

CHAPTER ONE

THE REALISTS AND THE SYMBOLISTS

In this preliminary chapter selected works are examined to illustrate briefly the treatment of violence and madness by the realists and symbolists. A fuller treatment is offered in subsequent chapters with more illustrations from the works of more recent novelists. Our aim in this chapter is limited to providing some background to the themes in terms of literary history, hence the focus is only on those works which help place the themes of violence and madness in a historical perspective.

Books like The Grapes of Wrath and The Sound and the Fury were published during a single decade, a decade which was a time of crisis for America and yet they represent totally different responses to that crisis.

On the basis of that difference are devised three categories of writers :

Dreiser and Steinbeck (realists); Faulkner (symbolist); Fitzgerald, who provides a link between the two. There is a separate section on Flannery O'Connor because though she, like Faulkner, employs symbols, she overlays the themes of violence and madness with comic cruelty.

First, let us examine the way in which the treatment of violence differs in the works of writers belonging to these separate categories.

Dreiser is an earlier writer and yet he can be classified with Steinbeck because in their work violence is not formalized beyond its social context. It is not presented as an abstract gesture because their works are rooted in social facts and their social concern does not permit abstraction.

In both writers the source of violence is the environment. Displaced from their natural environment their characters go to a new environment which controls their lives. That is why Dreiser and, to some extent, Steinbeck are thought of as naturalists.

Donald Pizer points out that Dreiser had no faith in man being supported by supernatural agencies or divine guidance; he thought of man as "an insignificant unit in a universe of natural forces. Although these forces, whether biological or social, were the source of racial progress, they often crushed the individual within their mechanistic processes".¹ The big city, for instance, in Sister Carrie, in its ruthless rush toward progress renders human beings insignificant by turning them into mere tools or gadgets, mechanically performing the same task over and over. It is only a matter of time, one feels, before they are replaced by a machine. Carrie's task at the shoe factory is to punch eye-holes in leather. After a few hours

she begins to feel that she is "one mass of dull, complaining muscles, fixed in an eternal position and performing a single mechanical movement..."²

The big city is sharply divided between the rich and the poor. From the point of view of the rich, it is a source of pleasure where one does the rounds of theatre, restaurant, races, riding. The poor see a completely different city, a place where they can barely eke out a living. To make matters worse, the poor pour into the big cities in order to improve their lot. Dreiser describes the Chicago of 1889 as "a giant magnet, drawing to itself, from all quarters, the hopeful and the hopeless..."³ This influx creates such a sea of workers that exploitation becomes easy. They are given a pittance for back-breaking work. Carrie gets just four and a half dollars a week, out of which four dollars go for board. When winter comes she falls ill because she does not have enough warm clothes. Since she is absent from work she loses her job. Working conditions are terrible, "the idea being that something was gained by giving them [the employees] as little and making the work as hard and unremunerative as possible".⁴

New York is a bigger city than Chicago and hence the problems are magnified further : the rich are richer - Hurstwood who was such an important person in Chicago is a nonentity in New York - the poor completely wretched. As Pike puts it in The Image of the City in Modern Literature :

The city is a highly developed form of social organization on a large scale; it is inescapably a community, however defined. Yet during the nineteenth century the literary city came more and more to express the isolation or exclusion of the individual from the community, and in the twentieth century to express the fragmentation of the very concept of community.⁵

In this isolation of the individual from the community is reared the notion of each man for himself. Exploitation underlies not only business relationships but even debases human relationships. Drouet exploits Carrie's situation to make her her mistress; Hurstwood does not let friendship stand in the way of his wooing of Carrie.

Most of the violence in Sister Carrie is of this variety, springing from the environment, doing mental violence to those who come under its crushing influence. Those who suffer this violence most are the poor. This kind of violence is realistically depicted in scenes of tramps shivering in the cold, waiting patiently for the charity of a free bed, a free meal, a free loaf of bread.

The ultimate violence that can befall a person Dreiser seems to be saying, is caused by the gradual slide from riches to deprivation. Most of the book is taken up with the fall of Hurstwood : in Chicago he is "acknowledged, fawned upon, in a way lionised".⁶ Position and money make him what he is. When he loses that, even his personality disintegrates so that instead

of fighting adversity he lounges around in a rocking chair, reading newspapers. He tries for a time but jobs are scarce and he soon gives up. When Carrie walks out on him, he sinks to the final degradation of begging - even pride is not allowed to the poor. He degenerates more and more till he finds that "people took him for a chronic type of bum and beggar. Police hustled him along... pedestrians waved him off".⁷ His mind decays and his suicide is inevitable but more pathetic than his suicide is the fact that no one knows of it. He is, after all, now just a nameless tramp, buried along with others of his kind in Potter's Field.

The only instance of physical violence in this book has its basis in social reality. Violence is generated by a strike on the trolley lines. New men are enlisted to keep the cars moving. The strikers get violent because of this and start attacking the cars, tear up tracks, put up barricades and even fire shots at those driving the cabs.

These strikers are violent but the really poor, the homeless, are not depicted as violent in any way. They are presented more as victims of a social order which gives more to those who already have and nothing to those who are in real need.

When we turn to Steinbeck we see that his concern with social injustice is concentrated on the exploitation of labourers. Violence in The Grapes of Wrath is placed within the context of the migration of dispossessed Oklahoma farmers to the West.

The book is built around the Joad family, but as Lisca points out, Steinbeck's subject is "not the adventures of the Joad family so much as the social conditions which occasion them..."⁸ The series of adventures - if one can call them that - that befalls the Joads gradually build up to a crescendo when Casy is killed. Casy has assumed the role of leader because he has realized that if all the workers got together and protested, something could be done about their condition. This is what the land-owners are afraid of and Casy is killed when his head is bashed in with a pick-handle. Just before he is killed, Casy, who, as critics have pointed out, is Christ-like, echoes Christ's words to the Romans, "You don' know what you're a-doin'".⁹ Tom kills Casy's murderer : "Tom leaped silently. He wrenched ^{the} club free. The first time he knew he had missed and struck a shoulder, but the second time his crushing blow found the head and as the heavy man sank down, three more blows found his head".¹⁰ Tom has to go into hiding and finally sees what Casy was trying to do. He steps into Casy's shoes and takes over his work.

The situation in The Grapes of Wrath is one where physical violence seems inevitable but the workers are too overwhelmed by the odds against them to protest. The landowners are aided by deputies who put into jail potential trouble-makers, labelling them 'reds'. Physical violence erupts suddenly when one such 'red' is captured, but most of the violence in this book is not overt. It is constantly on the fringe of the action,

brooding, waiting for a chance to explode. Steinbeck suggests violence in different ways. For instance, the dispossession of farmers from land on which they have worked for years is itself an act of violence. Although threats are uttered there is no actual bloodshed because the farmers are no match for faceless owners who employ tractors to knock down their houses. The action of knocking down a house is extremely violent because a house is a home, part of one's consciousness. For the owner it is like knocking down part of himself: "The iron guard bit into the house-corner, crumbled the wall and wrenched the little house from its foundation so that it fell sideways, crushed like a bug".¹¹

The same tractors are used by the land-owners for farming and for Steinbeck this fact is as violent as rape because no love of land is involved: "Behind the harrows the long seeders - twelve curved iron penes erected in the foundry, orgasms set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion".¹²

The farmers, on the other hand, had used their hands for farming, not monstrous machines and as Bluestone puts it, "the attachment of the men for the land is often so intense that it borders on sexual love".¹³

They are lured to California by handbills promising them a land of plenty. But it is a doomed exodus. The conditions are generally the same as those prevailing in the Chicago of

Sister Carrie : too many workers, not enough jobs, making for easy exploitation. The only way to survive is to do away with one's scruples and moral principles. Carrie's rapid rise to success is due to her having jettisoned her morals for material comforts. Connie walks out on his pregnant wife in order to learn how to drive a tractor and earn three dollars an hour. One can see here a basic difference in Steinbeck's and Dreiser's vision. In Steinbeck only a few like Connie are brutalized. Most of the workers are depicted as morally strong, people who would starve rather than exploit their fellow sufferers. In Sister Carrie each person fights for himself but in The Grapes of Wrath there is a sense of community, a sense of shared loss. Whereas Dreiser stresses the isolation of an individual in a big metropolis, Steinbeck presents the transformation of a whole group of exploited people and so there is the feeling of an archetypal journey to the promised land, symbolized by the turtle.

What prevails throughout The Grapes of Wrath is the sense of violence held in abeyance : when people are deprived of the basic needs of life, when they have to watch their own children starve, violence has to breed within, waiting for a chance to explode. There is the feeling of the situation slowly building up to a big explosion of violence, a violence of such dimensions that for all their ruthless tactics the deputies are not able to contain the pent-up fury of people who have been deprived of too much for too long. This imminent

violence is symbolized by the rain which comes crashing down after a long drought. The rain is a symbol of deluge as well as grace.

Although the focus is not on the problems of the exploitation of labourers in Of Mice and Men, violence still seems to lurk around the fringes. It is to be seen in the clearly demarcated line between the labourers and the land-owners, in the dream of the labourers for a small plot of land of their own. The impossibility of the realization of this modest dream creates frustration and discontent beneath the surface bonhomie.

Violence in Of Mice and Men centres upon Lennie who, in actuality, is a gentle, even timid creature. It is his powerful body which transforms every tender gesture, even his terror, into acts of extreme violence: terrified of Curley he mangles his hand into pulp; stroking an animal's fur, a girl's hair, he breaks their necks. Lennie's innocence is most evident during the extreme violence of killing.

Although rooted in social realism, Steinbeck makes violence problematic. Though murder is the most extreme form of violence, George's killing of Lennie is an act of love. An act of love, then, is manifested as violence. In The Grapes of Wrath violence is presented in a relatively straightforward manner: a worker is hit, he hits back. But in Of Mice and Men it destroys the conceptual foundation of love

and violence by blurring the distinction between the two. The juxta-position of these two opposites forces us to re-examine the structure of violence.

Examining violence in Tender is the Night we find that it has two sources : the deep rooted neurosis of the individual spawned by the hollowness of the age. The complexity lies in the fact that the individual is as much a child of the Jazz Age as he is victim of his overriding individualism.

Nicole's schizophrenic mental condition is caused by an act of violence, suggesting the degeneracy of the age. After her mother's death, her innocent love and trust in her father are shattered by his seduction of her.

Dick does violence to himself when he lets his life take a course he knows is going to be destructive. A brilliant psychologist, he is extremely ambitious and idealistic to start with but allows himself to drift into a marriage that can only be disastrous since it is with a rich mental patient. What perhaps makes it worse is that he really loves her so that he gives himself up whole-heartedly to her cure. He even gives up his practice and spends his time in the pursuit of leisure. His brilliance is employed to dazzle the fashionable set, his creative energy in giving exciting parties. "The viciousness of post-war life", as Di Battista says, "can be seen in the festivities that occupy much of the novel's narrative time, festivities not held to celebrate the return

of conquering heroes but to mask moral defeats".¹⁴ Dick's has been a moral defeat and as he begins to feel more and more useless he takes to drink. He finally fades into obscurity after Nicole leaves him, drifting from one small town to another.

Nicole too is responsible for his dissipation. She and her sister use him (Baby Warren even offers to get her another man when she feels Dick is not as good for Nicole as he used to be). Nicole drains him of his strength and gains in strength herself, discarding him for another man when he is a complete failure.

While they are married she depends on him totally, descending into a state of violent insanity when that dependence is threatened. Rosemary finds her swaying by a bath-tub, chanting : "I never expected you to love me - it was too late - only don't come in the bathroom, the only place I can go for privacy, dragging spreads with red blood on them and asking me to fix them".¹⁵ When a mental patient writes to her making what are obviously false allegations regarding Dick, she chooses to believe them and gets violent, wrenching the wheel of the car from him, almost killing them.

Having to face scenes of this sort enervates Dick. Nicole is mentally sick so she cannot help these frequent breakdowns but she is responsible for a much worse form of violence - she encourages him to stagnate: "Naturally Nicole, wanting to

own him, wanting him to stand still forever, encouraged any slackness on his part, and in multiplying ways he was constantly inundated by a trickling of goods and money".¹⁶

Violence in Tender is the Night is mainly generated, as we have just seen, by explosive human relationships, but there is also the physical manifestation of violence resulting from the neurosis of the age: the murdered black on Rosemary's bed; a woman shooting a man on a crowded station platform; Abe North beaten to death in a speakeasy in New York; a senseless duel. Through these Fitzgerald suggests that behind the feverish gaiety of the Jazz Age lies an emptiness which can only erupt in self-consuming violence.

With Faulkner we move into a completely different area. Brooks¹⁷ points out how, for Faulkner, the history of the South is tragic in Aristotle's sense of the term. Like the tragic hero, the South has its virtues - its courage, its chivalry - and it has its tragic flaw - slavery.

Brooks also reveals Faulkner's attachment to a second myth, the myth of the American Dream. Although attracted to it, he realized how tainted it had become.

Curiously enough for Faulkner violence is a 'tool' which he employs in telling a story. The author, he says, narrates in a moving way what he knows of his environment and people around him: "He writes like a carpenter uses his tools... Like violence. Violence is just a tool I use to tell something the best way I am capable of telling it".¹⁸

Faulkner uses this tool in a far more complex and subtle manner than do Dreiser or Steinbeck or Fitzgerald. The four sections of The Sound and the Fury, for instance, represent different manifestations of violence. These distinct forms of violence reveal differences in temperament of each brother.

Benjy, like Lennie, is capable of unconscious violence. Since he is capable of doing violence he is castrated. Because he is an idiot his biological life is truncated.

It is in the representation of mad consciousness that Faulkner is more sophisticated than Steinbeck. Benjy's consciousness mirrors the inhumanity of those around him. People talk about him in his hearing as though he were a lifeless object in a museum. Only Caddy treats him like a human being worthy of love, earning thereby his complete devotion.

Quentin directs violence toward himself by brooding constantly over the past. This inner-directed violence is externalized when he commits suicide. One of the reasons for his suicide is that, with his blind belief in the Southern code of honour, he finds intolerable the idea of Caddy's violation.

Through the psychic convulsions of Caddy and Quentin the Southern crisis with its mythical dimension is encoded. Caddy's violation parallels the debasement of the Southern myth: the violence done to an aristocratic land is like the intrusion

of the profane into the sacred. The mythical dimension is suggested through a spatialization of form. Caddy is not presented as ^{an} amalgam of archetypes, not in the way Sutpen is presented to recall Agmemnon and other figures. Caddy's character has a mythical, historical dimension which makes her seem a composite, generalized character. And yet she emerges as a vivid, particularized individual. This is a clear indication that Faulkner also develops characters in whom the contemporary history is subsumed. Her history is the history of the South in its present manifestation and that makes her a tragic figure. This is entirely different from the way Nicole's violation is presented by Fitzgerald. Her violation is placed within the closed matrix of the family. But through the ravishment of Caddy the rape of the land is encoded. Catherine Baum¹⁹ makes out a good case for Caddy's elevation to the stature of a tragic heroine but she is tragic not merely as an individual but also as the representative tragedy of a land.

While the Quentin section has a brooding, obsessive quality, real brute violence is employed in the Jason section. Jason's name itself suggests a self-centred betrayer. Even as a child he is different from the other children, lacking their sensitivity - the sort which even Benjy possesses. To spite ~~him~~ Benjy he cuts up his paper dolls. The dismemberment of the dolls is symbolic of the latent violence within him and

signifies the cynicism of the new breed that has sprung up in the south:

I dragged her into the dining room.
Her Kimono came unfastened, flapping
about her, damn near naked. Dilsey
came hobbling along. I turned and kicked
the door shut in her face.²⁰

He has no qualms about appropriating the money Caddy sends Quentin. Jason represents that side of the South which in its heyday was held in check and was present only in white trash. The contamination within the Compson family is an indication of the disease stalking the South.

But Faulkner turns the violence back on Jason at the end. With a splendid ironic twist, Jason who has always prided himself as a self-sufficient man is finally cut to size.

His chase of Quentin and her boy-friend and the money they have taken, ends in a comic-violent scene with the old man in the circus wanting to kill Jason:

Jason tried to grasp him in both arms,
trying to prison the puny fury of him.
The man's body felt so old, so frail,
yet so fatally single-purposed that
for the first time Jason saw clear and
unshadowed the disaster toward which
he rushed.²¹

Although the Jason section is considered realistic compared to the Quentin section, Faulkner throws a hallucinatory aura over the chase scene. This hallucinatory quality has the function of emphasizing Jason's confused state of mind.

When Sanctuary was published in 1931, it shocked the reading public by its unprecedented violence, epitomized by the corn cob rape. The growing cult of cruelty was attributed to it, but what is interesting about it is the impotent gangster who commits the corn cob rape. Popeye is vicious and cruel and has no qualms in killing but as Esslinger points out he "may be the symbol of evil... but he might also be the Popeye of E.C. Segar's comic strip".²² He is so grotesquely evil, so much the personification of evil, forever frozen in its mask that he can only come out of comics (although the Popeye of Segar is not evil, just strong) or out of a bad Hollywood film where the gangster is totally black (Popeye always wears black) with no shades of grey. This kind of hoodlum anticipates those dark menacing figures that inhabit John Hawkes' fictional world.

Violence is an integral part of the American vision. Nathanael West is specially emphatic about it:

In America violence is idiomatic. Read our newspapers. To make the front page a murderer has to use his imagination, he also has to use a particularly hideous instrument. Take this morning's paper : FATHER CUTS SON'S THROAT IN BASEBALL ARGUMENT. It appears on an inside page. To make the first page, he should have killed three sons and with a baseball bat instead of a knife. Only liberality and symmetry could have made this daily occurrence interesting.²³

This aspect of American society is explored in his own novels. In The Day of the Locust, for instance, Hollywood is vividly portrayed as a cannibalistic place whose inhabitants devour each other. A striking illustration of violence is the nightmarish last scene in which an insane act of violence - a young man trying to crush a small boy by jumping up and down on his ^{back} - triggers off mob fury leading to a stampede. Frustration, caused by meaningless, ^{boring} lives, has brought these people to such a feverish pitch that only explosive violence can bring them some relief. Hollywood is the optimum expression of American materialism where human beings are transformed into zombies. In Miss Lonelyhearts violence is not so much situational as imagistic, expressed through a series of grotesqueries which represent the deformities of modern American culture.

It is amazing how in most most works the manifestation of violence is accompanied by madness. Although these are different categories there appears to be some kind of organic relationship between the two. At times, violence breeds madness, at times madness is reflected in violent acts.

These categories seem to be symbolic of modern man but writers like Dostoevsky also dealt with them. Dostoevsky's vision of life is Christian and both violence and madness are viewed against the context of evil. Myshkin's idiocy has its genesis in that twilight region between antinomianism and faith.

He must forever stumble and grasp the nettle to redeem himself. This idiot is Christ as innocent fool. He constitutes a moral frame of reference against the background of decadent Russian aristocracy. But for Steinbeck and Fitzgerald the Christian ethos is no longer adequate. The idiot of Dostoevsky and Steinbeck are castaways whose innocence mirrors the world's corruption without refracting it as in the case of Benjy.

The novels under consideration offer three figures representing this paradigm. Benjy of The Sound and the Fury being the most substantially realized among them. The other two are Lennie in Of Mice and Men and the victims of neurosis who people Fitzgerald's work.

Steinbeck's rendering of madness is down-to-earth. Lennie's conversation is like a child's but his responses are sensory like an animal's. For George he has the single-minded devotion and loyalty that a one-man dog has; he has a dog's fascination with furry little animals; he obeys orders from his master; understands punishment; cannot retain complex things the way one imagines a dog cannot. Steinbeck emphasizes this through his language where Lennie is likened to an animal: he drinks water from a pool "with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse".²⁴ "Lennie dabbled his big paw in the water..."²⁵ "Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again. George snapped his finger sharply, and at the sound Lennie laid the mouse in his hand".²⁶ His

resemblance to a dog is highlighted when both Lennie and the old dog are shot exactly in the same manner and both as an act of mercy.

Lennie is not a complete idiot - he can understand a few things. He understands George's dream of a land of their own and even shares this dream. The recitation of what they are going to do on this land has become a liturgy which Lennie joins in.

Lennie knows when he has done something wrong. When he kills Curley's wife accidentally he knows he has done wrong and hides in the brush waiting for George. For the first time Steinbeck shows us the working of his mind but it is a simple rendering of madness unlike the sophisticated treatment Faulkner gives in his projection of Benjy's mind. Lennie first sees his aunt who scolds him:

And then from out of Lennie's head
there came a little fat old woman...
She stood in front of Lennie and
put her hands on her hips, and she
frowned disapprovingly at him.

And when she spoke, it was in
Lennie's voice.²⁷

After she has finished scolding him, a rabbit appears and scolds him too :

Aunt Clara was gone, and from out
of Lennie's head there came a
gigantic rabbit. It sat on its
haunches in front of him, and it
waggled its ears and crinkled its
nose at him. And it spoke in
Lennie's voice, too...

"Well, he's sick of you," said the rabbit. "He's gonna beat hell outa you an' then go away an' leave you".

"He won't", Lennie cried frantically.
 "He won't do nothing like that. I know George. Me an' him travels together".

But the rabbit repeated softly over and over, "He gonna leave you, ya crazy bastard. He gonna leave ya all alone. He gonna leave ya, crazy bastard".²⁸

Lennie's associative process is syntagmatic in that the scowling aunt fades into the hectoring rabbit. Both aunt and rabbit are phantasma thrown up by Lennie's sense of insecurity and his yearning for George's company. With Benjy, as we will see later, the thinking - if one can call his mental lucubrations that - is scrambled and disjunctive revealing a total freedom from clock-time or linearity.

With Fitzgerald madness is not a static condition but a reaction to external stimuli and is not totally Freudian. The subconscious of the individual is anchored in history. Nicole's schizophrenia is caused by exposure to specifically intense experiences. Unlike Steinbeck, Fitzgerald seems to suggest the gradual breaking-up of an individual's mind. At the same time, the pressures of the Jazz Age, the high pace of living, the frenzy of an international high society - these elements are made incarnate in the characters. Madness is worked out at two levels - the individual and the social. It seems to represent the extent of alienation that an individual feels in

a world to which he cannot relate. That is why there is no bond between Nicole and Dick as there is between Lennie and George or Benjy and Caddy.

Nicole is arrested at the adolescent stage where she was seduced by her father. She is traumatized by her experience but Fitzgerald directs our gaze toward something beyond this trauma to a world where her father's rapacity has its material referent. Just as in commerce ruthless tactics are employed for profit, in personal relationships all barriers are broken for personal satisfaction.

Nicole's seduction results in her distrust of all men till she meets Dick. There is a transference of emotion and trust from her father to Dick. Their marriage seems a perfect one but in actuality is interspersed with Nicole's break-downs. Her dignified and reserved personality, her rare beauty and her role as a perfect hostess makes more shocking the sudden revelation of her swaying by a bath-tub; dissolved in crazy laughter while telling a guest that she cannot use the bathroom because the key has been thrown down the well; her trying to cause an accident. These break-downs are caused by the fear of the withdrawal of Dick's support. Her dependence on Dick is total and the thought of being on her own terrifies her. As Rollo May maintains impotence and powerlessness also breed violence. May feels that often the only strategy available to the powerless is to accept the overt powerlessness and to get

their power by covert means.²⁹ Nicole's occasional break-downs could be her strategy for gaining power over Dick by getting his complete attention.

Her schizophrenic personality also encodes the schizophrenic personality of the Jazz Age: glitter on the surface and emptiness within. As Di Battista says "Tender is the Night is punctuated throughout with Nicole's schizophrenic breakdowns, retreats into a private madness that complement and comment on the public surface of a carefree life".³⁰

The final irony is that a neurotic person is seen moving toward freedom and a sane person plunging into neurosis. Dick as good as gives up his brilliant career when he gets married, concentrating his brilliance on the cure of his wife. Since he is emotionally involved with her he cannot maintain the distance so necessary to a psychiatrist. Savage talks of "Dick's actual subterrene complicity with Nicole".³¹ Certainly he identifies with her mental agony, her suffering. This is stated clearly when Nicole has a break-down:

...somehow Dick and Nicole had become one and equal, not opposite and complementary; she was Dick too, the drought in the marrow of his bones. He could not watch her disintegrations without participating in them.³²

Nicole by drawing on his strength regains her independence but Dick has been rendered useless. He has become powerless, without the capacity Nicole had when she was powerless, for violence.

In Faulkner madness is brought to a sharp focus in the Benjy section. His madness is central to the structure of the novel.

Various mental disorders can be discovered in The Sound and the Fury. The first three sections of the book reveal the world through the consciousness of the three brothers. This structure enables Faulkner to focus our attention on the different neurosis without discussing them clinically. It also enables him to plot a network of associations between individual acts and the complex drama of futility which is what Southern history has come to stand for.

The rendering of Benjy's idiocy is completely unprecedented in scope. For the first time we are taken into an idiot's mind instead of looking at him from the outside. Faulkner makes us realize how for a person with no mind the response to the world is through the senses. Candace, for instance, is the smell of trees. Benjy's reactions are recorded exactly as he sees or hears or feels without a corresponding understanding of their cognitive significance, with what Millgate calls "camera-like fidelity".³³ For instance he records: "She gave me a flower and her hand went away".³⁴ What is perceived is not the identity of the person or the meaning of flower as gift but the visually recorded action of the hand coming toward him and withdrawing from him.

Benjy does not understand the notion of going to a place - the place comes to him: "Then the barn wasn't there and we had to wait until it came back"³⁵

For him even the mirror is a place: "Father put me down and went into the mirror..."³⁶

Although the Benjy section deals with Benjy's confusion one comes across a sentence like: "The slanting holes were full of spinning yellow".³⁷ At times are recorded the crude observations of a retarded mind, able to see only a hand coming to feed him; at others, one discovers in him a perceiving sensitivity.

Benjy is also viewed as a Christ figure. His innocence is not that of someone who can differentiate between good and evil and make a choice. Arthur Miller calls madness the perfection of innocence³⁸ and this is the kind of innocence Faulkner has presented - the innocence of someone who is born mindless.

Benjy's role is ramified to include other functions. Faulkner uses the figure of the idiot to explore reality from the perspective of the idiot's consciousness. The world is usually seen from the point of view of a rational, logical being who imposes his interpretation of life based on history, tradition and religion. An idiot gives the writer a completely new perspective, unfettered by history or religion or tradition. Therefore madness is rendered not as abnormality but as a premise for developing all kinds of structural tensions.

Taking a close look at Quentin's neurosis, one might say that he is ruled by what Freud had classified as the two basic instincts : Eros and Thanatos. One can say that the Oedipus complex is present too in Quentin's obsession with his sister. But in Faulkner psychology is not viewed as an isolated phenomenon as it sometimes is in Fitzgerald. It is interwoven into the texture of the novel.

The Quentin section is Joycean in the sense that it is full of reverie. The use of reverie and his mental state give the section a hallucinatory quality. Quentin sees the world through the veil of his particular neurosis. He traverses through the planes of fantasy and reality as though they were on the same continuum.

Quentin is very much the Southern gentleman. His continuous harking back to his past probably has something to do with this aspect of his personality.

The past impinges constantly on the present. Even something as immediate as a fight, where a normal person would be capable of registering only the present blows, is superimposed on a past fight. For Quentin it is the fight he had with Dalton Ames in the past which is more important because it involves Caddy.

Both Benjy and Quentin love Caddy to the point of obsession, but it is interesting to see how Faulkner handles the same emotion when it occurs in the mind of an idiot and

of an intelligent man. The following paragraph shows Quentin's obsession with Caddy; at the same time the language mimetically suggests his mental chaos through syntactic chaos: "Why shouldn't you I want my boys to be more than friends yet Candace and Quentin more than friends Father I have Committed what a pity you had no brother or sister. No sister no sister had no sister..."³⁹

Benjy's recall is more through association:

"Wait a minute : Luster said. 'You snagged on that nail again. Can't you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail'."

Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through⁴⁰

Jason considers himself sane but his too is an obsessed consciousness. He can think only in terms of success and fortune. Since emotions are not practical he has done away with them. He does not need love only "a good, honest whore".⁴¹

He is also obsessed by the need to take revenge on his niece, Quentin. His hatred of her stems from the fact that she has been the indirect cause of his having lost a bank job. He ill-treats her and takes away her money and feels he is justified in doing so. When Quentin steals the money that Jason had stolen from her, he chases her with manic energy:

Of his niece he did not think at all,
nor of the arbitrary valuation of the
money. Neither of them had had entity
or individuality for him for ten years;
together they merely symbolized the job
in the bank of which he had been deprived
before he ever got it.⁴²

The mental state of each brother is also highlighted
through the manipulation of time.

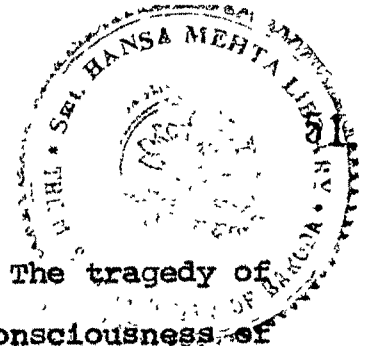
For Benjy time does not exist. The past and present are
inextricably mixed. The past could be the immediate past or
the past of twenty years ago. Except for the sense of loss
over Caddy he does not understand that the past is past.
He has no sense of the future.

Quentin, on the other hand, is obsessed with time. His
first sentence refers to it:

When the shadow of the sash appeared on
the curtains it was between seven and
eight O'clock and then I was in time,
again, hearing the watch.⁴³

He is chained to the past. The present is meanⁿingless.
He wants to do away with the future and so he breaks the
hands of his watch: As Brooks points out in The Yoknapatawpha
Country,⁴⁴ Rollo May refers to certain neurotics who are
psychopathic personalities and have to kill time which may be
a way of killing themselves. Perhaps Quentin's 'killing' of
his watch is a symbolic killing of time, followed by the
destruction of self.

Jason with his need to make money has time only for the
present and future. He is derisive of the past, the past of



the South or of his own aristocratic family. The tragedy of the South is thus precipitated by this new consciousness of self as something latched on to the present in conflict with the past-directed consciousness of the decadent aristocrats.

Thus in Faulkner both violence and madness activate a tragic vision of life. These are conditions which cannot be cured by psychological analysis or treatment. The seventeenth-century writers had treated evil as a necessary condition of life; modern writers seem to suggest that chaos cannot be ordered if chaos is internal and self-perpetuating. Meaningless violence and madness take the place of evil in the modern world, inevitable like evil and like evil impervious to legislation.

To rephrase this in the form of Todorov's concept of fictional time we find that there is not much durative space in Dreiser and Steinbeck because their work has a causal link. There is, in Todorov's words :

an immediate causality as opposed to a mediated causality. The first would be of the type "X is brave → X challenges the monster". In the second, the appearance of the first proposition would have no immediate consequence but in the course of the narrative X would appear as someone who acted bravely. This is a diffused, discontinuous causality, which is expressed not by a single action but by secondary aspects of a series of actions, often remote from one another.⁴⁵

In Fitzgerald and Faulkner since causality is not mediated simply as social act it is not possible to provide easy links. Everything is internalized.

In the works of Dreiser and Steinbeck immediate causality, the use of a particular segment of history, the set of tensions provided by society for initiating social action produce a certain type of cause-effect sequence. However, despite the cause-effect typology artistic balance is achieved. There is a finite centre to these books but these writers succeed in transcending it by restructuring their fictional world as we saw earlier with subtler manipulation of time and space than they are given credit for.

In symbolic fiction like Faulkner's the historical background is internalized and is reproduced as something transformed by the psychology of the individual. The source of violence and madness is not purely sociological or historical - it has to do with the isolation of the individual, with his alienation from society and history. There is also a greater unpredictability because the causal link is blurred, ramified. The situation from which violence and madness result gets internalized. The classic example of this is the Quentin fight - while he is getting beaten up his mind is on his fight with Dalton Ames. In addition to perspective mythology provides the distancing effect. Rolló May when discussing the nature/nurture theories about violence⁴⁶ says that what these theories leave out is the question of the values which are rooted in

both nature and nurture. They link the two and are connected with aggression and violence. May says that the roots of values lie in the archetypal and unconscious symbols and myths of the society which, as we noticed, provide Faulkner's writing its peculiar valencies.

In conclusion we could say that in realistic writing the individual is placed within a social context and yet linked to other human beings. There is thus a shift from individuality to individualism in modern writing. In works like Faulkner's symbolic writing the characters have no links with other characters. They are caught in their own private hells and prefer to stay there alone.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Violence in O'Connor comes filtered through comedy. Her stories reveal an obsession with violence and death and underlying them is a vein of humour which at least in the beginning suggests an atmosphere free from danger but reappears in the form of brutal overtones. But the innocuous scene being played out by ordinary people in a placid landscape changes to one of grotesque horror. Many characteristics of black comedy in recent American fiction seem to be foreshadowed by O'Connor's short stories. A writer like Hawkes, in fact, claims to be influenced by O'Connor.

An examination of her stories leads to the discovery of certain basic patterns.

In almost all her stories the human drama is played out against a rural background, and with the exception of one story, it is always the southern landscape that is evoked.

The backdrop against which the story unfolds suggests peace, calm, a world that has gone on forever, unchanging, unchangeable. We expect violence to take place at night in the city, tall buildings casting black shadows on the deserted sidewalks, deliberate footsteps echoing down narrow, dark alleys. But here violence erupts in broad daylight with the sun shining over green grass and swaying trees. Beneath the misleading sylvan pastoral scene, the rolling green pastures,

rich farms, dark woods of the Southern landscape is a sense of watchful waiting nature, mutely observant, with the about-to-spring quality of the tiger.

Because of her evocation of the Southern landscape and specially her use of grotesquerie, O'Connor's work has often been labelled 'Southern Gothic', a classification O'Connor herself objected to. She is perhaps justified in resenting this term because to classify her writing as Southern Gothic is to ignore the manner in which she manipulates perspectives almost cinematically. Her language is charged with a sense of a dream turning into a nightmare.

In her stories one always comes across an intrusive alien who is gradually metamorphosed into a snarling chimera. His arrival into an ordinary world signals the eventual disruption of that world. A supplicant in need, the stranger slowly achieves control, gaining power in an imperceptible manner. The meek salesman ("Good Country People") selling Bibles is the perfect example of what good country people are like, earnest, honest, sincere, so bashful we can almost see him blush: "I know I'm real simple. I don't know how to say a thing but to say it. I'm just a country boy".⁴⁷ An experienced reader of O'Connor would immediately recognize the hint. The give-away lines are like a knowing wink, a talking to the reader over the head of the characters. This supplicant to Hulga's affection has whisky and obscene cards in a hollow Bible, his voice becomes the dominant voice, controlling even

the intellectually superior Hulga with her Ph.D. in Philosophy. His control is so hypnotic that he even persuades Hulga to remove her artificial leg and makes off with it.

In Jane Austen too there is the pattern of the stranger disrupting a small world, bringing a new sense of values to a society which is narrow in its views. But O'Connor's stranger does not have the same function. Nor is he in the tradition of the lone Westerner, the heroic stranger who is a kind of saviour. O'Connor's stranger is more like the serpent in Eden, an Iago insinuating, manipulating.

The satanic stranger represents one pattern. The other pattern is the stranger who becomes the victim. He is the outsider who must be sacrificed. A sacrificial victim like Oedipus or Christ.

Besides the stranger, there is yet another recurring character in O'Connor's fiction: the sinister child. There is an abscess of innocence when the devil looks out of a child's eye. The face of innocence is disfigured.

In certain fictions when children are cruel, they are cruel because they seem to be imitating adults, as in Golding's Lord of the Flies. O'Connor's children, on the other hand, do not mimic adults. They possess an adult consciousness.

The three boys who invade Mrs. Cope's property ("A Circle in the Fire") are menacing enough but it is the little

girl, Mrs. Cope's daughter, always standing at the window, always watching silently, who is really sinister.

In social, legal terms the good girl is facing three bad boys. But the language suggests a fury avenging herself on the boys. A double vision thus emerges. This is true of Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation". Mrs. Cope's daughter and Mrs. Turpin seem to be victims and yet there is a suggestion that they are evil forces. To describe what O'Connor is doing in religious terms, in terms of good and evil, is infructuous. Boundaries between good and evil are so blurred that evil acquires all the ambiguities of an uneasy dream.

O'Connor's stories are also characterized by the tension created through the juxtaposition of opposites:

1. The decadent and the vital
2. The sacred and the profane
1. The decadent and the vital

She opposes the decadent and the vital by having the blacks represent vitality and the whites, decadence.

O'Connor destroys the stereotype of the black Southerner - the faithful servant, funny and dumb. We can divide the blacks in her stories into two broad categories:

- (a) the black servant, lazy, ineffectual, providing part of the humour;
- (b) the rebellious Negro who exudes power.

With this second kind one can almost see her using the blackness of the Negro to suggest a satanic quality. The decadent Southern whites live too much in the past to realize that the blacks have become powerful and are insulted by their patronizing attitude.

One way she hints at their power is by making them massive, physical giants. In "Everything That Rises Must Converge", the Negress is a "giant of a woman" whose face is set "not only to meet opposition but to seek it out. The downward tilt of her large lower lip was like a warning sign: DON'T TAMPER WITH ME".⁴⁸

But the whites do not heed this warning and head straight toward their doom.

A racial situation is always a source of violence but by stressing the dynamics of black force O'Connor produces not a simple confrontation between black and white but between the decadent and the vital.

Further complexity is introduced by the fact that it is not only the whites who are to blame. Both the blacks and the whites are enclosed in their own world. Each has a stereotyped image of the other so that no communication is possible. If the whites patronize the blacks, the blacks see insult in the most innocent gesture. The blacks are transformed not only into scourges but almost mechanical objects. The white man blunders along and touches the wrong switch and sets into motion a complex bit of machinery:

The huge woman turned and for a moment stood, her shoulders lifted and her face frozen with frustrated rage and stared at Julian's mother. Then all at once she seemed to explode like a piece of machinery that had been given one ounce of pressure too much. Julian saw the black fist swing out with the red pocket book.⁴⁹

If the blacks are depersonalized objects for the whites so are the whites for the blacks. The blacks hit out blindly as at an insect in the dark. O'Connor is obviously looking beyond the racial problem into something more primitive in human nature.

2. The Sacred and the Profane

Much has been made of O'Connor's religious favour, so much so that all her characters are said to finally attain a state of grace. Dorothy Walters, for instance, labels her work "Christian tragicomedy" and emphasizes her "deep concern for the redemption of the human spirit through trials of fire and love" so that her characters are "brought at last to the healing grace of salvation".⁵⁰ Yet Walters herself admits that there is at the same time a "consciously Christian vision at war with an alternative (though unconscious) "demonic view".⁵¹

Although O'Connor herself talks about the state of grace and says that the writer's proper role is that of 'prophet' with the dual function of "the prophetic sense of 'seeing through' reality...and the propetic function of recalling people to known but ignored truths".⁵² and although her stories do resonate to Biblical, apocalyptic overtones, they are

certainly not religious allegories. In fact in her work is the oblique juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane. John Hawkes even accuses her of using "the devil's voice as a vehicle for satire". According to him, "the creative process transforms the writer's objective Catholic knowledge of the devil into an authorial attitude in itself some measure diabolic".⁵³

In Dostoevsky there is often a Christ figure who is the ultimate naif but in O'Connor we are confronted with a crooked Christ as well as a suffering devil. The Christ figure may be a tyrant instead of a saviour; on the other hand, the satanic character may be a victim. What constitutes evil in O'Connor's fiction is difficult to define.

The tension in her work turns on this demonic in the divine and divine in the demonic. A visual image of the profane intruding into the sacred is the hollow Bible containing whisky and obscene cards ("Good Country People"). Then there is Mr. Shiftlet ("The Life You Save May Be Your Own") whose body forms "a crooked cross".⁵⁴ If he is evil, what can one say about Mrs. Crater "ravenous for a son-in-law"?⁵⁵ The Misfit, a homicidal maniac, identifies himself with Christ: "It was the same case with Him as with me except He hadn't committed any crime and they could prove I had committed one...".⁵⁶ We might call the boys in "A Circle in the Fire" satanic in their destructive pranks but isn't Mrs. Cope's

concentrated dead virtue a form of evil? She is so involved with her material goods that she is completely untouched by the poverty and needs of those around her. And what is one to make of O'Connor's attitude to the boys? The wanton destruction of property and the burning of trees followed by their wild ecstatic dance celebrating their triumph are represented with ritual deliberation and they are likened to prophets:

She stood taut, listening, and could just catch in the distance a few wild high shrieks of joy as if the prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace, in the circle the angel had cleared for them.⁵⁷

Questions of crime and punishment, sin and expiation are not handled in terms of poetic justice. The Misfit and Mr. Shiftlet are the rejects of society and perhaps have turned to crime because of the injustice meted out to them. But because of the injustice done to the Misfit sometime in the past, do his victims deserve to suffer at the present moment? What is the grandmother guilty of, after all? A little bit of foolishness and selfishness. Certainly nothing to warrant the punishment she finally gets. O'Connor reaches out to the realm of uncertainty about the very meaning of existence against which questions of crime and punishment, sin and expiation and poetic justice become redundant. This attitude to life can hardly be termed religious or Christian and despite apparent religious configurations, there is the open-endedness of modern fiction in her stories. One might add

that although O'Connor has Christian inclinations, her escatology or sense of ending seems to be post-apocalyptic, leading to a revelation closer to Yeats' beast slouching toward Bethlehem.

To say then that through her writing O'Connor seeks to remind people of the evils of forgetting God, is to disregard what Conrad calls the fascination of the abomination reflected in her work.

The tension created through the juxtaposition of opposites, the device of the intruding stranger, the sinister child, all these accentuate the sense of violence which is basic to her vision.

Violence in O'Connor's work stems from a preoccupation with death. She explains this preoccupation by saying, "I'm a born Catholic and death has always been brother to my imagination. I can't imagine a story that doesn't properly end in it or in its foreshadowings".⁵⁸ But this obsession with death can be better understood when we remember that she was dying of the fatal disease, disseminated lupus, inherited from her father. We can also perhaps relate the inference that the disease had been inherited with the fact that she almost always writes about motiveless violence, meaningless killings.

Her stories begin in an ordinary world, lived in by ordinary people when there is an abrupt eruption of violence turning it into a nightmarish world. What stuns us is the

suddenness with which violence take place just when we are lulled by the placid scene into believing that nothing out-of-the-way is going to happen.

A peculiar note of quarantined menace underlies all her stories. Even where there is no overt violence, language creates a sense of menace. "A stroke of Good Fortune" deals simply with a woman who finds out while climbing the stairs to her flat that she is pregnant inspite of her determination not to have a child. But look at the description of the staircase - it is not inanimate but seems alive with hidden threats: "The steps were a thin black rent in the middle of the house, covered with a mole-colored carpet that looked as if it grew from the floor. They stuck straight up like steeple steps. They reared up".⁵⁹

The story ends with : "The she recognized the feeling again, a little roll. It was as if it were not in her stomach. It was as if it were out nowhere in nothing, out nowhere, resting and waiting, with plenty of time".⁶⁰

That sounds more like a creature from another world, a monster watching and biding its time before slouching to be born.

In "The Artificial Nigger", again, there is no physical violence. The main focus is on betrayal. The betrayal of the grandson by the grandfather is akin to the violent tribal

initiation ceremonies, involving the transition from a state of childhood to adulthood.

Physical violence in O'Connor's stories does not always result in death. A violent act can cause a drastic change in a person's life so that he is never the same again.

"Revelation" is set in a doctor's waiting room and is marvellously funny with people of different races and attitudes revealing the kind of people they are through speech and action. Mrs. Turpin is a smug, self-satisfied person who is exchanging clichéd pleasantries with another woman when a girl she has never seen before hurls a book at her, tries to strangle her and says to her, "Go back to hell where you come from, you old wart hog".⁶¹

Mrs. Turpin is then transformed from an ordinary middle-aged woman into a huge mother earth primitive figure, almost a profane, grotesque beast, an incarnation of a hog.

Physical violence can be of the gruesome variety where bodies are crushed or gored. In her novels violence stems from the protagonists' obsessed love for Christ which they try to deny. It is only after they have gone through, what is for them, the purifying fire of violence that they accept their inevitable destiny as prophets. Both kill before they turn to Christ.

Hazel (Wise Blood) kills the "other prophet" - made up to look almost like his twin - by running over him in his car. In an Oedipus like act of redemption he blinds himself.

Violence in The Violent Bear It Away centres on an idiot child. His own father tries to drown him but manages to save him as he realizes how much he means to him. Tarwater succeeds in drowning him but finds himself baptising him as he drowns him.

No story opens with a violent gesture. O'Connor weaves a very intricate network of passions, hidden motives and frustrations. Violence does not erupt between two individuals per se. There is a sense of two kinds of reality, two different sets of experiences, struggling for supremacy. It is a collision of two world views and in the fall-out there are no victors gloating over the dead body of the adversary. Her stories always end on a note of unrelieved desolation.

Though the stories do not open on a note of violence, soft chords are struck which proleptically give a hint of the violence to come. In "A Good Man is Hard to Find" there is a detailed description of the grandmother's dress which ends with the line : "In case of an accident anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady".⁶²

In "A Circle in the Fire" the sun sets the plantation on fire before the boys do :

"... the sun...was swollen and flame-colored and hung in a net of ragged cloud as if it might burn through any second and fall into the woods... The sun burned so fast that it seemed to be trying to set everything in sight on fire".⁶³

The look Mrs. Shortley gives the Poles ("The Displaced Person") is a clear indication of coming disaster:

"Her look ... revolved downwards slowly the way a buzzard glides and drops in the air until it alights on the carcass!"⁶⁴

A scene gravitates toward a violent explosion. The Misfit ("A Good Man is Hard to Find") makes desultory conversation while a whole family is being shot in the woods. The sense of menace is increased in this story because we are never shown the actual killings.

Beginning with a domestic situation there is a sudden acceleration of pace which leads to the final act of violence.

O'Connor's technique is like that used in a tragic plot. The spring is wound so tight that it is ready to snap open and tension is released with such force that everything is swept away in its wake. Not only the world outside but the whole inner landscape wears a devastated look. The disfigured face of Julian's mother ("Everything that Rises Must Converge") is an indication of the ravages caused by the encounter with the black woman.

When violence occurs two things happen simultaneously at times : a scene unfolds in slow motion whereas the pace of narrative is suddenly accelerated. Violence, then has the dual quality of a slow replay of a fast action. The following passage is a perfect illustration of this technique:

Mr. Shortley had got on the large tractor and was backing it out from the shed. He seemed to be warmed by it as if its heat and strength sent impulses up through him that he obeyed instantly. He had headed it on a slight incline and jumped off and turned back toward the shed. Mrs. McIntyre was looking fixedly at Mr. Guizac's legs lying flat on the ground now. She heard the brake on the large tractor slip, and looking up she saw it move forward, calculating its own path. 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. She had felt her eyes and Mr. Shortley's eyes and the Negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them in collusion forever and she had heard the little noise the Pole made as the tractor wheel broke his backbone. The two men ran forward to help and she fainted.⁶⁵

The scene begins with things happening quickly. The simple past tense is used. Suddenly with the line "later she remembered..." the scene changes from a present scene to a flashback. The simple past tense shades into the past perfect. The scene now is taking place in Mrs. McIntyre's memory and there is a consequent slowing down, noises are blotted out, eyes are frozen in collusion forever. From kinesis there is a movement to stasis. Then with the last sentence, "the two

men ran forward to help and she fainted", the simple past tense is used again so that we are out of Mrs. McIntyre's memory and back in the fast pace of the present scene.

The following passage too reveals the quickening and slowing down of pace:

In a few moments something emerged from the tree line, a black heavy shadow that tossed its head several times and then bounded forward. After a second she saw it was the bull. He was crossing the pasture toward her at a slow gallop, a gay almost rocking gait as if he were overjoyed to find her again. She looked beyond him to see if Mr. Greenleaf was coming out of the woods too but he was not. "Here he is, Mr. Greenleaf!" she called and looked on the other side of the pasture to see if he could be coming out there but he was not in sight. She looked back and saw that the bull, his head lowered, was racing toward her. She remained perfectly still, not in fright but in a freezing unbelief. She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance, as if she could not decide at once what his intention was, and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed. One of his horns sank until it pierced her heart and the other curved around her side and held her in an unbreakable grip. She continued to stare straight ahead but the entire scene in front of her had changed - the tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky - and she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable.⁶⁶

The bull's movements are quick as described by the narrator. The slowness is not in the bull but in Mrs. May. In fact there are two things happening at once: the charging across of the bull and the trance-like perspective of Mrs. May, which slows down movements.

O'Connor at times invests the most violent of acts with a tender quality. The bull in "Greenleaf" is more like Mrs. May's lover than her killer. He bounds across to her with "a gay almost rocking gait as if he was overjoyed to find her again..." and when he kills her, his action is described as burying his head in her lap, "like a wild tormented lover".

In "The River" the boy's death by drowning has this same tender, almost joyous quality:

... the waiting current 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 his fear left him.⁶⁷

Through this dual method of acceleration of pace superimposed by a slow repaly and the tender quality of the violence, fantasy is created. A dream-like aura envelopes her stories. At the same time there is nothing supernatural about them because fantasy is generated by realism.

O'Connor was able to view her own impending death with a certain ironic humour and this humour she brings to her writing. Since humour is shed upon a violent act, it inevitably has a tinge of cruelty to it. Even a violent death is fraught with a sense of comic grotesquerie.

Hazel in Wise Blood kills the "ther prophet" by running over him in his car. O'Connor describes the blood coming out

of him and forming a puddle around his head. All this is presented in the usual mode of narrative fiction but the next sentence shocks us because it is comic : "He was motionless all but for one finger that moved up and down in front of his face as if he were marking time with it".⁶⁸

The sense of comic cruelty is released through the manipulation of grotesquerie. There are crippled figures, freaks, people with something missing, close-ups of faces distorting, eyes which are not aligned:

"One of Powell's eyes seemed to be making a circle of the place... The other eye looked at her".⁶⁹

"Her face was fiercely distorted. One eye, large and staring, moved slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed on him...".⁷⁰

There are times when the fictional structure is formalized into something akin to myth. The last scene of "Greenleaf", for instance, brings to mind the myth of Zeus who raped Asia in the form of a bull. Right from the start, the bull is described as a lover, a god:

"...the bull, silvered in the moonlight, stood... his head raised as if he listened - like some patient god come down to woo her..."

"...he appeared again... with a hedge-wreath that he had ripped loose for himself daught in the tips of his horns..."⁷¹

Greek myths embody the sacred and the profane. Here Mrs. May find salvation in the bull's profane embrace and dies peacefully.

violence often results from some mental quick.

O'Connor's treatment of insanity ranges from homicidal maniacs identifying themselves with Christ to the idiot to obsessed and hysterical characters. Some kind of obsession is usually present, whether with religion or one's property or one's grandchild.

In her novel The Violent Bear It Away old man Tarwater is obsessed with Christ's teachings. He sees himself as a prophet and goes to the extent of kidnapping first his nephew and then young Tarwater in order to baptize them and turn them into prophets. His madness, however, seems to have a magical quality about it because those who come in close contact with it are contaminated for life. The novel can be read in two ways: as the story of ^{the} conversion of a young man into a real prophet or as the working to its logical conclusion of a mad obsession.

As in Faulkner, O'Connor's idiot ("The Life You Save May Be Your Own") is an exploited figure except that there is no Caddy to provide tenderness. This idiot is like an object to be manipulated. The most important difference between Faulkner's idiot and O'Connor's idiot is that like Faulkner she does not take you inside the idiot's consciousness. She is more a victim

than a human being. Benjy, on the other hand, is very human. Faulkner dramatizes the contrast between a huge physique and a small mind. But O'Connor's creation of an idiot with her blonde good looks and pink skin suggests an emblem. She is static.

Again in The Violent Bear It Away there is no attempt to recreate the idiot's consciousness in the fictional mode. Only his external traits are stressed. He too is more of an object to be manipulated by the sane, rather than a living being.

There is, we might say, a certain amount of basic primitivism in O'Connor, like that found in a Rousseau painting. Though at times she tends to repeat herself, her stories are perfectly crafted, everything subsumed to a central design. Whatever she does seems to be a search for the shape of life. Fromm speculates that Freud developed the idea of a conflict between life and death (eros and thanatos) being at the centre of human experience rather than sexual desire and ego drives because he himself was preoccupied with death as he grew sick. Perhaps in the same way, the fact of her illness, her own incomplete life impels O'Connor to search for completeness in form.

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