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FLANNERY O'CONNOR THROWS THE BOOK: A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH TO FINDING GOD

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To: Dean Kenneth Furton
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This thesis, written by Maite Jerez, and entitled Flannery O'Connor Throws the Book: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Finding God, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who had to sacrifice their own careers and their own education to make sure that my brother and I had ours. To Eric, thank you for coming here; thank you for being you. Finally, to my son Gavin . . . you have motivated me beyond what words can convey, but I will offer a few borrowed ones to try to express what you have brought back to my life: And something thought or done or wished without a little innocence, although it were as red as terror and as green as fate, greyly shall fail and dully disappear – but the proud power of himself death immense is not so as a little innocence – e.e. cummings

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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The purpose of this thesis is to explain how God is present in select Flannery O'Connor stories. It argues that although God is not present in the text, it is an entity that intervenes to deliver the characters from their false perceptions of self. Through the theories of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud, literary criticism regarding psychoanalysis and O'Connor's work, an understanding of the writer's own views on God and literature, and a close reading of the text, we find that God is a hidden body that can be uncovered via functions of the unconscious. The research argues that the strength of the divine is felt when elements of the unconscious make their way into consciousness, regardless of any and all defenses put up by the conscious mind and the ego of the characters. It concludes by asserting that O'Connor affords the same opportunity for the reader.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction

In her introduction to Three by Flannery O'Connor, O'Connor's friend Sally Fitzgerald sums up the author's intentions with a metaphor borrowed from "Revelation": "And what did she herself do but 'throw the book' at us all?" (xxx). Seeing as O'Connor was deeply devout and very attached to her Catholicism, it is almost a given that her works would bleed with religious motifs such as redemption, atonement, and epiphany. But they do not, and ironically, they do not because the writer herself refused to partake in the overly-sentimental and sermonizing practice of preaching religion to her audience. Besides feeling it undesirable, O'Connor understood that such a method would fall on blind eyes, since she felt her audience, despite its intentions, could only go so far in understanding God. The shortcomings of modern people would never allow a direct confrontation with God, and modern readers, whom she saw as mostly secular and morally vacuous, would never be open to explicit messages from the text about God. Nevertheless, she felt it important to instill a sense of God as a force superior to humans into her literature and therefore in the reader. The question then is how does she accomplish such a task without becoming preachy or maudlin? How exactly did she "throw the book at us all?" The answer is that she makes the readers tap into sources and forces within themselves that would allow them to come into contact with God, and those sources and forces stem mostly from the psyche and from the unconscious. O'Connor reveals her characters' psychological demons so that they might make way for a conversation with a higher being. As Julian, Ruby, and Mrs. May "gaze" at their "others," their repressions ultimately lift so that the encounter with God can happen unimpeded by any unconscious blockage of the divine. But it is not just Ruby and the

other characters who get a book thrown at their eyes in hopes that they might see, it is also O'Connor's audience, one she did not believe could see God on its own.

In his biography of O'Connor, Ted Spivey sheds light on what the writer was contending with. One of the main obstacles for her was the audience itself: ". . . Flannery O'Connor . . . believed that [she was] sent to address a society that had become so materialistic that it could no longer deal with . . . ultimate questions and life Solutions . . ." (27). Her own feelings, as revealed to the mysterious friend "A" in The Habit of Being, reflect an even more cynical view about her audience:

> . . . I find myself in a world where everybody has his compartment, puts you in yours, shuts the door and departs. One of the awful things about writing when you are a Christian is that for you the ultimate reality is the Incarnation, the present reality is the Incarnation, and nobody believes in the Incarnation, that is nobody in your audience . . . . At least these are the people I am conscious of writing for. (92)

Although the vast majority of her readers could have been labeled as "believers," O'Connor thought of them, and her characters, as theologically dense and too complacent in their own skewed notions of God and religion. Paired with her doubts about humans' ability to understand God and morality, O'Connor's perception of her readers demands that the spiritual act of writing in which she engages and the ways in which she presents her moral lesson be altered to fit this impermeable audience.

But as dark and hopeless as O'Connor might seem at times, she sometimes offers a bit of hope for her readers. In "Novelist and Believer," an essay found in Mystery and Manners, she discusses "the man of [her] time, the unbeliever, who is nevertheless

grappling in a desperate and usually honest way with intense problems of the spirit" (156). Thus, people might not believe, but the recognition of the spirit, in one way or another, is there. She defines two other types, the man who "recognizes a divine being not himself, but who does not believe that this being can be known . . ." (159) and the other type, who "can neither believe nor contain himself in unbelief and who searches desperately" (Mystery and Manners 159). In all three cases or "types" that she points out, there is a built-in hope for recognition and salvation. However, for O'Connor, human blindness and the spiritual miasma in which her audience lived presented a bigger problem than the hope of salvation presented a possibility.

As a result of her views on modern culture, her devout religious nature is belied by a language that shies away from the pious and the preachy. The reconciliation of these two seemingly contradictory elements constitutes the tension in O'Connor's writing that reflects the spiritual act of discovery and recognition that she herself equates with the writing process. In other words, O'Connor seeks to create presence out of absence, of God that is. God does not appear in text. In fact, the only times the word "God" is even mentioned in her stories are when a character speaks it, and even then, it is usually reserved to show how ignorant that character's notion of God is. Characters speak of Jesus, the church, and all the virtues promoted by religion, such as self-sufficiency, charity, and sacrifice, to name a few, but even then, they are just revealing how warped their definitions of these virtues and their identities as spiritual beings are. Sarah Gordon mentions the problem of "how to reconcile the stark narration with Christian love and forgiveness" (qtd. in Witschi), and one can add that this characteristic of O'Connor's writing is itself the tool with which she seeks to awaken faith and spirituality in her

complacent audience. Instead of imposing "prescriptive morality" (Folks) through the vernacular of the church, O'Connor metaphorically assumes the role of Jesus, sacrificing herself, her faith, and her characters for the sake of the readers whom she hopes to save.

Therefore, O'Connor needed to resort to trickery, per se, to get her audience to see God in a text in which divinity is present, but not to the spiritually blind eye. It would take more than mere lessons and morals to get through. It would take something on the part of the reader and on the part of the writer. To O'Connor that something is the kind of sensory violence and distortion that awakens the reader. The violence on which O'Connor depends can include the physical, but the ultimate examples of violence in the stories have more to do with the pain of recognition. The recognitions in the stories deal mostly with the self or with the character's relationship with an "other" that in turn reveals the truth about his/her self and by extension, about God. O'Connor explains her rationale for such a method in "The Fiction Writer and His Country":

> The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to his hostile audience by shock – to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures. (Mystery and Manners 33-4)

The senses, to O'Connor, are crucial in getting across the message of God. By inciting the sensations in her writing, she hopes to get the readers to feel, in more ways than one, what they are designed to feel. The hope presumably is that this feeling will incite thought: ". . . the fiction writer begins where human perception begins. He appeals

through the senses, and you cannot appeal to the senses with abstractions" ("The Nature and Aim of Fiction" 67). More specifically, O'Connor is concerned with the sense of vision, both literally and figuratively. In "Writing Short Stories," she asserts the supremacy of such a sense: "Judgment is something that begins with the act of vision, and when it does not, or when it becomes separated from vision, then a confusion exists in the mind which transfers itself to the story" (Mystery and Manners 91). It will become clear in the coming chapters just how operative vision is, not only for her readers, but also for her characters. After all, her characters receive their epiphanies through just that – visions that reveal truth and that shatter the consciousness of everyone who is privy to the illusion – the character and the reader.

But for O'Connor, and for the protagonist and the reader, revelation does not stop at the mere vision; it is what is presumed to follow that matters. Sight and the ultimate visions in her stories are mere vehicles for true recognition, and in the end, that recognition always involves a confrontation with one's self and with God: ". . . what is needed is the kind of vision that convinces the total self and, for the author, this vision follows the suffering that results from an encounter with destructive forces" (Spivey 144). These visions on which O'Connor so much relies also distort the objective world and thus "show a hidden truth" ("The Catholic Novelists and Their Readers" 179). In short, this act of seeing in her fiction and these visions reshape what the reader and the character think is true to reveal what actually is true, and underneath that truth lies some message from God. The sights and visions so symbolically significant in the stories are distorted to capture the attention, to shock the reader into paying attention: "I have to bend the whole [work] – its language, its structure, its action. I have to make the reader

feel, in his bones if nowhere else, that something is going on here that counts. Distortion in this case is an instrument . . . the kind that reveals, or should reveal" ("Novelist and Believer" 162).

Yet in "The Church and the Fiction Writer," O'Connor claims, "When fiction is made according to its nature, it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete, observable reality" (148). The idea of distortion and the grounding of fiction in reality might appear contradictory at first, but by analyzing the relationship between the two, one can make sense of this dynamic. In the three stories that will be examined, one can see that the stories, on their surfaces, are quite believable in terms of plot, characterization, setting, and all other major elements of fiction. She does not distort in order to bend what we would accept as believable. What she does distort are the psyches of the protagonists in question. She distorts their sense of self and their reactions to others and to the worlds around them in order to show just how warped they are mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Distortion should not be mistaken, at least in the case of the stories to be discussed, with a mere bending of reality. It should be understood as a distortion of what these characters sense and what they understand and perceive. Therein lie the distortions of vision and of reality on which she relies.

The discussion of distortion leads to the premise and the paradox of the argument – that God is only attainable in O'Connor's fiction through means that are not readily perceptible by the audience. They cannot be. If we are to accept what O'Connor says about her own readers, then we must accept that the reader is incapable of conscious reflection and recognition. And if we accept this weakness, then by extension, her characters must also be "blind," so that we may relate to them and see God through the

same circumstances in which they see God, through the "epiphanic moments of grace or vision in which . . . contact is made, no matter how briefly, with one's own self, with other men [and women], and with God" (Spivey 94).

But it cannot stop there. It is not a mere question of seeing something and coming to a realization. There is much more at work, and here is where the theories of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud, two foremost psychoanalysts, enter the field of vision of both the protagonists and the audience. Even for those readers who might label themselves as "non-believers," O'Connor's satirical take on her own characters, through which she reveals their follies and ridiculously inflated senses of self-importance, intends to do the same for that segment of her audience. The unconscious phenomena that are revealed via psychoanalytic paradigms will compel both the believing and the non-believing reader to "see" God. And as resistant as O'Connor was to psychoanalysis, it is nevertheless evident that without the power of the unconscious and its functions and components, there can be no epiphany, no true knowledge, and no acknowledgment of or identification with what most mattered to her – God.

The following chapters will explore how the theories of Lacan and Freud can help us understand the ways in which O'Connor's characters and readers come to see the light, the truth. The discussion will look into various theories on the unconscious and how the phenomena in the unconscious psyche contribute to both the crises in the characters as well as the ways in which the unconscious ultimately pushes them toward contact with God. The chapters will show how O'Connor's violent epiphanies and the mechanisms of the mind work together to bring sight to the spiritually blinded, and that, just as is the

case with the characters, the audience too will receive the divine message O'Connor felt had been falling on deaf ears.

II. Gazing Into O'Connor: A Lacanian Perspective

As mentioned in the introduction, God is inextricable from O'Connor's work despite O'Connor's well known avoidance of heavy-handed religious imagery and pious language. This aspect of her writing presents the interesting paradox evident and discussed earlier, and the paradox entails the use of grotesque realism to relay the message of God that O'Connor felt was necessary but unpalatable for her spiritually vacuous audience. By effacing God in her fiction, O'Connor creates the presence of God even in the divinity's absence, and by avoiding pious language and imagery, she sacrifices religion and herself, yet she makes the work itself the embodiment of the spirit that can reach the audience. However, it follows that if she removes God from the story, something or someone must replace it in order for readers to tap into their faith and thus perceive God. This chapter will examine God through what psychoanalyst theorist Jacques Lacan calls "the gaze." Through Lacan's theories, we can see how O'Connor embodies God in her work and relays the importance of her faith to both character and reader, thereby communicating God's message without offending the sensibilities of her audience. God is then replaced by something in her fiction – the gaze between the subject who receives the revelation and the object of the gaze, or the "other." The current chapter will examine how the gaze functions in O'Connor's stories "Revelation," "Everything that Rises Must Converge," and "Greenleaf."

The "other" comes into being for the infant in Lacan's mirror stage, the stage marked by the moment at which the child looks at his reflection and gains the recognition that he is a distinct entity. The phenomenon is necessary if the infant is to begin recognizing those outside him/her as well. By realizing he/she exists as one, the

recognition of others is possible. Lacanian scholar Philippe Julien explains that the sight of the "other" can invoke an emotive response that is pleasurable in that the child sees in the "other" a symbol for what he or she lacks in the moment:

> By means of vision, the infant anticipates its future motility: what it cannot accomplish today in its own, anaclitic situation, it sees realized in the other. Thus is born a temporal split between vision and the other sensory powers. The primacy of the visual permits the child to see the future of its body: its fascination with the other's image arouses, stirs, and drives it. It is as if the eyes impelled its acts . . . The primacy of the visual induces a rupture with that which is animal. (31)

For O'Connor, the visual was primary because she needed to make her characters "see" in the literal and symbolic sense. Julien would agree with O'Connor's use of vision as the primary sense since the mere ability to visually sense something, according to him, leads to a higher recognition:

> . . . through vision, I am captured by the other's space, fascinated by the other's spatial field, which is outside myself . . . the image of the other suddenly fixes my gaze. There is a moment at which visual spatialization brings social temporality to a halt, a critical moment punctuated by a piercing look . . . Captured by the image, I become it, a subject infatuated with himself or herself . . . (37)

Thus we move into Lacan's notion of the "gaze," a psychological phenomenon not to be confused with mere sight. As Michael Brown explains, ". . . looking refers to the active, seeing to the passive and the gaze to the reflexive." In other words, the "gaze" contains not only the visual recognition of an object, but also the unconscious material of

the subject or viewer. To Lacan, the desire behind the "gaze" is never fully the subject's; it is inexorably linked to the object. But because desire can never be eliminated, the subject will never find it satisfied in any object, thus leading to *la chose*, the myth of unity that emerges in the interaction between object and subject. There is never any pure reality behind the "other" that represents lack, loss, and absence, and being the object of the gaze of the "other" can be threatening and "conveys a sense of frightening mystery: What is going to become of me? What does the other want from me?" (Guervich) Furthermore,". . . Lacan severed psychoanalysis from biology by equating the structure of psychoanalysis with that of language . . ." (Kurzweil 101). Thus, the function of the gaze as the excavator of unconscious material for the object is evident in the exchanges, although nonverbal, between the protagonists in O'Connor's stories and the perceived "others." By recognizing their "others" through the gaze, Ruby Turpin, Julian, and Mrs. May all come face to face with a knowledge that is being repressed by the unconscious until the culmination the story.

Before taking a closer look at "Revelation," a few of O'Connor's own thoughts on her story and on her protagonist Mrs. Ruby Turpin indicate her reliance on the "noise" that makes the point in her work. In Habit of Being, she writes to Cecil Dawkins: "[Revelation] has one of those country women in it who just sort of springs to life. You can't hold them down or shut their mouths" (546). And in a letter to "A," she expresses that the story is not one to merely mock this country persona: "I'm much cheered that the story . . . makes the right kind of noise in your head, though I am fearful other heads will be less reliable. If the story is taken to be one designed to make fun of Ruby, then it's worse than venal" (552). O'Connor here reflects not only what has already been

discussed – the mistrust she feels towards the modern audience – but also the fact that to O'Connor, it was the "noise" the stories incited in her audience that delivered God to the reader and not any kind of overt sermonizing.

Mrs. Turpin, the main character in "Revelation," is a land-owning, robust Southern lady who mistakenly views herself as a God-following, tolerant humanitarian but whom O'Connor reveals as a hypocritical bigot whose altruism is purely selfish. Ruby's erroneous perception of self is increasingly revealed throughout the story as Mrs. Turpin shows her condescension in relation to the "white trashy lady" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 407) in the doctor's waiting room. But in O'Connor's treatment, the white trash woman becomes the external embodiment of Mrs. Turpin's inner ugliness and lack of honest self-perception:

> There was nothing you could tell her about people like them that she didn't know already. And it was not just that they didn't have anything. Because if you gave them everything, in two weeks it would all be broken or filthy or they would have chopped it up for lightwood. She knew all this from her own experience. Help them you must, but help them you couldn't. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 413)

Yet it is the same white trash lady whom Mrs. Turpin judges and scorns throughout the story that possesses what she lacks – honesty. In her discussion of black people, Mrs. Turpin tells the "pleasant lady" how nice she is to her negro workers because she "[runs] out with a bucket of ice water" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 410) to greet them; whereas the white trash lady states, "They ought to send all them niggers back to Africa" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 411). Mrs. Turpin's hypocrisy is revealed not only in the patronizing way in which she proclaims she would rather be a "neat clean respectable

Negro woman" after having struggled with Jesus' hypothetical question to her – to be white trash or a Negro – but also in her remark about how one can "talk at [Negros] but not talk with them" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 420). Thus, although the white trash woman is portrayed contemptibly through Mrs. Turpin's point of view, she is a reminder to Mrs. Turpin and the audience of humanity's selfish and skewed views on tolerance, morality, and love of mankind. The trashy lady is the external embodiment of the ugliness within Mrs. Turpin and of the honesty of self she lacks.

However, it is the frequent and fixed gaze by Mary Grace on Mrs. Turpin that underscores the presence of a force, of God itself, which shocks Mrs. Turpin into awareness. Mary Grace gazes upon Mrs. Turpin, and in the exchange, Mrs. Turpin is expected to recognize her lack. It is only when Mrs. Turpin fails to understand the message of the gaze (that she is not the God-loving Christian she claims to be) that O'Connor's book is literally and figuratively thrown at her protagonist and ultimately, the reader. Immediately upon entering the doctor's waiting room to which she takes her husband Claud, "her gaze settled agreeably on a well-dressed grey-haired lady whose eyes met hers . . ." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 405) This eye contact quickly reassures Mrs. Turpin that she is justified in expecting the child to give up his seat for her, but even more, that she is justified in her presumptuousness. Just as rapidly, Mrs. Turpin's line of sight is assaulted by Mary Grace, an acne-ridden, fat college girl who constantly directs her "scowl" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 406) at her. Throughout the waiting room scene, the girl keeps her eyes "fixed like two drills" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 413) on Mrs. Turpin, and the visual exchange between her and Mary Grace is even

occasionally interrupted by the white trashy woman who reinforces Mrs. Turpin's rigid belief in her superiority.

At this point Mary Grace provides Ruby with an opportunity to confront the bitter truth. Mary Grace's mother describes her as a girl who has it all but "who just criticizes and complains all day long," (Three by Flannery O'Connor 415) which sounds very familiar to the way one might describe Ruby. The mother then adds, "'I'm afraid there is nothing to do but leave her to her folly. Some day she will wake up and it'll be too late'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 415). Nowhere is it clearer in the text than here that O'Connor has provided the embodiment of Ruby's "other" through Mary Grace, a girl who in appearance and demeanor is everything Ruby is not, but who based on the mother's description could be a spiritual twin for Ruby. Throughout this drawn-out exchange between Mary Grace and Mrs. Turpin, Mrs. Turpin clings to her misguided sense of self: "When I think who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is!'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 415). It is thereafter when Mary Grace literally throws the book at Mrs. Turpin that the unconscious interaction between the two surfaces:

> . . . her gaze was drawn slowly downward to the churning face on the floor . . . The girl's eyes stopped rolling and focused on her . . . She leaned forward until she was looking directly into the fierce brilliant eyes. There was no doubt in her mind that the girl did know her, knew her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition. "What do you got to say to me?" she asked

hoarsely and held her breath, waiting, as for a revelation. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 416)

The "gaze" between Mary Grace and Mrs. Turpin abruptly enlightens the latter about her ignorance in thinking herself superior, and Mary Grace becomes a "personal shadow" that "corresponds to the contents of [Mrs. Turpin's] personal unconscious . . ." (Rowley) Furthermore, this unconscious realization leads her into a closer and more direct conversation with the key figure for O'Connor – God. Mrs. Turpin's almost unconscious fixation on the girl reveals what Lacan argues is the "gaze" – "the uncanny sense that the object of our eye's look or glance is somehow looking back at us of its own will" (Felluga). Furthermore, the fire imagery evokes the archetypal/symbolic significance of fire as what Rebecca Rowley calls in her article, "supernatural strangeness." Mrs. Turpin feels that the girl knows her, that this stranger knows something about her, and "the face resists possession" (Heaton 6). Ruby's perception is juxtaposed against Mary Grace's response to her question: "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 416), shocking Ruby Turpin into having to cope with the possibility that she might not be a guest of honor in heaven after all.

Thus in writing like O'Connor's where the language masks the spiritual message, God is present in the absence, and it is at this point in the story that Mrs. Turpin truly begins her conversations with God. Through the gaze in which the supernatural material is conveyed, Mrs. Turpin starts to recognize her ignorance and spiritual lack. After this encounter, Mrs. Turpin imagines herself as a warthog and denounces the accusation, but as the story continues, the lingering effect of the "gaze" with Mary Grace proves more powerful: "But the denial had no force. The girl's eyes and her words, even the tone of

her voice, low but clear, directed only to her, brooked no repudiation" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 418). Once Ruby leaves the office to go home, her anger shifts from the girl to other objects – the hogs. Having left the doctor with one bad eye (which means she is still not "seeing" clearly, whether literally or figuratively) and feeling "entirely hollow except for her heart," (Three by Flannery O'Connor 415-6) Ruby's internal gaze at the hogs becomes another futile attempt to suppress the meaning of the girl's words:

> The instant she was flat on her back, the image of a razor-backed hog with warts on its face and horns coming out behind its ears snorted into her head. She moaned, a low quiet moan. "I am not," she said tearfully, "a wart hog. From hell." But the denial had no force. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 418)

Out of anger, she attacks the pigs, and the "gaze" shifts to the animal she has been accused of resembling. As she attacks the pigs, she impudently questions Mary Grace's message, a message we can presume comes from a higher power. Mrs. Turpin responds:

> "What do you send me a message like that for?" she said in a low fierce voice, barely above a whisper but with the force of a shout in its concentrated fury. "How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?" . . . she gripped the hose, blindly pointing the stream of water in and out of the eye of the old sow whose outraged squeal she did not hear. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 422)

Mrs. Turpin's attack on the animal is an angry assault against the painful and shocking realization of her true spirit. In essence, she tries to blind herself, by blinding the pig, to these unconscious realizations brought about in her "gaze" with Mary Grace and with the sow. She cannot stand the look of the sow, both aesthetically and in an

exchange with her. As "other," the sow reminds her of Mary Grace's words, but even more, it reminds her of that unconscious shadow which has surfaced since the book incident. The role of the "other" has shifted now that Mary Grace has been removed from sight, and the sow becomes the embodiment of spirit on which the numinous is conferred. By questioning this physically absent force, Mrs. Turpin has now moved past the girl and the pigs and made God the "other," not just any "other," but the "other" that in some ways represents the realm of Lacan's Real, the realm, incidentally, to which God, or the idea of it, belongs.

To Lacan, the Real is the "state of nature from which we have been forever severed by our entrance into language" (Felluga). It follows that God and spirituality fall into this category since they are terms only superficially explained with words and signifiers and since they seem to be part of the collective human experience. The definition of the Real explains, perhaps, why O'Connor finds pious language ineffective, as it can never truly capture the reality that is her faith anyway. Thus, O'Connor presents Mrs. Turpin's encounter with this supreme "other" at the pig pen in the form of a vision:

> Then like a monumental statue coming to life, she bent her head slowly and gazed, as if through the very heart of mystery, down into the pig parlor at the hogs . . . A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant with a secret life . . . her gaze bent to them as if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 423)

It is clear here that Mrs. Turpin has begun to experience what can be described as numinous. Her sublime vision continues and turns her misconceptions of class and racial hierarchy on their heads:

> There were whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 423)

Mrs. Turpin and her companions are following the purported inferior classes, or the minor "others," into heaven. It would appear that, whether internalized or not, she has learned that her place in society might be superficially higher, but that the true "other" she challenges (God) prior to the vision knocks her into the lower ranks, "arresting her will and forcing her to contemplate a reversal of the social order and picture of wholeness which she has heretofore ignored" (Rowley). Furthermore, this reversal of fortune is O'Connor's way of correcting what she sees in mankind – souls that are "[inevitably] doomed in virtue of their presumption to know what they need to be seeking" (McGill) and

> [a] vision of a collapse of a paralyzed world, which [Ruby Turpin] has partly inherited and partly created in her own mind [and] leads not, as in so many other O'Connor stories, to death but rather to a vision of a new communal life that she can enter at any time she chooses. (Spivey 142)

In the works of O'Connor, merely believing in religion is not the method of acquiring the spirit; there must be a process of questioning, confrontation, and doubt that leads to recognition. Mrs. Turpin is a perfect example of this. She constantly seeks self-assurance by contrasting herself to the blacks, to the poor, to the "white trashy lady," to

Mary Grace, and to the sow. In addition, although there is more religious imagery in this passage than in others, with the "white robes" and the "procession," it is nevertheless absent of an overt, authoritarian religious message.

Emmanuel Levinas describes the nature of epiphany in O'Connor: "The absolutely other is not reflected in consciousness . . . We are concerned with questioning a consciousness, and not with the consciousness of questioning . . . [this is] precisely the welcome of the absolute other" (qtd. in Handelman 273-4). Mrs. Turpin's direct questions to God are not what ultimately provide the answer; it is her shocking realization that incites unconscious doubts about her life, her motivations, and her desires. Through the lessons imparted at the end of the story, O'Connor allows Mrs. Turpin and the audience to come into contact with this being that is not in the text, but that nevertheless constitutes true morality, one in stark contrast to the characters' contrived moralities. In such a way, they are in touch with the supernatural "other" whom they misjudged prior to their epiphanies and who ultimately reminds them of what they have lacked all along – a genuine sense of truth as seen through their relationships with all the "others" in their lives.

Mrs. Turpin certainly has been stunned into learning and accepting the truth about the mortal "others" as well as the immortal, intangible "other" that is God. She experiences what Lacan would label the *après coup*, "something that is not graspable in the moment, but only through a recognition that comes afterward" (Brown). Even taking Lacan's own statements on how "there is no real Other who could guarantee the truth of the subject," (Braungardt) we must nevertheless acknowledge that there is something outside the material existence of Mrs. Turpin that locks her in a "gaze" and allows her to

see the truth brutally, but plainly. And it is not only through Mrs. Turpin that O'Connor reveals her moral to the audience; it is also the audience's gaze on Mrs. Turpin at work:

> We *know* Mrs. Turpin. And we feel comfortable in that doctor's waiting room, interestingly enough, because while Ruby establishes her difference from the other patients, *we* are experiencing our own superiority . . . O'Connor's technique distances the reader from this "stout," happy lady and her fatuous self-congratulatory attitude . . . it is the reader who "throws the book" at Mrs. Turpin. (Gordon 178)

Thus it is clear that O'Connor avoids all overt and egregious piousness yet still ensures that her message of devotion to God is subconsciously understood:

> The Other of [O'Connor's] art is not necessarily any God of theology, and it may yet be the Other of psychoanalysis and the unconscious . . . Lacanian analysis may very well offer the return of O'Connor to theology within a broadly defined western cultural tradition. Thus, in a strange twist, O'Connor may yet have her way even in the face of her other/Other. (Mellard 632)

The same may be said about the unconscious forces in "Everything that Rises Must Converge," where the gaze and the recognition of the "other" are made more personal by the mother-son relationship. As in "Revelation," the blind protagonist who has killed or refused to confront some disturbing self-knowledge gets a chance at redemption. Julian immediately reveals his resentment towards his mother, which is later revealed to be based on the mother's racist air of superiority and unconditional tolerance of her son's indolence. The mother isn't even named and is described as a mere "dumpy figure" with an "atrocious hat" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 272), thus setting up the

mother as an antagonist to her son. Julian is tied to his mother ostensibly because he awaits work he feels is commensurate with his education, but the relationship between mother and son is complicated, to say the least. Psychoanalyst Christina Wieland expounds on troubled mother-son relations:

> . . . [the] matricidal psyche is regarded as the "normal" way of separating from mother within Western culture, but that implies a psyche which attains only a semblance of separation, by violent means . . . it utilizes masculine anxieties . . . and a masculine identification with father as the core of the super-ego, in order to create a rigid repression barrier. (210)

Based on Wieland's ideas, there are a few points to make about Julian and his mother. Julian's spite for his mother perhaps stems from the masculine anxieties Wieland points to: "He separates himself from his mother [and] establishes barriers against the general idiocy of his fellows by existing in a kind of mental bubble where he feels safe from any kind of penetration from without," and "he distances himself by looking at her and making his eyes the eyes of a stranger" (Paulson 82). By making her eyes those of a non-maternal figure, Julian makes the gaze between him and his mother one that establishes her as the "other." As a result, there is a vehicle through which Julian will ultimately receive his grace.

Julian tells his mother that he knows that someday he will make money, though he knows that he really will not, but his mother's insistence that he will and her denial of the gloomy reality of "bulbous liver-colored monstrosities of a uniform ugliness" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 272) only enables the current situation, one in which Julian is discontent and dependent upon her. Thus, she "castrates" him of his independence and

his masculine identity, and as a consequence, she becomes the *objet petit a*, one which reminds him of his lack of power and his inability to break from her: ". . . his eyes glazed with determination to make himself completely numb during the time he would be *sacrificed to* her pleasure" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 272). The emphasis on "sacrificed to" underscores Julian's feelings that what "mommy" wants, "mommy" gets and serves as a catalyst for his bitterness. But in fact, O'Connor attempts to shatter his martyrdom in the text itself. As he daydreams about himself as saint and sacrificer, "The presence of his mother was borne in upon him as she gave a pained sigh. He looked at her bleakly. She was holding herself very erect under the preposterous hat, wearing it like a banner of her imaginary dignity" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 274-5). Julian's mother as *objet petit a* and "other" is also evident in his own statements on his upbringing:

> The further irony of all this was that in spite of her, he had turned out so well . . . in spite of growing up dominated by a small mind, he had ended up with a large one; in spite of all her foolish views, he was free of prejudice and unafraid to face facts. Most miraculous of all, instead of being blinded by love for her as she was for him, he had cut himself emotionally free of her and could see her with complete objectivity. He was not dominated by his mother. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 277)

Julian's mere acknowledgement of his mother's weaknesses and their potentially impeding effects on his life implies that there is a lack he wishes to remedy, and thus, something he cannot see – that he is in fact dominated by his mother. Mellard adds that the mother is the "first figure in whom the subject identifies itself, as well as the first

form from whom it splits off an antagonistic opposite" (626-7). Julian's sense of being disempowered is most evident in this passage. He points his mother out as that "other," a referential point against which he has measured himself, but a closer look at the passage reveals more about his mother as this object of comparison. Although Julian thinks he is not blinded by his love for her, Lacan would argue that he is blind to the reality of their relationship: ". . . on the basis of an imaginary belief in a possible completion, the subject thinks that it can be or has been deprived of something real" (Van Haute 185). It is then clear to see how fractured a relationship to the "other" might be when the relationship to one's mother is so fundamentally flawed.

The scene with the Negro woman whose hat is identical to Julian's mother sheds more light on just how much he yearns to be freed from his mother's "gaze." He goes out of his way to punish her and by extension, sever their bond: "The vision of the two hats, identical, broke upon him with the radiance of a brilliant sunrise. His face was suddenly lit with joy . . . She turned her eyes on him slowly. The blue in them seem to have turned a bruised purple" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 281). His pleasure at her displeasure only points to his mother's hold over him, a hold based on his wishful notion that he can in essence regain what she has taken from him – his manhood. He punishes his mother for living "in the laws of her own fantasy world" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 276), but he does not seem to realize the grip his mother's "gaze" has on him. "Julian's aggressively critical stance toward his mother develops until the mother and son can no longer recognize each other . . ." (Paulson 83-4). Julian almost allows himself to feel pity for his mother, but instead, he decides that "justice entitled him to laugh" and that "[her] punishment exactly fits [her] pettiness (Three by Flannery O'Connor 281). The irony of

his statements reflects the blindness brought about by his mother's dominance over him. The image of his "mother . . . shrunken to the dwarf-like proportions of her moral nature, sitting like a mummy beneath the ridiculous banner of her hat" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 280) might offer a momentary satisfaction, but it is just another example of Julian trying desperately to cope with the reality of his situation by making his mother the "other" onto which he projects all his anger. He cannot see, until the end, that "the tide of darkness" would eventually "sweep him back to her" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 285) and that her death would announce another kind of "other."

Lacan (as well as Freud, who will later be explored) would argue that one of Julian's main impediments in truly knowing this "other" is his narcissism. During Lacan's mirror stage, the parent might be identified as a good and bad mother or father:

> Narcissistic interactions, Lacan teaches, are located on the axis lying between the other and the *moi*, the unconscious self that is founded on the subject's experience of language and images absorbed in infancy. When it is neurotically attached to the narcissistic engagements, the subject (called *je,* the "I" by Lacan) effectively denies the authoritative Other that underlies all "normal" psychic effects. (Mellard 641)

Indeed, it is evident through Julian's self-delusions that he fits the mold of a narcissistic personality – one so enamored with oneself that he/she can see nothing beyond him/herself. It is also evident throughout the story that Julian has created a barrier between himself and his mother, but Lacan would argue that this barrier goes beyond a mere mother-son divide. When he attempts to get rid of the "other" that is his mother, he is in essence killing off something else: "[He] kills not his mirroring, narcissistic,

Imaginary other, but his Other in the register of the Symbolic – a far graver crime, indeed, one that in psychoanalytic terms equals the murder of God in a Christian subject's denial of God's grace" (Mellard 642).

Such is the case with Julian; his mother's death is what thrusts him into the realm of the true "other." He may gaze upon her, so to speak, and consciously recognize her as the object of his disdain, but it is only her loss that translates into true understanding. When the "darkness" sweeps over Julian and he is left with the sight of his dead mother, his "gaze" becomes one that can allow for his own revelation: ". . . the mother's death makes it impossible for her to change her ways and one wonders if the son, even as he suddenly sees the essential unity that binds them to each other and to all people, is capable of change" (Spivey 144). The story ends before we can see if this change has indeed occurred, as is the case in the other two stories being discussed, but the implicit possibility for change is what matters. After all, it is typical in O'Connor's fiction that the confrontation with the "other" is never conscious and willed by the self, rather brought about by radical, undesired forces. "There is a moment of purgatorial suffering and with it the vision that he has always loved his mother and that their love is the essential fact of their shared existence" (Spivey 146-7), thus allowing him into the "world of guilt and sorrow" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 285) that severs him from his narcissistic and seemingly rational world and allows him to "see beyond [his rationalism] to salvation" (Shinn 66).

Here again for O'Connor, she finds an outlet for her God. There is no overt message of religiousness or Godliness in the story, and certainly there is no evidence that Julian is even a believer in the Christian sense, but the message is nevertheless there –

that if we are self-absorbed in our delusions and enamored of our false notions about the world and about others around us, we run the risk of abrupt and violent reminders that show the limits of the conscious powers of humans.

O'Connor offers us another perspective of the relationship between mother and son through the eyes of Mrs. May in "Greenleaf." In this case, however, it is the mother who is the protagonist, and her gaze is not limited to her sons, but also to the Greenleafs and to a bull, all who remind her that she is a woman trying too hard to dominate a patriarchal world over which she can never reign. Like Ruby and Julian, she too will learn about her ignorance and lack of self-awareness, but she will also learn that they are what have kept her from establishing healthy relationships with the people in her life and from finding true contentment.

Although Wesley and Scofield only mock their mother, they nevertheless reflect one of the underlying causes of Mrs. May's troubles – that she is completely ill at ease in a patriarchal society because, in a futile attempt to control her world and all its components, she actually loses that control. At the beginning of the story, we are privy to her dream:

> She had been conscious in her sleep of a steady rhythmic chewing as if something were eating one wall of the house. She had been aware that whatever it was had been eating as long as she had had the place and had eaten everything . . . the house . . . the boys . . . everything but the Greenleafs. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 286)

When she awakes, she finds the Greenleaf boys' bull, which is presumably the "something" in the story that is munching away at her house, but when one considers that

the bull is compared to an "uncouth country suitor," (Three by Flannery O'Connor 287) we realize that there is potent symbolism behind the bull. David Havird believes that the bull represents a "ravenous sexuality" as it is called a "wild tormented lover" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 306). Nancy Bishop Dessommes claims that the bull is a symbolic "male intruder" that forces Mrs. May to see her world differently. I would agree with Dessommes that it is indeed a male intruder, but I would add that the intrusion is more than just literal; it is an intrusion on her unconscious, one that threatens her sovereignty and her control over her land, her family, her possessions, and overall, her perceived (but false) position of power in the world. Thus the dream in which the bull slowly but effectively eats away at her is opening the way to a realization, one that will show Mrs. May her proper place in relation to others.

One way in which she is taught her proper place is through her relationship with her sons, a relationship in which she is the object of the "gaze" that condemns her for attempting to be the male authority and self-proclaimed "iron hand" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 289) of the family. Throughout her verbal attempts to establish her authority over them, she fails. Mrs. May's statements to her sons about their "salt-free diets" and "nice girls" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 289) only serve to irritate the men, and they establish the fact that her intrusions are unwelcome. In the "gaze" between her and her sons (or the Greenleafs for that matter), there never seems to be any comfort for Mrs. May. Lacan explains, "Drive offers a constant pressure in its circulation around the lost, unobtainable *objet petit a.* The *objet petit a* can be contained by any object. But the object of the drive cannot offer perfect satisfaction . . ." (Brown). In this case, Mrs. May's continuous desire for self-sufficiency and autonomy is born of the lack she senses

in her "gaze" with the men. The problem is that Mrs. May seeks a power that is only attainable if she can get past the realm of the material world because in the material world, the "others" refuse to let her have any power.

The question then arises: Is there an object that might come closer to satisfying her drive, even if not completely so? The answer might lie in the power she derives from her land:

> She wiped her eyes with the table napkin and got up and went to the window and gazed at the scene in front of her . . . When she looked out the window in her house, she saw the reflection of her own character . . . "Everything is against you," she would say, "the weather is against you and the dirt is against you and the help is against you . . . There's nothing for it but an iron hand!" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 295)

The pasture might then represent what appears to be her triumph over a masculine order, a victory she achieves with the "iron hand" her sons mock and disregard. Mrs. May senses her lack, making the pasture the "other" that reminds her of that; but insofar as the pasture does not really deliver her from her circumstances, it becomes the *objet petit a* that signifies what she lacks. The discussion then turns more specifically to her obsessive desire for the kind of potency typically attributed to men in her society.

The "gaze" between Mr. Greenleaf and Mrs. May serves to remind her of what she really has – the unfulfilled potential for male strength embodied by her uncooperative sons and as falsely represented in her. In his book Oedipus in Evolution, Christopher Badcock defines the concept of "female" as "not-male" and "not-male" as "no-penis" (108). It appears to be an oversimplification of the idea, but it is a formula that explains

Mrs. May: ". . . we should expect penis-envy to be part of the behavioral repertoire of all females . . . ready to be stimulated into action should circumstances be appropriate" (Badcock 99). Clearly, Mrs. May's inoperative sons and pathetic relationships to men in general could stir that unconscious penis-envy, but furthermore, her circumstances continually remind her of what she lacks – true control over the male world. Hence her frustration with Mr. Greenleaf's "fox-colored" eyes and his relatively successful sons paired with her certainty that he wants to shoot her, not the bull. More specifically linked to Lacan is his idea of the "other" as linked to the phallus: "In Lacan, this Other/Autre resides in the place of the father, but its power comes from the authority of the Name-of-the-father and thus from something absent – the signifier Lacanians know as the phallus – rather than from some anatomical part actually present" (Mellard 627). The phallus is not an object, literally speaking, it is a power and an authority that a woman can never possess. Mrs. May's constant and seemingly futile quest for power over this masculine realm then might be pathetic, but ironically enough, it is nevertheless what she must understand to obtain that phallic power.

Standing in sharp contrast to Mrs. May is Mrs. Greenleaf. Mrs. Greenleaf does not repress her faith, and as such, she becomes an "other" to Mrs. May, one that reinforces her lack as well as her alienation from the maternal realm of the sublime and her unsuitable participation in the paternal realm of the Symbolic. The latter's constant praying, groaning, ritual, and repetition of "Oh Jesus, stab me in the heart" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 291) are repulsive to Mrs. May, who has a so-called "large respect for religion, though she did not, of course, believe any of it was true" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 291). Lacan explains, "Being 'not all' means that a woman exceeds all

systems of representation . . . There is a jouissance (pleasure) proper to her and of which she herself may know nothing, except that she experiences it – that much she does know" (Sprengnether 198). Mrs. Greenleaf embraces her lack; Mrs. May mourns it. Mrs. May refuses to embrace this role that the universe has prescribed for her. Therefore, Mrs. Greenleaf, the "trash" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 291) she is to Mrs. May, is nevertheless immune to Mrs. May's "gaze" in that she is able to leave the world of the Symbolic, a place in which Mrs. May unsuccessfully seeks refuge.

Accepting that light means truth, it is possible that Mrs. May has accepted the message of God as "other," the force whose existence she denies until she is literally stabbed into seeing it. Like Ruby Turpin and Julian, Mrs. May is stuck in her own delusions of knowledge and power and finds herself on a hamster wheel struggling against what has already defeated her. She is destroyed by a series of events that lead to a psychic breakdown but an ultimate revelation. O'Connor calls the bull a "patient god"; indeed, the bull ends up as the embodiment of supernatural recognition. Observing her religious behavior shows Mrs. May's trite belief in God. She has nothing but contempt for Mrs. Greenleaf who surpasses the male world of the Symbolic into the realm of true spirituality, and she presumes to know what Jesus would want: "Jesus [she says to Mrs. Greenleaf] would be *ashamed* of you" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 291). She even exclaims to her sons, "I will die when I get good and ready" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 295). Like Mrs. Turpin and Julian, Mrs. May is ultimately castigated for seeing her "others" as inferior and for ultimately challenging the supernatural "other."

In the end, the bull that has claimed her land as his all along penetrates her, and even penetrates her psyche. As the story closes, she finds herself confronted with the higher "other" through her violent and intimate interaction with the bull:

> She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her . . . and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed. One of its horns sank until it pierced her heart . . . 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. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 306)

"The entire scene in front of her" indeed has changed. The idea of the "uncouth country suitor" and the rape of her land come back into play to remind her of her sex, and this realization leads her to confront the truth – that she is not a man; that she does not have the power of a man. The gaze between her and the bull destroys her false perceptions, and the painful vision and recognition that O'Connor provides to thrust her characters into the realm of the divine is what allows Mrs. May to finally find her place as the woman and the mother she has not been able to be. Mrs. May is now, like Julian and Mrs. Turpin, an initiate into the world of recognition, and as "unbearable" as that truth is, it is the only truth that can allow her to gain real recognition. Like Europa, who is struck by the beauty of Zeus in the form of a bull, Mrs. May's stare (or gaze) into the eyes of the bull (god, symbolically speaking) allows her to see what she has been blinded to all along – that there are powers beyond her that she cannot control. O'Connor leaves us with the sense that Mrs. May has perceived the beauty in the divine power of the event, as the

mythical Europa perceives it in the creature. By doing so, she has come to true self-awareness and succumbed to the powers beyond her.

III. You Can Run, but You Can't Hide (From Your Repressions): A Freudian Perspective

The ways in which O'Connor brings forth God in her writing are also evident when one looks at the theories of Sigmund Freud. Through the Freudian lens, one sees that the protagonists who have been discussed exhibit, on the broader level, the same lack of self-awareness and the same self-delusions that were revealed in the discussion on Lacan. However, the vehicles through which this ignorance is revealed are different. Although the idea of the "other" is still instrumental, the unconscious factors at work in Julian, Ruby Turpin, and Mrs. May fuel the dysfunctional relationships between the protagonists and their "others."

Although O'Connor famously distrusted psychoanalysis, her fundamental distrust does not translate into an absence of its interpretive power. As Mellard points out, "For O'Connor, God is always the prescribed authoritative Other/Autre toward which she consciously directs her thoughts and work, but there is an unacknowledged other . . . lurking in her fiction and commentary everywhere . . . it is Sigmund Freud" (627-8). Freud's theories are palpable in O'Connor's texts, despite her distaste for them. Critic Suzanne Morrow Paulson argues that the protagonists in O'Connor's fiction "suffer internal conflicts because of their own narcissism and regressive behavior" and that "O'Connor might substitute the word 'pride' for narcissism and think of regressive behavior as the sign of the spiritually underdeveloped soul" (36). Yet, O'Connor seemed unwilling to admit the power of Freud's theories when it came to the interpretation of her work. The writer was very careful as to who read her stories with a Freudian lens (Paulson 37), and she thought that Freud's psychology was "not an adequate instrument

for understanding the religious encounter or the fiction that describes it" ("Novelist and Believer" 165).

However, there are undoubtedly ways in which one can apply the atheist psychoanalyst's theories, whether O'Connor cares to acknowledge it or not. For the most part, it is through the lack of psychological development of the three characters in question and again, the lack of self-awareness as explained through Freudian phenomena, that Freud's theories serve as a viable lens through which to read and understand her. This lack of psychological development is the crux of the issue for the three characters: "If one fails to develop on the psychological level, this will have repercussions on the spiritual; if one makes extraordinary progress spiritually, this may clear up psychological problems" (Cousins 47). But none of the three protagonists has developed past his or her psychological setbacks, so none can truly develop spiritually until the end of the stories when a traumatic event shatters all illusions.

It is precisely illusions, both mental and visual, that play a big part in the issues of each character in question. Illusion is motivated by wish fulfillment, according to Freud (Kung 46), and in the analysis of each story, we will glance at what these particular illusions are. Frederick Assals' article "The Terrifying, the Comic, and the Melodramatic" sheds light on the overall effect of illusion on O'Connor's fiction. He argues that the protagonist cannot separate what he/she "is (which in turn is inseparable from what he/she takes his/her world to be as opposed to what *is*) . . ." and thus ". . . her narrator points not just to misjudgment or incomplete awareness, but to a veritable chasm of self-deception" (205). Turning to Freud himself, one understands the consequences of illusions, but illusions are not dangerous because they are necessarily false; they are so

because they stem from places in the unconscious that are too tainted to be trusted. In "The Future of an Illusion," Freud argues that "the illusion is not the same as an error" (704). Furthermore, he explains why the illusions are so dangerous: ". . . we call a belief an illusion when a wish fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relations to reality, just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification" (704). One would assume then that sound self-reflection would yield healthy illusions, but indeed, Freud would respond that it is "merely an illusion to expect anything from intuition and introspection; they can give us nothing but particulars about our own mental life . . ." (705). In other words, we cannot be trusted to understand our reflections because too much depends on factors we cannot sense or begin to understand. O'Connor would undoubtedly feel that this is true about her audience, and the psychological crises are made even worse when there is no reflection at all, as is the case with the three characters in question.

The lack of self-awareness evident in her characters becomes further complicated when one considers that the need for wish-fulfillment that incites illusions is itself fed by the problem of repression. The experience of repression holds true for the three O'Connor characters in question. In his essay "Repression," Freud defines the term as "turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (569-70). Repressions in turn cause our wishes to be colored by forces we cannot detect or understand, but more importantly, they are so deeply-rooted in the psyches that they become impossible to ignore, and they typically begin in childhood:

> . . . it is helpful to recall that initially a child conceives of himself as essentially omnipotent, the external world, including the parent, an extension of himself. As

> reality collapses that fantasy, every frustration is reacted to with a rage of destructive fantasies directed at the source of the frustration . . . . (Katz 61)

These "destructive fantasies" and misguided emotions all cause the characters not only to displace their aggression onto "others," but also to increase the frustration and anxiety brewing beneath when these confrontations prove to actually make them aware instead of perpetuating their ignorance.

Ruby Turpin, Julian, and Mrs. May all suffer from repressions that reflect the helplessness of their respective situations, but also evident in all three cases is the stress that this repressed helplessness puts on their psyches, especially when it comes to the interactions among the ego, the id, and the superego. Simply put, the id represents the instinctual and primitive forces that are checked and balanced by the superego, the part that is in essence our moral standards and expectations. The ego is what we would call the "self" that is presented to the external world and that is shaped by the struggle between the id and the superego. In "The Ego and the Id," Freud explains just how wrought with tension the psyche becomes when the forces of the id (where the repressions are most at work) and the superego that is shaped by external social influences begin to work on the ego:

> Helpless in both directions, the ego defends itself vainly, alike against the instigations of the murderous id and against the reproaches of the punishing conscience . . . the first outcome is interminable self-torment, and eventually there follows a systematic torturing of the object, in so far as it is within reach. (655)

In the cases of these characters, the repressed material that strengthens the urges of the id is threatened by the presence of the object, the objects onto which they project the undesirable aspects of their personality, their "others":

> In projective identification, another person serves as a container into which unacceptable parts of oneself are unconsciously placed . . . . The other is unconsciously or consciously manipulated to fit the projection placed into them. The projector can then identify with the unacceptable aspects that the other is expressing, without taking conscious responsibility for them. (Slipp 48)

But these "others" are not only receptacles for the characters' aggression, they are also the embodiments of the "punishing conscience" that begins to destroy reality as the characters see it. As the pressure from the "other" builds, the repressed material in the unconscious begins to fight to come to the forefront, and as Freud explains, "anything arising from within (apart from feelings) that seeks to become conscious must try to transform itself into external perceptions . . ." ("The Ego and the Id" 632). By offering life-altering visions (illusions) at the conclusions of the three stories, O'Connor shows how unconscious material comes to the forefront and how the characters are taken over by the ultimate superego – God.

The first example of what has been discussed is evident in the protagonist of "Everything that Rises Must Converge" – Julian. By the end of the story, Julian comes face to face with the ultimate superego – God. But why is it that it takes the loss of his mother to make him confront his guilt and see his wrongdoing? Gordon Kaufman describes God like a "protective and caring parent who is always reliable and always available to its children when they are in need" (qtd. in Miner 3). Interestingly, careful

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The first example of what has been discussed is evident in the protagonist of "Everything that Rises Must Converge" – Julian. By the end of the story, Julian comes face to face with the ultimate superego – God. But why is it that it takes the loss of his mother to make him confront his guilt and see his wrongdoing? Gordon Kaufman describes God like a "protective and caring parent who is always reliable and always available to its children when they are in need" (qtd. in Miner 3). Interestingly, careful

consideration of Julian's mother's treatment of him, shows that she matches this description quite well. But Miner follows Kaufman's definition with her own important dilemma – that "secure attachment to a caregiver is associated with secure attachment to God . . . it does not address consequences for a person with insecure attachment to a caregiver" (9). She follows with the key question, which is clearly applicable to Julian: ". . . can this person ever find security of attachment to God?" (Miner 9). One would argue that for Julian, that answer is no. He can only find that attachment by being forced to leave behind his insecure attachment to his mother.

An insecure attachment between mother and son, Freud might argue, comes mostly from issues of the Oedipal complex that arise between the two and the repressions that are created from the complex. From the beginning of the story, the reader is privy to the resentment that Julian feels for his mother. The causes of this resentment will be explored later, but a look at how Julian characterizes his mother underscores the flawed relationship between the two:

> . . . and because the reducing class was one of her few pleasures, necessary for her health, and *free*, she said Julian could at least pull himself out to take her, considering all she did for him. Julian did not like to consider all she did for him, but every Wednesday night he braced himself and took her. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 271)

What follows briefly thereafter is even more telling of how bound to her and to his situation Julian feels: ". . . while he, his hands behind him, appeared pinned to the door frame, waiting like Saint Sebastian for the arrows to begin piercing him" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 271). Thus reality is different in his conscious world, in his ego. In

his conscious mind, he is just a martyr, born to pay for the sins of his mother. There is a reason for this, and the reason is a defense mechanism in a way. When he compares himself to Saint Sebastian, it "concretizes [his] need to identify with the notion of sacrifice and martyrdom . . . [and] justif[ies] his weakness; it serves as an excuse for not carving out his future" (Knapp 90). Martyrdom obscures the truth – that he is ineffective as a son, as a man, and as an individual. The fact that he sees himself as such also shows, however, a hope for a rebirth and for recognition. But rebirth and recognition cannot happen as long as he remains trapped in the defenses of the ego and as long as he continues to think that "he would have stood his lot a lot better if she had been selfish . . . as if in the midst of his martyrdom he had lost his faith" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 271). In the relationship between mother and son, then, it is clear that there is some deeply-seated anger, and this anger can be understood through the Oedipal complex as explained by Freud.

Although male children are, simply put, "in love" with their mothers as objects of desire in infancy, in order to be a boy, a male must move away from his mother and relate more to the father. To do that, he must start to break free from her influence and her grip:

> The boy needs to deny aspects of himself considered as feminine, in order to differentiate and protect himself from engulfment by the all-powerful preoedipal mother . . . Those aspects of himself that are unacceptable to his masculine identity are repressed and projected onto women. These include feelings of dependency, helplessness, and emotionality. (Slipp 48)

Yet Julian has not been able to differentiate and separate himself from his mother. He has projected these feelings onto her, when it is clear that it is he who feels dependent,

helpless, and emotional. And by projecting, he is committing one of the biggest crimes in the fictional land of O'Connor . . . he is stunting his self-awareness and by extension, his ability to communicate with the realm of what she sees as "real" – the divine. Julian reflects a powerlessness that maims his manhood, and O'Connor manages to show just how attached to the womb Julian is. In order to compensate for that unnatural feeling of attachment, he makes himself a martyr that lives only to please his irritating mother. The mansion that Julian's mother uses as a reminder of a more prosperous past is one important symbol in that it enables his resentment towards his mother:

> [The d]ecayed mansion . . . . remained in his mind and his mother had known it. It appeared in his dreams regularly. He would stand on the wide porch, listening to the rustle of oak leaves, then wander through the high-ceilinged hall into the parlor that opened onto it and gaze at the worn rugs and faded draperies. It occurred to him that it was he, not she, who could have appreciated it. He preferred its threadbare elegance to anything he could name and it was because of it that all the neighborhoods they had lived in had been a torment to him – whereas she had had hardly known the difference." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 274)

Julian's powerlessness is evident in the quotes already mentioned, but it is further seen in his alienation from his mother:

> This was the kind of mental bubble in which he established himself when he could not bear to be a part of what was going on around him. From it he could see out and judge it but in it he was safe from any kind of penetration from

without . . . His mother had never entered it but from it he could see her with absolute clarity. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 276)

In theory, Julian's strategy might be effective, but the problem is that he does not realize the utter ignorance of his own statement. His "mental bubble" might be safe from his mother, but all other aspects of his life and psyche are totally dominated by her. Julian realizes that as much as he wishes to be free of his mother, he cannot be, for he is too symbolically castrated by her noble intentions – her sending him to college; her supporting him while he waits for a future that he himself admits will never come; her sacrificing her own oral health to get his teeth straightened (Three by Flannery O'Connor 277). Julian's acknowledgment of all these gifts given to him by his mother should create in him what Freud explains in "Observations on Transference Love" as a search for "power and independence" (393) brought about by the child's realization that he "owes his life to his parents, or that his mother gave him life . . ." (393). Julian's mother has given him life and sustenance and an affection that he refuses to requite, and the love is unrequited because he hates her for stripping him of any power to do anything for and by himself and that he perceives in her, instead of a genuine maternal affection, a selfish need to own him and control him: "He could not forgive her that she enjoyed the struggle [for his sake] and that she thought *she* had won" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 277). And yet, as resentful as Julian is that his mother strips him of his own ability to sustain himself, he blames her for his lot in life, a fact that only shows his ignorance when it comes to self-reflection. Julian defines her world as one in which "the law . . . was to sacrifice herself for him after she first created the necessity to do so by making a mess of things," and "[i]f he had permitted these sacrifices, it was only because her lack of

foresight had made them necessary" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 276-7). Setting aside his blatant attempt to rationalize his life and how it has turned out, what O'Connor would likely care to emphasize is his complete lack of self-awareness, which Freud would argue is caused by the repression of certain conscious realizations and an ego unable to cope with reality.

The ego is the seat of tension which strives to maintain balance between the demands of the id and the superego, and it is the ego, in fact, that is threatened for Julian. In his discussion on the ego, Freud explains just how the psyche might turn away disturbing truths from the conscious mind, as it clearly does for Julian:

> The hysterical ego fends off a distressing perception with which the criticism of its superego threatens it, in the same way in which it is in the habit of fending off an unendurable [energy] by an act of repression. It is the ego, therefore, that is responsible for the sense of guilt remaining unconscious. ("The Ego and the Id" 653)

Julian perhaps should feel guilty that his mother does it all for him and that he cannot even stomach taking her to her gym class (and certainly he will feel guilty later on in the story for other reasons), but instead, his inept ego turns her into the "other" that threatens to destroy him, and as a consequence, he tries to detach himself from her. In "An Outline of Psychoanalysis," Freud argues that leftover fixation results in an "excessive dependence" (qtd in Lerman 79) and that although he "no longer ventures to love his mother . . . he cannot risk not being loved by her . . . (qtd in Lerman 79). Of course, he does not realize this paradox, and this fact becomes repressed in Julian. Freud further explains how the ego in defense mode wards off all the truths that would render one

powerless. What Julian represses gets channeled into guilt for not doing more for himself and for admonishing his mother for his own shortcomings. The problem is that he does not see this guilt because it is hidden in the realm of the unconscious. It is so deeply hidden, that his ego seems to overcompensate by glorifying himself with delusions:

> The further irony of all this was that in spite of her, he had turned out so well. In spite of only going to a third-rate college, he had, on his own initiative, come out with a first-rate education; in spite of growing up dominated by a small mind, he had ended up with a large one; in spite of all her foolish views, he was free of prejudice and unafraid to face facts. Most miraculous of all, instead of being blinded by love for her as she was for him, he had cut himself emotionally free of her and could see with complete objectivity. He was not dominated by his mother. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 277)

Clearly ridden with irony from the perspective of the audience, this example further reveals how repressed his guilt and his unpleasant perceptions really are.

However, as buried as repressed material might be, it would be erroneous to argue that the repressed material does not work upon the psyche. For Julian, the repressed material is working quite actively, and mostly to punish his castrating mother, the one he sees as a small-minded, prejudiced, silly woman. When the Negro woman knocks his mother down for offering the child money, Julian snaps: "That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies . . . He thought bitterly of the house that had been lost for him" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 284). The condescending pennies he so resents are really the ones his mother has been providing for him, and his pleasure in her pain reflects that built-up anger at his dependence on her.

"[H]e has sought with his liberal utopianism to destroy his mother's racist, traditional world of that dying pre-civil-rights South which she clings to" (Spivey 148), but in reality, he is punishing himself for taking her "condescending pennies." Julian appears to think that all his fantasies of punishment are coming true; that this mother who has stunted his development is going to pay for holding him back and for reminding him of his inadequacy as an individual. What he fails to realize is that it is not his mother who deserves the punishment, rather the figure he only projects onto her. By constantly attempting to detach himself from her and her influence, what he is really doing is admonishing himself for allowing her to take control of his fate. All his repressed anger and powerlessness, despite his attempts to deny them and rationalize them, rise to the surface to ultimately punish him.

That same punishment that stems from repressed energy and that turns on its own ego is precisely the means through which Julian comes face to face with his reality and with the superego he has been renouncing. Freud describes God as mankind's ultimate superego, and it is the ultimate superego that intervenes and comes to teach Julian a lesson in the end. Freud argues:

> [People] will have to admit to [themselves] the full extent of their helplessness and their insignificance in the machinery of the universe; they can no longer be the centre of creation, no longer the object of tender care on the part of a beneficent Providence. They will be in the same position as a child who has left the parental house where he was so warm and comfortable. ("The Future of an Illusion" 717)

That same helplessness Julian has repressed, all the while being the center of his mother's universe, is now at the forefront, helping him see that he has been blind to his own part in the tension between him and his mother and that he has been overly cruel in his repudiation of her. The benevolent power that has sheltered him (his mother) is gone, as is that Providence. In its place is the ultimate superego – the hand of God – which has shattered his illusions and yanked him from the security of the mother he so takes for granted. As his mother is dying and leaving this world, Julian is faced with the ultimate dilemma, and his powerlessness is multiplied, like the child of the Oedipal stage:

> . . . he is afraid to break loose, for everything ahead seems dark and unknown. The mother was life; to break with her means death. And so he stands poised on the brink of being and non-being. It is at this point that he needs a savior, someone who will come and lead him across the passage, across the chasm of darkness. (Cousins 53-4)

But in typical O'Connor fashion, it is too late. It is now time for his mother to cease to be his "other" onto whom he projects his faults and for him to come face to face with the ultimate "other," the one who will require that he come face to face with his reality: ". . . he can, through the willing acceptance of purgatorial suffering, begin to ascend with all other pilgrims moving toward a convergence with the love of God, the love that binds individuals to each other" (Spivey 148). In "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes," Freud explains that repressed material comes to the fore in a way that would justify the shocking nature of O'Connor's conclusions: ". . . a storm of emotion in him forces him to believe in the reality of the threat which he has hitherto laughed at" (673-4). Julian scornfully mocks

his mother, takes pleasure in her discomfort and humiliation, all the while hating her for her help and denying that she had anything to do with how he turned out. All his adolescent notions get shattered at the moment of her death when her "fiercely distorted" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 284) face serves as the final reminder of her departure from his life:

> . . . when death finally comes to Julian's mother, the young man is cast out of his ordered Cartesian world of a masculine, overly intellectualized liberalism and discovers first the love that flows from his true self and then next discovers, in the concluding words of the story, "his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow." (Spivey 148)

The dreadful realization of the loss of his mother and the loss of his ignorance, the latter maintained up until this point by the repression of his Oedipal issues, at last thrusts him into the O'Connor world of the divine realm, the only place where her protagonists can finally find themselves and commune with the ultimate superego – God. As a result, Julian finds himself suspended in a moment with a powerful force he can neither vanquish nor rationalize away, and in this way, he is reminded that he is not who he thinks he is and that all his petty, self-created sacrifices are mere fabrications to help him cope with his own dissatisfaction. His failure to cease seeing his mother as his "other" calls forth the supreme one who "emphasizes the human tendency toward interdependence and the idea that the inability to recognize sameness and thus 'converge' or 'love,' results in destructiveness" (Paulson 84).

The destructiveness that results from the inability to see the truth is not only evident in "Everything that Rises Must Converge," but also in "Greenleaf." With Mrs.

May, repression of certain truths is also at play, but the dynamics between her and the characters in the story are more complex. One can see Mrs. May's delusions of grandeur through her delusions of malehood. Like Julian, these false notions of self lead to a sense of security that is projected onto "others." But although they both project their respective counterparts onto innocent victims, for Mrs. May, the tension inside is even stronger, as she struggles to survive in a man's world without the help of a man. Her issues are evident not only in her relationship with her sons, but also in her attitudes towards the Greenleafs and in the ignorance about herself and her place in the world that causes her behavior throughout the story and that ultimately brings her face to face, like Julian, with the ultimate superego.

One of the most obvious ways in which Freud's theories come to light in Mrs. May's life is through her relationship with her apathetic and borderline useless sons, but if her sons are so, it is due to the mother-son relationship. She herself acknowledges that "the only thing [the sons] had in common was that neither of them cared what happened to the place" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 289). At some point, the line gets crossed, and the feeling goes from apathy to disdain. "I wouldn't milk a cow to save your soul from hell" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 294), says Wesley, one of the boys. Her other son Scofield claims: ". . . neither you nor me is her boy . . ." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 300). All of the following are just small examples of the clear, emotional rent between the mother and her boys, but the text does not corroborate any readily apparent reason for them to feel this way about their mother. It is because of the subconscious factors at work between the boys and Mrs. May that one truly understands the resentment they feel.

Of all Freudian concepts, castration is the one most at work in the relationship between the woman and her callous sons. Freud believes that when a mother becomes too authoritarian over her boys, he perceives a threat, a threat that means the loss of the powerful tool he possesses – his penis: ". . . persistent rage toward the mother is carried from childhood into adulthood [because of] her continued dominance later on. The post-oedipal mother may be intrusive, exert excessive control, be overly protective, or interfere with separation and the establishment of the child's autonomy" (Slipp 35).

There is no doubt that Mrs. May is this post-oedipal mother described above. Unlike Julian's mother, whose smothering ways seem to stem from noble intentions and from her desires for his success, Mrs. May has clearly not been able to yield any control of her sons, even at this stage in their lives. She reminds her sons of their dependence on her as a means to validate herself. For instance, she demands of Scofield, the intellectual who is constantly making plans and who "talked about Paris and Rome but . . . never even went to Atlanta" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 293), "Who in Paris is going to see that you get a salt-free diet? And do you think if you married one of those odd numbers you take out that *she* would cook a salt-free diet for you? No indeed, she would not!" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 293). She continues to insult their sense of independence: "Do you see that if I hadn't kept my foot on [Mr. Greenleaf's] neck all these years, you boys might be milking cows every morning at four o'clock?" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 294). But what Mrs. May does not realize is that the fact that they were never held responsible for anything and the fact that she constantly reminds them of how much they need her, whether true or not, do not deepen their gratitude for her; they only make her more vile in their eyes.

Specifically how vile she becomes rests upon the sense of worthlessness that ensues when a boy is figuratively castrated by his mother. Under normal circumstances, "the superego, usually at around the age of five – the end of the oedipal stage of development – begins to take over the function of authority hitherto carried out by one's parents" (Bingaman 17-8). However, Mrs. May has not allowed their own superegos to take over and to allow them to construct their own moral frameworks and build their own lives. In doing so, she has robbed them of the precious autonomy obtained by boys after the Oedipal stage. When she tells the boys all the things she has hitherto told them and then adds, "When I die . . . I don't know what's going to become of you" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 295), she is symbolically pressing on them the "iron hand" of which she is so proud and not allowing them room to be: ". . . a threat is pronounced that this part of him which he values so highly will be taken away from him. Usually it is from women that the threat emanates; very often they seek to strengthen their authority by a reference to the father . . ." ("Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" 662). But there is no father for these boys to turn to, and so they are in a bind when it comes to finding someone with whom to identify who is not their castrating mother; this only serves to worsen the tense relationship.

The boys seem to be aware of this. In other words, the knowledge of their castration is repressed in her, but clearly not so in them. It is clear that they feel totally handicapped by her presence and her constant reminders of how necessary she is to their survival. Wesley would not even milk a cow to save her and wonders how he turned out to be such a "nice boy" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 300) despite having a mother like his, and Scofield knows exactly where she feels vulnerable: "Why Mamma, I'm not

going to marry until you're dead and gone and them I'm going to marry me some nice fat farm girl that can take over this place . . . some nice lady like Mrs. Greenleaf" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 289). He, being the intellectual and seemingly non-spiritual son, even asks her, "Well, why don't you do something practical, woman? Why don't you pray for me like Mrs. Greenleaf would?" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 294). The mere mention of Mrs. Greenleaf is insult enough and will be discussed further, but it is clear that her son criticizes her methods of "helping" them. Instead of just wishing them the best (praying) and allowing them to be what and who they want to be (when they hypothetically marry the "fat farm girl[s]"), she continues to impose herself and her opinions on them.

Clearly, the admonitions by her sons and their utter dismissal of her opinions and desires upset Mrs. May's ego as a mother. Her frustration is palpable in the text: ". . . she wanted to jump and beat her hand on the table and shout, 'You'll find out one of these days, you'll find out what *Reality* is when it's too late!'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 294). But no matter how frustrated she gets, she cannot break with them. Not only can she not stop meddling in their lives, she cannot bring herself to properly punish the boys. Her "iron hand" is useless, and its worst enemy is herself. She threatens and screams and admonishes, but she never does:

> "I work and I slave, I struggle and sweat to keep this place for them and soon as I'm dead, they'll marry trash and bring it in here and ruin everything. They'll marry trash and ruin everything I've done," and she had made up her mind at the moment to change her will. The next day she had gone to her lawyer and had had

the property entailed so that if they married, they could not leave it to their wives. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 289-90)

In the above example, it is not the boys she seeks to punish; it is some hypothetical women that do not even exist and that threaten to take her place in the boys' lives. In other words, she is not taking her anger out on her sons; she is taking it out on the idea that perhaps some other woman will be the authority figure in her house over her sons. The idea touches a nerve and reminds her that really, her power is not that great. More importantly, it reminds her, albeit subconsciously, that she does not have control over or the respect of her sons, who are failures. Her realizations, which she suppresses, are made even more painful when the Greenleafs enter the picture.

The Greenleafs serve as the "others" onto whom Mrs. May projects all the anger and frustration over her sons. By thinking of the Greenleaf boys, she sees everything her boys do not have and are not. The Greenleaf boys married "nice girls," were "some kind of sergeants," both "managed to get wounded" and now "had pensions," and "had a piece of land that the government had helped them to buy in a brick duplex bungalow that the government had helped to build and pay for" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 292). Besides the obvious envy one can see, it must be irritating for Mrs. May to know that all of this happened under the parentage of Mr. and Mrs. Greenleaf, whom she regards as useless trash, and with the help of the government. Here she is, working and slaving on her own for her sons, and what has come of it? The clear distinction between her sons and the Greenleaf boys reminds her of her own failures as a mother, but instead of confronting the fact and the truth about her boys, she takes the anger out on the Greenleaf family. To further aggravate the issue is the presence of Mrs. Greenleaf – a mother who

has apparently succeeded, despite all the evidence Mrs. May feels should have worked to the contrary. When she witnesses Mrs. May in her prayer rituals, she disdainfully remarks, "Jesus . . . would be *ashamed* of you. He would tell you to get up from there this instant and go wash your children's clothes . . ." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 291). Besides the delusions of grandeur, pretending to know what Jesus would want, one can see just how blinded by envy and frustration Mrs. May is. She cannot comprehend that a woman like that has raised two independent, relatively successful boys while she has raised two logs: "Whenever she thought of how the Greenleaf boys had advanced in the world, she had only to think of Mrs. Greenleaf sprawled obscenely on the ground, and say to herself, 'Well, no matter how far they *go*, they *came* from that'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 291). In a futile attempt to console her fragile and shattered maternal ego, she turns Mrs. Greenleaf into an "other" onto which she can project her own shortcomings.

However, the more significant "other" of the family, and the one with which she ultimately engages in a power struggle is Mr. Greenleaf. When she thinks about Mr. Greenleaf, her farm hand, she immediately begins to rationalize why she will not get rid of him even though she thinks he is totally incompetent: "She had not fired him because she had always doubted she could do better. He was too shiftless to go out and look for another job; he didn't have the initiative to steal, and after she had told him three or four times to do a thing, he did it . . . (Three by Flannery O'Connor 287). She must realize at some level that without Mr. Greenleaf, she would be on her own. Her two sons would certainly not help her, and Mr. Greenleaf frequently reminds her of this: "If hit was my boys they would never have allowed their maw to go after hired help in the middle of the

night. They would have did it their self" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 287). What ensues is a power struggle between a powerless mom and a seemingly inept father who has obviously done something right, seeing as his two boys have lives of their own. Mrs. May is in essence envious of Mr. Greenleaf's sons and his relationship to them.

Exactly how Mr. Greenleaf and the boys' bull becomes a part of this power struggle has to do with what both the man and the bull represent in Mrs. May's domain. She may see Mr. Greenleaf as "shiftless" and lazy, and the bull may seem (to the reader) just a nuisance that gnaws at her, but they are much more than that: "Mr. Greenleaf appears to represent male potency: his phallic nature is emphasized in the figure of his son's bull, which he allows to run loose in Mrs. May's herd – his way of asserting his power over his female employer and of establishing his own territory" (Assals 40). The bull itself also stakes out Mrs. May's territory, and his intrusion on her land (and even in her dreams) "suggests myth (violence to women, for example, the rape of Europa) as well as the conflict between male and female forces, the spiritual and the bestial" (Assals 42). The rape here of her land is what truly upsets the woman, but this mere fact already shows how she has abandoned the woman and allowed the male counterpart in her to take over, which leads her, throughout the story, to be obsessed with measuring her success as a mother, a landowner, and a person by her land and the success of her sons. Besides contributing to her blindness and to a persona that is laughable by the real males in the story, the "pursuit of material territory and the inability to transcend self indicate primitive natures . . . regressive and profane . . . [and coincide] with what one expects of the narcissistic self" (Assals 42).

So it is not just the boys whom she figuratively castrates; she also tries to render Mr. Greenleaf impotent by wanting to desperately get rid of the bull and by extension castrating it of its power too. It is nothing short of infuriating to Mrs. May that this bull that belongs to the Greenleaf boys who belong to the useless Mr. Greenleaf is now running around staking its territory on her territory. Allowing the bull to run loose is Mr. Greenleaf's way, perhaps, of asserting the malehood she constantly tries to strip him of with her constant nagging, but why the bull running loose is so bothersome to Mrs. May reflects the power she is trying to assert through her "territorial claims, possessiveness, and competitiveness" (Assals 42). She cannot bear to relinquish any control to this man whose sons have tormented her with their success and whose wife has reminded her of how vain her attempts as a mother have been. As a result, a more tense struggle ensues as the story progresses and the threat and indestructibility of the bull becomes more palpable. As the story begins, the bull is described as follows: ". . . silvered in moonlight . . . his head raised as if he listened – like some patient God come down to woo her – for a stir inside the room" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 286). From the start, the bull is clearly a potent symbol of masculinity, reminding the woman not only of her lack thereof, but also of the fact that she is a vulnerable woman, vulnerable to the power of the beast that has invaded her. Furthermore, O'Connor depicts this "god" as having a "wreath [that] slipped down to the base of his horns where it looked like a menacing prickly crown" (287). Mrs. May's only response, as he lifts his "crowned head" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 286) is "Get away from here, Sir!" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 286), a clear sign of submission. It is therefore not surprising that she would want so desperately to render the beast powerless over her, even though she is clearly dominated

by its presence, a presence that reinforces her repressions and strengthens her male persona while weakening her true self.

Mrs. May's refusal to lose the battle with the Greenleafs and the bull, her "others," is worsened by all that she represses. Because she is not conscious of these repressions, she acts out in a fruitless attempt to bully and belittle Mr. Greenleaf: "If I recall, they wore my boys' old clothes and played with my boys' old toys and hunted with my boys' old guns. They swam in my pond and shot my birds and fished in my stream . . ." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 301). In other words, his boys did all the "boy" things they did thanks to her and her sons, her way of claiming her place in their success and simultaneously allowing her sons to have some part in something constructive. By trying to re-construct the Greenleaf story via arguing that without her and her boys they would have and be nothing, she does much the same thing she does earlier to her boys – she tries to instill some gratitude into Mr. Greenleaf while ironically emasculating him and exacerbating the problem.

The reason why she continues to attempt to emasculate the men in her life, however, becomes the question, and just as their symbolic castration can be used to explain why the men act the way they do, penis envy might explain why Mrs. May attempts to subjugate the males in the story. In "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," Freud briefly defines the phenomenon:

> The little girl's clitoris behaves just like a penis to begin with; but, when she makes a comparison with a playfellow of the other sex, she perceives that she has "come off badly" and she feels this is a wrong done to her on the ground of her inferiority. For a while still she consoles herself with the expectation that later on,

> when she grows older, she will acquire just as big an appendage as the boy's. Here the masculinity complex of women branches off. (665)

He continues to assert that "a girl may refuse to accept the fact of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she *does* possess a penis, and may subsequently be compelled to behave as though she were a man" ("Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" 674). Clearly, this is the case with Mrs. May, and the fact that she is not a little girl is not significant since Freud would argue that "the hope of some day obtaining a penis in spite of everything and so becoming like a man may persist to an incredibly late age . . ." ("Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" 674).

Mrs. May, in essence, hangs on to the hope of this metaphorical penis, which causes her repressed knowledge to come to the surface through her attempts to enfeeble Mr. Greenleaf, his boys, and her sons. The truth she represses is what makes her want to rule with an "iron hand" and her insistence on maintaining authority in such a way is what makes her so unpalatable as a female to the men in the story. In turn, she becomes defensive and attempts to explain her actions away:

> Her city friends said she was the most remarkable woman they knew, to go, practically penniless and with no experience, out to a rundown farm and make a success of it. "Everything is against you," she would say, "the weather is against you and the dirt is against you and the help is against you. They're all in league against you. There's nothing for it but an iron hand!" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 295)

Mrs. May perceives that the world is against her, but instead of accepting how others see her and adjusting to it, she insists on fighting the "natural" order as delineated by Freud – one in which "masculinity goes hand in hand with independence and separation, whereas femininity goes hand in hand with attachment and relationality" (Bingaman 111). Mrs. May wants independence, and instead of relationality with the people in the story, she wants to overpower them and to become, in essence, the superego to all. She even tells Mr. Greenleaf that if she has to pull the trigger *for* him, he will shoot the bull, thus forcing Mr. Greenleaf to kill the external embodiment of his own sons' manhood (if we accept the bull as a symbol for masculinity) and further emasculating him.

But Mrs. May is herself emasculated, in turn, by the men in the story, and ultimately, by O'Connor's form of divine intervention. Scofield mocks her: "'Look at Mamma's iron hand!' Scofield would yell and grab her arm and hold it up so that her delicate blue-veined little hand would dangle from her wrist like the head of a broken lily. The company always laughed" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 295). Her emasculated son mocks her delusions of manhood, and when she tells Mr. Greenleaf that the boys "didn't come because she was a woman" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 301-2), Mr. Greenleaf retorts, "You got two boys. They know you got two men on this place" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 301-2). By reminding her that there are two men who will not do anything for her, Mr. Greenleaf holds the mirror up to her image, one that reflects a failed mother. In either case, the power she so strives for is stripped. She attempts to project onto her "others," but her "others" only seem to mock her and reflect right back at her, a fact that just heightens the anger for Mrs. May who "explode[s] with rage at the very idea

of being female and restricted," and "emphasize[s her] ugliness in a negative assertion of power" (Katz 64).

The ultimate "other" that strips her at the end though is the divine "other," the one who should truly be the superego and whom she attempts to supplant. In fact, when it comes to O'Connor, "in most of [her] stories the mother's pride is ultimately smashed by a vindictive male voice . . ." (Assals 196). Freud himself saw god as nothing more than "an exalted father" ("Totem and Taboo" 504). It is the bull that presents this voice, and "the bull's horns serve . . . as a forceps in her spiritual birth, 'pulling her forward on his head, so that she seemed . . . to be bent over whispering some last discovery into the animal's ear.' The 'last discovery,' both the final and ultimate one, is the discovery of life and the secret connection . . ." (Kehl). The idea of the "uncouth country suitor" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 287) and the rape comes back into play to remind Mrs. May of her sex, and this realization leads her to confront the truth – that she is not a man; that she does not have the power of a man. Her ego then is destroyed, and ". . . she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 306). The painful vision and recognition that O'Connor utilizes to thrust her characters into the realm of the divine is what allows Mrs. May to finally find her place as the woman and the mother she has not been able to be. Again recalling the myth of Europa, the god has pierced her with the knowledge she has repressed and that has now been brought to the forefront of her psyche. In fact, it is ultimately Mr. Greenleaf who shoots the bull, showing her once again that she has been encroaching in territory that might have been hers legally but not spiritually. All that she has repressed, that has acted upon her psyche to make her an unbearable woman to

everyone on "her" land is no longer in her line of vision, like the "black streak, bounding toward her" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 306) is. As is typical in O'Connor, it is this violence and this "freezing disbelief" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 306) that functions as the spiritual recognition that has been absent all throughout: ". . . in the end the underlying masochistic fantasy of submission breaks through, as when the self sufficient Mrs. May . . . is gored by a bull, a phallic god . . . this is her moment of truth . . . in which she discovers her real identity" (Katz 65). Submission breaks through, but it is she who is in the submissive position at the moment. Mrs. May has been put in her place, and it is the spiritual recognition of such that allows her to finally know the truth about herself and her deluded notions of womanhood, motherhood, and control.

Ruby Turpin in "Revelation" is another example of a woman whose flawed notions of self O'Connor violently smashes, but unlike Mrs. May, Ruby's delusions have little to do with her place in the world as a woman and more to do with her place as a person in general. As she enters the waiting room, "Her little bright black eyes took in all the patients as she sized up the seating situation" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 405). After making various judgments about who should move to accommodate her, she spots white-trash, and comes to the following conclusion: "If Jesus had said to her before he made her, 'There's only two places available for you. You can either be a nigger or white-trash,' what would she have said? 'Please, Jesus, please,' she would have said, 'just let me wait until there's another place available . . .'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 407). She then settles on being a "neat clean respectable Negro woman" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 408), as if all Negro women were otherwise. Her arrogance in her position and her worth is evident very soon in the text.

In Freudian terms, Ruby possesses the ceremonial thought pattern of the obsessive neurotic. She seems to be obsessed with classifying herself and comparing herself against others in order to validate who she is. By rationalizing who she is, Ruby is in essence reacting to the subconscious thoughts she is repressing. Ruby might argue that she "never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black trash or decent" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 408), but her language and her need to constantly remind herself of these facts belie what she perceives her true feelings are. Her rationalizations are just defense mechanisms, as Freud explains in "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices":

> When the ceremonial is first being constructed, the patient is still conscious that he must do this or that lest some ill should befall, and as a rule the nature of the ill that is to be expected is still known to [her] consciousness. But what is already hidden from [her] is the connection – which is always demonstrable – between the occasion on which this expectant anxiety arises and the danger which it conjures up. Thus a ceremonial starts as an *action for defence, a protective measure.* (433)

The explanation offered might explain why the narcissistic Ruby Turpin "sometimes . . . occupied herself at night naming the classes of people" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 408). Ruby categorizes blacks, white trash, landowners, and she even gets into subcategories of each (Three by Flannery O'Connor 408), but it is clear that as superior as she thinks she is, O'Connor's text mocks her and her kind, and this mockery is reflected in the fact that the narcissistic fat woman cannot see who she really is because she spends most of her time explaining what she thinks she is not: "He had not made her

a nigger or white-trash or ugly! He had made her herself and given her a little of everything" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 413). But the fact that the classes of people really just end up "moiling and roiling together in her head . . . crammed together in a box car" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 408) shows that subconsciously, this hierarchy she has constructed is not as solid as she thinks, nor is her position in it.

What O'Connor uses to mock Ruby is her minor "others" in the story – the white trash lady, the pigs, and Mary Grace. Through the white trash lady, we gain access into exactly what aspects of her personality Ruby tries to suppress. As she enters the waiting room and mentally denigrates the woman for the way she is dressed and for not making her dirty little boy move for Ruby's sake, Ruby immediately calls to mind her classification system, where she is above the Negros and the white trash. Soon, the white trash woman begins to interact with Ruby: "'One thang I don't want,' the white trash woman said, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. 'Hogs, nasty stinking hogs, a gruntin and a-rootin all over the place'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 410). In retrospect, the announcement of the hogs foreshadows the later encounter and the labeling of Ruby as such by Mary Grace, but even in the moment in the narrative, one can see how Ruby projects her distaste for the white trash based on a shadow that fears with all its might the possibility of being white trash too: "If Jesus had said to her before he made her . . . 'You can either be a nigger or white-trash' . . . she would have said . . . 'All right make me a nigger then – but that don't mean a trashy one'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 407-8). Her clear disdain for anything unlike her makes the white-trash woman an even stronger symbol of Ruby's shadow. Her defensive response to the woman then is, "Our hogs are not dirty and they don't stink . . . They're cleaner than

some children I've seen. Their feet never touch the ground . . ." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 410). In a statement that will become ironic for Ruby at the end of the story, the white trash woman responds, "I know I wouldn't scoot down no hog with no hose . . ." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 410). When Ruby is found later on doing just that, she will be reminded (as will the reader) that she is in no way above the trash she scorns.

The interaction with the white trash woman continues and moves from hogs to "niggers." Her next statement to Ruby occurs when a young black man comes into the doctor's office, and the woman says, "They ought to send all them niggers back to Africa," to which Ruby responds, "There's a heap of things worse than a nigger . . ." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 411). But as is the case in the scene with the pigs, when her classification system is turned on its head and she and Claude are following the white trash and the niggers, the irony of her statement is revealed. There are things worse than a "nigger" – a deluded woman who is in a constant struggle to drown all the unfavorable aspects of herself so that she can convince herself of her own greatness. Here is where Mary Grace becomes relevant. Mary Grace's mother describes her as a girl who has it all but "who just criticizes and complains all day long" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 415), which sounds very familiar to the way one might describe Ruby. The mother then adds, "'I'm afraid there is nothing to do but leave her to her folly. Some day she will wake up and it'll be too late'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 415). At this moment in the story, Mary Grace takes over as "other," and Ruby, who has already made herself susceptible to attack through the confrontation with the white-trash lady, is brought even closer to the

kind of recognition that will relieve her of her repressions and her illusions of how good and clean and respectable she is.

Through the encounter with Mary Grace, O'Connor not only reinforces Ruby's self-created, self-inflated sense of worth, but she also creates the vehicle through which the woman can begin achieving consciousness:

> It was the ugliest face Mrs. Turpin had ever seen anyone make and for a moment she was certain the girl had made it at her. She was looking at her as if she had known and disliked her all her life – all of Mrs. Turpin's life, it seemed too, not just all the girl's life. Why, girl, I don't even know you, Mrs. Turpin said silently. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 412)

Although still oblivious to her own hubris, Mrs. Turpin here is at least beginning to recognize a certain something in Mary Grace, a something that disrupts her normally intact pattern of seeing herself and those around her, and this something is beginning to threaten her schema and starting, albeit unconsciously, to bring forth a repressed knowledge to the surface: ". . . experience shows that we understand very well how to interpret in other people (that is, how to fit into their chain of mental events) the same acts which we refuse to acknowledge as being mental in ourselves" ("The Unconscious" 576). The awareness Freud speaks of is starting to increase as the encounter between the girl and the woman continues: "She leaned forward until she was looking into the fierce brilliant eyes. There was no doubt in her mind that the girl did know her, knew her in some intense personal way, beyond time and place and condition" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 416). If indeed Mary Grace is the "other" who begins to let Ruby know who

she really is, then "both in appearance and word, [Mary Grace] serves to reduce to impotence the formidable Mrs. Turpin" (Katz 64-5).

When Mary Grace utters, "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog . . ." (Three by Flannery O'Connor 416), the girl provides the shock and trauma necessary, according to Freud, to snap Ruby out of her obsessive thought patterns and beliefs, "for any deviation from the ceremonial is visited by intolerable anxiety" ("Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices" 430). Moreover, he would argue that it is precisely this wound to her worth that brings what has really been at work the whole time – a lack of true self-worth forced upon her consciousness by the traumatic event of attack: "After a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism, she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority" ("Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" 674). The scar is evident not so much in her denial of Mary Grace's words, but more so in the fact that "[t]he girl's eyes and her voice . . . brooked no repudiation. She had been singled out for the message, though there were trash in the room to whom it might be justly applied. The full force of this fact struck her only now" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 418). Ruby Turpin has been forced out of the sleep she is in, through her confrontation with her "other" (who represents all the ugliness on the outside that Ruby possesses on the inside) and through the trauma that awakens her, to see that there is a motive behind the girl's reaction to her, even if Ruby does not quite know what it is at that moment in the story.

Mary Grace's confrontation is only the beginning in terms of Ruby Turpin coming face to face with the "other." It is the ultimate "other" with whom she needs to deal once Mary Grace is out of the picture. And although Ruby is now psychically ready

to receive the message, she does not realize it. All the way home and in her conversation with the Negroes who flatter her, she refuses to lend any credence to what Mary Grace says. Instead, she decides to confront the true source of the message, the ultimate superego in Freudian terms – God. Disappointed that god had made her so great, or so she thought, but had sent her the message of being a "wart hog" through Mary Grace, she sets off on a path of displaced anger:

> Her fist was knotted and with the other she gripped the hose, blindly pointing the stream of water in and out of the eye of the old sow whose outraged squeal she did not hear . . . . "How am I a hog?" she demanded. "Exactly how am I like them?" and she jabbed the stream of water at the shoats. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 422)

As Ruby shoots water at the innocent pig and her shoats, she verbalizes her ultimate threat, and she tempts the Self to step in and answer her: "'Go on,' she yelled, 'call me a hog! Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell. Put that bottom rail on top. There'll still be a top and a bottom! . . . Who do you think you are?'" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 422-3). It is obviously not the hogs that anger her, but this force that sends her the message that she is not what and who she thinks she is. This internal conflict is what leads Ruby to get up out of bed and decide to take on the "others" onto which she thinks she can displace her anger: "She squared her massive shoulders. Then she marched into the front of the house and out the side door and started down the road to the pig parlor. She had the look of a woman going single-handed, weaponless, into battle" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 421). The description is suggestive of what is

going on in the unconscious – a helpless ego about to go to war with a force it cannot match, the losing party having to confront the ultimate "other" -- the Self.

But Ruby Turpin truly crosses the line when she not only questions the ultimate "other," she challenges it. Clearly, this would upset a staunch Catholic like O'Connor. In fact, hubris always has been a highly punishable crime in literature and mythology. The Freudian explanation as to why Turpin feels justified to ask God, "Who do you think you are?" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 423) lies in the "projection hypotheses – that our representations of God are nothing but ascribing human qualities to God" (Krell 2). Ruby thinks so highly of herself, she has erroneously projected her own qualities onto God, and by doing so, she has incited the universal superego, the one that "return[s] to her like an answer from beyond the wood" (Three by Flannery O'Connor 423) and the one who brings forth the vision that puts her in her place:

> There were whole companies of white trash . . . bands of black niggers . . . and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity . . . Yet she could see from their faces that even their virtues were being burned away. (Three by Flannery O'Connor 423)

For Ruby Turpin, as for all the others, the lesson involves dissolving delusions, and in her particular case, it is about her own grandeur as a human being. Regarding Ruby, O'Connor writes, ". . . faced with a reality that is 'deeply serious and horrifyingly

repugnant' . . . not only [is she] not superior to humanity, but in many ways, [she is] inferior to the rest of humanity or at least on the same level with it" (Simpson 48). Freud would argue that this realization can only come about if the narcissistic tendencies are shattered via the shocking awakening of knowledge that has been repressed, and "[t]he realization of impotence . . . has an exceedingly lowering effect upon self-regard" ("On Narcissism: An Introduction" 560). O'Connor's violent and sudden vision allows Turpin to literally and figuratively see her place in the world, and O'Connor is then allowed to put her in her proper place, both in text and in Ruby Turpin's own psyche. The truth reveals that she is not a good person who is above others because of her jolly disposition and her possessions and her position in society. She is just as hateful as the white trash woman, as judgmental as Mary Grace, and as nasty as the hogs, but unlike these, she is blind to it, and she projects onto them when she should really be confronting it and coming to terms with it, as she is at the end of the story: ". . . all such attempts have proved singularly ineffective and will do so as long as [she tries] to convince [herself] and the world that it is only *they* . . . who are wrong" ("Approaching the Unconscious" 73).

Thus in the Freudian sense, it is generally a lifting of repressions in the minds of the individuals we encounter in the three stories discussed that works to get these characters to see the truth from which they have been subconsciously running. Whether it is a son with a desire to break free from his mother's Oedipal grasp, a woman who wants to belong in the male world but whose attempts are counterproductive, or a self-proclaimed respectable lady of Southern society who is at the top of her own deluded

caste system, it all boils down to cracking the mechanisms which have allowed them to stay in ignorance until the end: ". . . there is no lifting of the repression until the conscious idea, after the resistance has been overcome, has entered into connection with the unconscious memory-trace. It is only through the making conscious of the latter itself that success is achieved" ("The Unconscious" 580), and they are "unpleasurable [sensations that] impel towards change, towards discharge . . ." ("The Ego and the Id" 633-4). O'Connor's sudden and violent visions are just these sensations that lift the resistance and force it to the forefront of the psyche. Furthermore, they bring them into consciousness and provide "subliminal verbalization[s]" (Davis 113) with which to understand the new onslaught of information.

It is important to note that although the visions and epiphanies are traumatic in their timing and their content, they nevertheless represent a superego (i.e. God) that is harsh, but not merciless. If it were the latter, there would be no hope for these characters to learn their lessons. Thus the lessons must be only strong enough to allow for the pain of knowledge but not for a painful end. O'Connor, additionally, would not betray her faith by blocking possible redemption, so the God she allows for in her stories is the same God that Freud, even if he sees it only as a man-made creation, believes is ultimately at work, the "benevolent Providence which is only seemingly stern and which will not suffer us to become a plaything of the overmighty and pitiless forces of nature" ("The Future of an Illusion" 12). Julian, Mrs. May, and Ruby Turpin are all victims of the delusions created by the knowledge they repress, and through their "others" and the ultimate "other," God as superego, they are frightened so that they may be re-born in truth and real self-awareness.

IV. Conclusion

Upon having examined the psychoanalytic processes responsible for bringing forth truth and by extension God in O'Connor's stories, one can conclude that these same processes can also work on the reader. After all, it is clear that in the end, O'Connor's stories are at least partially about the relationships among people and the interaction between the person and the world in which he/she lives. It would not be far-fetched to argue that by "throwing the book" at her characters, she is in essence also trying to hit us square in the face with at least the opportunity to learn from the lessons the characters must confront so that we may also (perhaps) come face to face with certain truths about ourselves and our relationships to God, however we define that term.

Carl Jung broke from Freud in some respects, but ultimately, both men had a fundamental distrust of the ego. In "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," Jung sums up what I would argue O'Connor would hope for us – a

> consciousness which is no longer imprisoned in the petty, oversensitive, personal world of the ego, but participates freely in the wider world of objective interests. This widened consciousness is no longer that touchy, egotistical bundle of personal wishes, fears, hopes, and ambitions which always has to be compensated or corrected by unconscious counter-tendencies; instead it is a function of relationship to the world of objects, bringing the individual into absolute, binding, and indissoluble communion with the world at large. (127)

What Jung describes is precisely what we observe in O'Connor's fiction – a smashing of the ego, the same ego that has fought hopelessly to obstruct the repressed knowledge that would facilitate recognition (albeit painfully).

By reading O'Connor then, we too "gaze" onto our "others," the ones we see on the page. Perhaps we cannot identify with Julian or Mrs. May or Ruby, but O'Connor would argue (as I would) that we can identify with the same self-delusions or the same denials that these characters cling to for comfort. The realizations might not be as violent or traumatic as the visions O'Connor provides for her characters are, but we are nevertheless reminded that at any moment, we too can be confronted in a shocking and agonizing manner by a moment where our delusions and illusions are shattered, and by remembering our fragility and recognizing those repressed forces that eventually cause our egos to crack under tension, we make room for a higher consciousness to communicate with us. And whether we believe in "God" or not is irrelevant. O'Connor might have had her definition of God and spirit, but there is no evidence that she was in any way closed-minded or prejudiced against anyone else's definitions of God. It is the connection to a higher level of consciousness, one that allows us to see the truth, to stop projecting blame onto "others," and to accept our part of the responsibility for creating our "selves" that I would argue matters more to the writer. If people could accomplish this, then "God" or what it represents as a symbol, is just that higher level of consciousness needed to escape the spiritual vacuum in which O'Connor thought most existed.

Michael Gillespie defines "epiphany" as an "'apparition' or 'revelation,' specifically the presence of the essence of something previously hidden" (66), and it is precisely in this way that we can begin to understand O'Connor's endings. The characters become the "others" onto which we project, upon whom we "gaze," and into which we probe to reflectively understand our own limitations, or at least the fact that we

have limitations. In so doing, we "smash" our own egos, and we are caught in a gaze between not only us and the characters, but ultimately, us and O'Connor. She then becomes the higher consciousness, as writer and creator, that replaces the higher consciousness concealed in the language but revealed through the epiphanies in the stories. The disturbing beauty of her concluding visual scenes speaks to the characters and to the readers as a higher power, but it also leaves us, like the dynamic in the tragic hero, with a fear of the truth and a hope for redemption, that is if we can accomplish what Jung argues is necessary and free ourselves from the "petty, oversensitive world of the ego." By mocking the egos of her characters, revealing to us how these characters blind themselves and make their conditions worse, and ultimately showing us that a psyche full of repressed truths will have its say, O'Connor makes the absent power of "God" present and allows us to see, as her characters do, that we are limited when we allow our own baggage to affect our communion with the world. Thus, she "throws the book" at her characters, but in essence, she throws it at us too.

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