フラナリー・オコナーの『烈しくせむるものはこれを奪う』における象徴的手法の様式

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Patterns of Symbolic Methods in Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away*

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Introduction

Flannery O'Connor's view of the world goes against the current of the times. In a society of disbelievers she is deeply preoccupied by religious concerns, and in a society of materialists she is deeply concerned with the recovery of lost spiritual values. She is not an innovative writer in the technique of writing as well as in her old-fashioned view of life. Indeed, she admits that "So-called experimental fiction always bores me."[1] But, although she employs the traditional methods of narrative realism and lays a stress on the specific details of time, place and sequential action, she is unconcerned to delineate reality in the style of the naturalists through the multiple accumulation of particularities. She is concerned with the use of the concrete details in order to individualize her action.

This concrete description of her work constantly tends toward the level of abstraction. One of the reasons is that some of the details function in depth as well as on the surface, increasing the story in every direction and accumulating meaning from the story itself, and thus they tend to be symbolic in their action. Another reason is that she is a master of the art of showing as opposed to telling. Indeed, she perceives that the major problem of the novelist "is really how to make the concrete work double time for him,"[2] and she insists that "He has to do it by showing, not by saying, and by showing the concrete."[3] In order to accomplish this purpose, she makes use of various images and symbols. Especially, *The Violent Bear It Away* is rich in such instruments and their skillful use. These elements are closely connected with the basic pattern of the story composed of rejection, flight, apprehension and capitulation, and play a significant role in the serious transformation of the young great-nephew, Francis Marion Tarwater, of the old prophet Mason Tarwater from the refusal of his religious mission into its acceptance. My concern, then, is to locate and discuss the patterns of such imagery and symbolism in relation to the structure of the story. For this discussion provides a key for understanding and resolving largely the

ambiguity of the story.[4)]

I

Young Tarwater's clothes and his hat are employed as the symbols of his old, defiant self in the story, while the corkscrew-bottleopener which his uncle George Rayber has presented to him is used as an emblem of his new, Rayber-influenced self. At first young Tarwater makes a violent resistance to Rayber's atheistic view of life, and thus he refuses to renounce the symbols of his rebellious self, the clothes and the hat. He wears the clothes that he has arrived in, and keeps his hat on;he steadfastly declines to wear the new clothes which his uncle buys for him.

Following his decision to drown Rayber's idiot son, Bishop, however, there seems to be a visible and symbolic change in young Tarwater's appearance and attitude. When his uncle takes young Tarwater to the Cherokee lodge by the lake reminiscent of Powderhead and takes him out on the lake in a boat, he urges young Tarwater to escape the great-uncle's influence and proposes himself instead of old Tarwater as young Tarwater's savior: "God boy, you need help. You need to be saved right here now from the old man and everything he stands for. And I'm the one who can save you."[5)] Young Tarwater expresses his intention to refuse Rayber's proposal as a savior by drawing his hat on his head, taking off his shoes and overalls, and swimming back to the dock.

Yet, Rayber at least succeeds in removing a symbol of his old, fierce self, the clothes, from him. For, when Rayber returns to the lodge, he sees young Tarwater lying on the bed in the new clothes that Rayber bought for him. This scene indicates that he has given up a symbol of his former individuality:

> In the plaid shirt and new blue trousers, he looked like a changeling, half his old self and half his new, already half the boy he would be when he was rehabilitated.[6)]

Young Tarwater also accepts a combination corkscrew-bottleopener which Rayber bought at a filling station and gave him as a "peace-offering." Although at first he denies any usefulness for the gadget and is unwilling to receive it, he eventually accepts it and thus seems to come under Rayber's influence.

Nevertheless, he still clings to a part of his former identity, for he is reluctant to renounce a sign of his old self, the hat. He is thoroughly deprived of his former personality by the wicked rapist. This young man in a panama hat and lavender shirt, who gives young Tarwater a ride on the way back to Powderhead, reminds us of the friendly stranger, the personification of the devil. He bears the same violet-colored eyes as those of the friendly stranger. Moreover, O'Connor even tells us that "There was something familiar to him in the look of the stranger but he could not place where he had seen him before."[7)] Young Tarwater loses consciousness from the drugged whiskey in the car of the young man, and is taken into the woods by him and raped. As tokens of his conquest he carries away young

Tarwater's hat and the corkscrew-bottleopener. Thus, after young Tarwater is assaulted by the personification of his former friend, he loses both his old, defiant self and his new, Rayber-influenced self. This foretells that he will have to accept the future role as a prophet.

II

The image of sight plays a significant part as the primary metaphor in the novel. For in the story each character's eyes are equated to his spiritual state and suggest what he is like. Old Tarwater bears the silver or fish-colored eyes of the prophet which look like two fish. Rayber, the atheistic, mechanical man, stares from "two small drill-like eyes set in the depth of twin glass caverns."[8] Bishop, the retarted child, who bears a close resemblance to old Tarwater, has eyes which are "clear, as if the other side of them went down and down into two pools of light."[9] The eyes of the friendly stranger, the embodiment of the devil, are violet-colored, as are those of the sinister rapist (whom O'Connor refers to as the stranger). Through the loathsome experience with the young rapist, young Tarwater realizes that his friendly stranger is no friend but the very personification of the devil. Young Tarwater's eyes at first resembles those of his own father, a graduate student of theology, who shot himself because he felt a morbid sense of guilt for an automobile accident. Yet, finally, when he accepts his appointed mission, his eyes are the same as the prophet's, scorched and "black in their deep sockets."[10]

III

Eye imagery serves an important function in the novel. Above all, the major image is that of old Tarwater in heaven, who is sharing a meal of loaves and fishes with the multitude. Dorothy Tuck McFarland traces this scene to the Gospels of the New Testament: "The multitude resembles the one described in the Gospels when Jesus miraculously fed the crowd of five thousand with five loaves and two fishes."[11] Each repetition of "the bread of life" as well as of the fish-colored eyes reinforces the Biblical parable which is the unifying metaphor of the action in the story. Old Tarwater repeatedly tells young Tarwater that "Jesus is the bead of life."[12] Young Tarwater is horrified at the prospect of eating "the bread of life" forever. Moreover, he senses that this hunger for "the bread of life" or for Jesus is "the heart of his great-uncle's madness."[13] Thus, he is afraid of this spiritual hunger:

> ...what he was secretly afraid of was that it might be passed down, might be hidden in the blood and might strike some day in him and then he would be torn by hunger like the old man, the bottom split out of his stomach so that nothing would heal or fill it but the bread of life.[14]

This concept of spiritual hunger is emphasized by the fact that no physical food can

satisfy the gnawing hunger, though young Tarwater persistently denies that he is hunger for "the bread of life." For instance, what attracts the boy's attention is a single piece of bread left unsold on bakery window. It should be noticed in this occasion that young Tarwater has been staring into a store window on his way to a Pentecostal church, as Dorothy Walters remarks:"The spiritual significance of the bread loaf in this scene is further heightened by the fact that the boy is on his way to a revivalist church meeting."[15] This scene indicates that he is tortured by spiritual hunger and caught in a dilemma. In other words, it foreshadows the reversal of conscious intent to resist his religious calling. Indeed, young Tarwater feels himself almost incapable of taking a meal during his stay with Rayber. Moreover, on the way home he is given a partly eaten sandwich by the truck driver who has picked him up on the highway. Although he faces starvation, he cannot force it down his throat. Thus, he is gnawed by a great hunger which any food on the literal level cannot appease.

When young Tarwater returns to Powderhead and remains standing beside the old Tarwater's grave, he sees in his vision of the multitude the old man leaning forward, impatiently following the progress of the single basket toward him. At this moment, the boy too leans forward, "aware at last of the object of his hunger, aware that it was the same as the old man's and that nothing on earth would fill him."[16] He feels "his hunger no longer as a pain but as a tide,"[17] that is to say, an energy, and he accepts this hunger and receives his commission. Therefore, he once again moves on toward the city as an independent prophet in order to fulfill it.

IV

Water is employed as a basic symbol of death and rebirth. It may safely be said that the central action of the story centers on the persistent attempts to redeem Bishop through a ritual of baptism. The essential rite to salvation is emphasized through the baptisms of the central characters. Old Tarwater has succeeded in performing the rites for his nephew Rayber and young Tarwater, though the act for Rayber involved a kidnapping and that for young Tarwater required the use of the water from the baby's bottle. What is more important to old Tarwater, however, is that he has not yet succeeded in administering baptism to Bishop. All the sustained efforts of the old man to baptize the child have resulted in failure because of Rayber's resistance. As a result, he commits this weighty task to his grandnephew he has raised up to be a successor.

Young Tarwater's fulfillment of the baptismal mission, his first mission to be a prophet, takes on a double meaning: the salvation of the idiot child and the beginning of the acceptance of the role as a successor to the old prophet. Baptism symbolizes the death of the old self so that a new self may be born, and hence the drowning of Bishop signifies a realization of the symbolic significance of the baptismal ceremony. To prove to himself as well as to his uncle that he will reject his prophetic calling and not baptize the idiot child, young Tarwater takes the child out on the lake in a boat and drowns him. At this crucial moment, however, he unwittingly repeats the baptismal formulas and virtually baptizes him;

although he does not intend to say them, some words of baptism "run out of 〔his〕 mouth and spill in the water."[18] Thus, the act is a salvation as well as an annihilation for the child. That the event suggestive of a ritual murder is irrevocable foreshows that he will be compelled to resigh himself to his fate of the prophetic mission. The dramatic death of Bishop also refutes Rayber's assertion that "Nothing ever happens to that kind of child,"[19] and it heightens young Tarwater's boast that he can "make something happen."[20] As Dorothy Walters observes, it "reminds us of the violence suggested by the title of the story, and it recalls that the young Tarwater hails from a place called Powderhead."[21]

V

The role of earth as a redemptive symbol is seen through the action relative to the burial of old Tarwater's body. Believing in the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgement, the old man insists that his body be not burned to ashes;while alive, he has prepared his own coffin, and has given young Tarwater his instructions to bury his body in the earth and raise a cross over his grave so that he can be correctly identified. Nevertheless, the boy is reluctant to fulfill the old man's injunctions to bury him ten feet deep and set up a cross over him, and he has the sympathies with Rayber's secular way of life. Finally, he rejects the old man's command by setting fire to the farmhouse with his corpse inside and sets out for the city where his uncle lives. However, the old man's desire to be buried properly is realized by his Negro neighbor. For, unknown to young Tarwater, the Negro friend has finished digging the grave which he left half-dug, buried the old man and put up a rough cross in the bare ground, and gone away.

When at the end of the story he returns to Powderhead, young Tarwater discovers a freshly mounded grave with a crude cross at its head and realizes that the old man's wish has been fulfilled. On this occasion, he hears the heavenly command which sounds as if the old prophet himself were speaking: "GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY."[22] For he has thrown himself to the ground with his face against the dirt of the grave. Before he leaves the clearing for the last time, he picks up a handful of earth from his granduncle's grave and smears it on his own forehead. Young Tarwater's gesture of smearing his forehead with earth implies a sharing of the old man's identity and an acceptance of the prophetic mission which the old prophet has imposed on him.

The act is suggestive of the service of Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. In the service for the day the ashes are put to the ceremonial use as a symbol of penitence and are placed on the foreheads of penitents. Dorothy Tuck McFarland maintains that, in addition to repentance, young Tarwater's act hints at the following implications:

> It suggests Tarwater's willingness to enter into the sufferings of Christ, which are commemorated during the forty days of Lent. It suggests his acceptance of a vocation rooted in the realities of life on earth ——the realities of humiliation, suffering, death—— which he had heretofore feared and rejected.[23]

These interpretations will ultimately fall under the same category as an interpretation of the story as his initiation into a grown-up prophet. For this act signifies a final coming of age for young Tarwater.

VI

Air serves a symbolic, though a less significant, function at certain points. When he is on his way home, young Tarwater feels "a sweet stale odor" in the car of the young man who turns out to be a rapist later. The stagnant sweetness suggests the atmosphere of moral corruption which surrounds the wicked driver. Indeed, young Tarwater soon loses consciousness from the apparently drugged whiskey, and is taken out into the woods by the young man and raped. When he recovers consciousness, young Tarwater realizes what has happened to him and he is enraged. He sets fire to "every spot the stranger could have touched"[24] and tries to purge the taint of corruption from his surroundings. His furious burning the place where the rape has occurred is regarded as a form of ritual purgation of the atmosphere. His eyes, which are described as "scorched" or "touched with a coal like the lips of the prophet,"[25] suggest that he himself has undergone a fiery purification. Through this bitter experience with the rapist who looks like his friend (both bear violet-colored eyes), young Tarwater learns that his friendly stranger is no friend but a devil incarnate.

When young Tarwater reaches the edge of Powderhead and stands looking down at the clearing, the friendly stranger manifests itself again and is still whispering to him in a voice like a soft breath of air:

> The presence was as pervasive as an odor, a warm sweet body of air encircling him, a violet shadow hanging around his shoulders.[26]

The boy fiercely shakes himself free from the stranger's shadow, lights another pine tree for the torch, and fires all the bushes of the woods with the burning brand until he has made "a rising wall of fire between him and the grinning presence."[27] At this point, he sees the grinning stranger as the devil to be destroyed:"He glared through the flames and his spirits rose as he saw that his adversary would soon be consumed in a roaring blaze."[28] Young Tarwater's destruction of the devil indicates that he has removed an obstruction to the acceptance of the destiny set before him.

VII

Fire as a basic symbol is second in importance only to water. Fire is employed as an emblematic instrument of inspiration and purification.[29] In order to hear the Lord's call, old Tarwater "had been burned clean and burned clean again. He had learned by fire."[30] When he kidnaps young Tarwater as a baby who is brought up to be his heir, he leaves a warning message for his nephew Rayber: "THE PROPHET I RAISE UP OUT OF THE BOY WILL

BURN YOUR EYES CLEAN."[31] The concept of "burning" or "fire" is repeatedly underscored by a child Pentecostal in town:

> "I've seen the Lord in a tree of fire! The Word of God is a burning Word to burn you clean!"[32]

At the end of the story young Tarwater himself, who again sets forth to the city in order to fulfill his prophetic mission, bears burned and scorched eyes.

Three times young Tarwater sets his surroundings on fire. Each action is closely concerned with the basic pattern of the story which consists of Tarwater's rejection of the prophetic calling, his flight to the city and his stay with Rayber, and his ultimate surrender to it. The first action that young Tarwater burns the farmhouse with the dead body of his great-uncle inside is his symbolic refusal of the prophetic calling for which he has been raised. As a result of his refusal, he seeks out his uncle living in the city.

The second that the boy fires every spot of the woods where the rapist has assaulted him is a ritual of purification. Symbolically this act means purging him from all sins against the directions of the old man as well as from the evil act of the rape. Accordingly, it forces him on "to a final revelation," and ensures that he will accomplish his future mission. The image of his eyes foreshadows the inevitable transformation from his ferocious attempts to disobey his calling into his final capitulation to it. Indeed, from this point on, his eyes look as if they were burned by the holy flames:"His scorched eyes no longer looked hollow or as if they were meant only to guide him forward. They looked as if . . . they would never be used for ordinary sights again."[33] The third that he fires furiously all the bushes of the grove is that he seeks to destroy the friendly stranger, the manifestation of the devil. Thus, he is convinced that he has no other choice but to capitulate to his vocation and accept it.

Conclusion

In *The Violent Bear It Away* O'Connor locates the effectual means of grace, the central theme of this novel, in young Tarwater's rape as in the literally murderous rage like the Misfit of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find."[34] In other words, he must be raped in order to accept his religious mission. O'Connor repeatedly identifies herself a writer with Christian concerns,[35] and regards grace or redemption as an essential key in the interpretation of human experience:"My subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil."[36] In this novel, the rapist representative of the devil accomplishes largely the groundwork that seem to be necessary for grace to be effective. Young Tarwater meets the young man in the lavender and cream-colored car, and thus he can achieve his final vision.

In *The Violent Bear It Away* O'Connor dramatizes the fatal transformation of young Tarwater from the rejection of the prophetic role into its acceptance. The drama of his inevitable reversal is clarified through the several references to diverse images and symbols. Through the multiple accumulation of these elements, moreover, she tries to heighten the dramatic effect of the novel's structure, the inevitability of young Tarwater's destiny, as

well as of its religious theme. Indeed, this novel shows us that the more young Tarwater thinks he is going forward, the more he is carried backward to the point where he began. Thus, the skillfully recurrent patterns of the symbolic methods play a dominant role in completing a cyclic and systematic form.

(Some of the symbolic patterns in this novel was treated in *Studies in Stylistics,* No. 33 (November, 1986))

Notes

1) Gerald E. Sherry, "An Interview with Flannery O'Connor," *Critic,* XXI (June-July, 1963), p. 29.

2) Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners,* ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), p. 98.

3) O'Connor, *Mystery,* p. 98.

4) Critics are divided in views as to the theme and the structure of the novel. Most of the critics place the different religious interpretations on the meaning of the story, whereas Josephine Hendin suggests a discontinuity between O'Connor's artistic commitment and her religious one: "My own feeling is that O'Connor never merely wrote about Redemption, but that the very act of writing was itself a redemptive process for her." Josephine Hendin, *The World of Flannery O'Connor* (Bloomington:Indiana U. P., 1970), p. 17. Some critics regard the novel's structure as an exploration of freedom, and others see it as a psychic determinism.

5) Flannery O'Connor, *The Violent Bear It Away* (New York:Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1960), p. 174.

6) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 176.

7) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 228.

8) O'Connor, *Violent,* pp. 87-88.

9) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 23.

10) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 243.

11) Dorothy Tuck McFarland, *Flannery O'Connor* (New York:Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1976), p. 106.

12) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 21.

13) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 21.

14) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 21.

15) Dorothy Walters, *Flannery O'Connor* (Boston:Twayne Publishers, 1973), pp. 92-93.

16) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 241.

17) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 242.

18) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 209.

19) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 168.

20) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 107.

21) Walters, *Flannery O'Connor,* p. 97.

22) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 242.

23) McFarland, *Flannery O'Connor,* p. 107.

24) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 232.

25) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 233.

26) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 237.

27) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 238.

28) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 238.

29) Stuart L. Burns discovers that the sun suggestive of fire is a constant symbol and sun imagery is pervasive throughout O'Connor's fiction, and he insists: "*The Violent Bear It Away* contains the most profuse and precise sun imagery in relation to the religious theme. Here, the sun functions both as the hand of God and as a barometer registering Divine disapproval or benediction." Stuart L. Burns, "'Torn by the Lord's Eye':Flannery O'Connor's Use of Sun Imagery," *Twentieth Century Literature,* 13 (1967), p. 163.

30) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 5.

31) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 76.

32) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 134.

33) O'Connor, *Violent,* p. 233.

34) Clair Katz maintains that the image of "rage" provides an important clue to understanding O'Connor's fiction:"The violence she depicts allows us to experience the gratification of raging against the limits imposed on us, raging with all the fury of our common childhood fantasies, while she forces us to submit to those limits, to turn the rage back on ourselves." Clair Katz, "Flannery O'Connor's Rage of Vision," *American Literature,* 46 (1974), p. 67.

35) For example, O'Connor insists:"I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that." O'Connor, *Mystery,* p. 32.

36) O'Connor, *Mystery,* p. 118.

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