place;" there is no location here at all for him, nor is there a cultural location for anyone like him who inhabits the same space of Southern racial codes.

Rather than accept a new type of location, Tanner rejects New York as a place with no location at all. In an unpublished letter to William Sessions in 1963, O'Connor wrote, "Those changes I dislike . . . have more to do with industrial living, men working

for machines, etc., the breakdown of the country community, cities all turning into Nowhere or Anywhere” (qtd. in Wood, 104). Like Tanner, O’Connor feared “no-place[s]” and saw the impending changes brought on by a loss of regional identity as an invasion of her own place. O’Connor examines not only the intense racial issues of the period and the region, but also the national Cold War fears that intensified those same Southern issues. In 1963, the year before O’Connor’s death, Governor George Wallace stood in the door of the University of Alabama and called the presence of the National Guard, there to enforce integration, an “unwelcomed, unwanted, unwarranted, and force-induced intrusion upon the campus” (Wallace). Many Alabamians and other white Southerners already viewed integration as a forceful invasion of the South, and while O’Connor’s work reveals characters who feel the same way, it also reveals characters whose feelings toward integration, like those of many mid-century white Southerners, are influenced by the United States’ fear of Communism. While Americans feared that their nation would be turned into a classless, place-less country and that they would be culturally, politically, and economically displaced by invading Communists, many white Southerners, like O’Connor’s characters, feared the dismantling of social systems of hierarchy, particularly those based on race, because they believed it would displace them and cause them to be lost in their own homeland.

Chapter III

Fellow Travelers: Flannery O'Connor and Science in Cold War America

*And here we have our Sputnik
No secret: the newborn planet is modest about its size
But this symbol of intellect and light
Is made by us, and not by the God
Of the Old Testament.²¹*

On October 8, 1957, Flannery O'Connor wrote to Maryat Lee that race issues in Georgia were far overshadowing concern with the space race against the Soviet Union. "The Russian moon," she wrote, "is just a light diversion for us" (HB 246). The "Russian moon" she references is *Sputnik*, the Soviet satellite launched October 4, 1957—the first artificial satellite to be successfully launched into outer space. "The Russians," *Life* magazine explains, "had hurled a 23-inch metal sphere into an orbit around the earth some 560 miles up, and at a speed of 18,000 mph it was completing one circuit every hour and 36 minutes. It weighed 184 pound, eight times as much as the Vanguard satellite the U.S. is still struggling to launch" ("Soviet Satellite" 34). The last sentence of this passage, like O'Connor's acknowledgement of the rest of the country's preoccupation with *Sputnik*, indicates the intense anxiety felt by Americans nationwide as the Soviets pulled ahead in the space race and accomplished a world-changing scientific feat that the U.S. could not. The major anxiety over *Sputnik* was not just the result of American space inferiority or jealousy over the U.S.S.R.'s scientific advancement; the anxiety was greatly compounded by the fact that the rocket that launched *Sputnik* proved

²¹ From a Russian poem written after the launch of Sputnik in 1957. *Time* printed this translation of the poem's final verse on November 18, 1957, with the commentary, "Moscow reminded the world that Russia's leap into space has implications beyond the scientific and the military. A poem in the Russian magazine *Krokodil* indicates that creation, from a Communist point of view, is at least under new management" ("Not by God" 69).

that the Soviet Union had the capability to launch long-range missiles, making nuclear threat a reality. “As *Sputnik* brought the world into the shrinking global village,” Zuoyue Wang explains, “many Americans also recognized the end of U.S. safety through isolation. It was a rude awakening to the nation’s vulnerability” (71). Elaine Tyler May confirms this, writing that in 1959, “two out of three Americans listed the possibility of nuclear war as the nation’s most urgent problem” (26). This fear of nuclear war bled into the lives of all Americans and propelled scientific advancement into the spotlight at mid-century, in a positive way that lauded technological progress, but also in a critical way that created fear.

The 1950s, in fact, were the first time in a long time that Americans doubted scientific advancement. May discusses the claim of Robert J. Lifton, who “argued that the atomic bomb forced people to question one of their most deeply held beliefs, that scientific discoveries would yield progress. Atomic energy presented a fundamental contradiction: Science had developed the potential for total technological mastery as well as for total technological devastation” (26). Indeed, when *Sputnik* was launched, the idea of “total technological devastation” became a very real possibility, much more so than it was while the United States enjoyed exclusive ownership of nuclear weapons. “The fact that the rocket that had launched *Sputnik*,” Wang explains, “could also serve as an ICBM to deliver an H-bomb to its target led many Americans to wonder whether the country had lost not only the competition for national prestige, but also the nuclear arms race” (Z. Wang 71). *Sputnik* represented the U.S.S.R.’s threat to American life, not only as a global scientific frontrunner but also as a physical threat in the form of nuclear weaponry.

While many Americans were stunned by the launch of *Sputnik*, which resulted in huge pressure from the American public for NASA to catch up to the Russians, it also resulted in a new American fascination with outer space, and with science. Though she claimed that the first satellite was a “diversion,” O’Connor was not immune to this climate of scientific insecurity and fascination. Her letters reveal that she was as interested in the space race as millions of other Americans were. In 1961, Brad Gooch writes, O’Connor “had been following the space race, her new symbol for human pride, on TV, and the next January reported to Betty [Hester], regarding the forthcoming televised space launch of John Glenn, ‘Tomorrow I am orbiting with Glenn’” (340)²². The aim of this chapter is to elucidate the ways in which the space race, nuclear fear, and questions of scientific advancement contributed to the shaping of O’Connor’s fiction, particularly in light of the religious overtones of her writing. I closely examine two of O’Connor’s works that feature intellectual characters who fight for their own beliefs in rational thought and for the advancement of science and technology. At the same time that O’Connor was crafting these characters, she was immersed in a culture obsessed with the fast pace of scientific advancement, particularly in outer space and in the development of nuclear weapons, and the concerns born of that culture are evident both in the characters she writes and in the conflicts those characters encounter with others who do not share their enthusiasm for progress and rational thought. I argue that the struggles between O’Connor fundamentalist characters and intellectual characters, particularly in “The Lame Shall Enter First” and *The Violent Bear It Away*, portray on

²² O’Connor also mentioned John Glenn in a letter written to the Fitzgeralds on March 15, 1963, when she writes the postscript, “Have you read about the lady in Texas who is having a chapel built in the shape of John Glenn’s capsule?” (*HB* 511). O’Connor’s underlying comment here is that the woman in Texas is equating space travel with religion, using a space capsule as a vehicle for worship.

small scales the national divide between Americans who sought further scientific progress as a means of social advancement and national security and those who pushed antirationalist agendas in order to appeal to religious sensibilities as a means of dealing with the fear of nuclear war and Communism.

The fear of nuclear war at mid-century was an unprecedented national concern that sparked terror, outrage, and a change in the way of life for many Americans. In the *Life* article that announced that the launch of *Sputnik* had "[sent the] U.S. [i]nto a [t]izzy," the magazine observed that "ominously, the launching seemed to prove that Russia's intercontinental ballistic missile is a perfected machine, since it would take such a rocket to launch the satellite" ("Soviet Satellite" 35). A following issue from October 21, 1957, confirms that "[a]ll the tracking fervor and growing familiarity with *Sputnik* did nothing to soothe Americans' shock at the original announcement of the Soviet breakthrough into space. It was becoming all too apparent Russian scientists are as good as any in the world—or better" ("The Feat" 19). Thus began in earnest the mid-century panic about Soviet nuclear attack, a panic that fueled many events of the era and influenced culture both in its time and in the decades that followed.

O'Connor's interest in the space race appears most significantly in her short story "The Lame Shall Enter First," a story that highlights American fascination with outer space, American anxiety about science, and the struggle between faith and reason that took place in Cold War America. Published initially in *Sewanee Review* in 1962 and then again in O'Connor's 1965 posthumous collection *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, "The Lame Shall Enter First" is the story of Sheppard, a widowed father who lives with his only child, Norton. Sheppard, a social worker, is determined to save the troubled

teenager Rufus Johnson, a juvenile delinquent who is known for breaking and entering and vandalism, and who has a deformed foot that requires a special shoe²³. While Sheppard ignores his own son, who he calls "average or below" (CS 449), he invites Rufus to come live with him and Norton, and lavishes Rufus with attention, buying him a telescope, a microscope, and a new special shoe. Rufus, who was raised by a religious extremist grandfather who has left for the hills to await the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the earth, spurns Sheppard's attempts to sway him with science and rationalism. All the while, Norton is dealing with the intense grief he feels after the death of his mother. As Sheppard ignores Norton in his attempts to save Rufus, he does not realize the pain his son is in, and his ignorance to Norton's grief results in the child's death.

Sheppard's attempts to use science, reason, and social work to better society through the salvation of Rufus Johnson, while he ignores emotion, spirituality, and his own son, reflect O'Connor's frequent disdain for intellectualism in her fiction. Like her other intellectual characters (among them, Joy/Hulga in "Good Country People," Ashbury in "The Enduring Chill," Julian in "Everything That Rises Must Converge," and Mary Grace in "Revelation"), Sheppard is treated with derision by the narrator. While Norton

²³ Rufus's foot, and Sheppard's attempts to help him with it by purchasing a new special shoe for him, inspires him to shout as he is taken away by police, "The lame shall enter first!" (CS 480). The title of the story stems from an experience O'Connor had while shopping in Atlanta shortly after she began walking on crutches. In 1955, she wrote to Betty Hester:

I have decided that I must be a pretty pathetic sight with these crutches. I was in Atlanta the other day in Davison's. An old lady got on the elevator behind me and as soon as I turned around she fixed me with the most gleaming eye and said in a loud voice, "Bless you, darling!" I felt exactly like the Misfit and gave her a weakly lethal look, whereupon greatly encouraged, she grabbed my arm and whispered (very loud) in my ear. "Remember what they said to John at the gate, darling!" It was not my foot but I got off and I supposed the old lady was astounded at how quick I could get away on the crutches. I have a one-legged friend and I asked her what they said to John at the gate. She said she reckoned they said, "The lame shall enter first." This may be because the lame will be able to knock everybody else aside with their crutches. (HB 116-17)

has become enamored of a telescope because Rufus has told him that his dead mother is in heaven, which is located somewhere in the sky, Sheppard ignores the child and focuses all of his energy on Rufus. When Rufus tells Norton that he can only see his mother by dying, Sheppard's refusal to deal with Norton's grief (and his own grief) causes the boy to commit suicide in an attempt to reach outer space in order to be with his mother. This conflict between science and reason, and the resulting tragedy of that conflict, reflect the same dilemma that Americans of the Cold War era felt in the face of unprecedented scientific advancement that was coupled with an intense fear of the apocalyptic global destruction that same scientific advancement could bring.

Using language that indicates unprecedented destruction, headlines from the first issue of *Life* published after the end of World War II declare, "Hiroshima: Atom Bomb No. 1 Obliterated It" and "Nagasaki: Atom Bomb No. 2 Disemboweled It" ("War's Ending" 26-7). "The people of the world," the magazine observes, "although thrilled by the prospect of peace, were shaken by the new weapon, which had brought it about. Even General Carl Spaatz, whose airmen dropped the bombs, said hopefully, 'Wouldn't it be an odd thing if these were the only two atomic bombs ever dropped?'" ("War's Ending" 25). An article from the same issue of *Life* ponders the difficulty of moving forward in an age in which such total and complete destruction is possible. "Military scientists speculated wildly about what the new weapon does to armies, navies, the art of defense," the article claims, "For if there is no defense, then perhaps man must either abolish international warfare or move his whole urban civilization underground" ("The Atomic Age" 32).

In a possible attempt to assuage American fear of that which they did not know, on August 20, 1945, *Life* published a series of articles devoted to the atomic bomb and

“The Atomic Age” (32). Among accounts of the two nuclear warheads, the issue includes educational articles on the atomic bomb, its development, and how it works. “It is in the nucleus,” the magazine explains, “that science has found the apocalyptic forces released over Hiroshima” (87B). The issue’s goal seems to be to answer the many questions Americans had after the bombs were dropped, and the large amount of scientific material in this issue reflects anxiety about a field of science—nuclear physics—that was a complete mystery to the majority of Americans. While deflecting this anxiety by way of explanation of nuclear physics, the magazine also promises a bright new future for America that this technology provides. *Life* claims that “science has made the first step” toward more uses for nuclear energy. “Its history promised that in time the others will follow, releasing the energy of the atom’s nucleus for driving automobiles and airplanes, doing useful things practical men still don’t dare to dream about” (87B). Though most of the post-war dreams of realistic uses for nuclear energy are thus far unrealized, the magazine’s promise of a bright new future for the United States on the heels of this frightening scientific development sought to assuage what could have developed into a national panic over a type of technology that few people understood but that everyone knew was capable of massive destruction.

For a short period of time, Americans were able to view the atomic bomb as a weapon that, while frightening, belonged to the U.S. alone and therefore was not a threat to its own citizens. All of that changed, however, on August 29, 1949, when it was confirmed that the Soviet Union had developed its own atomic bomb. “The existence of nuclear weapons, even in a peaceful world,” John L. Rudolph notes, “was enough to make one pause and ponder the ultimate fate of humanity. The growing Cold War with

the Soviet Union, however, brought home the possibility that another, more devastating war might actually take place” (9). Fear of the loss of the United States’ sole ownership of nuclear destruction was made clear in the October 3, 1949 issue of *Life*. “So the Russians have the makings of the Bomb,” an editorial reads, “three years sooner than they were expected to have it. The period of atomic monopoly is over. Now the U.S. and the Soviet Union face each other, Bomb to Bomb” (“Bomb to Bomb” 22). For the first time, nuclear war was a real possibility and Americans were forced to come to terms with the fact that not only were they not the sole owners of nuclear power, but the other owner was a Communist country

The fear of nuclear war was intensified by the threat of Communist spies who had infiltrated the United States. For an American public who had anticipated years of a nuclear monopoly, the fact that the U.S. lost that monopoly in part because of spies who had infiltrated American scientific development made the public all the more wary of the threat of Communists, not just abroad, but, more frighteningly, among them. The fear of Soviet spies was worth concern, as John Lewis Gaddis explains, “It is likely, indeed, that, during the first few years of the postwar era, Soviet intelligence knew more about American atomic bombs than the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff did” (54-55). Americans’ surprise at the Soviet acquisition of the nuclear bomb was merited, as they had been promised that it would be years before the U.S.S.R. caught up to American nuclear technology. But the prevalence of Soviet espionage in the United States changed that entirely. John E. Haynes argues that the “exposure of Soviet atomic spying” was “[p]erhaps [the] most upsetting to the American public.” This began with the discovery of espionage on the part of Klaus Fuchs, a British nuclear scientist who had worked on the

Manhattan Project and who “confessed to providing the Soviets extensive information on his work in building the atomic bomb at Los Alamos” (Haynes 57).

The information garnered by the discovery of Fuchs’s spying eventually led the United States to one of the most infamous cases of espionage in the Cold War—that of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. The pair were openly active in the Communist party until 1943, when they “dropped out of open Communist activity and into Soviet espionage” (Haynes 58). Julius Rosenberg was responsible for the creation of a ring of spies who worked in military technology, one member of which was his brother-in-law, David Greenglass (Ethel’s brother), who also worked at Los Alamos. The Rosenberg case is famous because it resulted in the couple’s execution. Haynes writes that the execution of Ethel Rosenberg was controversial because it appeared to have been part of a ploy on the part of the United States “to force the Rosenbergs to cooperate.” But they would not, and they denied their Communism until they died. “While there was no reasonable doubt of Ethel’s guilt,” Haynes continues, “execution seemed excessive considering the extent of her involvement in carrying out espionage. The government’s decision to use the threat of her execution to pressure Julius, and then following through on the threat when the pressure failed, was gruesome” (60). The execution took place in 1953, and launched a Communist campaign across the globe that labeled the pair as martyrs; it also provided a frightening portrait of what could happen to others who were determined to be Soviet spies.

Other Communist spies were also identified during this period, and the culmination of these events resulted in even greater damage to Americans’ sense of security in the mid-century. “It is difficult to overestimate,” Haynes claims,

the importance of the Fuchs and Rosenberg cases in arousing anti-Communist sentiment [. . .] [T]he nation's leaders had not prepared Americans for the Soviet bomb. Officials had assured Americans that it would be a decade at least and probably more before any possible adversary developed atomic weapons. When the Fuchs and Rosenberg cases broke and showed that the Soviets had stolen the secrets of the atomic bomb with the help of American Communists, the American public was furious and wanted drastic punishment of those responsible. (63)

Though Haynes writes that it is unlikely that it would have taken an entire decade for the Soviets to develop the nuclear bomb, he does assert that Soviet spies “saved the Soviet Union several years and an immense amount of money because it was able to skip much of the expensive development stage of the bomb project.” He also argues that the money saved on the Soviets’ espionage-fueled atomic development likely enabled them to approve the invasion of South Korea by North Korea in 1950 (63). All of this led to American support, in many ways, of the Red Scare. “Anticommunism and apprehension over the atom,” Wang argues, “proved mutually reinforcing, as real and imagined anxieties about growing U.S.-Soviet tensions, Soviet-sponsored conspiracies, atom spies, and the possibility of a future nuclear holocaust pervaded the nation’s conscience” (J. Wang 2).

This is the build-up of nuclear fear that contributed to the simultaneous fascination with and fear of Soviet space exploration that began in 1957, and the resulting space race that the United States ran against the Soviet Union through the 1969 moon landing. The necessity of scientific advancement was felt urgently throughout the mid-

century, but never with more fervor than when Americans compared themselves to the Soviet Union's advances in space technology and considered the implications that Soviet advancement had on the potential for nuclear war. "It is now more than two years since the Russians opened the Age of Space with *Sputnik*," *Life* proclaimed in November 1959, "two years during which the American reaction has caromed between panic, apathy, and partial achievement. The achievement includes 16 successful launchings, but we are still several years behind the Russians in their techniques of further progress into space" ("To Overtake" 36).

"The Lame Shall Enter First" clearly depicts the concern that O'Connor shared with the rest of the nation about the space race, scientific advancement, and the potential for global destruction via one of science's latest developments. For O'Connor, that concern is focused on society's mid-century potential to explore scientific progress at the expense of spiritual faith. She struggled, though, with the creation of Sheppard, the character who would celebrate reason and his own methods of bettering society while he rejected all else. Before the story was published, O'Connor actually tried to pull it from the *Sewanee Review*, writing to Elizabeth McKee on May 28, 1962, "I have just corrected the proofs for the *Sewanee* story that you haven't seen and I have decided that I don't like it and am going to try to persuade Andrew not to use it. However, I'm afraid it is too late" (HB 475). It was too late, and the story was published. In September of the same year, O'Connor wrote to Cecil Dawkins, "About the story I certainly agree that it don't work and have never felt that it did [. . .] The story doesn't work because I don't know, don't sympathize, don't like Sheppard in the way that I know and like most of my other characters" (HB 490-1).

Despite O'Connor's claims that she could not write Sheppard well because she did not identify with him, the story embodies mid-century ideas about science, outer space, and the struggle in Cold War America between faith and reason. Brad Gooch writes that the story was "taken from snippets of *The Violent Bear It Away*, left lying about in her imagination" and that it was another of O'Connor's "attempt[s] to get right the triangle of a liberal widower, his 'average or below' son, and a tormented, delinquent teenager" (339). Indeed, the story is very similar in many aspects to *The Violent Bear It Away*, which I discuss in the latter section of this chapter. Gooch also explains O'Connor's inspiration for "The Lame Shall Enter First," which stemmed from her knowledge of "current events and popular culture," writing that she named Sheppard after Alan Shepard, the first American man to experience space travel when he "made a suborbital flight in *Freedom 7*" in May of 1961. *Life* magazine of May 12, 1961, proclaimed that "the whole nation watched" Shepard's space flight "with a gripping sense of personal and emotional investment" and that, "while [h]e did not fly as far, fast or high as Russia's Yuri Gagarin," he did "[control] the flight of his capsule—which Gagarin did not" ("Shepard and USA" 20B). These comparisons to Gagarin exemplify the ways in which the media, and therefore the public, held the United States to a high standard of scientific advancement that demanded progress. National pride was at stake during this leg of the space race and the media, as well as the public, searched for a way to make Shepard's flight not merely a catch-up to the Soviets, but some sort of superior accomplishment.

Confidence in American scientific and military superiority was essential to the maintenance of American national security, but, Zuoyue Wang observes, the fear evoked by the Russian satellite launch was a huge blow to the scientific confidence Americans

had felt for years. "*Sputnik*, or 'fellow traveler [of the earth],' evoked intense but mixed feelings in the American people," Zuoyue Wang explains. "Ever since American scientists and engineers produced the atomic bomb and other technological wonders to win World War II, their countrymen had generally assumed that the U.S. domination in science and technology was unquestionable" (71). Once that domination was called into question, American safety was called into question as well. Both Lyndon Johnson and Edward Teller, the Los Alamos physicist who was responsible for the development of the hydrogen bomb, "pronounced the *Sputniks* a worse defeat for the United States than Pearl Harbor" (Z. Wang 72). *Sputnik* also caused a crisis of confidence among Americans who had long touted their superiority in technological development. *Life* claimed on October 14, 1957, that "U.S. rocket men were stunned" by the capabilities of the Russians to launch *Sputnik*. Many American scientists were attending "a satellite symposium in Washington" that included "Russian scientists who had given no hint of the impending launching," the article explains, "[a]nd they could not deny the assertion of one Moscovite that 'Americans design better automobile tailfins but we design the best intercontinental ballistic missiles and earth satellites'" ("Soviet Satellite" 35).

The realization that *Sputnik* would result in a completely different political landscape in regards to nuclear war was made clear October 21, 1957, when *Time* expressed in an article about *Sputnik* that the United States' possession of the only nuclear arsenal on the planet was what kept the Soviet Union from attacking. "This capability—the ability to smash Russia from up close and hence to destroy her more thoroughly than she could hope to destroy the U.S.—has been," the magazine claimed, "the ultimate deterrent to Russian military adventures." The magazine continued that the

launch of the satellite was accompanied by a new validity for the threat Stalin made to Roosevelt at Yalta. “Neither of us wants war,” Stalin said, “but our strength is that you fear it more” (qtd. in “The Beeper’s Message” 30). Khrushchev had been instilling fear in Americans before the launch of *Sputnik*; Robert J. McMahon writes that, “[n]ot only had the Russians seemingly beaten the Americans into space, but Khrushchev’s penchant for boasting and blustering about the number of long-range missiles was developing led even some sober-minded strategic analysts to worry about a Soviet military-technological surge” (76). *Sputnik* may have filled many Americans who dreamt of space exploration with hopeful yearning for American advancement in the field, but it also reminded the nation that the Soviets now had the military technology to back up their previous threats.

The fear over the Soviets' ability to enter space, coupled with American desire to maintain technological superiority, therefore resulted in what *Life* called "*Sputnik* Syndrome," which was "characterized by whirling satellites before the eyes, by alternating periods of deepest gloom and wildest premonitions of impending doom, and by the steadfast conviction that the U.S., helplessly and hopelessly, is falling behind the U.S.S.R. in military technology." Though the article claimed that "the syndrome has afflicted many who should know better," it remained a part of American life throughout the 1950s and into the following decades of the Cold War²⁴ ("The *Sputnik* Syndrome" 10). *Time*, in November of the same year, claimed, "*Sputnik I* and *Sputnik II* have painfully fractured the U.S.'s contended expectation that, behind an impenetrable shield

²⁴ The syndrome was also aided by international views of America's slow arrival to outer space. One headline, published in Bangkok's *Sathiraphab*, read "RUSSIANS RIP AMERICAN FACE." Americans riding the high of the victory of World War II were now faced with international embarrassment, as other countries not only questioned the dominance of the U.S., but seemed to delight in it. Another article in the *London Economist* claimed that *Sputnik's* "message" to the Americans was, "We Russians, a backward people ourselves less than a lifetime ago, can now do even more spectacular things than the rich and pompous West—thanks to Communism" ("The Beeper's Message" 30).

of technological superiority, the nation could go on with the pursuit of happiness and business as usual this year and the next and the next" ("Knowledge Is Power" 23). And so Americans simultaneously feared progress as they longed for more of it. The advancement of science and technology in the Soviet Union echoed the goal expressed by Stalin in 1931 when he said, "The history of old Russia is the history of defeats due to backwardness . . . In ten years at most we must cover the distance which separates us from the advanced countries of capitalism. . . Look into everything, let nothing escape you, learn and learn more . . . We must study technology, master science" (qtd. in "Knowledge," 23). And, at least in terms of science in the mid-century, keep up with capitalists they did.

As fear of nuclear war grew during the 1950s, it became a way of life for many Americans. May writes of a couple who, as part of a promotion, spent their entire two week honeymoon in an underground bomb shelter. The two were photographed at the shelter's entrance (and again sharing a kiss on the stairwell on their way underground) surrounded by all the goods that they would take below to sustain them for two weeks. May observes this "powerful image of the nuclear family in the nuclear age: isolated, sexually charged, cushioned by abundance, and protected against impending doom by the wonders of modern technology" (1). Modern technology provided the protection from a threat that was also produced by modern technology. The resulting confusion for many Americans caused them to simultaneously encourage American scientific advancement while they were afraid of it.

One of the most illustrative examples of the mundane nature of nuclear fear is found in the use of "duck and cover" drills, implemented in schools and also used as a

means of preparing the American public for an unexpected nuclear attack. In 1951, Archer Productions released "Duck and Cover," a mix of animation and live actors that taught children how to respond to a nuclear explosion. The film was produced as "an official Civil Defense film" and features a cartoon turtle who hides inside his shell to demonstrate the "duck and cover" defense. The narrator tells its young audience, "We all know the atomic bomb is very dangerous. Since it may be used against us, we must get ready for it, just as we are ready for many other dangers that are around us all the time." The film attempts to dispel panic by presenting a nuclear bomb as something similar to other accidents in life, like fires and car accidents. It then teaches children how to hit the ground, protecting their skin as much as possible, especially their faces and the backs of their necks, in the event of a nuclear explosion, which they are taught to recognize by a very bright flash of light. Children growing up in this era were conditioned not only to be ready in the case of nuclear war, but to expect nuclear war.

It is therefore fitting that O'Connor, in two passages that illustrate the arguments of my chapters, uses the first atomic bomb to convey her ideas about how global events affect every aspect of life, even in the rural South. She states that, for the writer, "the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima affects life on the Oconee River," and, in another passage, "a bomb on Hiroshima affects my judgment of life in rural Georgia" (*MM* 77, 134). Though the entire body of her fiction reflects a sense of the embodiment of the entire world in the experiences of individuals, this is a style that O'Connor developed as her writing career progressed. Her later fiction displays a stronger concern with global issues of nuclear war, science, and technology than her earlier stories, and in "The Lame

Shall Enter First,” more than any other piece of her fiction, modern technological and scientific advancement are central to the characters’ motivations.

The story’s main character, Sheppard, is the picture of modern convenience made possible by science from his first appearance, when he eats “his cereal out of the individual pasteboard box it came in” (O’Connor, CS 445). The idealistic social worker and champion of technology wants nothing more than to take young Rufus under his intellectual wing and show him the ways in which he can apply the intelligence Sheppard claims to see in him to a future in science. In an effort to inspire Rufus to live up to what Sheppard believes to be his potential as an intelligent boy, Sheppard tells Rufus and Norton, "Some day you may go to the moon [. . .] In ten years men will probably be making round trips there on a schedule. Why you boys may be spacemen. Astronauts!" (O'Connor, CS 461). This excitement is echoed in an article from January 6, 1958, when *Life* enthusiastically wrote of the possibilities of American science, proclaiming, “As recently as five years ago, most scientists believed space flight was, at best, generations away. The engineering requirements seemed superhuman [. . .] But the march of modern technology has already reduced those hurdles to practical engineering problems and to matters of time and money” (“Man Makes His Start” 53).

Sheppard also enthusiastically echoes public opinion at mid-century that travel to the moon would be life changing for the future of the American public. Even before Neil Armstrong’s moonwalk on July 20, 1969 (which O’Connor did not live to see), mid-century Americans had ideas about the future of moon exploration that promised a whole new world on the brink of existence. An article in *Life* on November 30, 1959 laments the tragedy that would result from American inferiority in not just the space race, but also

specifically the race to the moon. "What can man do on the moon, within the presently foreseeable scope of technology?" the article asks. In answer, the magazine claims,

He can live there, carrying his own environment; he can trap and meter energy there; he can establish missile bases there (inherently hardened sites on the far side). He can set up radar and optical observation facilities which would miss nothing of military or other significance in progress upon the turning world. He can (says Singer) even achieve his own water supply from lunar stones. ("To Overtake" 36)

The promise that Sheppard makes to Rufus therefore encompasses more than a quest to the moon; it implies an entirely new way of life made possible by science, technology, and space travel, one that Americans already saw emerging in the many advancements made during the mid-twentieth century.

Sheppard's views are also similar to those held by Americans who believed in science as the redeemer of national security during the Cold War, a view that divided the country between rationalists and fundamentalist Christians, but one that also caused those who supported science to rally together in that support. "In the White House, the Pentagon and the remote missile-and-rocket-testing areas from Florida to Eniwetok," an article in *Time* on November 14, 1957 claims, "there was a new sense of urgency last week. Across the U.S. most of the post-*Sputnik* criticism and political backbiting gave way to the closest thing to an identity with national purpose that the U.S. has known since Korea" ("Rocket's" 18). Uniting to further American scientific development gave many U.S. citizens a national cause and drew them even closer together in opposition of

Communism. On April 7, 1961, *Life* magazine lamented the fact that “Since 1957 the world prestige of the U.S. has suffered acutely from the spectacular achievements of the Soviet space program.” Echoing the public opinion of many who believed that superiority in space was equal to superiority on earth, both in political might and military strength, the magazine continues, “But now, suddenly and unexpectedly, the U.S. finds itself with the power to make a dramatic technological stride forward. We *can* catch up with the Russians after all! More than that, an increasing number of experts believe we can actually overleap them by a considerable margin” (“Sooner” 47, original emphasis). For those who felt the effects of “a strong sense of wounded nationalism” that Wang argues was present “[u]nderneath the Cold War rhetoric,” this was more than happy news; it was news that promised national safety (Z. Wang 72).

"The Lame Shall Enter First" is laden with excitement stemming from the optimism produced by American science. Sheppard later promises Rufus, "you can be anything in the world you want to be. You can be a scientist or an architect or an engineer or whatever you set your mind to, and whatever you set your mind to be, you can be the best of its kind" (O'Connor, *CS* 472). Sheppard notably does not suggest a career in the arts or humanities for Rufus, but pushes him toward science and technology, placing emphasis on his belief that the greatest future accomplishments of society will take place in these fields. The same belief was held by the Soviet Union at mid-century, and caused an extreme swing in the U.S.S.R. toward science and technology-based education. In 1956, William Benton wrote in *The New York Times* of his experiences visiting Soviet “*teknikums*,” facilities that had been erected in the U.S.S.R. specifically to educate Soviet children and young adults, particularly in science and math. “This is the new ‘cold war’

of the classrooms,” Benton writes, “And it is very dangerous. I have seen for myself the vast technocratic Sparta that is burgeoning in the U.S.S.R.” (15). Benton writes of the schools that have been tailored to scientific education and the ways in which Soviet students of all ages at mid-century devoted much more time to studying these fields than American students did. He also laments the inferiority of the American education system in comparison to that blossoming in Russia.

In support of his distress over the lack of American scientific education, particularly in comparison with that provided by the Soviet Union, is the statement Benton quotes by Lewis L. Strauss, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. Of Soviet education, Strauss states, “I can learn of no public high school in our country where a student obtains so thorough a preparation in science and mathematics, even if he seeks it—even if he should be a potential Einstein, Edison, Fermi, or Bell” (qtd. in Benton, 40). Benton concurs, citing the fact that of the 28,000 high schools operating in the U.S. at the time of the article, “we produced only 125 new teachers of physics. I repeat: only 125” (40). The idea of a future American genius being suppressed by lack of accessibility to scientific training by a culture that denies him or her a technological education pointed to an American society that would continue to fall further and further behind Soviet technology, an idea that most Americans knew could have dire consequences for the U.S. Therefore, Benton aligns himself with the likes of Sheppard, pushing for the advancement of scientific education as a means of more scientific careers for Americans.

Though Benton is unlike Sheppard in that he also places value on the humanities and the emotional side of education, something Benton sees as a negative aspect of the

Russian schools in which memorization is valued over critical thinking, he still calls for drastic changes in order to advance the United States' science education system. "How can we meet this new Soviet challenge?" he asks. Part of his answer is to increase scholarship and fellowship funding from the federal government, but he also places high value on increasing the quality of the teachers in public schools. He seeks to propose a way to solve the lack of "physicists, chemists and mathematicians" in the U.S., writing, "We in this country must begin to educate more scientists and engineers and we must do it without turning our schools into *teknikums*, or our colleges into factories for producing highly conditioned robots" (Benton 44).

While Sheppard shares these same views, and presses them on Rufus, he is, unfortunately, one of these same "highly conditioned robots," although his conditioning is self-imposed. He claims to care for Rufus Johnson and others like him because of a selfless desire to better society, but his actions speak more to the scientific void of emotion of which Benton writes, and it is this that O'Connor criticizes. Beyond including Norton in the statement that both boys could be astronaut, Sheppard makes no promises to Norton equal to those he makes to Rufus about his scientific future, nor does he encourage him to find his own potential. In fact, Sheppard later sarcastically mocks Norton when the boy tells his father that he wants to be an astronaut. When Rufus tells Sheppard that he plans to become a preacher, Sheppard doesn't attempt to hide his contempt for the profession, nor does he hide his disdain for what he views to be the intellectual inferiority of his son. O'Connor writes, "'What are you going to be, Norton,' Sheppard asked in a brittle voice, 'a preacher, too?' There was a glitter of wild pleasure in the child's eyes. 'A space man!' he shouted. 'Wonderful,' Sheppard said bitterly" (CS 476).

Norton's eyes, which previously indicated his disinterest with the world and with scientific thought when they are described as "a paler blue than his father's as if they might have faded like the shirt," now "glitter "with "wild pleasure" (CS 445, 476). But Sheppard has no interest in his son's desire to participate in the scientific advancement of humankind, and, even worse, O'Connor's narrator suggests, he is ignorant of the fact that Norton wants to be a "space man" because of his confusion about the heaven of which he has learned from Rufus.

While Sheppard is tragically oblivious to his son's interest in outer space, he is obsessively focused on fostering a love of science in Rufus Johnson. Before Rufus comes to live with Sheppard and Norton, when he is at the center where Sheppard volunteers on the weekends, Sheppard is intent upon talking to Rufus about outer space. "He roamed from simple psychology and the dodges of the human mind to astronomy and the space capsules that were whirling around the earth faster than the speed of sound and would soon encircle the stars," O'Connor writes. "Instinctively he concentrated on the stars. He wanted to give the boy something to reach for besides his neighbor's goods. He wanted to stretch his horizons. He wanted him to *see* the universe, to see that the darkest parts of it could be penetrated. He would have given anything to be able to put a telescope in Johnson's hands" (CS 451).

Sheppard's enthusiasm for the possibilities of space travel and the options opened by scientific progress place him with those Americans who were vocal proponents of technological advancement and rational thought based in scientific evidence, often in opposition to faith-based belief systems or antirationalist thought that seemed to abandon all hope of competing in the technological sphere and instead waited for the impending

doom that nuclear war and Communism would bring (often by way of a biblical apocalypse). An editorial in *Life* of October, 1957, extolled the virtues of rational thought and scientific progress, arguing,

The U.S. cannot lag in weapons against Communism; indeed, we must recover our lead to strengthen our hand in seeing a reasonable argument with Russia that free nations can accept. But while doing so we must gain strength also from our older, grander mission, the one Communism can never share. That mission is to make the world habitable even while we explore others; and to keep the light of freedom and reason accessible to all our fellow men. ("Common Sense" 35)

According to this article, the spirit of advancement in science is one that is clearly and specifically American, not Communist. *Life* calls on the patriotism of Americans in order to foster the American spirit that will propel scientific progress in the U.S., therefore benefiting the country and the world. The article paints advancement in technology as a philanthropic endeavor that ensures freedom and that is the patriotic "mission" of the United States. The article also aligns freedom and American patriotism with reason. Khrushchev, however, claimed that scientific advancement was indicative of the superior might of Communism. He "chilled American observers with his boasts about Soviet economic and technological prowess," McMahon observes, "and his infamous remarks

that the Soviet Union would soon be turning out missiles like sausages”²⁵ (78). Much of Americans’ constant mid-century fear of being obliterated by Soviet missiles can no doubt be contributed to Khrushchev’s frequent threats toward the U.S. According to Gaddis, “[f]rom 1957 through 1961, Khrushchev openly, repeatedly, and blood-curdlingly threatened the West with nuclear annihilation. Soviet missile capabilities were so far superior to those of the United States, he insisted, that he could wipe out any American or European city. He would even specify how many missiles and warheads each target might require” (70). So while Communists in the Soviet Union studied science in order to further Communism and their own national pride, Americans did the same in the name of freedom, capitalism, and global access to rational thought, something they claimed was denied by the Communist system.

For many Americans, as for Sheppard and Rufus, these ideas boiled down to a conflict between faith and reason. While many Americans were able to cheer scientific progress while still professing Christianity, not all straddled the line and those who chose a side often did so loudly. O'Connor herself was no stranger to the struggle between faith and reason. Though her fiction and much of her personal correspondence reflect a solid confidence in her faith, and she is frequently depicted as a writer who was unwavering in her devout Catholicism, the recent publication of a prayer journal she kept during her years as a graduate student at Iowa reveals earlier doubts and questions. In this prayer journal, written between January of 1946 and September of 1947, she confesses her

²⁵ John Lewis Gaddis asserts that Khrushchev’s claims were greatly exaggerated. “Though [he] frequently claimed that the Soviet Union had many missiles ready,” he writes, they actually did not have nearly as many as they claimed. The Soviet Premier later admitted, “It always sounded good to say in public speeches that we could hit a fly at any distance with our missiles [. . .] I exaggerated a little” (qtd. in Gaddis, 69). Gaddis also includes a comment from Khrushchev’s son, a rocket engineer, who stated, “We threatened with missiles we didn’t have” (qtd. in Gaddis, 69). These revelations, however, did not dispel the panic and fear of Americans who lived in the time period during which Khrushchev made such claims.

doubts as she writes to God, asking repeatedly for the strength to believe while faced with a culture that tempts her with reason. "I dread, Oh Lord, losing my faith," she writes. "My mind is not strong. It is a prey to all sorts of intellectual quackery" (*PJ* 5). In another entry, she writes of faith, hope, and charity, confessing that faith "gives [her] the most pain." In this entry, she prays:

At every point in this educational process, we are told that [faith] is ridiculous and their arguments sound so good it is hard not to fall into them. The argument might not sound so good to someone with a better mind; but my mental trappings are as they are, and I am always on the brink of assenting—it is almost a subconscious assent. Now how am I to remain faithful without cowardice when these conditions influence me like they do. (*PJ* 15)

The prayer journal presents a different side of O'Connor than the later letters and essays do. Despite the fact that her understanding of current culture, including science, indicates that she certainly didn't shirk science and technology in favor of faith alone, she remained staunchly devoted to her faith throughout the rest of her life. In the battle between faith and reason, it appears that O'Connor's faith was, as she wanted it to be, victorious.

But O'Connor's turn toward faith did not result in a complete rejection of reason, as it does for some of her characters and as it did for some Americans of the mid-twentieth century. The conflict between reason and religion was heightened at mid-century, as more Americans turned to religion for varying reasons while scientific

advancement continued to progress and change the ways in which Americans viewed the world. Martin E. Marty writes that, “during the Eisenhower era, which began in 1952, there was a revival of religion, or at least of an interest in religion” (403). This is reflected in an article in *Time* from 1955 that calls America “a spiritual paradox,” claiming it was “at the same time, the most religious and the most secular nation in the world.” The magazine explains:

From 1943 to 1953, U.S. distribution of the Scriptures jumped 140%. In a recent survey of religious attitudes, more than four-fifths of U.S. citizens said they believed the Bible was the ‘revealed word of God.’ But another survey shows 53% unable to name even one of the Gospels. And a panel of 28 prominent Americans asked to rate the 100 most significant happenings in history, ranked Christ’s crucifixion 4th (tied with the Wright brothers’ flight and the discovery of X rays). (“The American Religion” 62)

Reinhold Niebuhr echoes the opinion that there is a widening gap between those who follow science and those who follow religion, writing in *Life* in 1957, “At the turn of the century, Dwight Moody conducted revivals both here and in England and proved for the first time that American evangelism could be an export article. Since Moody’s time, the chasm between Christian pietism and modern scientific culture has greatly widened” (92).

The complex nature of religion in America was further complicated by scientific advancement, both a fierce support of it and a fear of it, and by the Cold War, and, for

many Americans, the battle between faith and reason in the United States could not be easily reconciled. “By the early 1950s,” John L. Rudolph writes, “the intensification of the Cold War and the fear of domestic subversion contributed to public anxieties that seemed to push many toward antirationalist worldviews” (39).

In 1955, Thomas E. Murray, then the Atomic Energy Commissioner, published a piece in *Better Homes & Gardens* and also in *Time*, that addressed American conflict between science and religion. Authored by a scientist with a clear preference for religious practice and belief, Murray’s article, “Science and Religion Must Join if World is to Survive H-Bomb,” portrays a merger of science and religion as integral for the continuation of the human race. Murray writes that he has seen a change in “some leading nonreligious scientists. They are beginning to acknowledge that the concept of divine creation should no longer be dogmatically excluded from rational speculation about the origin of the universe. To my mind, there are today startling possibilities for a religious break-through into the secular mind. The time is ripening for a marriage of religion and science.” While O’Connor’s characters are never able to achieve both religion and science (they ardently choose one or the other and any attempt to merge the two, such as in the case of Norton, is disastrous), Murray calls for a union. Claiming that “atomic bombs are dangerous only because some atomic men cannot be trusted,” Murray writes that an incorporation of religious belief into twentieth-century scientific culture will result in less atomic threat, because “the greatest atomic decisions must come from the heart and the soul, not the skilled brain that comprehends a cyclotron.”

While O’Connor examines fundamentalists and the rationalists who oppose them in the South, a revival held in 1949 outside of the South, in Los Angeles exemplifies the

joining of anticommunist views with pro-religious sentiments. Stephen J. Whitfield describes this event, which began "[t]wo days after President Truman's disclosure of the loss of nuclear monopoly" (77). The revival's preacher was Billy Graham, who claimed that Communism and Christianity were "two camps" divided by present world events and that Communism "has declared war against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion!" Graham continued that, "[u]nless the Western world has an old-fashioned revival we cannot last!" (qtd. in Whitfield, 77). The revival's attendance reached 350,000 by the end of 1949, a testament to Graham's persuasive nature and to the readiness of many Americans to begin or intensify their religious devotion. Marty calls Graham "[t]he most popular Protestant voice after the Second World War" (410), and part of this vast popularity may be due to the fact that Graham's revivals were targeted specifically at an American culture immersed in fear of Communism and nuclear war. "Graham's crusades," Whitfield asserts, "broke with the pietist tradition of his predecessors and were pitched explicitly to the culture of the Cold War" (79).

The revival in L.A. may well mark the beginning of an upsurge of antirationism in the United States, a backlash against the scientific advancements that many believed had brought the world to the brink of destruction. Not surprisingly, this was interpreted by many religious extremists, Rufus Johnson's grandfather included, as a sign of the end of the world, as brought about by Jesus Christ in the biblical apocalypse²⁶. Even Murray closes his article by acknowledging his own belief in a biblical end of days brought about by atomic war, writing, "I do not mean to speak in tones of careless reassurance as one sometimes does to a child. For all you and I know, it may be the incomprehensible and

²⁶ Jon Lance Bacon discusses the ties between O'Connor's fiction and mid-century religious portrayals of the apocalypse in "'Jesus Hits like the Atom Bomb': Flannery O'Connor and the End-Time Scenario."

inscrutable will of God to make the twentieth century ‘closing time’ for the human race.” In “The Lame Shall Enter First,” Rufus’s grandfather has “gone with a remnant to the hills,” Rufus explains. “Him and some others. They’re going to bury some Bibles in a cave and take two of different kinds of animals and all like that. Like Noah. Only this time it’s going to be fire, not flood” (O’Connor, *CS* 456-57). Rufus tells this as if it is fact—it *is* going to be the end of the world by fire—and there were many Americans at mid-century, including Billy Graham and his many thousand followers, who viewed things in a very similar way.

Merging these fears with the fears Americans felt in connection with Communism, Graham appealed to a vast number of Americans, and his popularity among mainstream religious believers, as opposed to only extreme fundamentalists, helped his views to spread even further. While his beliefs were in many ways fundamentalist, Marty writes, “he packaged these so attractively that Hollywood stars and athletes who cared little for the fine points of doctrine followed him, thus helping him teach the evangelicals to embrace worldly American culture in the name of the simplest values of the past” (414). In 1957, a *Life* headline proclaimed that Niebuhr believed that Graham was “oversimplifying the issues of life.” Niebuhr took issue with Graham’s method of salvation, writing that the evangelist’s version of Christianity “promised a new life, not through painful religious experience but merely by signing a decision card. Thus, a miracle of regeneration is promised at a painless price by an obviously sincere evangelist. It is a bargain” (92). While Graham’s message was in many ways true to the arguments of many fundamentalist Christians of the twentieth century, his methods differed at times

and the result was a huge mid-century following, many of whom were yearning for answers and solace in a time of Cold War fear.

Rudolph notes that the mid-century “religious resurgence was viewed by some as a growing threat to the advancement of scientific thinking” (40). This same view is held by several of O’Connor’s characters, including Sheppard. He represents the members of American Cold War society who felt that new advances in science opened doors and made possible not only safety and security through technology, but also a whole new world of knowledge and intellectual possibility. “In place of fundamentalist belief,” Bacon notes, “Sheppard holds up the achievement of modern science and technology” (“Jesus Hits” 29). Rufus Johnson, on the other hand, represents the members of society who saw scientific advancement as the harbinger of the end of the world, and who valued faith and spiritual advancement, i.e. religion, over intellectual and scientific pursuits. Bacon also notes this tie, writing that, “the conflict between passionate fundamentalist and godless rationalist is central to *The Violent Bear It Away*,” which I discuss later in this chapter, “as well as a related story, ‘The Lame Shall Enter First’” (“Jesus Hits” 27). Rufus even seems to literally reject rational knowledge, as he loses interest in the telescope Sheppard buys for him, then in the microscope Sheppard buys. The boy fervently reads encyclopedias, but, O’Connor writes, “[e]ach subject appeared to enter his head, be ravaged, and thrown out” (CS 466). Rufus seems to hunger for knowledge, but he rejects it immediately after consumption.

What does stay in Rufus’s mind, however, are his fundamentalist Christian beliefs and his unwavering challenges to Sheppard’s atheism. Sheppard’s lack of spiritual belief is harshly criticized in O’Connor’s short story, just as atheism is treated harshly in all of

her fiction. And as she crafted these atheist characters who all meet tragic ends, the atheism of Communism was a major contributor to the intense rise in religious belief in the United States at mid-century. Whitfield explains that religious belief at mid-century was “intensified” because of “the need to combat a political system that was above all, defined as godless. Thus, church membership and a highly favorable attitude toward religion became forms of affirming 'the American way of life' during the Cold War, especially since the Soviet Union and its allies officially subscribed to atheism" (Whitfield 83). This was an attitude held by President Eisenhower, who also subscribed to the idea of Communism as a political system that was often defined by its atheism and who used that definition as an appeal to the American people. Eisenhower, Marty writes, “applied the language of the religious crusades first to World War I, then to his campaign against corruption in Washington, and, finally, to his assault against godless communism abroad” (405). The rhetoric of mid-century in regards to godlessness portrayed Communism as undeniably evil and as a system without any sort of moral compass to dictate its policy of personal freedoms, much less the ones Americans valued highly, such as religious freedom.

The Soviet Union’s view of religion, Anderson writes, was made clear in an August 1959 editorial that appeared in *Pravda* claiming that religion is incompatible with “the interests of the working masses” and that it “hinders the active struggle of the people for the transformation of society” (qtd. in Anderson, 19). These sorts of proclamations only confirmed what Americans had long believed about the Soviet Union, and they gave them even more reason to fear the atheism that accompanied Communism. Americans had also been warned of these evils throughout the 1950s by Graham and other

evangelists like him. “Only as millions of Americans turn to Jesus Christ at this hour and accept him as Savior,” Graham preached, “can this nation possibly be spared the onslaught of a demon-possessed communism” (qtd. in Whitfield, 81). With language like this, Graham depicts Communism not only as devoid of god, but as directly influenced by a biblical Satan. “What made Graham so special among the conservative anti-Communist voices of the 1950s,” Whitfield writes, “was the root cause that he ascribed for the evil that the country confronted” (81). Graham expressed in September of 1957, the month before *Sputnik* was launched, his “own theory about Communism,” which was that it was “master-minded by Satan.” Graham claimed to be able to see “no other explanation for the tremendous gain in Communism in which they seem to outwit us at every turn, unless they have supernatural power and wisdom and intelligence given to them” (qtd. in Whitfield 81). To an American public confused about the uncertain times in which they found themselves, Graham provided a concrete reason for the enemy they faced, and he provided a concrete way to battle that enemy: Christian salvation. Communism was therefore portrayed as a political stance created specifically by Satan and the only way to combat such a thing, according to evangelists like Graham, was by conversion to and dedicated practice of Christianity.

American religious interest occurred for multiple reasons, but most of the specific causes for the popularity of religion at mid-century can be traced to the Cold War. “For the two decades after World War II,” Marty writes, “Americans, showing a revived interest in religion, gave signs of wanting to work for a consensus in national life” (429). In addition to a desire to use religion as a way to create an American way of life, many Americans also viewed religion as a way to combat Communism and to solidify their

own American-ness. Whitfield notes that, “conspicuously active church membership became the most effective shield against the suspicion of subversiveness” and that the mid-century therefore experienced an upsurge in church membership. “In the twentieth century,” he writes, “church affiliation had never been as high as it was in the 1950s and it would never be as high again.” In a survey in 1954, nine out of ten Americans professed belief in “the divinity of Christ” and “almost two in three accepted the existence of the devil” (Whitfield 83). While many people genuinely turned to Christianity out of the fear that accompanied the Cold War, some associated themselves with religion in order to appear more patriotic and avoid being labeled Communist sympathizers during the Red Scare. Graham went so far as to employ the ties between Christianity and patriotism, and between atheism and Communism, in order to attract converts. “If you would be a true patriot,” he proclaimed, “then become a Christian. [. . .] If you would be a loyal American, then become a loyal Christian” (qtd. in Whitfield, 81). Graham appealed both to patriotic Americans who sought any way to defend their country against Communism and to fearful Americans who did not wish to be labeled as Communist sympathizers during the Red Scare.

Sentiments such as these were also used in an official capacity by the United States government, which made clear its association between American loyalty and Christianity with two major additions in the 1950s. In 1954, Congress voted for and approved the addition of the phrase “under God” to the pledge of allegiance; in the “same year,” Rudolph notes, Congress “mandated that all U.S. currency carry the motto ‘In God We Trust’ as a bulwark against godless communism” (40). The incorporation of religion into the American government continued in 1955 when a “nonsectarian prayer room was

Constructed on Capitol Hill,” and in 1956 when “all first- and second-class mail had to be canceled with a die bearing the nondenominational request to ‘Pray for Peace’” (Whitfield 89). Rudolph explains these developments as the result of the fact that “Congress [was] always a mirror of public sentiment” and that “the strong identification of communism with atheism made religious participation a particularly visible way of demonstrating one’s patriotism” (40, 39). The media also jumped on board, as made evident in the commentary about an atheist poem originally printed in the Russian magazine *Krokodil* and reprinted in a *Life* magazine in a piece titled “Not by God” on November 18, 1957. *Life* printed the last verse of the poem, which reads:

And here we have our *Sputnik*
No secret: the newborn planet is modest about its size,
But this symbol of intellect and light
Is made by us, and not by the God
Of the Old Testament

With this poem, *Life* claimed, “Moscow reminded the world that Russia’s leap into space has implications beyond the scientific and the military.” The poem, the American magazine claims, “indicates that creation, from a Communist point of view, is at least under new management” (“Not by God” 69). This sarcastic explanation of the poem from *Life* makes clear the disdain felt not only for the Soviets, but also for their attribution of a world-changing creation to themselves and not to the Christian God.

The Soviet Union's atheism was a source of contention for many Americans of the mid-century, as the idea of a "godless" political system presented further threat to the United States and compounded fear of Communism. The stark contrast between what was by mid-century a heavily Christianized United States and a country with a national stance of atheism only further highlighted the differences between Americans and

Soviets. John Anderson writes that Nikita Khrushchev was the Soviet leader "who from the late 1950s onward presided over a renewed and vicious assault on organised [sic] religion" (6). Raised by religious parents, Khrushchev claimed that his atheist schoolteacher helped him think freely in opposition to his strict childhood (Anderson 14-15). In 1958, he stated, "I think that there is no God. I have long ago freed myself from such an idea. I am an advocate of the scientific world view. Science and belief in supernatural forces are incompatible and mutually exclusive views" (qtd. in Anderson, 15). While many Americans did and do believe these views to be possible simultaneously, the faction of extreme Christians who abandoned science and reason in favor of end day scenarios felt the same way as Khrushchev—they just chose the opposite side. Billy Graham, like "virtually all other evangelists," Whitfield writes, "assumed that Christianity and capitalism are as inextricably connected as the spiritual conversion of souls and their worldly success as selves" (81). A world leader who not only professed atheism but also sought to spread it as he sought to spread Communism was unacceptable, and indeed terrifying, to a mid-century American population. Evangelical Communism was frightening; evangelical atheism paired with Communism was even worse. Whitfield writes that a sermon given by a different preacher in 1953 claimed that "almost all ministers of the gospel and students of the Bible agree that [Communism] is master-minded by Satan himself" (qtd. in Whitfield, 81). For the two-thirds of Americans who believed in the literal existence of Satan, statements like these provided both an origin for Communism and a way to fight it.

In 1951, Graham claimed, according to *The New York Times*, that New York City "stands on the brink of catastrophe as the No. 1 target for Communist destruction"

(“Evangelist Warns”). On July 3, 1957, the evangelist claimed that the atheism of the Soviet Union “could bring the United States to its knees unless Americans repented of their sin” (“Graham Foresees Peril”). On August 20 of the same year, Graham spoke again at Madison Square Garden to a crowd of 17,000, and warned that “recent Communist gains in Syria and Indonesia and the current Hollywood scandal trial” could be signs that “all the world appears to be getting ready for a conflict that could destroy civilization.” The article, printed in *The New York Times*, ends with the note that, “Decisions for Christ were made by 555 persons” (“Graham Cites”). In the wake of all of this religious zeal, Americans responded not just by rallying to Christianity, but by demonizing atheism and associating it closely with Communism. Whitfield discusses the influence of Communist fear on the heightened religion of the 1950s, writing that, “such stark conceptions of how the Soviet threat was to be defined and resisted” resulted in an unsurprising statement from “a leading District of Columbia clergymen” who called “an American atheist ‘a contradiction in terms’” (87). President Eisenhower himself stated, “Without God, there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life” (qtd. in Marty 405). Equating religion with the American “way of life,” the President aligned belief in God with the essential qualities of being American, and he aligned Communism with a government that, by existing without God, is in opposition to America’s way of life.

Eisenhower also said: “Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith—and I don’t care what it is” (qtd. in Whitfield, 88). In this statement, Eisenhower is careful to uphold a freedom of religion, as long as religion is present; freedom to be atheist, however, became a different story during the Cold War.

The American public, the government included, responded to the atheism-Communism link by discriminating against American atheists. “A dozen states barred atheists and even agnostics from serving as notary publics,” Whitfield writes, “and in many other states as well agnostic couples were not allowed to adopt children” (87). Atheists and agnostics are therefore another entry on the list of casualties of the rampant paranoia of the Cold War, as their religious beliefs, or lack thereof, labeled them as unpatriotic and therefore possibly Communist. O’Connor’s portrayal of atheist characters such as Sheppard and Rayber, therefore, draws on American distrust of atheism that was driven by the association of atheism with Communism.

On January 2, 1947, O’Connor wrote of atheism in her prayer journal, “No one can be an atheist who does not know all things. Only God is an atheist. The devil is the greatest believer & he has his reasons” (*PJ* 25). A devout Catholic who was very vocal about her religious dedication and her religious views, O’Connor was greatly influenced, likely more so than by any other outside force, by the views of the Catholic church. From the beginnings of her career, she sought to infuse her fiction with Christianity, writing in another journal entry, “Please let Christian principles permeate my writing and please let there be enough of my writing (published) for Christian principles to permeate” (*PJ* 5). In another entry, she gives thanks in her prayer for a story she has just written, writing “Don’t ever let me think, dear God, that I was anything but the instrument for Your story—just like the typewriter was mine.” She goes on to pray that the meaning of her revisions of this particularly story “be made too clear for any false & low interpretation of it” (11).

O'Connor's dedication to Catholicism is very thoroughly explored throughout criticism of her work and her life, and the "Christian principles" for which she prayed are often the foci of scholarship on O'Connor's fiction. For my purposes, the position of the Catholic church on Communism speaks to O'Connor's views of the Cold War²⁷, particularly in light of the fact that "Roman Catholicism," according to Whitfield, "considered Communism the Antichrist itself" (91). Whitfield explains that the Catholic church found Communism's "desire to abolish private property" in opposition to "the papal assumption that property was integral to an orderly society" (91). Moreover, "[t]he violence of Communist methods and the reductive materialism of 'scientific socialism' were an affront to Catholic affirmation of transcendent love. The explicit godlessness of the Marxist movement directly challenged the worldly power and the salvific claims of the church" (Whitfield 91). The anticommunism of the Catholic church is well documented in the decision of Pope Pius XXII to "excommunicate Catholics who voluntarily 'profess, defend, and spread' Communist tenets, which were described as 'materialistic and anti-Christian'" (Whitfield 91-92). The Pope made this decision for the excommunication of Communists in 1949, even though, Whitfield points out, he "never excommunicated any Nazis, never stifled their hopes of salvations after they had perpetrated genocide" (91). This is indicative of how seriously the Catholic church opposed Communism, and for O'Connor, just as for the other millions of American Catholics, the dictum of the Catholic church made a significant impact on her personal views of Communism and solidified her position, and therefore often the position of her narrators, on the argument between faith and reason during the Cold War. While my goal

²⁷ I have already discussed O'Connor's views of Communism in regard to the publication of her work in Communist countries, which she would not permit.

is not to make claims about O'Connor's purpose in her fiction (despite her well-documented statements of her purposes in her prayer journal and in her letters), the stance of the Catholic church on Communism represents one of the two major religious factions of the United States in the mid-century; the other is Protestantism, represented through various media by fundamentalist evangelists such as Billy Graham²⁸. Because both Protestantism and Catholicism were strongly aligned against Communism, Christian religion itself became patriotic during the Cold War.

The popularity of religion raised questions about rational belief in scientific advancement and progress and how those beliefs might be linked to Communism. The Soviet system of Communism, Rudolph explains, was based in a "technocratic culture" that "enabled a scientific understanding, even prediction, of the direction of human progress" and in which "technological progress was synonymous with social progress" (51). The U.S. measured social progress in more complicated ways, and promoted Christianity while still valuing scientific advancement as the only way to preserve its military prowess. "Science provided the foundation," Rudolph writes, "on which the technological and military strength of the United States rested and, given the crisis atmosphere across the nation, scientific know-how in research and education was called upon by the federal government to meet the challenge" (107). But not all Americans were able to reconcile these two systems and for many there remained a divide between faith and reason, as "the enemies of rationality," Rudolph argues, "were individuals cloaked

²⁸ While not all Protestants made claims as fundamentalist or extreme as those made by Billy Graham, his prominence at mid-century, his influence on President Eisenhower, and the public accessibility of his statements provide representation of mid-century Protestant beliefs about godless Communism during the Cold War.

not in red, but in the vestments of the growing evangelical religious groups of the mid-1950s and those who would bend to their will to avoid controversy” (150).

The divide between rationalists and fundamentalists resulted in some ways in negative consequences for the lack of scientifically focused career paths for Americans of the mid-century. An article in *Time* from November 18, 1957 reflects on the launch of *Sputnik* and its implications for American science education in the article “Knowledge is Power.” The magazine tells its readers:

Today Russia graduates more than twice as many scientists and engineers per year as the U.S. So sophisticated was the approach of Communist bosses to science—particularly since World War II—that they freed scientists from the Communist system itself, set them up in a never-never land of unlimited funds, limousines, dachas, and even—in the last few years—freedom of thought. (23)

The dedication of the Communist country to science is made evident to a capitalist American audience who would be shocked by Soviet departure from Communism in order to encourage any type of work and value it more than any other; the news of the Soviets’ treatment of their scientists would instigate fear for much of the U.S. population who knew the implications of *Sputnik*’s launch.

“The Lame Shall Enter First” echoes a distrust of scientific information in Rufus, who repeatedly states that space and science will not result in a person going to heaven, nor will they stop the devil that Rufus claims controls the science-focused Sheppard. Sheppard cannot justify any religious belief because of his belief in scientific

advancement and understandings of the world, particularly when it comes to space travel and psychological science. Sheppard is a social worker, one of the professions that O'Connor often "took to task," according to Sarah Gordon, consisting of positions held by people "who would reduce life's difficulties to a matter of secular compassions" (*Obedient* 235). In a 1965 *New York Times* review of *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Charles Poore writes that, "O'Connor has field days with progressive parents who adopt unmanageable outcasts," citing "The Lame Shall Enter First" as one of the two stories that demonstrate this. Ironically, O'Connor's bachelor's degree from Georgia State College for Women is in social science. "When the time came to declare a major," Gooch explains, "she chose Social Science to avoid taking two requirements for the English major taught only by Dr. Wynn," a professor she disliked and wanted to avoid because he didn't like her style of writing and gave her an 83 in English 102, a grade that "[kept] her off the first-quarter's dean's list" (93). In her junior year, she was forced to take sociology courses to complete her major of Social Science, and she disliked those courses very much, writing in a letter, "The only thing that kept me from being a social-scientist was the grace of God and the fact that I couldn't remember the stuff but a few days after reading it" (qtd. in Gooch, 105).

Sheppard's occupation as a social worker, combined with his fierce dedication to atheism and scientific rationalism, are portrayed through his depiction as the stereotypical "egghead." He "displays the elitism attributed to the egghead—," Bacon argues, "an intellectual arrogance that poisons his relationship with his own son" ("Jesus Hits" 31). Sheppard's job is as "City Recreational Director," O'Connor writes, but "[o]n Saturdays he worked at a reformatory as a counselor, receiving nothing for it but the satisfaction of

knowing that he was helping boys no one else cared about.” This is where he meets Rufus Johnson, “the most intelligent boy he had worked with and the most deprived” (CS 446). While he compares his office at the reformatory to a confessional, he places his own profession much higher than that of a religious official, as Sheppard feels that “[h]is credentials were less dubious than a priest’s; he had been trained for what he was doing” (449). Sheppard’s desire to reform Rufus Johnson—to do his job as a social worker—transcends his desire to do anything else, including caring for his own son. Considering the options of Rufus Johnson, O’Connor writes that, “[n]othing excited [Sheppard] so much as thinking what he could do for such a boy” (452).

But Sheppard has no such thoughts about Norton, who he sees merely as a lazy, dull, selfish child whose grieving over his mother, which has gone on for over a year, should have already ended. When Sheppard criticizes Norton for expressing his desire that Rufus will not come to their house, he tells the child, “Think of everything you have that he doesn’t! [. . .] Suppose you had to root in garbage cans for food? Suppose you had a huge swollen foot and one side of you dropped lower than the other when you walked?” Though Norton has no comprehension of such an idea, Sheppard continues to berate him, saying, “You have a healthy body, [. . .] a good home. You’ve never been taught anything but the truth. Your daddy gives you everything you need and want. You don’t have a grandfather who beats you. And your mother is not in the state penitentiary.” What Sheppard does not register is that the only thing he has said that matters to Norton reflects the one thing that Sheppard actually has *not* done for the boy—help him deal with the loss of his mother. At Sheppard’s statement about Rufus’s incarcerated mother, Norton begins to cry, claiming that if she were imprisoned, “I could go seeeeee her” (O’Connor,

CS 447). Ironically, the realm of social work certainly includes grief counseling, but this is an aspect of his profession, a potential specialized help that he could give his son, that Sheppard ignores. "If you stop thinking about yourself and think what you can do for somebody else," he tells Norton, "then you'll stop missing your mother." This is entirely untrue for Norton, who is ten years old and has no comprehension of communal duty or contributing to society. Sheppard's only brief moment of vocalized grief occurs in this passage, when he responds to Norton's revived crying by asking, "Don't you think I'm lonely without her too? [. . .] Don't you think I miss her at all? I do, but I'm not sitting around moping. I'm busy helping other people. When do you see me just sitting around thinking about my troubles?" (448). Sheppard's solution to his own grief is to immerse himself in social work at the expense of attention paid to his child.

Sheppard sees no rationality in Norton, no scientific excuse for his behavior, and no effort on the part of his son to contribute to the society in which he lives; therefore, the child has no value to him. Sheppard is particularly critical of Norton's capitalism. After chastising the boy for eating cake with peanut butter while Rufus Johnson eats out of a trash can, Sheppard criticizes Norton's desire to sell seeds that day, asking him why he wants to sell them. When Norton replies that he wants to win a prize of a thousand dollars that will be awarded to the person who sells the most, Sheppard asks him what he would do with the money. "Keep it," Norton replies. This is greatly frustrating to Sheppard, who suggests that Norton should instead use the money to buy playground equipment for an orphanage or a new shoe for "poor Rufus Johnson." Sheppard considers his son's greed when O'Connor writes that Norton was "[a]lways selling something. He had four quart jars full of nickels and dimes he had saved and he took them out of his closet every few

days and counted them" (O'Connor, CS 448). Sheppard hates this quality in his son; O'Connor writes, "Johnson's sad thin hand rooted in garbage cans for food while his own child, selfish and unresponsive, greedy, had so much that he threw it up" (449). Disgusted with his own child, Sheppard instead puts his efforts into helping Rufus Johnson, a boy he implies in his berating of Norton, has *not* been taught "the truth" because he has been raised by a fundamentalist Christian grandfather.

Sheppard is the embodiment of all that could go wrong in mid-century when social science is applied to the human condition and takes the place of human compassion. In December of 1952, an editorial in *Life* raised the question of "Christ in American Culture," arguing for the importance of that role. The article mentions various types of "pseudo-religion," claiming that "[t]he boldest of these is 'scientific humanism,' the notion that Man can govern and perfect himself through science, especially social science" ("Christ in American Culture" 16). This is Sheppard's religion (though a very purposefully flawed version of it), and in O'Connor's story, it is one that he follows at the expense of emotional connection to his child. In 1959, a significant voice emerged in support of this same idea when Sir Julian Huxley, "the grandson of Darwin's friend and defender, Biologist Thomas Huxley," spoke at the Darwin Centennial Celebration at the University of Chicago of "what he called a 'religion' of the future." *Time* claims that Huxley's new religion "sounded a lot like the old humanist faith of the past" and quoted Huxley as saying that the new religion he envisioned "will have 'no need or room for the supernatural.' It will be evolutionary, because 'the earth was not created, it evolved.'" Citing a number of things that have happened because of religion that are not "good things," Huxley claims that, "the new religion [. . .] 'could be a good thing. It will believe

in knowledge. It will be able to take advantage of the vast amount of new knowledge produced by the knowledge explosion of the last few centuries in constructing what we may call its theology—the framework of facts and ideas which provide it with intellectual support” (qtd. in “New-Time Religion?” 88).

This, too, is Sheppard’s religion, and it is violently opposed in “The Lame Shall Enter First.” Huxley does not shed morality in favor of science, but rather believes his scientific religion

should be able to define our sense of right and wrong more clearly, as to provide a better moral support, and to focus the feeling of sacredness on fitter objects, instead of worshiping supernatural rulers. It will sanctify the higher manifestations of human nature in art and love, in intellectual comprehension and aspiring adoration, and will emphasize the fuller realization of life’s possibilities as a sacred trust. (qtd. in “New-Time Religion” 88)

Like Sheppard, Huxley sees science as the means by which to shed a belief in the supernatural. He believes that not only can this change be accomplished without losing morality and humanity, but that the change will actually enhance those things. But this view cannot be sustained in O’Connor’s fictitious world, and Sheppard’s desire to live by a religion such as this one, the one he upholds in opposition to the fundamentalist belief of Rufus Johnson, costs Sheppard his son.

The fight between Rufus and Sheppard, and between faith and reason, begins during Rufus’s counseling sessions, when Rufus tells Sheppard that the devil has made

him do the bad things he has done. Sheppard's response is to become enraged thinking of Rufus's beliefs, which he thinks are instilled by handmade "signs nailed on the pine trees: DOES SATAN HAVE YOU IN HIS POWER? REPENT OR BURN IN HELL. JESUS SAVES" (O'Connor, *CS* 450-51). After Sheppard's "despair [gives] ways to outrage," O'Connor writes, he cries, "We're living in the space age! You're too smart to give me an answer like that!" (451). Sheppard equates intelligence with rationality and therefore with atheism. Once Rufus comes to live with Norton and Sheppard, the house becomes a constant battleground, and Norton is a casualty. Sheppard initially includes both boys in his assessment of future careers, saying, "Why you boys may be spacemen! Astronauts!" Rufus, however, responds by saying, "Astro-nuts" and telling Sheppard that he will not go to the moon, but that when he dies, he will go to hell. "It's at least possible to get to the moon," Sheppard says. "We can see it. We know it's there. Nobody has given any reliable evidence there's a hell." Rufus retorts that the evidence is found in the Bible. This literal use of rational evidence of the moon pitted against faith-based "evidence" found in the Bible is one that has played out in modern debates for decades, and here it causes a fight that results in Norton's confusion as he tries to reconcile the rational things his father has taught him with Rufus's teachings which, while without physical evidence, give him the hope that he will see his mother again.

O'Connor professed her own desire that more Christians (specifically Catholics) turn to the Bible not as intellectuals but as believers. Comparing Catholics to Southern fundamentalists, she observes, "Unfortunately, where you find Catholics reading the Bible, you find that it is usually a pursuit of the educated, but in the South the bible is known by the ignorant as well" (*MM* 203). Norton is ignorant of the Bible but Rufus, for

all his lack of formal education, is not, and is able to describe hell to Norton, disturbing Norton so much that his father must intervene. Sheppard's attempts to protect Norton from faith and to instill in him a factual, scientific knowledge of the world become problematic in this scene, for Sheppard has given no explanation to Norton of his mother's death that makes any sense to the child. Norton becomes frantic in his desire to know whether or not his mother is "burning up" and "on fire" in hell. Sheppard gives Norton an explanation that he has obviously given him before, saying, "Your mother isn't anywhere. She's not unhappy. She just isn't." But because Rufus can offer him a literal location for his dead mother, that the child can understand, Norton becomes the only character to attempt to merge faith with science. Though Sheppard reflects that it "would have been easier if when his wife died he had told Norton she had gone to heaven and that some day he would see her again, [. . .] he could not allow himself to bring him up on a lie" (O'Connor, *CS* 461). When Rufus tells him his mother is "On high," which he explains is "in the sky somewhere," Norton quickly stops believing his father and turns instead to the more comforting explanation that Rufus provides. It is here that Rufus plants the first seed that leads to Norton's death, telling him, "but you got to be dead to get there. You can't go in no space ship" (462). Rufus's assertion that heaven is unattainable by spaceship directly calls into question American efforts to reach outer space, particularly if that endeavor is pursued at the expense of religious belief. The subtext here is that scientific progress will not advance humankind in such a way that benefits the soul; this type of journey is possible, according to O'Connor's story, only by a journey of faith.

Sheppard's response to Rufus's claims that heaven is real but cannot be reached by a human-made vessel is to compare space travel to evolution, including another anti-fundamentalist idea that debunks creationism when he says, "Man's going to the moon [. . .] is very much like the first fish crawling out of the water onto land billions and billions of years ago. He didn't have an earth suit. He had to grow his adjustments inside. He developed lungs." But both boys ignore this entirely and Norton immediately returns to questioning Rufus about biblical afterlife, asking, "When I'm dead will I go to hell or where she is?" Rufus tells the child that right now, he would go "where she is," but if he lives "long enough," he will "go to hell" (O'Connor, *CS* 462). Rufus provides a simplified version of the religious concept of the age of accountability; Norton has a free pass to heaven as long as he is too young to understand his sin, but once he is old enough to know he is sinning, he will be hell-bound unless he becomes a Christian. Norton doesn't understand this, however; he only knows that now is the time to go to heaven to be with his mother, as it won't be possible later. When Sheppard insists that the boys go to bed, Rufus whispers to Norton that he will tell him more about it later, thus beginning the unlikely partnership in which Norton finds a source of information about his dead mother, and in which Rufus finds a way to hurt Sheppard.

Rufus's plan to assert his religious beliefs as superior to Sheppard's reason is to hurt Sheppard by converting his son, though it is a half-baked conversion that leaves Norton only sparsely educated in Christianity. Rufus also possesses a very real belief in what he teaches Norton, even if he himself does not presently abide by a Christian policy of resisting the devil's temptation. Rufus quickly resumes his old tricks of vandalism and breaking and entering, all the while teaching Norton the fundamentalist ideas of his cult-

following grandfather who is in a cave awaiting the Second Coming. When Sheppard finds out that Rufus's grandfather has left him to go with an end time cult to the woods to prepare for the world to be destroyed by fire, Sheppard calls him "the old fool," to which Rufus replies, "He ain't no fool" (O'Connor, CS 457). While Rufus is not with his grandfather, and instead has chosen to continue his delinquent ways that he claims are influenced by the devil, he still believes in the devil and in heaven and hell.

Though Sheppard claims that Rufus's beliefs in Jesus have been "flushed" out of his head, Rufus whispers, "I'll show you" (O'Connor, CS 474). It is at this point that Rufus begins in earnest his efforts to convert Norton from rationalism to Christianity, reading to him from the Bible and teaching him the same things he learned from his grandfather. Rufus's aims to take revenge on Sheppard by converting his son to a belief system he knows Sheppard despises. "Rufus," Gordon writes, "causes the death of an innocent child, Norton, through his efforts to defy Sheppard" (*Obedient* 233). Sheppard is so disturbed by Rufus's religious assertions and so preoccupied with his newly acquired hatred of Rufus that he only reacts with sarcasm when his son tells him that he wants to be an astronaut. Sheppard had previously mourned the fact that Norton would "be a banker. No, worse. He would operate a small loan company" (O'Connor, CS 445). Now he ignores his son's interest in science and technology, only muttering, "Wonderful" sarcastically upon Norton's proclamation. Rufus responds in an earnest evangelical attempt to sway Norton directly from science to faith, saying immediately, "Those space ships ain't going to do you any good unless you believe in Jesus [. . .] I'll read you where it says so," as the two pour over a Bible (476). But even Rufus seems immune to the reason that Norton spends so much time in the attic after this religious instruction begins.

He says, “that kid is crazy. He don’t want to do nothing but look through that stinking telescope” (473). To Rufus, it is “crazy” that a person would want to explore space and science for any such length of time, but it makes perfect sense to him to spend extended periods of time reading the Bible, an endeavor that, despite his current claim that Satan controls him, is worthwhile.

Echoing Billy Graham's assertion that Communists (and therefore, presumably, atheist rationalists) were possessed by Satan, Rufus Johnson tells Sheppard that he, too, is under Satan's control. “Satan has you in his power,” Rufus says, before he launches an argument in which he disputes Sheppard’s claim that he is “too intelligent” to believe in Satan. When Sheppard tells him to leave the table, O’Connor writes, “The boy rose and picked up the Bible and started toward the hall with it. At the door he paused, a small black figure on the threshold of some dark apocalypse. 'The devil has you in his power,' he said in a jubilant voice and disappeared” (CS 478). Sheppard’s disenchantment with his goal of saving and converting Rufus eventually takes over his urge to do good for society (or to avoid his own grief), and he sees the sky “crowded with stars he had been fool enough to think Johnson could reach” (479). Finally, the stars are unreachable for Rufus; though Sheppard has claimed throughout the story to this point that anything was attainable for the child because of his intellect, Rufus’s religious belief overshadows everything else.

For all of Sheppard’s attempts to convert the boy to science and reason, and despite his own criminal and sinister behavior, Rufus will not be swayed from his stance as a fundamentalist Christian who rejects Sheppard’s knowledge, science, and intellect in favor of a belief in a literal Satan and in salvation through Jesus Christ. As he is being

arrested toward the end of the story, Rufus claims, "When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist" (O'Connor, *CS* 480). But Sheppard believes that Rufus's Christian upbringing is what holds him back, as he has told him that the bible "is something for you to hide behind" and that it is "for cowards, people who are afraid to stand on their own feet and figure things out for themselves" (477). This reflects O'Connor's fears from years earlier when she recorded in her prayer journal that psychiatrists claimed Christian faith to be born of a fear of hell rather than a solid belief in heaven. O'Connor responds to this in her prayer journal, writing,

I do not want it to be fear which keeps me in the church. I don't want to be a coward, staying with You because I fear hell. I should reason that if I fear hell, I can be assured of the author of it. But learned people can analyze for me why I fear hell and their implication is that there is no hell. But I believe in hell. Hell seems a great deal more feasible to my weak mind than heaven [. . .] I don't want to fear to be out, I want to love to be in; I don't want to believe in hell but in heaven. Stating this does me no good. It is a matter of the gift of grace. Help me to feel that I will give up every earthly thing for this. I do not mean becoming a nun. (*PJ* 5-6)

But while O'Connor reconciled a belief in Christianity, hell, heaven, Satan, and Jesus, with her knowledge of and interest in science, particularly space travel, her fiction is full of characters who cannot reconcile such beliefs. They either reject science in favor of faith, or they meet disastrous ends when they refuse to choose faith over reason.

For Sheppard, the consequence is a lifetime ahead of him during which he must live with the knowledge he acquires in the same moments that his son is hanging himself in the attic. "I did more for [Rufus]," Sheppard realizes, "than I did for my own child." When Sheppard realizes what he is saying and the implications of his mistake, O'Connor writes,

Norton's face rose before him, empty, forlorn, his left eye listing almost imperceptibly toward the outer rim as if it could not bear a full view of grief. His heart constricted with a repulsion for himself so clear and intense that he gasped for breath. He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. He saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts, leering at him from the eyes of Johnson. (O'Connor, *CS* 481)

Sheppard realizes that it is he who has been greedy and selfish, he who has tried to mask his grief with something else. But his intention to "make everything up to" Norton will not be realized. He will not be able to "never let him suffer again," to "be mother and father," or "kiss him" and "tell him that he loved him, that he would never fail him again" (482).

Sarah Gordon writes that Norton's "grief over the loss of his mother is as movingly described as anything in O'Connor's fiction" (*Obedient* 228). Likewise, the ending of "The Lame Shall Enter First" is arguably the most tragic of any of O'Connor's endings, though it is not the only piece of her work that uses the death or even murder of a young child to display the flaws of its characters. Another tale of the conflict between

belief and nonbelief and the implications that has for a young child is O'Connor's short story "The River," published in her 1955 collection *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. It is the story of Henry (who calls himself Bevel), a child whose secular upbringing has left him without any understanding of Christianity. Bevel is about four or five years old and "The River" takes place on a day that he spends with a babysitter, Mrs. Connin, and on the following morning. When Mrs. Connin takes Bevel to her house, he sees "a colored picture over the bed of a man wearing a white sheet. He had long hair and a gold circle around his head and he was sawing on a board while some children stood watching him" (O'Connor, *CS* 161). When he asks Mrs. Connin who this man is, she is completely shocked that he doesn't recognize Jesus Christ in the portrait and embarks on a lesson in Christianity aided by a book titled "The Life of Jesus Christ for Readers Under Twelve."

Happy that this babysitter takes him to her house instead of staying at his home because "[y]ou found out more when you left where you lived," Bevel reflects on what he has learned in just one short morning away from his parents' apartment. "He had already found out this morning," O'Connor writes, "that he had been made by a carpenter named Jesus Christ. Before he had thought it had been a doctor named Sladewall, a fat man with a yellow mustache who gave him shots and thought his name was Herbert, but this must have been a joke. They joked a lot where he lived." He accepts the religion presented to him as fact by Mrs. Connin without questioning it and instead assumes that, because his parents evidently joke so much, they must have been joking about his own origins. Bevel has never heard of the concept of Jesus Christ as a person. "If he had thought about it before," O'Connor writes, "he would have thought Jesus Christ was a word like 'oh' or 'damn' or 'God,' or maybe somebody who had cheated them out of something

sometime” (CS 163). Despite this, Bevel immediately accepts the story of Christ, as Mrs. Connin tells it to him, as simple fact.

Mrs. Connin then takes Bevel with her to see a healing preacher at a riverbank. While at this service, O’Connor again displays the adamant choices for nonbelievers of the mid-century according to fundamentalists. Like the Americans who forced choices like patriotic or Communist, and Christian or atheist, the preacher at the river tells a nonbeliever in the congregation that he must choose between Satan or Jesus; there is no middle ground. “Believe Jesus or the devil!” he shouts. “Testify to one or the other!” (O’Connor, CS 166). When Mrs. Connin offers Bevel to the preacher to be baptized, Bevel doesn’t understand what baptism is. The preacher then gives him the explanation that after his baptism, “you’ll be able to go to the Kingdom of Christ. You’ll be washed in the river of suffering, son, and you’ll go by the deep river of life. Do you want that?” Bevel, because of his childhood among rationalist parents, misunderstands the preacher and believes that he will be able to leave his current living situation, and live instead in the Kingdom of Christ, which he thinks is literally underwater in the river. He thinks, “I won’t go back to the apartment then, I’ll go under the river” (168). Bevel displays the same childlike acceptance of physical location for Christian afterlife as Norton; both children are, O’Connor’s stories imply, left defenseless against the mortal consequences of their blending of rational thought with faith-based belief.

After his baptism, however, Bevel does not “go under the river,” but instead is left with the statement from the preacher, “You count now [. . .] You didn’t even count before” (O’Connor, CS 168). This is a statement of particular interest to Bevel, who is treated as an afterthought by his partying parents; O’Connor’s story depicts Bevel’s

parents, who spend both mornings of the story in bed with hangovers, as neglectful. When Mrs. Connin takes the child home, his parents' stance on baptism is made clear. Upon hearing that Bevel has been baptized, O'Connor writes, "His mother sat straight up. 'Well the nerve!' she muttered" (169). Bevel's mother then discovers that he has stolen the small religious book Mrs. Connin read to him. O'Connor writes that she "began to read it, her face after a second assuming an exaggerated comical expression" (170).

The next morning, alone in the apartment as his parents sleep off their partying from the night before, Bevel begins to think about the river. "Very slowly," O'Connor writes, "his expression changed as if he were gradually seeing appear what he didn't know he's been looking for. Then all of a sudden he knew what he wanted to do" (CS 172). He retraces the steps that took him to the previous day's religious service and, once there, wades into the river. "He intended," O'Connor writes, "not to fool with preachers anymore but to Baptize himself and to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river" (173). Though he at first has trouble staying underwater, he eventually manages to reach "the waiting current [that] caught him like a long gentle hand and pulled him swiftly forward and down. For an instant he was overcome with surprise: then since he was moving quickly and knew that he was getting somewhere, all his fury and fear left him" (174). Bevel drowns in an attempt to reach what he believes to be a literal Kingdom of Christ under the river, just as Norton hangs himself in an attempt to reach a literal heaven that he believes is located in outer space. In "The River," the conflict between reason and faith is not as pronounced as in "The Lame Shall Enter First," particularly in regard to science and technology, but the sentiment is the same. Bevel is unaware of the option of a faith-based belief system, and his confusion when he

tries to merge it with the rational ideas on which he has been raised combines with parental neglect to result in the child's death.

“The Lame Shall Enter First” is a later story than “The River,” and the Cold War conflict between science and religion is more realized in the latter. Once Sheppard realizes his own neglect, a realization that the reader never witnesses Bevel's parents experience, he runs to find Norton, his heart bursting with a suddenly-realized love for his son. But he instead finds the child hanging dead by a rope from a rafter in an attempt to reach his mother. Norton's death is, ironically, the result of not just his father's refusal to engage in a relationship with his young son and help him through his grief, but also the result of Norton's combination of beliefs in both a fundamentalist Christian view of the afterlife and a scientific understanding of outer space; believing in both prevents him from fully understanding either. While the merger of outer space with heaven may be the stuff of outlandish cults for twenty-first-century readers²⁹, Norton's difficulty in understanding a physical concept of heaven is a struggle with which O'Connor was also familiar. In her prayer journal, she writes:

I cannot imagine the disembodied souls hanging in a crystal for all eternity praising God. It is natural that I should not imagine this. If we could accurately map heaven some of our up-&-coming scientists would begin

²⁹ Contemporary readers may note the striking similarity between Norton's suicide and that of the members of Heaven's Gate, the cult from which many members committed group suicide in 1997. With at least one other cult member following in suicide in May of the same year, members of Heaven's Gate killed themselves in an attempt to reach a spaceship which they believed was located behind the passing Hale-Bopp Comet. The bodies of 39 members were found on March 26, 1997 in California and the members left behind video tapes in which they stated their belief that the Hale-Bopp comet was the way for them to “[shed] their containers” and “[leave] this planet” (Purdum). As the Heaven's Gate websites explained, the cult members viewed Hale-Bopp as “the ‘marker’ we've been waiting for—the time for the arrival of the spacecraft from the Level Above Human to take us home to ‘Their World’—in the literal heavens” (qtd. in Purdum).

drawing blueprints for its improvement, and the bourgeois would sell guides 10¢ the copy to all over 65. But I do not mean to be clever although I do mean to be clever on 2nd thought and like to be clever & want to be considered so. (*PJ* 6)

Norton also has trouble imagining heaven, but he has no trouble imagining outer space, and in fact finds it so easy that, as he blends his scientific understanding of space with his new religious education from Rufus, he imagines that he sees his mother waving to him when he looks through the telescope. The last time Sheppard sees Norton alive, the child is sitting at the telescope, gazing intently into the night sky, but Norton doesn't initially see Sheppard. "The child's back was to him," O'Connor writes, "He was sitting hunched, intent, his large ears directly above his shoulders. Suddenly he waved his hand and crouched closer to the telescope as if he could not get near enough to what he saw." Whereas Norton's eyes are often described by Sheppard as dull, here there is "an unnatural brightness about his eyes" and he exclaims, "I've found her!" (*CS* 478). When the child tries to get his father to look through the telescope to see his mother, Sheppard says, "you don't see anything in the telescope but star clusters" (479). Though Norton begins "to wave frantically" while looking through the telescope, Sheppard writes it off as foolishness and insists that Norton go to bed. Upon seeing what he believes to be his mother waving to him, Norton attempts to reach her the only way he knows how—by following the instructions of Rufus Johnson, who has told him he cannot get to her in a space ship, but that he can reach her only by dying. "The light was on in Norton's room but the bed was empty," O'Connor writes. Sheppard "turned and dashed up the attic stairs and at the top reeled back like a man on the edge of a pit. The tripod had fallen and the

telescope lay on the floor. A few feet over it, the child hung in the jungle of shadows, just below the beam from which he had launched his flight into space” (482). The conflict between Norton’s newly acquired Christian friend and his atheist father is too much for the child to comprehend, and when neither party is able to accurately explain anything to him, his conflicted understanding leaves him hanging dead from an attic rafter in an attempt to reach outer space and heaven.

Discussing “The Lame Shall Enter First” in a letter to John Hawkes, O’Connor references Hawkes’s previous claim that she wrote from the perspective of the devil, a claim she previously disputed, this time writing, “In this one, I’ll admit that the Devil’s voice is my own” (*HB* 464). While working on the story, she also wrote to Betty Hester, “The thing I am writing now is surely going to convince Jack [Hawkes] that I am of the Devil’s party” (449). The link between science and tragedy, highlighted by O’Connor’s narrative voice in “The Lame Shall Enter First,” was a connection long familiar to mid-century Americans. Even those who believed in the American right to end World War II with the use of atomic weapons were aware of the ways in which the country, and therefore the world, walked a very thin line between safety and destruction after the Soviet Union acquired nuclear weapons. After the development of scientific weapons of mass destruction, only more development of more advanced weapons could dampen the threat of global destruction; it was a catch-22 that the science that caused tragedy could only prevent future tragedy by being further advanced.

An editorial in *Life* from October 3, 1949, claimed, “So far the American people have done very well at living with their exclusive possession of the Bomb, and they may be expected to do as well living with Soviet possession of it. On the morning of

September 23, they joined many millions of other people in the knowledge that they, their children, their cities might be struck by the Bomb” (“Bomb to Bomb” 22). Though the article goes on to argue that the end of a nuclear monopoly might yield the result that the world is safer because no one will use such weapons (a prophetically accurate observation), the fear felt by Americans at the development of the Soviet nuclear bomb resonates. As *Life* pointed out in October of 1957, “the conflict between freedom and Communism is a long, tiresome and seesaw business in which the apparent lead can change many times” (“Common Sense” 35). Norton’s death indicates a larger, looming fear of that “seesaw” of power, for many Americans were of the same view as the 1959 *Life* article that claimed that the U.S. must advance in the space race because “Russia is working with determination and skill and (so far) superior accomplishment to the same end” (“To Overtake” 36).

American mid-century advancement in science and technology was largely due to the sense of urgency felt by many Americans due to their fear of lagging behind the Soviets. “With *Sputniks* beeping overhead,” Wang writes, “all other Soviet propaganda appeared perilously true: their gross national product grew at a faster rate than that of the United States [. . .]; they were producing twice as many engineers as the United States; other countries would adopt the Soviet political system” (Z. Wang, 71-72). But there were also many who believed that advances in technology led to more destruction, such as the hydrogen bomb, “a ‘super-bomb’ which ‘would be at least a thousand times more powerful’ than the atomic weapons used to end World War II” (Gaddis 36). Edward Teller, the main scientist who spurred the development of the H-bomb, even when others who worked on the Manhattan Project refused to do so, advocated for its creation because

he felt it was integral to national security. Even so, he himself acknowledged the popular fear of the United States, admitting that he felt it, as well. “The science of today [. . .] is the technology of tomorrow,” Teller stated, lamenting the speed with which Russian science education was moving forward. “Many people are afraid we will be attacked by Russia. I am not free of such worry,” he confessed, “But I do think this is the most probable way in which they will defeat us. They will advance so fast in science and leave us so far behind that their way of doing things will be their way, and there will be nothing we can do about it” (qtd. in “Knowledge,” 23).

As Americans worked to catch up to, or stay ahead of, Soviet technology, they also were all too aware of the horrors they invented. Americans who feared such technological advancement were not alone; there were scientists who felt the same way, most likely because they had seen firsthand what their scientific advancements were capable of. “The deadly success of their A-bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki had rocked the consciences of the atomic scientists,” *Life* claims, citing Robert J. Oppenheimer’s statement, “The physicists have known sin.” Teller was without the aid of many of his Los Alamos colleagues when he discovered the secret to creating “a practical H-bomb,” a discovery that came after the first successful detonation of a hydrogen bomb by Soviet scientists; though Russia created the H-bomb first, it was Teller who created a more efficient version. His reasons for such a development were steeped in fear of Soviet superiority in nuclear weapons, and stemmed from a belief that the only way to neutralize the threat of atomic bombs was to create a bomb that was even more powerful and that threatened absolute destruction; this threat of mutual assured destruction would keep the Soviet Union from instigating an apocalyptic launch of nuclear warheads. Even after the

development of the hydrogen bomb, Teller extolled the reasons for more and more education for Americans in the sciences. “If the Russians go ahead faster than we do in this direction,” Teller warned of scientific education, “then we will be just helpless. If we are not able to use our freedom in the direction of accelerated progress, and if the Russians use their tyranny in this direction, they will win” (“Knowledge,” 23).

But the push for more scientific education, more technological advancement, and a more scientifically based—and to many, a therefore more secular—American culture was met with resistance by many Americans. These are the types, often in caricature, that O’Connor pits against her intellectual characters, particularly in “The Lame Shall Enter First” and *The Violent Bear It Away*. While Sheppard attempts to steer Rufus Johnson toward a scientific career path, the most intense focus on education—and the evils that accompany it—is found in O’Connor’s 1960 novel. In creating Sheppard, Gordon writes that, “O’Connor presents a character whose expression of feelings is blocked and whose solace is ‘intellectual’ activity, as is frequently the case with characters in O’Connor’s work” (*Obedient* 234). “The Lame Shall Enter First,” as I have mentioned, is a reworking of similar characters in O’Connor’s second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*. The novel is strikingly similar in its portrayal of a rationalist, and atheist, single father who tries to sway a young boy away from fundamentalist Christian beliefs.

O’Connor struggled to write Rayber, just as she struggled to write Sheppard, though her letters indicate that she was more satisfied with the former. Bacon writes that O’Connor used the “cultural stereotype” of “the egghead” to develop Rayber and Sheppard because she did not have “any emotional connection, any real understanding” to help her write these two men (“Jesus Hits” 30). O’Connor wrote to Catharine Carver in

1959, “Rayber has been the difficultly all along. I’ll never manage to get him as alive as Tarwater and the old man but I can certainly improve on him” (*HB* 327). O’Connor first invented a version of Rayber (a quite different version from the one realized in *The Violent Bear It Away*) in one of her earliest short stories, “The Barber,” written while she was in graduate school in Iowa. Gordon argues that O’Connor has “a tendency to flatten certain characters or character types to create her satire—the liberal intellectual in various guises, for example.” The “flattening” of these characters may well be the result of O’Connor’s inability to emotionally connect to them in the same way she was able to sympathize with fundamentalists like old Tarwater. Gordon argues that this causes “O’Connor herself, therefore” to “[engage] in the very habit of abstraction that she clearly satirizes in such characters as Rayber [. . .] and Sheppard” (*Obedient* 96).

O’Connor confessed that she struggled with Rayber, writing to John Hawkes in 1959, “Rayber, of course, was always the stumbling block [. . .] I don’t really know Rayber or have the ear for him” (*HB* 352-53). She also later told Richard Gilman that “she hadn’t ‘gotten right’ the intellectual Rayber. ‘I don’t reckon he’d be very convincing to you folks in New York,’ she said” (Gooch 310). This statement proved true in at least one circumstance, for in an unfavorable review of *The Violent Bear It Away* for *The New York Times*, Orville Prescott, despite his previous admiration of O’Connor’s fiction, writes that, “Rayber’s bumbling, ineffectual trust in IQ tests and psychiatric theories is equally unsatisfactory if it is supposed to stand for modern scientific thought” (Prescott). Realistic or not, however, Rayber is one of O’Connor’s signature caricatures who serves a very specific purpose and represents a very specific ideal; in this case, the caricature represents the mid-century affinity for rationalism over religion and the dire

consequences of replacing human compassion with technology. In his efforts to resist religion, Rayber denies himself all emotion and cannot find a place for himself in a world that includes both compassion and reason.

Rayber is the nephew of old Tarwater, the elderly self-proclaimed prophet who lives in the woods of Powderhead, Tennessee. Rayber's history with Christianity is complex and this complicated relationship with religion impacts his entire life. Old Tarwater kidnaps Rayber when he is a child and takes him to live with him at Powderhead for four days. During this time, old Tarwater does his best to change the young Rayber's views and teach him his own religious ways. Rayber is quite susceptible to these notions, to the point that when his own father comes to retrieve him, he doesn't want to leave. But Rayber rejects old Tarwater's teachings, and later, when he is fourteen, returns to Powderhead just to shout at old Tarwater in anger because of what he did to him. As a result, years later, Rayber ventures out to Powderhead to try to retrieve his own nephew, young Tarwater, and save him from the old man's religious influence. When Rayber comes to the house to retrieve the infant Tarwater, bringing with him a female social worker, old Tarwater threatens him with a shotgun. When Rayber doesn't heed the old man's warnings, he is shot twice, once in the leg and once in the ear, resulting in the need for technological aid in his hearing for the rest of his life.

Rayber gives up on Tarwater and marries the female social worker in his desire to have a son so that he can raise a child to believe in rational thought, science, and progress. Rayber's son is born with a mental handicap, however, and Rayber is tormented by his desire to pass his own wisdom to a developing child. When Tarwater shows up on his doorstep, Rayber is as exhilarated as Sheppard is when he discovers that Rufus

Johnson has come to his house. Like Sheppard's attempts to reform Rufus, Rayber seeks to free Tarwater from Christian belief as he believes he has freed himself. Both men are thrilled at the opportunity to reform these young boys through education, science, and psychology, and to therefore undo the religious teachings that have been imposed on these children by their elderly caretakers. Each story ends in tragedy for the characters' children, though, and in both cases the tragedy is caused by the religious delinquent boy, but also indirectly contributed to by the father. In *The Violent Bear It Away*, Rayber's son, Bishop is murdered by young Tarwater when Tarwater's urge to resist his religious upbringing results in his decision to drown Bishop rather than baptize him. "Norton," Sarah Gordon writes,

is another version of the child Bishop of *The Violent Bear It Away*, the story fashioned from an early draft of the novel in which Sheppard figures as the Rayber character, determined to save Rufus Johnson from a life of crime and from his 'primitive' fundamentalist belief. Indeed, Bishop and Norton are two of O'Connor's most lovable characters, and they are both, O'Connor makes clear, essential to the salvation of their earthly caretakers. (*Obedient* 228)

Rayber, like Sheppard, is unsuccessful in his endeavor to undo the religious beliefs of Tarwater and teach him the ways of scientific and rational thought, and both characters are shown the errors of their ways through the deaths of their children, though Rayber's realization is starkly different from Sheppard's.

The Violent Bear It Away employs a conflict between science and faith that is very similar to the conflict of “The Lame Shall Enter First.” But because of his mechanical hearing aid, Rayber is connected literally to science in a way that Sheppard is not. Throughout the story, special attention is brought to Rayber’s hearing aid, a device that not only serves as a constant reminder of the man’s attempt to take the infant Tarwater away from Powderhead, but also as a literal connection between humanity and science. Rayber’s hearing aid is described when Tarwater arrives on his doorstep after the death of his great uncle after Rayber tells him, “Wait here, deaf,” and disappears into another part of the house. “He came back almost at once,” O’Connor writes, “plugging something into his ear. He had thrust on the black-rimmed glasses and he was sticking a metal box into the waist-band of his pajamas. This was joined by a cord to the plug in his ear. For an instant the boy had the thought that his head ran by electricity” (VBA 87). Early in Tarwater’s perception of Rayber, the man is presented as inextricably entwined with technology. As Asals argues when Tarwater later questions Rayber about the hearing aid, in Tarwater’s mind, “Rayber begins to be absorbed into the machine he wears” (77).

As Rayber attempts to begin his undoing of the old man’s theological teaching, O’Connor writes, Tarwater’s eyes “followed the wires of the hearing aid down to the metal box stuck in [Rayber’s] belt. ‘What you wired for?’ he drawled. ‘Does your head light up?’” (VBA 103). Tarwater notices this association between Rayber and science in a passage in which Rayber extols the virtues of rational thought, telling Tarwater, “He did you a terrible injustice [. . .] He kept you from having a normal life, from getting a decent education. He filled your head with God knows what rot!” (103). While Rayber claims

that Tarwater's head is "filled" with "rot," his own head is filled with electricity. As he teaches Tarwater that all the things his great uncle taught him are wrong—professing that scientific views of life, not faith-based ones, are the only ones that are valid—his physical body fuses with science. After telling Tarwater his head does "not light up," Rayber explains the reason for his hearing aid—that he was shot by his uncle. Soon after, Tarwater makes another connection between Rayber's physical body and technology, asking him, "Do you think in the box [. . .] or do you think in your head?" (105). Because the hearing aid transfers sound directly from the box into Rayber's ear, Tarwater's assumption that he may also "think in the box" is not far-fetched, particularly for a child who has been raised away from much exposure to modern technology.

Tarwater's conclusion that there is little, if any, difference between Rayber's head and the metal box that allows him to hear indicates that Rayber understands nothing that isn't transmitted through a scientific, technological process. Later, at the Cherokee Lodge, as Rayber and Tarwater are fishing, Rayber continues to try to help Tarwater, saying, "I know I can help you. Something's eating you on the inside and I can tell you what it is." Frustrated by Rayber's attempts to save him from the teachings of old Tarwater, Tarwater says to his uncle, "Why don't you shut your big mouth? [. . .] Why don't you pull that plug out of your ear and turn yourself off?" (O'Connor, *VBA* 175). Tarwater believes that Rayber is like a robot, a mechanical system that spews rational thought and that can only be stopped by being unplugged and therefore turned off. Here, Rayber's hearing aid becomes the source of power for not only his thoughts, but also for his existence. Tarwater's questioning of Rayber's ability to exist apart from the machine, to think if the machine does not aid him, is indicative of Rayber's complete immersion in

science and technology and his inability to live without it. In Tarwater's understanding, Rayber cannot function without the machine attached to his body.

And Rayber does often turn himself off by taking the hearing aid out. Because he is able to control what he does or does not hear, Rayber is able to use technology to change the world he experiences and to change his perception of the world around him. "The schoolteacher intellectualizes deafness," Ciuba argues, "and his hearing aid facilitates this retreat into information science" ("To the Hard of Hearing" 10). Though Rayber claims that he does not think inside the mechanical device of his hearing aid, he does use the hearing aid to control his environment and to censor what he does or does not hear, rendering himself selectively deaf, most often in situations during which he wishes to switch off his human emotions. He "uses his deafness," Gary M. Ciuba argues, "to exclude the noise that threatens to overwhelm him" (9). This often occurs in situations in which Rayber feels vulnerable to human compassion. Rayber views love as a disease that runs in his family, and he connects it with faith. He believes that if he gives in to his desire to love, particularly to love his son, he will be giving in to an irrational compulsion that has plagued his family, which he calls "a curse that lay in his blood." Though Rayber believes he only has "a touch" of that "curse," he still is on guard against it at all times (O'Connor, *VBA* 113). Instead of loving his son, he reduces his emotions for him to the most rational, mathematical explanation he can. "His normal way of looking on Bishop," O'Connor writes,

was as an x signifying the general hideousness of fate. He did not believe that he himself was formed in the image and likeness of God but that Bishop was he had no doubt. The boy was part of a simple equation that

required no further solution, except at moments when with little or no warning he would feel himself overwhelmed by the horrifying love [. . .] If, without thinking, he lent himself to it, he would feel suddenly a morbid surge of love that terrified him—powerful enough to throw him to the ground in an act of idiot praise. It was completely irrational and abnormal. (VBA 113)

Rayber suppresses his love for Bishop, believing it to be "completely irrational" and indicative of the "touch of the curse" that has been passed down through his family. He does not view all types of love this way, as "[h]e knew the value of love and how it could be used," but his love for Bishop cannot be applied to any purpose and therefore he rejects it as completely as he can. The type of love Rayber feels for Bishop, he thinks, "was not the kind that could be used for the child's improvement or his own. It was love without reason, love for something futureless, love that appeared to exist only to be itself" (113). And so Rayber dampens that love in whatever ways he is able.

Rayber's most extreme attempt to quell his love for Bishop is an attempted murder. As he tells Tarwater, he once tried to drown his son at the beach, but, once Bishop was unconscious, O'Connor writes, Rayber "had a moment of complete terror in which he envisioned his life without the child" (VBA 142). Rayber shouts for help and someone revives Bishop with CPR. "The next day," O'Connor continues, "there had been a picture in the paper, showing the rescuer, striped bottom forward, working on the child. Rayber was beside him on his knees, watching with an agonized expression. The caption said, OVERJOYED FATHER SEES SON REVIVED" (143). Rayber cannot bring himself to murder his son, despite his horrific belief that, as he later tells Tarwater, "[i]n a hundred

years people may have learned enough to put them [mentally handicapped children] to sleep when they're born" (168). After this unsuccessful attempt to control his love for his son by murdering him, Rayber controls his emotions by choosing what he does or does not hear, such as the moment when he unplugs his hearing aid at the Cherokee Lodge to avoid hearing the sounds of young people dancing. "Rayber's own control," Asals claims, "is symbolized in the box of his hearing aid, an emblem of imprisonment and death which both epitomizes his mechanistic faith and selects his version of reality: sounds that disturb him are simply switched off" (181).

Rayber does, however, force himself to listen through his hearing aid to the sounds of his son being murdered. While Tarwater has taken Bishop out in the boat, Rayber is in his room. "He turned on the hearing aid and at once his head buzzed with the steady drone of crickets and treefrogs," O'Connor writes. "He searched for the boat in the darkness and could see nothing. He waited expectantly. Then an instant before the cataclysm, he grabbed the metal box of the hearing aid as if it were clawing his heart. The quiet was broken by an unmistakable bellow" (VBA 202). The bellow that Rayber hears is that of his son. While Bishop's murder is re-lived through Tarwater's memory later in the novel, the reader first learns of what happens to Bishop through Rayber's experience of it, and it is an experience based purely in sound; Rayber can hear but he cannot see. Rayber does not try to help his son, nor does he turn off his hearing aid to avoid the pain of listening to Bishop's death. Rather, O'Connor writes,

He did not move. He remained absolutely still, wooden, expressionless, as the machine picked up the sounds of some fierce sustained struggle in the distance. The bellow stopped and came again, then it began steadily,

swelling. The machine made the sound seem to come from inside him as if something in him were tearing itself free. (202)

Even as he listens to the sounds of his son's murder, Rayber forces himself to allow the hearing aid to process these sounds as information. Rayber knows what is happening and, even after the murder, "He remained standing woodenly at the window. He knew what had happened. What had happened was as plain to him as if he had been in the water with the boy and the two of them together had taken the child and held him under until he ceased to struggle." But Rayber does not do anything other than allow his hearing aid to transmit sound to him, which he then rationalizes. In his final appearance in the novel, he stands still at the window, in the knowledge that "they would drag the pond for Bishop" the next day (203).

Aware of his overwhelming love for Bishop, Rayber expects to mourn him. "He stood waiting," O'Connor writes, "for the raging pain, the intolerable hurt that was his due, to begin, so that he could ignore it." Rayber expects that this will be the ultimate opportunity to force himself to act rationally, to ignore human emotion and instead transform it into information, but he never gets that opportunity. The pain never comes and Rayber "feel[s] nothing. He stood light-headed at the window and it was not until he realized there would be no pain that he collapsed" (VBA 203). This last depiction of him, emotionless after listening to his son's murder, is O'Connor's portrait of a man whose fight to de-humanize himself and instead rely on science and technology and reason alone, without faith or compassion, has resulted in the final complete transformation from man to machine. In a letter to a student, O'Connor wrote that Rayber

did love [Bishop], but throughout the book was fighting his inherited tendency to mystical love. He had the idea that his love could be contained in Bishop and that if Bishop were gone, there would be nothing to contain it and he would then love everything and specifically Christ. The point where Tarwater is drowning Bishop is the point where he has to choose. He makes the Satanic choice, and the inability to feel the pain of his loss is the immediate result. His collapse may then indicate that he is not going to be able to sustain his choice—but that is another book maybe. (*HB* 484)

Rayber is unable to reconcile religious belief, or even love, with scientific fact. He believes that he must resist that which is emotional in order to agree with that which is rational.

Sheppard suffers from a similar problem, as do many of O'Connor's other intellectual characters, notably Joy/Hulga in "Good Country People." O'Connor's religious characters are also subject to this all-or-nothing mentality; Old Tarwater (and eventually young Tarwater) and Rufus Johnson reject science, technology, and reason in favor of spiritual belief. Rayber equates love with an irrational, supernatural disease that he must constantly suppress, and the result is a robotic, inhuman existence made all the more apparent by O'Connor's depictions of his hearing aid. Because he has "[achieved] the triumph of cybernetic form over chaos," Ciuba argues, "Rayber sacrifices all that is human in himself and others. He reduces the individual to the rational or the mortal [. . .] The cyborg uses his hearing aid as a substitute head, a mechanized version of his intellect. Into it goes noise, and out of it comes pure information" ("To the Hard of Hearing" 10).

This process is not unlike that described by William Benton when he claimed that Soviet scientific instruction, though highly valuable and in many ways to be emulated in American education, resulted in “highly conditioned robots” due to the severity to which the students were taught to focus on memorization and to study science without any accompanying liberal arts (44). A *Time* article from 1957 on “The Advancement of Science” quotes Pope Pius XII, who claimed, “Modern man [. . .] thinks that man can be scientifically and technologically understood and controlled [. . .] But this is a false concept. Man’s dignity and limitation consist in his being a spiritual being who can by a free act of commission or omission control evil within him or encourage it” (qtd. in “The Advancement of Science” 44). *Time* supports the Pope’s claim, stating that the 1957 meeting for the American Association for the Advancement of Science featured “a symposium of social, biological, and physical scientists” who “agreed that science and technology were far from understanding and managing man” (44). In opposition to these ideas, Rayber attempts to use science and technology to both understand and, most certainly, to manage humanity and the humanity within himself, but his efforts go too far and he is left without even the compassion to mourn his murdered son.

Rayber is even described as a robot by the woman who runs the desk at the Cherokee Lodge, who observes that “his eyes had a peculiar look—like something human trapped in a switch box” (O’Connor, *VBA* 154). Rayber’s thinking process is also tied to a robotic system that takes place in a box when old Tarwater recalls the paper Rayber published about his religious fanaticism during the time old Tarwater was living with his nephew. Though the devil, speaking to Tarwater early in the novel, argues that no one “cares what a schoolteacher reads,” old Tarwater cares very much and his anger at

Rayber over the article resonates throughout the novel (25). While old Tarwater is living with him, Rayber observes his uncle and writes a paper about him that is published in a “schoolteacher magazine,” presumably an academic journal. The article claims that old Tarwater’s “fixation of being called by the Lord had its origin in insecurity. He needed the assurance of a call and so he called himself” (75). When old Tarwater realizes that the paper is about him, he is furious at Rayber’s attempt to put him “in his head.” Telling Tarwater the story of this betrayal, old Tarwater says, “That’s where he wanted me [. . .] and he thought once he had me in that schoolteacher magazine, I would be as good as in his head” (18). Rayber tries to use this as an educational opportunity, telling the old man “You’ve got to be born again, Uncle [. . .] by your own efforts, back to the real world where there’s no saviour [*sic*] but yourself” (76).

Old Tarwater, believing that young Tarwater will be raised in such an environment and determined to save him from it, then kidnaps young Tarwater, leaving a copy of the magazine in the baby’s place in the crib along with a message that reads: “THE PROPHET I RAISE UP OUT OF THIS BOY WILL BURN YOUR EYES CLEAN” (O’Connor, *VBA* 76). Old Tarwater frequently insists that Rayber is always trying to put information in his head and to put people in his head in order to transform them into information. When he tells Tarwater the story of how he kidnapped him from Rayber, he says, “I saved you to be free, your own self! [. . .] and not a piece of information inside his head! If you were living with him, you’d be information right now, you’d be inside his head” (16). It is no wonder that Tarwater uses the same language when talking to Rayber and that Tarwater is so quick to make assumptions about how the machine that Rayber wears functions as a head itself. Tarwater, before his great-uncle’s death, feels that if it were not

for old Tarwater, he would be “in the schoolteacher’s head, he would be laid out in parts and numbers” (18). O’Connor’s narrative sympathy for both Tarwaters supports their view that Rayber reduces all things, including people, to data, and the parts that are not able to be processed in such a way are discarded; Rayber’s treatment of his own son concurs with this view. Old Tarwater is insistent that putting people “in his head” is Rayber’s only goal and that, had he known this, he would not have gone to live with him. “The old man had not known when he went to live there,” O’Connor writes, “that every living thing that passed through the nephew’s eyes into his head was turned by his brain into a book or a paper or a chart” (19). The old man also uses this same language when telling Tarwater why Rayber didn’t try harder to take him away from Powderhead. The reason, he tells him, is “he found you a heap of trouble. He wanted it all in his head. You can’t change a child’s pants in your head” (75). Young Tarwater adopts this same language. When Rayber tries to get him to take “a simple aptitude test,” telling him it is “a kind of game,” Tarwater refuses, and tells Rayber, “I’m free [. . .] I’m outside your head. I ain’t in it and I ain’t about to be” (111).

Rayber, with his aptitude tests and psychological data-gathering, represents a scientific approach to psychology that was new to twentieth-century Americans. These ideas about psychology were so new, in fact, that *Life* magazine, in 1957, published a series of articles on psychology, beginning with “The Age of Psychology in the U.S.” In the first installment, author Ernest Havemann writes that, “widespread use of psychology as an applied science of everyday living is brand-new and strictly American” and that “in the U.S., for better or worse, this is the age of psychology and psychoanalysis as much as it is the age of chemistry and the atom bomb” (68). Explaining that psychoanalysis was

previously rejected by religious believers, and vice versa, Havemann writes that, “the whole general field of psychology and psychiatry, which grievously shocked a good many of our grandparents and aroused the antagonism of many philosophers and especially religious leaders, has become much more respectable than it used to be.” Havemann ends the first installment by claiming that the number of psychologists and psychiatrists, already large in 1957, “is leaping ahead almost by geometrical progression” (80). In the last installment of the series, Havemann sings the praises of psychology and its influence on the mid-twentieth century, as well as its potential. He writes,

Thanks to the men of the new science, we now know more than any previous generation of mankind about the human senses, human learning and human intelligence. We know a good deal about our motives and our conflicts [. . .] All of us, even the myriads among us who have emotional problems ranging from the light to the serious, have far more hope for the future. (“Where Does Psychology Go” 88)

Also in 1957, Joseph R. Royce published "Psychology in Mid-Twentieth Century" in *American Scientist* with the intent of explaining the quick changes in psychology over the last few decades and the intensity with which Americans were confronted with psychology in the mid-century. "In 1945," Royce writes, "the American Psychological Association had around 3000 members; in 1955 the membership of the APA was 13,475." As Royce notes, the public felt that no facet of American life was immune to psychological scrutiny by these new scientists. "There is hardly a nook or cranny of life," Royce asserts, "where their behavioral investigations have not been conducted." Royce echoes old Tarwater's insistence that Rayber's only motivation is to

study every single move he makes, every word he says, and apply his psychological science to it. The boom in psychology resulted in some public anxiety, or at least confused questioning. "Exactly what kinds of things are these psychologists doing?" Royce asks. "What kinds of questions are behavior scientists and practitioners trying to answer? To what extent is psychology a science? Our purpose is to shed some light on these and other questions concerning contemporary psychology" (57). Royce also points out another important characteristic of twentieth-century psychology, which is its classification as a science. This is the same sort of classification that is important to Rayber, as well as to Sheppard.

To answer the question of psychology's place in the scientific realm, Royce includes a chart in his paper that shows "the relationships between modern psychology and its most closely related fields," including biology, anatomy, psychology, physics, chemistry, anthropology, sociology, and education. The inclusion of psychology among hard sciences like physics and chemistry changed the way in which psychology was viewed at mid-century. At mid-century, the field was no longer vague, but could gather and apply specific data. Royce explains this to his readers, pointing out that "psychology, like all other scientific fields, is continuously striving for greater and greater quantification. Thus, we have inserted a wide band denoting mathematics, indicating that mathematics underlies all fields of knowledge which strive to be scientific, whether pure or applied" (58). Thus the type of psychology practiced by Rayber in *The Violent Bear It Away* is made possible; he can, as old Tarwater interprets, gather information and keep it in his head. Psychology at mid-century, according to Royce, "covers the spectrum from the physical sciences, through biology, to the social sciences, and has amassed literally

mountains of empirical data" (73). Royce also compares behavioral psychology, which seems to be Rayber's specialty, specifically to chemistry, writing, "Today the chemist does not speak of water, but rather of so much hydrogen and so much oxygen. In other words he has broken down a relatively complex phenomenon, water, into its component parts. Exactly the same step is taken in the factorial study of behavior" (65-66).

The result of all of this is that psychology, in the mid-twentieth century, experienced a drastic change as it moved into the realm of science. "More important, perhaps," Royce writes, "is the fact that we have firmly brought in the scientific method where it previously was not allowed." Royce explains to his mid-century audience that the major change in psychology is, due to its new ways of gathering, using, and applying data, its move into the field of science. "In about seventy-five years," Royce writes, "we have moved away from the habit of philosophizing about the nature of 'mind' to a fairly healthy state of setting up observations and experiments when we want to put questions to human nature" (73). Like Rayber, the psychologists Royce references embraced the introduction of new methods of study and practice, and Rayber, though an extreme example, reflects this same sort of shift from psychology as a type of philosophy to a type of science.

The development of psychology as a science is due, Royce argues, to the need for better soldiers after World War II, and, therefore, psychology became particularly important during the Cold War. "The need for applying what was known about a person's senses and perpetual-motor capacities grew primarily out of the highly technical demands of fighting a modern war," he writes. "Much of what man does in carrying out an Atomic Age war is to manipulate mechanical and electronic gadgets of various kinds. This puts a

very high premium on how well man's receptors and effectors can perform" (61). As much of mid-century culture turned toward science as an answer to advanced methods of war, most notably the nuclear bomb, psychology also answered the call for scientific ways to provide better warfare and better protection against invading forces. Royce also mentions the development of standardized tests, like the one Rayber tries to convince Tarwater to take, writing, "The field of psychometrics grew directly out of practical demands placed on the authorities of the French school systems. These educators were concerned with the problem of teaching very bright, average, and very dull children in the same classroom." Hence an intelligence test was developed in the very early 20th century, followed by "standardized tests which could be administered in large groups" for testing World War I recruits (64).

While Rayber tries to process information inside his head and Tarwater does all he can, just as his great-uncle did, to stay outside of his uncle's head, Rayber also brings with him another evil of the mid-century according to many fundamentalists: school. Tarwater has never been to school, but, O'Connor writes, "[h]is uncle had taught him Figures, Reading, Writing, and History beginning with Adam expelled from the Garden and going on down through the presidents to Herbert Hoover and on in speculation toward the Second Coming and the Day of Judgment" (*VBA* 4). Tarwater's education has some obvious gaps, as his great-uncle has stopped teaching him Presidents a few decades too soon and notably has left out, it appears, all science. The bulk of Tarwater's specific education comes from the Bible and from the speculative assumptions his great-uncle makes about judgment day. But this is the only type of education worthy of any time, according to both old and young Tarwater. In the novel, Wood claims, "the

fundamentalist prophet Mason Tarwater gives his grandnephew an antinaturalist and thoroughly teleological education, though of course he wouldn't have recognized such ponderous adjectives" (35).

For both Tarwaters, one of the most heinous things about Rayber is that he would have insisted that young Tarwater attend a formal school. "Besides giving him a good education," O'Connor writes, the old man "had rescued [Tarwater] from his only other connection, old Tarwater's nephew, a schoolteacher who had no child of his own at the time and wanted this one of his dead sister's to raise according to his own ideas" (*VBA* 4). "The schoolteacher" is the label O'Connor frequently used when referencing Rayber in her letters, and she also uses the label frequently in the novel. "Many fundamentalists," Bacon notes, "viewed higher education as a direct threat to their values and beliefs" ("Jesus Hits" 33). This is certainly the case for the fundamentalist old Tarwater. Rudolph observes the rejection of rational education by Christian fundamentalists when he discusses the changes made to American classrooms during mid-century. "The Cold War," he writes, "demanded a school curriculum that would provide the necessary intellectual rigor to compete internationally with the Russians and, at the same time, reinforce American democratic values" (10). While the United States tried to keep up with Soviet science and technology, the public fear of Communism and atheism resulted in a simultaneous attempt to ensure that classrooms were conducive to both scientific, academic study and to instilling patriotism in the students. Religious education, particularly that like Tarwater's, is far removed from any type of "intellectual rigor" or even well-rounded subjects. The old man has warned Tarwater of the evils of formal education, presenting school as a worst-case scenario and one that is the largest threat old

Tarwater seems to hold over the boy. “If you were living with him [Rayber],” the old man says, “you’d be information right now, you’d be inside his head, and what’s furthermore [. . .] you’d be going to school” (O’Connor, *VBA* 16). Tarwater believes that school is a place in which he would be “one among many, indistinguishable from the herd” (18). While American education is less likely to be described as a “herd” of indistinguishable students, Communist education could much more easily be tied to this type of classification. Students of the Soviet Union in the twentieth century studied the exact same books, covering the exact same material on the exact same days, across the entirety of the vast country. This type of education, while convenient for students who might move between locations and easy to control in terms of material and a national educational standard, could easily result in the type of faceless anonymity that Tarwater fears.

As the Soviets developed their own scientific education programs, education was changing in the United States, as well. One of the most influential voices in mid-century education was that of John Dewey, whose ideas about education influenced the early twentieth century, the mid-century, and beyond. In his obituary in the *New York Times* on June 2, 1952, Dewey's "principal achievement" is purported to be "perhaps his educational reform. He was the chief prophet of progressive education." The obituary explains that Dewey's method of "learning by doing" has influenced American education since the 1930s and that "in 1941 the New York State Department of Education approved a six-year experiment in schools embodying the Dewey philosophy." In an article in the *New York Times* on June 9, 1946, Alvin Johnson writes of John Dewey's pragmatism and his ideas about science and democracy, "Dewey wished us to live by science and science

has turned traitor to mankind, produced a technology of war that has leveled the most treasured of monuments and has sent millions of men, women, and little children shrieking down to Hades." Echoing the sentiments of many mid-century Americans who feared the new technological advancement in nuclear warfare, Johnson addresses those who disagree with Dewey's belief in the necessity of science. He includes a passage from what was at the time Dewey's latest book, in which Dewey claims:

The accusation brought against [pragmatism] of child-like trust in science omits the fact that it holds that science itself is still in its babyhood. It holds that the scientific method of inquiry has not begun to reach maturity. It holds that it will achieve manhood only when its use is extended to cover all aspects of all matters of human concern. (qtd. in Johnson)

Dewey's concern is that a lack of scientific development, in many fields, not just those that are traditionally viewed as scientific, is detrimental to a developing society such as that of mid-century America. It is a view shared by Rayber and Sheppard in O'Connor's fiction, as these characters are greatly invested in the development of scientific and rational thought, and in the scientific fields of psychology and education. "The crisis in modern life," Johnson writes, "with its terrible wars and its menace of wars still to come that will destroy civilization, is a consequence of the tremendous gulf between the physical sciences and the moral and social sciences." Dewey's answer to this problem is education. Education, Johnson writes, is how Dewey suggests we "bridge this gulf and, [. . .] prepare the rising generation to face bravely the problems of social and moral inquiry." Dewey's ideas about education at mid-century are integrally linked to scientific development. Like Rayber and Sheppard, he saw education as vitally important

to the continued advancement of society, though Dewey also linked it inextricably to the advancement of a successful democracy. At the height of the Cold War, this idea was even more significant for Americans. "Dr. Dewey believed," his obituary proclaims,

that if democracy were to survive in this country it would require a tremendous reorganization of instruction and administration in the schools. Democracy, [Dewey] maintained, "cannot go forward unless the intelligence of the mass of people is educated to understand the social realities of their own time." ("Dr. John Dewey Dead")

Dewey's argument in 1946 was that contemporary education was not prepared to incorporate enough scientific study, and therefore the subject of Dewey's book, in which ideas of democracy play a central role, is that this must change.

In 1959, though he had been dead for seven years, Dewey was again the focus of a *New York Times* article, this time written by Fred M. Hechinger and focusing on Dewey's ideas about education in contemporary society. "Education's public part in the race between intelligence and catastrophe," Hechinger writes, "has never been considered more immediate than today." Hechinger ties Dewey's ideas to American anxiety about the ways in which children were educated in mid-century Russian schools, writing, "Today the American school finds itself bombarded by the demands of modern society. The expansion of the frontiers of science and knowledge, the competition with Russia and the beginning effects of automation [. . .] crowd in upon the schools and their curriculum." Dewey was also strongly opposed to Communism, a fact made evident not merely by his strong support of democracy throughout his life, but also by his belief "that known

Communists should not be permitted to teach children" ("Dr. John Dewey Dead").

Dewey's ideas about education, very important to mid-century American culture, display the significance many influential Americans saw in scientific education in the United States. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey writes that, "science marks the emancipation of mind from devotion to customary purposes and makes possible the systematic pursuit of new ends. It is the agency of progress in action" (Dewey). Dewey's encouragement of scientific advancement in education is accompanied by his explanation of the ways in which it has already bettered society. "Science taking effect in human activity," he writes, "has broken down physical barriers which formerly separated men." He continues,

It has brought with it an established conviction of the possibility of the control of nature in the interests of mankind and thus has led men to look to the future, instead of the past. The coincidence of the ideal of progress with the advance of science is not a mere coincidence. Before this advance men placed the golden age in remote antiquity. Now they face the future with a firm belief that intelligence properly used can do away with evils once thought inevitable. To subjugate devastating disease is no longer a dream; the hope of abolishing poverty is not utopian. Science has familiarized men with the idea of development, taking effect practically in persistent gradual amelioration of the estate of our common humanity.

(Dewey)

Dewey's ultimate idea is that science betters society for all humankind and therefore the educational system of the United States must incorporate it more fully in order for the nation to thrive as a democracy and in order to better society.

Scientific education is also very important to Rayber in *The Violent Bear It Away* (and to Sheppard of "The Lame Shall Enter First"), though democracy is of less importance to him than freedom from what he views as irrational, oppressive religion. To keep young Tarwater from the fate of being educated with scientific, and therefore secular, ideas, old Tarwater has taught him what he believes he should know, and *only* what he believes he should know. The old man has previously attempted to educate Rayber in the same way. "In four days" when Rayber is kidnapped by his uncle as a child, O'Connor writes, "the old man taught him what was necessary to know and baptized him" (VBA 64). Old Tarwater's version of a "necessary" education takes no longer than four days and culminates in the adoption of Christianity. When Tarwater is a baby, living with Rayber until the old man kidnaps the infant, and old Tarwater shows up on Rayber's doorstep, Rayber tells him, "I'm sorry, Uncle. You can't live with me and ruin another child's life. This one is going to be brought up to live in the real world. He's going to be brought up to expect exactly what he can do for himself. He's going to be his own savior [*sic*]. He's going to be free!" (70).

Rayber sees rational education as freedom, and he sees rational thought as freedom specifically from religion and from the supernatural teachings that old Tarwater imposed upon him when Rayber was a child. "As Tarwater's primitive version of home-schooling indicates," Wood argues, "O'Connor honored the fundamentalists' high regard for the Bible" (36). Rayber, of course, finds this not only insufficient, but incredibly

damaging, and he believes that he himself is a victim of the harm inflicted by his four-day education from old Tarwater, though he has managed, he believes, to rid himself of it. “He’s warped your whole life,” Rayber tells Tarwater. “You’re going to grow up to be a freak if you don’t let yourself be helped. You still believe all that crap he taught you” (O’Connor, *VBA* 173-74). As Tarwater and the schoolteacher discuss the Christian concept of a second coming of Christ, Rayber indicates that no one dead will “rise again.” Tarwater, who has never had the opportunity to learn or believe anything else, asks him if this is true. Rayber is thrilled to have the opportunity to teach Tarwater fact over fiction. “That’s why I want you to learn all you can,” he tells him. “I want you to be educated so that you can take your place as an intelligent man in the world” (110). Rayber’s insistence that old Tarwater only teaches damaging “crap” is positioned in opposition to old Tarwater’s intense belief in the evils of formal education.

Old Tarwater takes his hatred of formal schooling so far as to ascribe it to a function of Satan, made evident in the passage of the novel in which the two Powderhead residents fool a truancy officer. “The truant officer had come only once,” O’Connor writes. “The Lord had told the old man to expect it and what to do and old Tarwater had instructed the boy in his part against the day when, as the devil’s emissary, the officer would appear” (*VBA* 17). The man who is in charge of making sure that young children attend school is “the devil’s emissary,” making clear that American education is based in Satan’s agenda. While it takes chicanery and wile to protect young Tarwater from these educational evils, old Tarwater believes that there has been divine intervention to protect Rayber’s son Bishop from being raised by such a rational man. He believes that “the Lord

[. . .] had preserved the child [. . .] from being corrupted by such parents. He had preserved him in the only possible way: the child was dim-witted” (9).

Critics have noted O’Connor’s preference for the fundamentalist Christians of her stories, and indeed the narrator often sides against the characters like Sheppard and Rayber who tout rational agendas. While the devoutly Catholic O’Connor was by no means a follower of Billy Graham’s denominational choices, she did feel a strong kinship to the fundamental Christians of the South, a sentiment revealed by her affinity for old Tarwater. Wood writes that, “O’Connor honored the fundamentalists’ high regard for the Bible” in the way she has old Tarwater educate his young grandnephew, and the fact “[t]hat Southern fundamentalists care more for biblical doctrines than empirical evidence placed them, in her view, nearer to her own Catholicism than to liberal Protestantism” (36). O’Connor confirmed this allegiance to a character who values faith much more highly than he values reason, writing, “The modern reader will identify himself with [Rayber], but it is the old man who speaks for me” (*HB* 327). In a 1962 interview, Granville Hicks asked O’Connor “why she, a Catholic writer, has written about Fundamentalist Protestants in both of her novels [. . .] and many short stories.” O’Connor replied, “I’m not interested in sects as sects; I’m concerned with the religious individual, the backwoods prophet. Old Tarwater is the hero of *The Violent Bear It Away*, and I’m right behind him 100 per cent.” Hicks then claims that old Tarwater’s “religion is closer to [O’Connor’s] than either the outright secularism or the diluted Protestantism of the North” (qtd. in Magee 83).

In “The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South,” O’Connor writes that, “the Southern Catholic writer” has an “imagination [that] has been molded by life in a region

which is traditionally Protestant” (MM 196). Referencing her own work, she observes, “When you write about backwoods prophets, it is very difficult to get across to the modern reader that you take these people seriously, that you are not making fun of them, but that your concerns are your own and, in your judgment, central to human life” (204). Indeed, her contemporary reviews reveal that her fundamentalist characters were, as she feared, often misunderstood in regards to the roles she intended for them. In *The New York Times* on February 24, 1960, Orville Prescott wrote in his review of *The Violent Bear It Away* that it “is a novel about religious mania” (Prescott). And so it is, and it is one that reflects mid-century “religious mania” during the Cold War. But, O’Connor stated, a Catholic novelist “will feel a good deal more kinship with backwoods prophets and shouting fundamentalists than he will with those politer elements for whom the supernatural is an embarrassment and for whom religion has become a department of sociology or culture or personality development” (MM 207). O’Connor’s statement references the rational fields of psychology and sociology and the scientific advancement, in warfare and outer space as well as multiple other fields, that were growing rapidly in the mid-century Cold War era.

O’Connor’s fundamentalist sensibilities reject those characters whose rational ideals align them with the very people she mentions who compartmentalize religion into the realm of cultural studies, sociology, or psychology, and she creates these exact people in Rayber, the psychologist academic fused with technology, and Sheppard, the science-obsessed social worker; both characters are also atheists. When these characters attempt to change the beliefs of others, they are unsuccessful. When they attempt to reject faith in favor of reason, they are met with disaster—in both cases, the death of a young son. As

Americans of the mid-century Cold War era struggled to reconcile fear with discovery and faith with reason, O'Connor's characters experience the same struggles on small scales that illustrate the types of changes taking place in the United States in light of atomic advancement and the space race. O'Connor's kinship with fundamentalist Christians in the mid-century South is rooted in a belief of literal heaven, hell, devil, and Christ; her caricatures of these same types of Christians—Rufus Johnson and Francis Tarwater—are set in opposition to the intellectual, rational, scientific characters of Sheppard and Rayber. In a culture struggling to find its own location among drastically changing ideas about science and faith, these opposing ideas have dire consequences in O'Connor's fiction. While O'Connor herself may have retained an interest in science and technology without losing her faith, her fictional characters are never able to do the same.

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