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BUTLER, Rebecca Roxburgh, 1943-
THE MAD PREACHER IN THREE MODERN AMERICAN NOVELS: MISS LONELYHEARTS, WISE BLOOD, LIGHT IN AUGUST.

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1977
Literature, American

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THE MAD PREACHER IN THREE MODERN AMERICAN NOVELS:

MISS LONELYHEARTS, WISE BLOOD, LIGHT IN AUGUST

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and Agriculture
and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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B.A., Southeastern Louisiana College, 1965
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1966
August, 1977
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

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Title of Thesis: THE MAD PREACHER IN THREE MODERN AMERICAN NOVELS: MISS LONELYHEARTS, WISE BLOOD, LIGHT IN AUGUST

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Date of Examination:

June 30, 1977
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people shared their experience, enthusiasm and books with me during the writing of these chapters that there is not space to list them all. Those to whom I owe an especially happy debt include Michael Dunne, Ava Haymon, Sue Jensen, David Lange, David Madden and Walker Percy.

I am grateful to Gerald Becham, Curator of the Flannery O'Connor Collection at Georgia College, Milledgeville, for his generous assistance with my work there.

To Professor Donald E. Stanford for his long-term advice and encouragement; to Professor Panthea Reid Broughton, first for her beautifully balanced book, William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual, also for her painstaking reading and acute analysis; to Professor Darwin Shrell for his unfailing receptivity and fruitful suggestions; to Professors Lawrence Sasek and John Wildman for their timely and thoughtful participation; I want to express my lasting appreciation.

Loving recognition goes to my husband, Gary, and my daughter, Allison, who contributed more than they know to this effort.
ABSTRACT

A review of the critical evaluations of Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes, and Gail Hightower reveals two opposing camps, one urging a view of the characters as spiritually transcendent, the other documenting their mental derangement. A more integrated view comes into focus when these men are studied as typical melancholics whose preference for symbolic over actual reality invites a merger of the psychological and the religious elements of their characterizations. This merger of seemingly incompatible kinds of knowledge is readily traced in the language of each novel, which begins by establishing an either-or dichotomy, then reverses the values of the opposing terms, and ends by uniting them. This union, in keeping with the melancholic assumptions of the mad preacher, is a grotesque one which furthers, instead of resolving, the ambiguities inherent in the conflict felt to exist between the natural and the supernatural. Each man lives in an unsatisfactory present which he attempts to revitalize by way of models from the past -- family, religious, aesthetic-- which only confirm his defeat. The confusion of the mad preacher is deliberately and carefully maintained, and is not intended to be resolved.
INTRODUCTION

In the early 1930's, both William Faulkner and Nathanael West found the character of the preacher a congenial metaphor for the depiction of the outsider, a figure who claims to, or wants to, see beyond ordinary reality, a figure inviting both sympathetic and ironic reception. Twenty years later Flannery O'Connor, following appreciative readings of Faulkner and West, created her own version of this antagonistic preacher whose insistence on telling what he sees repeatedly serves to alienate him from his community. Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower are characters who embody the conflict between religious ideals and scientific rationalism that has contributed to the widespread sense of cultural disorder, personal disorientation, and the loss of traditional value systems as it has been experienced in twentieth-century America. Their stories dramatize an effort to reconcile old visions with new: each possesses an American Protestant heritage which he attempts to adjust to a world he perceives as lacking spiritual insight, lacking even a serious interest in "truth." It is in their efforts to chart a new course of action that the question of their sanity arises. At the same time that their moral struggles are being presented in a sober, authoritative voice, an undertone insists that these
preachers' religious convictions are actually personal obsessions, nothing more than pathological symptoms of their disintegrating minds.

For most purposes, the religious and the psychological modes are mutually exclusive. Nothing very fruitful comes of explaining away religious conviction as wish fulfillment or obsessive guilt. A psychologist will not explain behavior in terms of original sin or the action of grace. And yet the imagination is drawn to the parallels and overlapping concerns of the two realms. For a writer, the combination is eminently suitable for the exploration of the ambiguous and ambivalent nature of the introspective man faced with a society in disruption, a culture undergoing a reorientation in values. When religion is increasingly assigned the value of an "illusion" and the scientific, the rational, the logical encompass all usable truth, the preacher becomes a man without a function. Worse, he becomes a fool or a charlatan. It is in this stance that West, O'Connor, and Faulkner have positioned their modern preachers, adversaries without enemies, whose battlegrounds are their own imaginations. For Miss Lonelyhearts the grotesque merger of the religious and the psychological finds expression in his "Christ complex," for Hazel Motes in his "Church Without Christ," and for Gail Hightower in his living "ghosts."
CHAPTER 1. SPLENDID DISCORD: A CHARACTER TYPE

Since it is the business of the reader to extract the meanings useful to him and ignore the meanings he thinks foolish, it is evident that contradiction is a powerful literary weapon.

William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity

I

The powerful combination of the religious and the psychologically abnormal that characterizes Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes, and Gail Hightower has attracted repeated critical attention and led most critics to attempt to place these characters in one of two categories, to interpret their struggles as essentially spiritual or to demonstrate the pathological nature of their behavior and respective ends.

Marcus Smith summed up the state of Miss Lonelyhearts criticism in 1968: "The main critical issue concerning Miss Lonelyhearts is whether the title character and protagonist is a tragic saint or a psychotic fool."\(^1\) In 1973 he returned to this issue to find it much the same:

\(^1\) "Religious Experience in Miss Lonelyhearts," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 9, No. 2 (Spring 1973), 177.
"Criticism of Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts seems stymied by the question of whether his protagonist, Miss Lonelyhearts, is sympathetically presented as a viable modern priest or saint, or whether he is merely a demented fool and meant to be regarded ironically."\(^2\)

In the first extensive study of West's work, James Light introduced the saintly interpretation, calling Miss Lonelyhearts a "Christ-like man who perceives that love and faith are the only answers to man's pain in a universe he cannot understand."\(^3\) Soon afterward Stanley Edgar Hyman argued that Miss Lonelyhearts "has a true religious vocation or calling, but no institutional church to embody it," and that he is "clearly the prophet in the reluctance stage."\(^4\) The relationship between "Miss Lonelyhearts' religious or mystical experiences and those of saints" was detailed by Thomas M. Lorch, who concluded that the protagonist's "religion and asceticism develop with slow assurance throughout the novel" as Miss Lonelyhearts prepares himself "according to the rules of Christian mysticism for the climactic mystical experience which forms


\(^3\) Nathanael West: An Interpretive Study (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 86-87.

\(^4\) Nathanael West UMPAW, No. 21 (Minneapolis: Univ of Minn. Press, 1962), pp. 16-17.
part of the novel's conclusion." The readings that found Miss Lonelyhearts "demented" began as early as the 1956 article by Arthur Cohen, "The Possibilities of Belief: Nathanael West's Holy Fool," in which Miss Lonelyhearts' "Christ complex" is defined as "precisely a complex, not a belief . . . not a faith. . . . [but] a fixation of the mind." Some critics who believed Miss Lonelyhearts to be an essentially religious character also recognized some psychotic overtones: Stanley Hyman, for instance, parallels the columnist's eventual rock-like state to Saint Peter's keystone position, then goes on to describe that experience as "catatonic withdrawal" and Miss Lonelyhearts' final vision as "the illusory grace of madness." W. H. Auden dismissed all of West's major characters as "sufferers of the same disease" and judged that, in Miss Lonelyhearts, "the only kind of personal relation is the sado-masochistic." Miss Lonelyhearts' disease results in his being "absolutely self-centered," seeing others merely as "images" or "projections of the pity or hatred he feels for himself." For Nathan Scott, Arthur Cohen's analysis of Miss Lonelyhearts' complex rang true: "it is the neurotic persuasion of this

5 "West's Miss Lonelyhearts: Skepticism Mitigated?," Renascence, 18, No. 2 (Winter 1966), 99, 108.


7 Commonweal, 15 June 1956, p. 277.

8 Nathanael West, p. 22.
confused Manichaean that the world requires to be redeemed by some great definitive action. . . . He is a self-elected Messiah." And he termed Miss Lonelyhearts' concluding sense of transcendence "the false ecstasy."\(^{10}\) The most recent Freudian criticism of Miss Lonelyhearts was written by James Hickey, who painstakingly analyzed Miss Lonelyhearts' "pathological" indulgence in "his Christ fantasies" and found that "ML's latent homosexuality, overt narcissism, delusions of grandeur, and desire to emulate his father's identity have driven him to augment an abnormal religious obsession to the complete withdrawal of a catatonic Christ complex."\(^{11}\) And Hickey concluded that the "incestuous desire for his sister contributes the basis for his neurotic inversion."\(^{12}\)

The critical appraisals of Hazel Motes, in fact, of Flannery O'Connor's fiction in general, similarly divide themselves into two camps: those that present a specifically Christian, sometimes Catholic, explication, and those that, like Isaac Rosenfeld's review for New Republic, find the protagonist too "plain crazy" to win a serious

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12 Hickey, p. 145.
hearing for his religious predicament. On the saintly side, Jonathan Baumbach discussed Hazel as a "symbol of mystical religion" in contrast to Enoch Emery, the representative of organized religion, and Lewis Lawson found Motes to be "an exemplar of Old Testament guilt." Robert Drake was the first to raise the issue of whether O'Connor's theology interferes with a complete acceptance of her fiction; in that study he viewed Hazel as "a Christian ascetic." In the same year, Stanley Edgar Hyman read Hazel's progress as "the making of an anchorite in our unlikely time." And in 1973 Dorothy Walters argued that Wise Blood details "a modern saint's legend" that is "a most intently serious study of the problem of redemption in the modern world." Of the studies that consider O'Connor's work in other than a religious focus, Josephine Hendin was the first to take a strong line against the preponderant Christian interpretations in favor of a "nihilistic"

13 "To Win By Default," CXXVII (7 July 1952), 19.


17 Flannery O'Connor, UMPAW, No. 54 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minn., 1966), p. 9.

psychological reading: Motes is fleeing "the terror of adult life by returning" to the life he knew as a child; he "turns into . . . a suffering mechanical man" whose "essential emotional death . . . preserves [him] in [his] passive, lonely fury." Claire Katz followed this approach in differentiating between O'Connor's "conscious purpose" and "a psychological demand which overshadows her intent." In her reading, "Hazel Motes rejects the faith of his dead mother and grandfather in an attempt to deny their control over him." But his "compulsive actions . . . result only in his seeing mirror images of what he denies, until he blinds himself and by this sacrifice of aggressive power is allowed to become one with Christ, the son who is also part of the all-powerful father."

The critical commentary on Gail Hightower follows the same pattern of contradictory interpretations that dominates the readings of Miss Lonelyhearts and Hazel Motes. Michael Millgate summed up the difficulties as he saw them in 1966: "The disturbing figure, morally and structurally, is that of Hightower. He has seemed to many critics a shadowy and indeterminate figure, lacking a sufficiently substantial stake in the plot or an adequately defined role in the moral or symbolic

19 The World of Flannery O'Connor (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 43, 60-61


21 Katz, p. 62.
patterns of the book as a whole."\(^{22}\) One of the earliest, and most explicit, statements of the confusion produced by Faulkner's preacher was Richard Rovere's complaint in his Introduction to the Modern Library Edition of the novel. After saying that he found Hightower "an extraordinarily moving figure," he proceeded to insist: "But when I think about him and his history as Faulkner gives it, I am quite unable to believe in him." Rovere cannot accept the dissimilarity between the character as a youth and as an aged recluse, "the Hightower of the sermons and the Hightower of the reveries": "I cannot believe both, or, if I do, I must split Hightower up into two men."\(^{23}\)

Most of the subsequent analyses of Hightower reflect this almost irresistible tendency toward dichotomy and bifurcation, and find that he is transcendentally successful, either personally or as a character, or that he is a miserable failure, again, personally or artistically. Carl Benson found Hightower to be the "moral hero" of the novel, "traveling . . . from selfish immunity to redemption."\(^{24}\) And Richard Chase praised him as "one of Faulkner's best characters" who "appeals to us in many ways."\(^{25}\) In the same year Darrel Abel called Hightower


\(^{23}\) (New York: Random House, 1950), viii-ix.

\(^{24}\) "Thematic Design in Light in August," South Atlantic Quarterly, LIII (1954), 54.

"the most significant character in *Light in August*" who is able "like God in a high tower in a medieval mystery play to see the present with detachment."^26 Cleanth Brooks included Hightower among the novel's characters who are "redeemed,"^27 and Robert Penn Warren agreed, using that same word to describe Hightower's reentry into the flow of time from his abstraction in the past.^28

The critics who judge Hightower to be a failure, either morally or structurally, include George Marion O'Donnel, who considered the story "confused and malproportioned" and Hightower "vague."^29 About the same time that Richard Chase was lauding Hightower and enumerating the appeals of his character, Alfred Kazin countered that he, "by general consent, is one of the failures of the book." He does not "compel our interest or our belief."^30 Edmund L. Volpe argued that Hightower does not, as others have urged, "achieve salvation," and that this failure stems from the

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preacher's intellectuality. Michael Millgate finally concluded that Hightower "remains a haunting conception" rather than a fully realized character, but he found this insubstantiality to be consistent with the characterization rather than a flaw: "It may . . . be very much to the point that Hightower is not completely realized -- obsessed with the past, he does not live in the present where realization can occur...."

From this representative survey a few dominant conclusions emerge: first, that there are clear parallels between the characterizations of Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower; second, that the combination of the religious and the psychopathological is central to those characterizations; and third, that the criticism itself, as it urges an either-or interpretation between the genuinely spiritual and the delusionally psychotic, suffers from the very division that is attributed to its subjects. One of the purposes of this study will be to illustrate in detail the parallels that make these figures members of one character type. Another purpose is to examine the interrelatedness of the religious and the psychological, with a view to providing a more inclusive, integrative analysis of these three portrayals than has thus far been the case.

An occasional critic has already moved away from the dichotomizing approach. For instance, in his second look at the stalemate in Miss


32 The Achievement of William Faulkner, p. 131.
Lonelyhearts' interpretations, Marcus Smith modified his own original reading, concluding that "the ambiguous effect of Miss Lonelyhearts is intentional," that "the great appeal of Miss Lonelyhearts is due precisely to the careful balance West establishes and maintains between ironic and sympathetic norms," and "that our proper response is an unresolved tension between the two emotions."^33 Kingsley Widmer also recognized the oxymoronic quality of the novel: "With a fascinated repulsion for the Christianity he sympathetically annihilates, West double-plays the material, shrewdly mixing savage parody with sweet seriousness. The reporter is equally portrayed as a clinical case with a 'Christ complex' and as a good man who by questioning 'the values by which he lives,' achieves a saintly compassion."^34 In the case of Hightower, Olga Vickery begins a chapter on Light in August with a discussion of the contraries which, operating simultaneously, make Faulkner's characters "multidimensional": "at once subject and object, observer and observed, creator and created. Thus Joe Christmas as well as the Reverend Hightower and Joanna Burden are both self-crucified and crucified by others, both villain and victim. The interplay of these polar aspects of the human being produces much of the dramatic tension and the grotesque quality in the novel."^35 No one has yet explored the simultaneity of contradictions that is Hazel Motes as an indication

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that O'Connor intentionally designed him as a representative of unresolved ambiguity.

These suggestions, as well as other sources that examine how the religious and the pathological coincide, such as William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, provided the direction for this combined study of three characters as one type, called here "the mad preacher." The merger of ordinarily mutually exclusive realms, particularly that of the religious and the psychological (though there are others, such as the tragicomic, at work as well), is a major feature of the mad preacher, but there are, in addition, many details of characterization which, when taken together, provide a descriptive definition and establish the requirements of the type. It is first to these parallels—in physical descriptions, settings, preoccupations, ritualistic habits, family influences—that we will turn in order to become acquainted with this figure.

II

The first indication of the portrayal to come, even before a physical description is given, is the allegoric name of each mad preacher, names calculated to introduce that mixture of contradictory impressions on which the characterizations thrive: Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes, Gail Hightower. All carry androgenous overtones (Miss Lonelyhearts' name in the opening sentence of the book is referred to by both feminine and masculine pronouns), overtones that are especially meaningful in the unsatisfactory relationships each experiences with women. In addition,
West uses an abbreviation, Miss L, as a pun on the word, missal. As his story unfolds, the discrepancy between the vulgar sentimentality and the "sweet seriousness" contained within his name grows. Hazel Motes' name directs attention to his eyes, their hybrid color and, on another level, their obstructed view, via the New Testament analogy. O'Connor further emphasizes his inadequate vision with the nickname, Haze. "Gail Hightower" implies both the tumult and the place of escape with which so much of the man's life is concerned. The fact that a high tower would not provide a safe refuge but subject the occupant to the storm's full fury is a crucial irony. It is particularly significant, also, that Hightower is the namesake of his "lusty and sacrilegious" grandfather. Faulkner is recorded as crediting the highly "suggestive" naming throughout Light in August to "the tradition of the pre-Elizabethans" and "my memory of the old miracle plays, the morality plays in early English literature." There is more than a touch of the medieval outlook in the rendering of all three men. Josephine Herbst mentions the "old Mystery Plays" parallel while discussing Miss Lonelyhearts as allegory. And O'Connor avowedly pursued the anagogical depth of the "medieval commentators on Scripture" because she saw it as "a way of reading nature which included most possibilities."


The naming of these men is a particular kind of plurisignation that allows the authors a highly economical means of extending and under-scoring their ambiguities. Every time the name appears another reverberation is sounded between the sets of paired opposites that structure the characterization.

The mad preacher is an ectomorph, tall, even gaunt, whose skull, sharply visible beneath his skin, takes on the function of a memento mori refrain. In fact, he clearly fits Robert Burton's description of the melancholic: "lean, withered, hollow eyed," bearing an "uncheerful expression," and "smelly." His physical features are managed, as is his name, so as to make the most of their symbolic suggestiveness.

West explicitly links Miss Lonelyhearts' physiognomy with the Judeo-Christian heritage: "his Old Testament look" is equally that of "the New England puritan. His forehead was high and narrow. His nose was long and fleshless. His bony chin was chaped and cleft like a hoof." Anyone skilled in the art of reading such correspondences can see the columnist's destiny in his face, as does Shrike, his feature editor, who with one look classifies him as one of "the priests of twentieth-century America" (p.9).


40 Nathanael West, Miss Lonelyhearts (1933; rpt. New York: Avon, 1959), p. 9. All subsequent references to the text of the novel are to this edition.
In the same way, Hazel Motes, much to his annoyance, is repeatedly recognized as a preacher. Like Miss Lonelyhearts, he is dressed in a cheap suit, and a fellow-traveler, Mrs Hitchcock, identifies his black, broad-brimmed hat as the kind "that an elderly country preacher would wear."41 Likewise, the taxi driver who takes Motes to a prostitute's address assumes that he is a preacher because of his hat as well as "a look in [his] face somewheres" (p.21), and the prostitute, Leora Watts, calls it "that Jesus-seeing hat!" (p.37). Motes' face is typically angular, with "a nose like a shrike's bill" (p.10) and compelling, deep-set eyes. His eyes bear much of the symbolic weight of the characterization, as what Hazel sees and what others see in him combine to assist the story's thematic ambiguity. Even the removal of his eyes, the result of his self-blinding, does not diminish this magnetism: his landlady finds herself staring into the burned out sockets, where "she saw him going backwards to Bethlehem" (p.119).

Hightower, thin when young, is still tall but "misshapen" at fifty, his skin "the color of flour sacking and his upper body . . . like a loosely filled sack falling from his gaunt shoulders."42 Faulkner focuses on his face to convey the duality and distance at the heart of the defrocked minister's character: "His face is at once gaunt and flabby; it is as though there were two faces, one imposed upon the other, looking out from beneath the pale, bald skull surrounded by a


fringe of gray hair, from behind the twin motionless glares of his spectacles" (p.77). Hightower's "rank manodor" Byron Bunch interprets as "'the odor of goodness,,'
" naturally repugnant "'to us that are bad and sinful'" (pp.269,261). This reversal of normal association, usually grounded in Christian tradition, sometimes broadly humorous, sometimes pointedly grim, is yet another of the techniques of antithesis that produce the ambiguity of the characterization.

Illness and neglect are a special category of the physical characterizations. To nourishment, grooming and comfort this abstracted individual is indifferent. Miss Lonelyhearts dismisses his lengthy sickness as "unimportant" because he believes it to be symbolic of but inferior to the spiritual contagion with which he is preoccupied (p.59). His fascination with the suffering and the crippled is similarly a function of his concern with symbolic, rather than actual, reality. Wounds as well as illness, self-inflicted and otherwise, are endured stubbornly by Motes. His boyhood penance of walking in rock-filled shoes, and discomfort from an incompletely healed war wound, both cited early in the novel, recur and are intensified: he adds glass to the rocks, wraps barbed wire around his chest, and blinds himself with lye. Nothing in O'Connor is too painful to escape her comic double-play, however: when Mrs. Flood discovers her boarder's barbed wire habit, her shock becomes indignation as she considers such practical consequences as the laundry: "'It's easier to bleed than sweat, Mr. Motes,' she said in the voice of High Sarcasm" (p.122). Hightower's haphazard eating, dress and hygiene are, again, indicative of this generic contempt thus expressed by the mad preacher for his own person. In some respects the
most self-conscious of men, as he strides through the town talking to himself, he is oblivious to his appearance and the support it lends to the generally held belief that he is quite mad: "The shirt is white but it is not fresh; his collar is soiled, as is the white lawn cravat carelessly knotted, and he has not shaved for two or three days. His panama hat is soiled, and beneath it, between hat and skull against the heat, the edge and corners of a soiled handkerchief protrude" (p.269).

The novel's settings extend the spirit of melancholy that grows out of the characterizations. The suitability of setting to character is particularly intense in these cases because of the mad preacher's imaginative need for symbolically appropriate, specially chosen places, habitats that he can, as it were, decorate in keeping with his accidie. Miss L, for example, chooses a room "as full of shadows as an old steel engraving" (p.16) where he nails an ivory Christ directly into the wall, hoping to produce the effect of writhing. The Essex is Motes' specially chosen "place to be" (p.43), a rat-colored vehicle with windshield wipers that "clatter like two idiots clapping in church" (p.44), and which serves, consecutively, as a pulpit, a bedroom-kitchen, a dream-coffin, and a murder weapon. Jefferson is the place special to Hightower's imagination, and he "knows," before his arrival there, exactly how the house he will "some day own and live in" (p.423) looks, the dark little house, all but concealed by low growing maples and crepe myrtle, and the darkened study, lined with books of "religion and history and science" where the grandson can look out on the street where his grandfather passed on his last ride. The mad preacher's quarters are designed to protect his much prized isolation, usually in darkness.
Each man prizes certain symbolic possessions unique to him — Miss L's disassembled crucifix, Motes' autonomous car, Hightower's father's patched Confederate coat — but there is other symbolic imagery that recurs from novel to novel, imagery that reemphasizes their immobilizing melancholy and their overwhelming sense of loss, associated, as it often is, with family deaths, physical pain, and a brutalized, impoverished, reduced humanity. The specific application of these motifs will be examined in the chapters that treat the novels individually, but listing them here will suggest their suitability to such abstractly-drawn characters: the rock and the stone, the shadow and the ghost, signs and headlines, and mirror reflections.

Through these descriptive elements of characterization — names, physical appearance and neglect, settings, prevalent imagery — a definite picture of the mad preacher begins to take shape. His melancholy is that of a man stricken by a conviction of the inherent corruption of the material world, both as he sees it in his surroundings and as he embodies it. Another major parallel, the American Protestant heritage, is offered as the source of both his habit of viewing the objective world symbolically and his contemptuous (i.e., Calvinistic) assumptions concerning man's efforts and achievements. Related to that heritage, and a major instance of the principle of duality basic to all three novels, is the disciple/opposite who ministers to and finally abandons each of these unorthodox preachers: Shrike for Miss Lonelyhearts, Enoch Emery for Hazel Motes, and Byron Bunch for Gail Hightower. In cooperation with these external and largely static components of the conventional design, a dynamic pattern common to all three characters establishes itself. Just as the descriptive details repeat themselves
from the beginning to the end of each man's story, so the process of these men's lives is a repetitive one. Movement without progress, the infinite repetition of an unchanging pattern of defeat -- this is the kind of action identified with the mad preacher.

One of the most significant of these repetitive patterns is the solitary preoccupation that, day after day and on into his dream life, this figure pursues, turning over and over in his mind, like a puzzle which presents but one, unsatisfactory solution, the meaning of his melancholy. Most maddening to him is the discrepancy between the idealized reality he envisions with his mental eye, and the rough, irregular reality he experiences. When these realities collide the result is characteristically described in terms of circular or retrograde movement, as in this passage by West (Miss L, daydreaming in a barroom, has been punched in the mouth): "His anger swung in large drunken circles" (p.28). Hazel Motes' collisions typically send him "in the opposite direction" (p.69) or impel him to try "to move forward and backward at the same time" (p.27). Gail Hightower's circularity is well represented in his own image of the "classic and serene vase" (p.419), as he once supposed the seminary, and, most thoroughly, in the "wheel of thinking" metaphor of Chapter 20. Moreover, Motes and Hightower would subscribe to Miss L's conviction that "his confusion was significant" (p.21), in contrast to the "arbitrary" order of their respective communities.

Ritualized action is another repetitive pattern--Miss L's compulsive neatness, which leads him to attempt to arrange the skyline; Motes' automatic, inappropriate assertions of self-righteousness; Hightower's sermons and his evening vigils--which simultaneously demonstrate both the intense need for a reliable order and the failure to find one of
unequivocal significance. We see the character travel in circles. Miss L alternately seeks out suffering people, fails to help them, and withdraws to his room. Hazel Motes, child and man, fights and flees the perverted mysteries of the carnival tent and Hoover Shoats, always resolving his own confusion in severe physical penance. Hightower retreats to the attic, to the seminary, to Jefferson, and, finally, to his study and his private version of the past.

The repetitive nature of his experience serves to confirm for each man his identity and his vision of the world. This identity, while admittedly unsatisfactory, has the virtue of being thoroughly familiar, since the mad preacher is a character who has consciously patterned himself on a family model, endeavoring, both out of love and fear, to make himself a replica of a lost father or grandfather. This imitation of an impressive family predecessor helps to explain, on the narrative level, the abstraction that dominates these inheritors of a seemingly bankrupt tradition. They are not wholly individualized because they are "possessed," in the tradition of Hamlet, by authoritative ghosts. Their appropriation of the parent's power requires a proportionate surrender of that risky privilege of individuality. Hightower rationalizes his abdication thus: "'And after all, I have paid. I have bought my ghost, even though I did pay for it with my life!'" (p. 429). Because West believed that, for the purposes of fiction, "In America ... families have no history." He chose Dostoevski's Father Zossima to

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fill the role of the awesome patriarch, linking him in Miss L's imagination with his actual father, a Baptist minister. As he strives to imaginatively recapture the spiritual bounty that he associates with these two figures, his resignation comes to match Hightower's: "'Every order has within it the germ of destruction'" (p.51). And Motes, gazing at his look-alike, Solace Layfield, The True Prophet, grimly resolves, in the imagery of his grandfather's sermons, "'If you don't hunt it down and kill it, it'll hunt you down and kill you'" (p.91).

Because, in each instance, the imitated parental figure is associated in the mind of the younger man with Christ, a set of reciprocal correspondences between his family relationships and Biblical analogues is made to reverberate. Many of the specific parallels have been the subject of those already-cited explications that followed the religious metaphor: the "virgin" Mary Shrike (and the medal that hangs between her breasts--won for the 100-yard dash) and the handicapped disciple, Peter Doyle; Motes, a runaway in the tradition of Jonah, intent on seducing and teaching the "innocent" Sabbath Lily, and his eyes that "see not" until he casts "the beam out" and becomes the blinded seer; Hightower, the faithless shepherd, Joe Christmas, the sacrificial victim, Lena Grove, the madonna in faded blue. In this context it is easy to see how the quest for order, which is frequently presented in romantic terms in all three novels, translates itself into a pursuit or imitation of the Christ-like life, at least a life measured against that standard of conduct: the precepts and imagery of Protestant Christianity are learned at home and invested in the family members. This correspondence works so well because the Biblical stories themselves are family stories--the Holy Family being the culmination of all those Old Testament families
whom Faulkner preferred because, instead of representing ideas, he said, they were simply people, "all trying to get something for nothing or . . . to be braver than they are."44

The very qualities that make the family such a meaningful vehicle for the representation of religious mysteries have also come to serve equally well the discoveries of depth psychology. Thus it is on this ground of common experience that these two kinds of knowledge, ordinarily considered incompatible and frequently treated as diametric opposites, are joined. The virgin Mary Shrike is also the forbidden Mother and Shrike the potentially castrating Father; the Doyles are another parent-pair, the siren/Circe/Aphrodite and her castaway/beast/Hephaestus. Hazel Motes' mother, laundry stick in hand, becomes the punitive witch with the magic ability to see through a tree, or, in another phrasing, she plays the part of the Super-Ego to Motes' father's Id. Hightower's fate is that of the child born to aging parents who is fixated in the narcissistic stage. The comic impact of this blending of the religious and the psychiatric testifies to the incongruity, partly of the language, but especially of the sense or order, of degree and decorum. The mad preacher is a figure of incongruity largely because he is displaced—as a newspaper advice columnist in Miss Lonelyhearts' case, as a throwback, as Mrs. Flood put it to Hazel Motes, to a more "gory" time when "boiling in oil, or being a saint, or walling up cats" was "normal" (p.122), as the suspected reincarnation of his grandfather in Hightower's

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Gwynn and Blotner, p. 167.
story—and his displacement carries both religious and psychological implications that originate in his family relationships.

The family context provides for a presentation of these complex issues that is at once simple and dramatic. In the family arena the child first experiences the power of the parent, from whom he also learns about God, the Father of all. Thereafter, the circumstances of his early experience are repeated and elaborated upon with a calculated ambiguity: the confusion of the mad preacher, struggling to identify a source of order in his world, is the old confusion of the natural with the supernatural, mediated through the imagination of the initiate. For example, each of these characters eventually shifts his attachment from his father to a figure whose imaginative appeal is more satisfying: Father Zossima for Miss Lonelyhearts, Asa Hawks for Motes, Gail Hightower I for Hightower II. These new models are clearly substitutes, both for the actual parents and the ultimate spiritual parent. And the function of these parental figures is that of the euhemerus, a heroic model from the past that can be imitated but never surpassed. Such an imitation is necessarily inferior, carrying implicitly its own defeat.

To review briefly, the characterizations of Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower develop along two lines, the dynamic and the static. The static attributes—names, body type, setting, symbols, imagery—are embedded in the dynamic structure, a cyclical repetition that contains three stages: 1) loss, 2) the search for a replacement

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from the past, 3) confirmation of defeat. The imaginative recreation, in stage two, of a lost order through memory, dream and reflection is central, both in sequence and in importance, to this character interpretation. The imitation of a model, for instance, becomes part of the grotesque nature of the novels as it illustrates one of the ways that man can become mechanical, can subvert his own humanity. Unless the agency of the imagination receives due emphasis, a one-sided, split view of the character seems inevitable, as the introductory summary of the criticism illustrates. And although the temptation to resolve the confusion surrounding the mad preacher impels us to choose sides, such a resolution does violence to the integrity of the character. He must remain both mad—in the several senses of that work—and a preacher—a rhetorical figure of moral exhortation. Robert Burton presents the matter with lyric economy in item number seven from "The Argument of the Frontispiece" of The Anatomy of Melancholy:

But see the Madman rage down right
With furious looks, a gaily sight.
Naked in chains bound doth he lie,
And roars amain he knows not why?
Observe him; for as in a glass,
Thine angry portraiture it was.
His picture keep still in thy presence;
Twixt him and thee, ther's no difference.46

CHAPTER 2: TRAPPED IN A METAPHOR

Only a symbol? He who asks this question shows that he has not understood the difference between signs and symbols nor the power of symbolic language, which surpasses in quality and strength the power of any nonsymbolic language.

Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*

The present period is characterized by a terminological tower of Babel.

Jolande Jacobi, *Complex/Archetype/Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung*

Before we can move on to the particular world of each mad preacher we must prepare ourselves for the language spoken there. That language, like the criticism summarized in Chapter 1, is dualistic; the polarity in the novel's diction in all likelihood inspired those many dichotomized readings. The disease-health opposition is a prominent one. Miss Lonelyhearts uses the words, "sick" and "complex" and "cure," while Shrike, his alter-ego, links by inversion the medical metaphor to the religious realm in this retort to Goldsmith in the chapter, "Miss Lonelyhearts and the Cripple":

"Don't call sick those who have faith. They are the well. It is you who are sick" (p.72).

Although Hazel Motes carries a shrapnel wound which seems to be related
to "a terrible pain in his chest" and "a hard hollow cough" (p.100), his preferred word pair is "clean"-"unclean," an Old Testament, rather than a medical, metaphor. In Hightower's memory his father, a "phantom," stands as the paradigm for paired contradiction; his participation in the Civil War "was proof enough that he was two separate and complete people, one of whom dwelled by serene rules in a world where reality did not exist" (p.415). Faulkner immediately offers a tellingly different view of the same model: "The father who had been a minister without a church and a soldier without an enemy, and who in defeat had combined the two and become a doctor, a surgeon" (p.415). The healing integration embodied here is seldom glimpsed and even more rarely articulated in the community of the mad preacher.

The power that abstraction holds over this figure makes itself felt through his language, a language full of forced polarization, either-or categories, black-and-white evaluation, a language that relies heavily on the metaphors of antagonism and division. It is sobering to observe this character's failure to resolve or transcend these simplistic dichotomies. It is chilling to recognize in his own language the source of the deadening categorical. The mad preacher experiences his own helplessness most acutely when he feels the noose of overdetermined terminology tightening. Miss Lonelyhearts juggles terms of "morality" and "medicine" (p.23), struggling, for example, to define "adultery" either as "a sin" or as therapeutic, "capable of steadying the nerves, relaxing the muscles and clearing the blood" (p.33). The exercise proves inconclusive, and the episode, like so many others, demonstrates only "the completeness of his failure" (p.45). Hazel Motes encounters a similar impasse when, after insisting that "blasphemy" and "fornication"
are "only words" (p.34), he is stunned to learn that Sabbath Lily Hawks is a "bastard": "the thing in his mind said that the truth did not contradict itself and that a bastard could not be saved in the Church Without Christ" (p.69). Tears run down Hightower's face as he stammeringly endeavors to negate Byron Bunch's declaration, "'But you are a man of God'" (p.319). When Hightower's self-revelation reaches its ultimate horror, it comes in the form of a "sentence" that "seems to stand full-sprung across his skull, behind his eyes: I don't want to think this. I must not think this. I dare not think this" (p.429). Clearly, words themselves, as much as the concerns they represent, are, for the mad preacher, a force with living strength.

We can best understand how this character that I have been calling the mad preacher constitutes a metaphoric fusion, rather than a polarization, of the fields of psychology and religion by focusing on their common ground, language.

The recent histories of both psychology and theology, as written by such professionals as Szasz and Maslow, by Tillich and Buber, demonstrate a renewed attention to and reassessment of terminology that parallels the twentieth-century fiction writer's reevaluation of the resources of language. The search for the redeeming, restorative word, and the frequent frustration of that search, is the structure that brings the trifocal conception of the mad preacher into alignment.

I

The uncomfortable feelings that certain words produce at certain times for the mad preacher result from his uncertainty as to whether
language has a life and power of its own or is simply an instrument at his disposal, a tool that he wields. Ernst Cassirer succinctly detailed both the psychological realities and the religious implications of this ambiguity in *Language and Myth*. As Susanne Langer translates, "the original bond between the linguistic and the mythico-religious consciousness is primarily expressed in the fact that all verbal structures appear as also mythical entities, endowed with certain mythical powers, that the Word, in fact, becomes a sort of primary force, in which all being and doing originate."  It is the force of the mythical entity that informs Miss Lonelyhearts' "Christ" and Hazel Motes' "Jesus" and Gail Hightower's "ghost." Cassirer, in his concluding passage, moves from what might seem to be a fatal crisis—"word and mythic image... have now cast off all reality and effectuality"—into a transforming liberation of the mind, which appropriates word and image "as organs of its own, and thereby recognizes them for what they really are: forms of its own self-revelation." The extent to which this liberation occurs, if at all, for Miss Lonelyhearts or Hazel Motes or Gail Hightower will be a meaningful issue after we have surveyed the terrain of mythopoetic language a bit more fully.

It is a short step from the dawning awareness of the word's self-revelatory power in Cassirer to Thomas Szasz's analysis of the history of the word "hysteria" in *The Myth of Mental Illness*. As Szasz reconstructs the pioneering efforts of the neuropsychiatrists, Charcot,


48 Cassirer, p. 99.
Janet and Freud, he finds that the redefinition of some "malingers" as "hysterics" exemplifies a shift from moral and religious criteria to a "biophysical model" that seemed to be more logical, but actually remained grounded in the dynamics of "domination and interpersonal control by strategies of deceit." The subjects as Salpetriere, for example, while feigning ignorance, produce the "symptoms" they understood the eminent doctors expected to see in order to receive, for example, better food. Another issue of particular relevance to our interest in the converging concerns of psychology, religion and literature is Szasz's discussion of hysteria as a kind of language, iconic, nondiscursive, with a hidden meaning (not at all unlike literary techniques of Indirection such as allusions, metaphors, linguistic fineses, jokes) and linked to "New Testament rules" that value "helplessness" and "the rewarding of disability." All such inexplicit communication provides at least two rewards Szasz concludes: "the challenge and mastery of an ambiguous or polyvalent message" and a certain assurance for "the speaker that he will be held responsible only for the overt meaning of his messages." The Myth of Mental Illness is pertinent to our investigation of the mad preacher both for its explication of the dangers inherent in borrowing "models" of conduct as well as for its

49 (New York: Harper and Row, 1961, pp. 6-9

50 The Myth of Mental Illness, pp. 119, 152.

51 The Myth of Mental Illness, pp. 13-14.

52 The Myth of Mental Illness, pp. 152, 155.
emphasis on language, both its obfuscating and its illuminating capacities.

When Szasz insisted that "a science can be no better than its linguistic apparatus permits,"53 he was echoing the concern voiced by Jolande Jacobi that the terminology of depth psychology, "inherited" from other disciplines, including "mythological tradition as well as physics, medicine," was in danger of falsifying the essentially ambivalent nature of the psyche.54 Karl Menninger often warned against a misplaced reliance on psychology's terminology, pointing to the difficulty, for example, of defining such common, but always relative, words as "health" and "illness."55 Abraham Maslow wrote that he was driven to invent such words as "resacralizing" and "desacralizing" because the English language "has no decent vocabulary for the virtues."56

These four leading professionals, among others, recognized, and worked to resolve, the implicitly destructive process of polarization that they saw as inherent in the language of their discipline. Szasz reworked the hypothesis that civilization is inextricably linked with "neurosis" --not, however, in terms of the former being a cause of

53 The Myth of Mental Illness, p. 4
the latter, as Freud (1930) suggested—but rather because all rules of conduct point implicitly to deviations from them. By focusing on the "bivalent, antithetical" meanings of basic words, such as the Latin sacer - "holy" and "accursed," he illustrated how words, in fact, symbolic communication of all types, and by logical extension, rules of conduct, imply their opposites. After deploring the "narrow, one-sided formulations" of a systematic, invariable terminology as wholly inadequate to a study of the psyche, Jacobi offered analogy as a tool of "indispensable efficacy" in presenting novel or highly abstract subjects. The frustration and seeming fruitlessness of psychological categories was a concern of Menninger's, by his own account, as early as 1915, when he rejected Herman Adler's "stupid, sterile specialty forever" in favor of "scientific medicine." The emotional casualties of World War I brought him back to psychology, but his distaste for "ambiguous jargon" remained. Even in his early Man Against Himself he worked with a bare minimum of psychoanalytic terms and emphasized the clearer "ignorance," "crime," "vice," "disease," "poverty," "ugliness," Menninger's later adoption of the phrase "unitary concept" links him to Maslow in a preference for what the latter calls

57 The Myth of Mental Illness, p. 155.

58 The Myth of Mental Illness, p. 175.

59 Jacobe, pp. 4-5, 35-55.

60 The Vital Balance, p. 1.

61 The Vital Balance, p. 5; Man Against Himself, p. 424.
"fusion-words," language that serves both descriptive and normative functions simultaneously. Instead of words that take their meanings only from a paired opposite, such either-or sets as "rational" - "irrational," Maslow recommends such words as these: "mature, evolved, developed, stunted, crippled, fully-functioning, graceful, awkward, clumsy." His assessment of the destructive separation at work in the very language of polarization and his characterization of individuals caught in the process of dichotomy are pertinent to our study of the mad preacher: "black-white thinking," the "loss of gradations, of degree" results in the person's "seeing everything as a duel or a war." He continually feels "frustrated idealism and disillusionment." His habitual posture involves a "continued search for something to believe in, combined with anger at being disappointed." "Once we transcend and resolve this dichotomy," Maslow continues, "we can recognize that the dichotomizing or the splitting is itself a pathological process. And then it becomes possible for one's civil war to end."

Contemporaneous with the psychologists' search for restorative words has been a similar search, accompanied by similar frustrations and triumphs, carried on by theological leaders. Two who have had a wide influence are Martin Buber and Paul Tillich.

62 Maslow, p. 27.
63 Maslow, p. 321.
64 Maslow, p. 321.
65 Maslow, p 92.
Buber's Ich-Du (I-Thou) is his verbal formulation for "a mode of existence" that includes both distancing polarity and unifying merger. Such a word pair Buber calls a "basic word of relation." About this most vital relation Buber writes two or three things that bring to mind the dilemma of the mad preacher. First, it is "the sublime melancholy of our lot" that this direct relation cannot be continuous; even love endures "only in the alternation of actuality and latency" and often in "an intricately entangled series of events that is tortuously dual." There is no better brief description of the mad preacher's career. Secondly, Buber chooses the child as the fundamental illustration of the "innateness of the longing for relation." His insight here parallels those of West, O'Connor and Faulkner in their parent-child creations: the "'imagination'" that apprehends a toy animal "lovingly and unforgettably" is not a kind of "'panpsychism'; it is the drive to turn everything into a You, the drive to pan-relation--and where it does not find a living, active being that confronts it but only an image or symbol of that, it supplies the living actuality from its own fullness." It is from within himself that Miss Lonelyhearts supplies the meaning of his sister's dance, that Hazel Motes discovers a penance that will satisfy God, and that Gail Hightower finds guilt in his father's patched Confederate coat.

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67 Buber, pp. 68-69.

68 Buber, pp. 76-78.
In his *Dynamics of Faith* Tillich wrote in his simplest prose style. His purpose was to "reinterpret" and restore "health" to the word "faith." He demonstrated how the dichotomy of "the subject-object scheme" could be transcended "in terms like ultimate, unconditional, infinite, absolute." In the common use of the word "holy" and the popular concept of "the holy" Tillich found a crippling reduction of what had been an ambiguously experienced mystery in which the divine and the demonic, the creative and the destructive potentialities were both active. When the demonic-destructive was refused participation, the holy retained only the meaning of "the morally good and the logically true. It . . . ceased to be the holy in the genuine sense of the word."

By making room for the contradictory in the experience of faith and holiness, Tillich constructs an inclusive dynamic that could be a description of the mad preacher's fate: "The holy which is demonic, or ultimately destructive, is identical with the content of idolatrous faith. Idolatrous faith is still faith. The holy which is demonic is still holy. This is the point where the ambiguous character of religion is most visible and the dangers of faith are most obvious: the danger of faith is idolatry and the ambiguity of the holy is its demonic possibility. Our ultimate concern can destroy us as it can heal us. But

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70 Tillich, p. 11.

71 Tillich, p. 15.
we never can be without it."72 Throughout this volume Tillich stresses the fundamental position of language: "Without language there is no act of faith, no religious experience."73 And the most powerful language is the symbolic, the mythic. He is in agreement with Langer that "demythologization" is not merely undesirable but impossible: "One can replace one myth by another, but one cannot remove the myth from man's spiritual life."74

This condensed survey has been meant to simply highlight a few of the particular concerns about words shared by contemporaneous psychologists and theologians, concerns shared as well by recent writers of fiction, and central to this exploration of the mad preacher. In their prefaces, translations, interpretations, critiques, and redefinitions the same difficulties were identified: that abstraction and jargon too easily become synonymous, and that the either-or categories established through language were relentlessly dividing without clarifying and deadening instead of revitalizing the study of man at his most complex. Each of these professionals offered similar suggestions for descending the "terminological tower of Babel." All agree on the importance of making explicit the capacities, the workings and the purpose of the language chosen to communicate even the most seemingly objective

72 Tillich, p. 16.
73 Tillich, p. 24.
74 Tillich, p. 50; Langer, "Translator's Preface," Language and Myth, viii.
of ideas. For the highly abstract concepts of psychology and religion this need is all the more acute, and it often requires the recognition and acknowledgment of the metaphoric reach and purposes of language. Many artists did perceive the import of the analogical in Freud's work: when Nathanael West wrote, "Freud is your Bullfinch," he was drawing attention to the mythic truth of Freud's science. But only another psychologist would find it necessary to explain that "mental illness is a metaphor," as does Szasz, or to insist, as Maslow does, that "'neurosis' is a totally obsolete word" left over from the "medical model." Perhaps because metaphor, analogy and parable have been the accepted mode for the transmission of religious knowledge always, Buber and Tillich were particularly careful to write explicitly about images and symbols rather than to use them unannounced.

It is with a sense of good fortune that I can begin to make use of certain words that until now were potentially too confusing in the mixed context of psychology and religion, words that are used in the novels themselves, or in the criticism of the novels, but words that refuse to limit themselves to one meaning: crazy, insane, demented, pathological, sick, irrational, mystical, obsessed, redeemed. The blurring of distinctions between such terms as "sin" and "disease" which the very influential works of Freud and James fostered, may now be understood


more clearly as something other than a perverse trick or a short-sighted blunder. An underlying, and often unacknowledged, reliance on analogy can produce, as it did in the above instance, the sometimes confusing and sometimes illuminating double-vision that includes both the religious and the scientific, or medical, kinds of knowledge. Once such analogy is made explicit, the words are freed from their bondage as partisan terms and returned to the general freedom of common usage. They may not be used casually or inattentively, but they have lost their obsessive quality, their overdetermined character.

The use of analogy is not the only link between man's study of the divine and his study of his mind. A broader area of interest and purpose joins not only the theological and the psychological, but also the artistic views of man and the world. There is, remember, a trifocal effort necessary to seeing the mad preacher whole. The religious, the psychological and the literary find their centers in conflict; they describe and evaluate certain kinds of conduct in conflict, and they provide insights, presented usually by way of analogy, that are intended to influence the conduct of life. This shared dynamic accounts for the analogous appropriation of terminology such as "reader/communicant/patient" and "story/confession/case history" and "writer/priest/doctor" analogy is the time-honored method of choice whenever feelings, insights, and convictions must be communicated.

The mad preacher stands within and draws his meaning from this overlapping territory. Through him runs a confluence of voices, assertions that he feels impelled to answer. The concerns of these voices we can group into three major streams: 1) the scientific, physical, natural, 2) the religious, moral, ideal, 3) the artistic, symbolic,
fictional. This character is not merely a clinical case, nor is he truly a mystic; he is both, as the criticism testifies, and he is more: he creates his own destiny, he dreams his life, he manipulates the symbols through which he exists, as is evident in his language. As he endeavors to accommodate and evaluate the conflicting demands of the natural and the ideal, he feels inundated. He is faced with more ambiguity than he can tolerate. Both the language he hears and the language he uses partakes of the deadening, irreconcilable categorical.

II

Words are not the only symbols available to the mad preacher, but they are the most plentiful, and to this creature of abstraction they come naturally. As he arranges them in an effort to define his world and justify himself, they take on the likeness of weapons or chess pieces, restricting him to a pattern of conflict from which there is no escape.

Every conversation becomes combative. Miss L feels attacked by Shrike's mockery of Christianity, and he, in turn, attacks Betty's unaffected love of nature and her belief in its restorative influence. Hazel Motes violently denies Asa Hawks' declaration that "some preacher has left his mark" on him (p.32), and he decides to "seduce" Sabbath Lily so that her father will take him seriously. The young Gail Hightower's "gleeful" conversation estranges the welcoming party of "old men and old women" who then begin "to talk down" his excitement with "serious matters of the church" (p.52). Dialogue functions to emphasize dichotomy and opposition. Because these young men are preoccupied
in defining themselves, every declaration they hear has the sound of a challenge. They feel that their destiny is at stake, and every voice that comes into their heads is added to the weight of the evidence they are amassing, pro and con.

In the mad preacher's sermons the same ubiquitous duality occurs. There a mixture of contraries presents the issues in startling clarity, but cannot resolve them.

Even in his sentimentally conventional advice columns Miss L cannot avoid antithesis: "'Life is worthwhile,'" he writes, because of "'faith that burns like a clear white flame on a grim dark altar'" (p.5). When he shifts to his urgent, hysterical tone, the same antithetical structure controls his message: "'Christ is the black fruit that hangs on the crosstree. Man was lost by eating of the forbidden fruit. The black Christ-fruit, the love fruit . . . .'" (p.81).

Hazel Motes, a similarly unorthodox preacher, delivers his first sermon spontaneously, actually unintentionally, in revulsion against Asa Hawks: "'I want to tell you people something. Maybe you think you're not clean because you don't believe. Well you are clean, let me tell you that....Listenhere,' he called, 'I'm going to preach a new church--the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified'" (p.34). His last sermon is more polished, but the reversed Protestant dialectic remains intact: "'I preach there are all kinds of truth . . ., but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's no truth.'" And he continues,

"You needn't to look at the sky because it's not going to open up and show no place behind it. You needn't to search for any hole in the ground to look through into somewhere else. You can't go neither forwards nor backwards into your daddy's time nor your children's if you have them. In yourself right
now is all the place you've got. If there was any Fall, look there, if there was any Redemption, look there, and if you expect any Judgment, look there, because they all three will have to be in your time and your body and where in your time and your body can they be?" (p. 90)

Hightower's sermons are an "outrage" in their mixture of Civil War pyrotechnics and Presbyterian salvation. With characteristic indirection, Faulkner presents, not the text of the sermons, but reports of them. The best indication of their actual content lies in the monologue Hightower delivers to his wife as their train approaches Jefferson:

"Listen. Try to see it. Here is that fine shape of eternal youth and virginal desire which makes heroes. That makes the doings of heroes border so close upon the unbelievable that it is no wonder that their doings must emerge now and then like gunflashes in the smoke, and that their very physical passing becomes rumor with a thousand faces before breath is out of them, lest paradoxical truth outrage itself" (p.423).

So it must have been when he tried to make his congregation hear it, see it. The man's own words tend to confirm their evaluation of his sermons as "sacrilege" and "insanity": tangles of fact and fancy, past and future, religious dogma and private myth.

Through the violent extremes of his sermons the mad preacher shares with his audiences his own confusion. Their response is a measure of the limits of paradox. After Miss Lonelyhearts' "black Christ-fruit" harangue, the Doyles turn away in "astonishment" and "embarrassment." The wayfarers on Taulkinham's streets usually greet Hazel's performance with blank stares, although one answers, "'There's always fanatics'" (p.34), and another decides that the street preacher is "nuts" (p.92). Hightower's congregation listens at first, "astonished," "dubious," and "puzzled" (pp.42,56), then "horrified and outraged" (p.58). The mad preacher pushes the rhetoric of contradiction beyond its logical usefulness. After repeated failures to elicit a sympathetic or understanding
response, he chooses the alternative of silence. Miss Lonelyhearts adopts the imperturbability of a rock as he endures smilingly and without a word Shrike's game of "everyman his own Miss Lonelyhearts." By the final chapter of Wise Blood, Hazel has retreated to his boarding house and will rarely exchange a word with his curious landlady, although he does explain, enigmatically, that he "can't preach any more" (p.120) because he does not have time. When Hightower enters the pulpit for the last time, he stands in silence long after his congregation has emptied the church, and after he is beaten by the Klan he maintains his silence. These dead-ends are the natural results of language used combatively, of furious antitheses whose head-on force makes impossible cooperation, compromise or progressive resolution.

The tensions of characterization that are captured in the language of the mad preacher are well described in William Empson's discussion of the seventh type of ambiguity. He uses as examples words in which two opposite meanings, "the two opposite values of the ambiguity," express a self-contained conflict. His analysis of such words as the Latin altus, the English let and temper and maze recalls Szasz's example of the Latin sacer and Tillich's more lengthy explication of holy. This sort of contradiction, Empson stresses, need not be overtly ambiguous; rather, there is a context or relation of opposition established that allows for a wide variety of interpretation while providing that intensity that comes from compressing heterogeneous material into a single unit. The unit, as Empson studies it, may be a single word, or it may be a metaphor, or even an entire poem. The mad preacher presents a case in which an individual character functions as that integrative unit. For
Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower the relational opposite of religious is insane. The combination of the theological and the psychological in the person of the mad preacher establishes a set of contradictions that cannot be logically resolved. The resulting characterization belongs to that pattern of contradiction that Empson defines as "at once an indecision and a structure, like the symbol of the Cross." Although the tensions within the mad preacher seem to spring from fundamentally opposed sources, that is, the natural and the supernatural, or the physical and the spiritual, there is a connection, an identity of the two values of the ambiguity that can be named with a word such as irrationality. Both the psychological and the theological views of man and his world depend upon an imaginative apprehension of reality that expresses itself through metaphor and analogy before it formulates law and system.

The intuitive apprehension of a transcendent reality has sometimes been given the name faith and sometimes delusion, also, both vision and hallucination. Such contrasting pairs abound, as we have seen, in the critical analyses of the mad preachers here under study. Another context for the irrational that seems even more appropriate to an investigation of this character type is the artistic. The issue of believable and unbelievable fictions is a major theme of Miss Lonelyhearts, Wise Blood and Light in August. The mad preacher is swamped in stories: the sickening accounts of Miss L's letter writers, the self-serving rationalizations of his friends, the sales pitches of newspaper

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advertisements and Oney Jay Holy, the tales of childhood trauma of Mary Shrike, Sabbath Lily, Enoch Emery and Gail Hightower. And behind all looms the Christ story, providing a metaphoric ground for these individual interpretations of personal experience.

It is as an artist, a manipulator of symbols, that the mad preacher can be seen attempting to transcend the dichotomies of the flesh and the spirit. In modeling himself after someone who seemed to have successfully conquered that conflict, the mad preacher hopes to achieve some measure of disinterestedness, some relief from the pain of lived experience. By making himself an analogue, as it were, of that Great One, he hopes to share in that success story. As an analogue, however, he limits himself to a rhetorical existence. That is to say, the mad preacher makes himself, not into a saint, nor into a psychotic, but into a fictional figure, an actor speaking on cue.
CHAPTER 3: A PRIEST OF OUR TIME

He lived by himself in a room that was as full of shadows as an old steel engraving. It held a bed, a table, and two chairs. The walls were bare except for an ivory Christ that hung opposite the foot of the bed. He had removed the figure from the cross to which it had been fastened and had nailed it to the wall with large spikes. Miss Lonelyhearts

The shortest of the three novels, Miss Lonelyhearts, is not complicated by a subplot, as is Wise Blood, nor an interwoven group of stories, as is Light in August. The Enoch Emery chapters of Wise Blood occupy almost half of that novel, and the Gail Hightower portions of Light in August account for no more than a third of the longest of the three novels. But Miss Lonelyhearts alone is the center of West's novel; the narrative is entirely in third person, but the voice is peculiarly Miss Lonelyhearts'. Because this limited focus makes Miss Lonelyhearts the simplest, it is the best of the novels with which to begin looking closely at the pattern of action common to all three of the preacher-figures.

For Miss Lonelyhearts, the present is marked by sterility and futility of epidemic proportions. His work and his friends are steeped in cynicism; even the parks and skyscrapers reflect the barrenness of
Idealism gone sour, of dreams betrayed. Miss Lonelyhearts is struck by a conviction that the world he inhabits is a dead one, and West carefully plants both support for his protagonist's conviction and suspicion that the deadness is in the eye of the beholder. To cure this numbing malaise, Miss Lonelyhearts struggles to invoke some elusive power from the past. His dreams, his childhood memories, his reading of Dostoevsky suggest to him that there is some hope for rediscovering vitality and sharing it. His failure to revitalize himself and reanimate the dead world and cure his letter writers is made explicit on the last page of the novel as he is shot by Peter Doyle while attempting to heal him miraculously.

Miss Lonelyhearts' introduction to failure takes place in the city room of the New York Post-Dispatch where he daily reads the despairing life stories of "Sick-of-it-all," "Desperate," "Broken-hearted," "Broad Shoulders" and is unable to find the words for a reply. But worse than the helplessness of his correspondents and his own halting response is the newspaper game that he finds himself a part of. Although Miss Lonelyhearts sees the letters as "profoundly humble pleas for moral and spiritual advice. . . . inarticulate expressions of genuine suffering" (p.53), he also knows that the lonelyhearts column was created in a purely commercial spirit, an effort to increase the paying readership. When he has difficulty finishing his column and Shrike offers him advice, it is with a practical eye to this audience:
"Why don't you give them something new and hopeful? Tell them about art. Here, I'll dictate:

'Art Is a Way Out.
'Do not let life overwhelm you. When the old paths are choked with the debris of failure, look for newer and fresher paths. Art is just such a path....'" (p.9).

Scorning the dishonesty of Shrike's cliches, Miss Lonelyhearts once recommended suicide in his column. His feature editor's response was characteristically mordant:

"Remember, please, that your job is to increase the circulation of our paper. Suicide, it is only reasonable to think, must defeat this purpose" (pp.32-33).

The sense of defeat experienced by Miss Lonelyhearts on the job stems partly from his ambivalence toward his assignment. Like the rest of the newstaff, he first considered the column a joke, and he still sees the value of keeping his distance from the frustration of the letters, but he is unable either to dismiss them with a laugh or to respond with the appropriate helpfulness. He wavers and feels inadequate. But if within himself Miss L finds a growing malaise, in his business associates he discovers the joint malady of commercialism and cynicism grown chronic. Shrike is the principal spokesman of this group. He mocks Miss L's dilemma:

"Miss Lonelyhearts, my friend, I advise you to give your readers stones. When they ask for bread don't give them crackers as does the Church, and don't, like the State, tell them to eat cake. Explain that man cannot live by bread alone and give them stones. Teach them to pray each morning: 'Give us this day our daily stone'" (p.11).

Goldsmith, another staff writer, echoes Shrike's witticism on suicide while encouraging Miss L to take advantage of the suggestive overtones in a letter from "An Admirer":

"How now, Dostoievski?" he said. "That's no way to act. Instead of pulling the Russian by recommending suicide, you ought to get the lady with child and increase the potential circulation of the paper" (p.43).
When Miss L joins his friends after hours at Delahanty's he hears the same bitter banter, and he recognizes their model in their hyena laughter:

Like Shrike, the man they imitated, they were machines for making jokes. A button machine makes buttons, no matter what the power used, foot, steam or electricity. They, no matter what the motivating force, death, love or God, made jokes (p.27).

West places his protagonist in a grotesque environment peopled with grotesque characters in order to demonstrate and justify Miss L's alienation. The characters are grotesque, for instance, when they manifest non-human qualities: Shrike's name as a reminder of the bird of prey, his face compared to the blade of a hatchet, the men at the bar, producing jokes mechanically, operating not independently, but like automatons or puppets. Most significantly for Miss L, there is no hope of reassurance from such friends, no possibility of their relieving his anxiety. The city room itself reflects this inhospitality, "cold and damp," where Miss L, gazing about in dejection "could find no support for either his eyes or his feelings" (p.65).

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79 Wolfgang Kayser's admirable survey and analysis, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (1957; rpt. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), frequently focuses on the alienation and estrangement that accompanies the grotesque, and concludes that the grotesque "is primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe" (p.185).

80 A ruling principle of the grotesque, as Kayser repeatedly demonstrates, is "the merger of mutually incompatible elements" (p.116): the "unnatural fusion" of the human with the animal or with the mechanical (p.183). This "frightful mixture of mechanical, vegetable, animal, and human elements is represented as the image of our world, which is breaking apart" (p.33).
The "obsessive environments," as Randall Reid calls the novel's settings, intensify the sense of sterility that pervades Miss Lonelyhearts' struggle in the newspaper game. In the little park between the newspaper building and Delahanty's the ground is covered with a "decay that...was not the kind in which life generates. Last year, he remembered, May had failed to quicken these soiled fields. It had taken all the brutality of July to torture a few green spikes through the exhausted dirt" (p.10). Miss L's preoccupation with sterility and deadness begins routinely to extend itself to violence. "Brutality" and "torture" do succeed in producing some "spikes" of grass, even though the ground is "exhausted." A little later in the novel Miss L thinks of himself in similar terms: "Like a dead man, only friction could make him warm or violence make him mobile" (p.34). Again and again Miss L returns to the premise that the sterility of his existence can be broken only by violence, that powerlessness can be overcome through extreme displays of power.

This same premise underlies the efforts of Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower to set right the unsatisfactory present. Hazel's murder of Solace Layfield and his own self-blinding are but the most extreme instances in a career studded with verbal and physical aggression. For the lonely child, Gail, the repeatedly exaggerated body count of his grandfather's encounters with the Yankees serves as a ritual charm that he will carry into his adulthood, where it will engender and justify his

wife's death, his own forced disestablishment, and a beating from the Klan. Face to face with a brutalized reality -- Miss L's letters, Hazel's Taulkinham, Hightower's war-stricken family -- the mad preacher seeks for a response, or a weapon, potent enough to return some reliable order to the human scene.

From the park, Miss Lonelyhearts looks at the sky, gray and empty, holding no signs of power, "no angels, flaming crosses, olive-bearing doves, wheels within wheels. Only a newspaper struggled in the air like a kite with a broken spine" (p.11). The newspaper has replaced the old religious symbols, but it lacks their efficacy; compared to them it is a broken toy. Even in broad daylight the park seems to be dominated by darkness and shadow, like Miss L's room. As he entered the park through an archway, Miss L "swallowed mouthfuls of...heavy shade" and "walked into the shadow of a lamp-post that lay on the path like a spear. It pierced him like a spear" (p.10). The ominous and sinister quality of Miss Lonelyhearts' world is largely the result of West's introduction of grotesque elements into an otherwise realistic setting. There is a gradual blurring of the distinctions between the realm of inanimate things and that of plants, animals and human beings, until "the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid." On a later visit to the park, for instance, Miss L wearily occupies a bench opposite an obelisk.

The stone shaft cast a long, rigid shadow on the walk in front of him. He sat staring at it without knowing why until he noticed that it was lengthening in rapid jerks, not as shadows

82 Kayser, p. 21.
usually lengthen. He grew frightened and looked up at the monument. It seemed red and swollen in the dying sun, as though it were about to spout a load of granite seed (p.33)

Some of Wolfgang Kayser's conclusions about the nature of the grotesque are particularly pertinent to West's handling of this principle of estrangement. Early in his study Kayser stresses that in both art and literature the grotesque world is one in which "the natural order of things has been subverted."83 The cumulative effect of West's choice of grotesque details is to define Miss Lonelyhearts' world as one lacking a meaningful and supportive order. The unnatural fusion of disparate realms (such as the sudden animation of the obelisk) that underlies this disorder, Kayser states, "may either be effected in the tangible objects themselves or it may result from a character's -- or the narrator's -- reaction to a given situation."84 West simultaneously employs both the physical environment and Miss L's unsettling perception of his surroundings to produce in the novel's reader the apprehension and confusion that Kayser considers central to the reception of the grotesque.85 When West describes Miss L's reaction to the obelisk's rapidly lengthening shadow, for example, he is careful to avoid any authorial explanation for this peculiarity. With the introduction of the "factually impossible," Kayser continues, "the border of the grotesque is crossed."86

83 Kayser, p. 21.
84 Kayser, p. 116.
85 Kayser, p. 114.
86 Kayser, p. 116.
If West had written the account entirely in either the indicative or the subjunctive, he would have shifted the balance of doubt and provided a clear measure of the reliability of Miss L's perceptions. Such a resolution, however, would destroy the very ambiguity it is West's purpose to maintain. He allows no appreciable distance to develop between his protagonist and the reader, staying always within close range of Miss L's consciousness. It is important that the columnist's soundness of mind be doubted -- he even doubts it himself -- but it is equally important that there be ample credible evidence for his perception of his world's dislocation.

There is one other attribute of the grotesque as a genre that is particularly relevant to Miss L's characterization and dilemma, and that is Kayser's assertion that unlike the estrangement of tragedy, which leads on to deeper meaning, the grotesque remains "within the sphere of incomprehensibility"; "no cause, no power can be named as responsible" for the estrangement of the world. And Kayser continues, "If we were able to name these powers and relate them to the cosmic order, the grotesque would lose its essential quality." Kayser suggests that the grotesque is a way of objectifying "the ghostly 'It!'" of the impersonal pronoun, by means of which "we seek to express that which language cannot name." Unless he wishes to weaken his effect, "the creator of grotesques ... must not and cannot suggest a meaning." Miss

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87 Kayser, p. 185.
88 Kayser, pp. 185, 209.
89 Kayser, p. 186.
Lonelyhearts' endeavor to interpret the dislocation that he sees and to find a remedy for it, therefore, is constantly foiled. He is unwilling to grant an absurd world in which suffering has no meaning.

In his preoccupied speculation about the source of the disorder that surrounds him, Miss L does not overlook human agency, but he is convinced of man's limits and suspects the inanimate world of hiding some malignant power. During his last visit to the park he again studies the sky and finds it "canvas-colored and ill-stretched."

He examined it like a stupid detective who is searching for a clew to his own exhaustion. When he found nothing, he turned his trained eye on the skyscrapers that menaced the little park from all sides. In their tons of forced rock and tortured steel, he discovered what he thought was a clew (p.46).

What he believes he has recognized in the skyscrapers is yet another kind of dislocation, typically American: a disproportionate zeal to shape the inanimate world into something colossal, accompanied by the fear that the inanimate world itself will take control. The skyscrapers, he theorizes, are the result of "an orgy of stone breaking" in which Americans "dissipated" their energy, working "hysterically, desperately, almost as if they knew that the stones would some day break them" (p.46).

Miss Lonelyhearts may have succeeded in uncovering a clue to his own exhaustion in this passage, for he has certainly had similar conflicts with the material world. His flight to Betty's apartment in Chapter 4 is occasioned by his own failure to organize the world into dependable patterns: "the shoes under the bed, the ties in the holder, the pencils on the table. When he looked out of a window, he composed the skyline by balancing one building against another" (p.20). He cannot, however, prevent a bird from flying across this static arrangement, and even his dominion over his own belongings seems challenged on this
day when

...all the inanimate things over which he had tried to obtain control took the field against him. When he touched something, it spilled or rolled to the floor. The collar buttons disappeared under the bed, the point of the pencil broke, the handle of the razor fell off, the window shade refused to stay down. He fought back, but with too much violence, and was decisively defeated by the spring of the alarm clock (p.20).

Miss Lonelyhearts' dilemma here has the comic ring of the mock-heroic; his exaggerated insistence upon orderliness makes him the laughable victim of a morning's trivial mishaps. West is characteristically double-playing his material, as O'Connor, having learned the manner well from this novel, would later do with Hazel Motes and his search for "a place to be": shifting in mid-stride from a sober, straight-forward tone to ironic slapstick, and back again to serious concern. With these rapid changes of attitude, West insures the reader's disequilibrium without entirely undermining his belief that beneath the ordinary disorder of city life, Miss L has glimpsed a dislocation of profound consequence. Fleeing his room for the street, he found that "there chaos was multiple":

Broken groups of people hurried past, forming neither stars nor squares. The lamp-posts were badly spaced and the flagging was of different sizes. Nor could he do anything with the harsh clanging sound of street cars and the raw shouts of hucksters. No repeated group of words would fit their rhythm and no scale could give them meaning (pp.20-21).

Note that not merely the disorder, but his inability to arrange and "give meaning" to random experience, his impotence, is what agitates him. The city room's cynicism, the park's decay, the street's chaos, the speakeasy's "alcoholic gloom" combine to increase Miss Lonelyhearts' melancholy and his conviction that the vitality and stability of the familiar and natural are disappearing.
West includes even the wholesome pastoral among these threatening, obsessive environments. Betty assures Miss L that if he were to live in the country, "he would find that all his troubles were city troubles," and she takes him on a recuperative trip to a Connecticut farm where she was born. Although thoroughly skeptical of Betty's plan, once in the woods, Miss Lonelyhearts "had to admit, even to himself, that the pale new leaves, shaped and colored like candle flames, were beautiful and that the air smelt clean and alive" (p.60). At last Miss L seems to have escaped the contagion that poisoned his life in New York. He and Betty make the farmhouse liveable, eat fresh food cooked over a wood fire, watch deer feed by the pond, swim, get plenty of sunshine and fresh springtime air. And yet the countryside is not without the same tokens of strife and decay, both human and inhuman, that mark the city. There is the tacky commercialism of the "Aw-Kum-On" garage, where Miss L goes for gasoline. The garage attendant blames the decline in the deer population on "the yids"; there are still deer at the pond, he says, because the "yids" don't go there. And there is an echo of the midtown park atmosphere in a description of the shadowy woods:

It was very sad under the trees. Although spring was well advanced, in the deep shade there was nothing but death -- rotten leaves, gray and white fungi, and over everything a funereal hush (p.62).

The disintegration to which Miss Lonelyhearts is so sensitive taints even the pastoral peace. The country landscape is demonstrably underlaid with rot, just as the city streets are the daily scene of violent disorder.

And that is why Miss Lonelyhearts is so relieved, on his return to the city, to realize that "Betty had failed to cure him and that he had been right...." (p.64). If a change of scene had succeeded in dispersing
his "troubles" Miss L might have been forced to conclude that the stagnation, the hostility, the despair, the senselessness that he feels surrounds him were merely projections of his querulous sensibility. As he drives through the slums of the Bronx, he feels reassured that these signs of disintegration are, indeed, visible in the cultural fabric.

The letter writers are a significant segment of the fabric that Miss L sees. Their stories embody the same impoverishment that marks the physical environment. For Miss Lonelyhearts they represent the cheated masses, maimed by some unknown hand and denied even the dignity of an explanation. Some are disfigured or crippled like "Desperate," the sixteen-year-old girl born without a nose, who wonders if she "did something in the other world" to "deserve such a bad fate" (p.7); or Peter Doyle, who, with one leg shorter than the other, works painfully long days as a meter reader, and, at forty-one, realizes that his future will be a futile repetition of his past.

West describes Doyle in detail, emphasizing his grotesque features:

The cripple had a very strange face. His eyes failed to balance; his mouth was not under his nose; his forehead was square and bony; and his round chin was like a forehead in miniature. He looked like one of those composite pictures used by screen magazines in guessing contests (p.75).

When Doyle walks, dragging his lame foot behind him, he makes "many waste motions, like those of a partially destroyed insect" (p.73). When he speaks, his words come out in "a jumble," and the gestures that are meant to accompany his conversation either "lagged behind...or ran ahead" of the subject. Peter Doyle is completely a creature of Miss Lonelyhearts' distorted, malfunctioning universe.
The disconnectedness that marks Doyle's speech and movements shows itself in a variety of ways in several of the other characters. In "The Dead Pan" our attention is drawn to the discrepancy between Shrike's rapid-fire speech, punctuated by extravagant gestures, and his face, which always retains a mask-like immobility. The "clean old man," whom Miss L and his friend Gates find sitting on a closed toilet seat in a men's restroom, is incongruously outfitted with gloves, a satin tie and cane, and affects an elaborate gentlemanly manner. Mary Shrike eagerly dates Miss L, flouting her husband, but even while she is kissing him, she refuses to "associate what she felt with the sexual act" (pp.33-34). Because "she always talked in headlines" (p.35), Miss L learns quickly that there is little substance behind the emotional urgency of her declarations. After a fight with her husband, Mary asks Miss Lonelyhearts to take her to a nightclub called El Gaucho: "'It's a little fakey, I know, but it's gay and I so want to be gay'" (p.39). When they enter and are shown to a table, a Cuban rhumba is playing and "Mary immediately went Spanish and her movements became languorous and full of abandon" (p.38). Whereas Doyle's incongruity is only physical -- his topsy-turvy face, his incoherent speech, his unsynchronized hands -- the peculiarities of the Shrikes and the clean old man are rooted more deeply in their characters. All three are involved in a bit of protective pretense that is initially confusing and ultimately exasperating for Miss Lonelyhearts.

Miss L cannot relax in the romantic atmosphere of El Gaucho's because he recognizes the shallow calculation that lies behind the "guitars, bright shawls, exotic foods, outlandish costumes -- all these things were part of the business of dreams" (p.38). Once he would have
laughed at "the advertisements offering to teach writing, cartooning, engineering, to add inches to the biceps and develop the bust" (p.38), but now he realizes that the people who come to El Gaucho and those who answer the advertisements are the same people who write to Miss Lonelyhearts for help. He does not find their dreams funny any longer, but he is increasingly sickened by the cheapened rate of exchange to which those dreams have been reduced. What remains is only the husk of the dream, only the packaging: as Mary flirts with Miss L, her dress is "like glass-covered steel and there was something cleanly mechanical in her pantomime" (p.39).

Mary will engage in no more than a pantomime of a romantic encounter; when Miss Lonelyhearts presses her to sleep with him, she begins to talk about her difficult childhood and how she watched her mother die of cancer. (Her mother, she says, suffered also from the cruelty of her father, who was an artist, "a man of genius.") "Parents are also part of the business of dreams," Miss L speculates:

My father was a Russian prince, my father was a Piute Indian chief, my father was an Australian sheep baron, my father lost all his money on Wall Street, my father was a portrait painter. People like Mary were unable to do without such tales. They told them because they wanted to talk about something...poetic (p.40).

"People like Mary," that is, virtually everyone Miss L knows and especially his letter writers, endeavor to find an added dimension in their lives that will yield them some measure of self-esteem. Too frequently, it seems to Miss Lonelyhearts, this search for the "poetic" results in nothing more than the fabrication of a posture that is unrelated to the realities of the situation: Shrike's manic gregariousness does nothing to improve his relationship with his wife; Betty's love of nature effects
no cure for Miss Lonelyhearts; Mary Shrike's romanticization of the past
keeps her at a distance from her husband. Such make-believe allows for
periodic escape from, but no change in the unsatisfying present.

Miss Lonelyhearts believes that he has come upon a key to under-
standing and, perhaps, changing the badly disjointed times in which he
and his fellow New Yorkers struggle. This key is the dream and its
corruption. "Men have always fought their misery with dreams," he
generalizes. "Although dreams were once powerful, they have been made
puerile by the movies, radio and newspapers. Among many betrayals, this
one is the worst" (p.64). This theory fits his letterwriters, like
Peter Doyle, who tells his wife that "the papers is crap," but writes
to Miss L because "I figured maybe you no something about it because
you have read a lot of books...."; and it fits his friends at the bar
who, having lost their own ideals, now mock the creative endeavors of
others with, "...after all one has to earn a living."; and the theory
accounts for Miss Lonelyhearts' discomfort with El Gaucho and adver-
tsements that convert private aspirations into "the business of dreams."
It is this devaluation of dreams Miss Lonelyhearts believes, that has
turned New York into a living nightmare. As he meditated on this
dilemma when he and Betty entered the Bronx on their return from the
country, he noticed a man "who appeared to be on the verge of death
stagger into a movie theater that was showing a picture called Blonde
Beauty. He saw a ragged woman with an enormous goiter pick a love
story magazine out of a garbage can and seem very excited by her find"
(p.64). The people's need for ideals is being met by cheap and empty
imitations, and Miss L feels that his column implicates him in this
worst of all betrayals. Moreover, he is ashamed of abandoning his own
Ideals: "The thing that made his share in it particularly bad," he reflects, "was that he was capable of dreaming the Christ dream" (p.64).

Religious ideals have suffered the same deprecation as private dreams, and this loss intensifies the general cultural impoverishment. The novel's opening paragraph focuses on one of Shrike's mock prayers, "Soul of Miss L, glorify me," and wherever Miss Lonelyhearts turns, he finds evidence of religion's reduced estate. "America has her own religions," Shrike snaps at the mention of the Thomistic synthesis. And to illustrate his meaning he produces a newspaper clipping headlined, "'ADDING MACHINE USED IN RITUAL OF WESTERN SECT.'" The Liberal Church of America, the article states, offers prayers on an adding machine because "numbers...constitute the only universal language" (pp.13-14). West did not need the computer as a metaphor for the dehumanization of the spiritual impulse. And when the religious motive is allowed, it is qualified and restricted so as to insure its impotence. Miss L's friends criticize his religious instincts as too "literary" and smugly agree that "even if he were to have a genuine religious experience, it would be personal and so meaningless, except to a psychologist" (pp.13-14). Because Miss L himself doubts the efficacy of a religious stance, he is caught in a double bind. His ambivalence is clearly indicated in his own formulation, "the Christ dream." The phrase suggests, simultaneously, spiritual aspiration and pacifying illusion. It is just as difficult for the reader as it is for Miss Lonelyhearts to judge whether his dream is an unconscious desire or a chosen commitment. If he affirms the reality and the power of the spiritual life, he runs the risk of finding himself in the ranks of the lunatic fringe. In the land of the skyscraper and the adding machine, only aspirations of a material nature are taken seriously.
Miss L's radical dissatisfaction with the present reality is typical of the mad preacher. Also typical is the uncertainty with which that reality is established. Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower move in similarly grotesque, shadowy environments which are unquestionably unwholesome: New York City during the depression, the ghost town of Eastrod, Tennessee, and the careless corruption of Taulkinham, the post-Civil War South. Each protagonist experiences the insufficiency of his world as a threat directed against his well-being. But even while the evidence supporting that view of a malevolent environment accumulates, it becomes increasingly obvious that the disharmony and violence of external reality is, to some extent, particularly unsettling because it reflects, rather than simply causes, these characters' own internal disruption. The mad preacher is a character who reads his environment for signs, and is especially sensitive to symbols that reinforce his melancholy. This conscious probing for meaning on his part adds another dimension to the usual functions of setting in these novels: the settings do aid in characterization, Miss L's shadowy room suggesting his melancholy, for example. Setting also helps to establish credibility for the character, the city room, the letters, the bar accounting for Miss L's depression. Additionally, setting is interpreted by the character himself in an effort to define his world and his place in it.

II

Miss Lonelyhearts finds his world uniformly non-supportive. The recovery of vitality that he seeks is not to be found in his job, in nature, with his friends, nor with his fiancee. With greater and greater frequency he turns to his imagination as a resource: his dreams,
memories and fantasies suggest the presence of a creativity that is absent in the external world. They also clarify his "Christ dream," its source, its meaning, and its value.

During the course of the novel Miss Lonelyhearts has four dreams. All have to do with the use of power. Several other motifs also recur. The first two dreams occur on the same night, in fact the first night of the narrative, after we have seen Miss L at work, in the park, and then at Delahanty's with Shrike. When he goes home he takes The Brothers Karamazov to bed with him and rereads a chapter on Father Zossima; then he contemplates his boyhood fascination with the name of Christ while staring at the ivory Christ he has nailed to his wall until, to interrupt this troubling reverie, he closes his eyes.

With sleep, a dream came in which he found himself on the stage of a crowded theater. He was a magician who did tricks with doorknobs. At his command, they bled, flowered, spoke. After his act was finished, he tried to lead his audience in prayer. But no matter how hard he struggled, his prayer was one Shrike had taught him and his voice was that of a conductor calling stations (p.17).

At this point in the narrative the reader has no difficulty in recognizing within the dream the issues that are paramount in Miss Lonelyhearts' waking life. Here he is faced by an audience expecting a performance, and as a columnist he is expected to enlighten and inspire his correspondents. As a magician he is in command, but his power is of a limited, theatrical nature. He can give the "dead...world of doorknobs" the attributes of life, but when he attempts to step out of his role of entertainer and exert spiritual leadership, Miss Lonelyhearts finds himself walking into an imitation of Shrike. This same failure figures repeatedly in Miss L's inability to complete his advice column with the religious seriousness he feels is appropriate.
The second dream is heralded by the final words of the first, "... in the Blood of the Lamb." In this next dream the deific Lamb of the prayer becomes a piece of livestock in the marketplace, or as West wrote of this chapter in Contempo: "the need for taking symbols literally is described through a dream in which a symbol is actually fleshed." Briefly, Miss Lonelyhearts dreams that he is again at college, arguing the existence of God into the early morning hours with two friends. Having run out of whiskey, at dawn they go to a market on the outskirts of town to buy some applejack. Once there they decide to buy one of the spring lambs and roast it in the woods. Miss L stipulates that it must be sacrificed to God first. After buying a butcher knife, they carry the lamb across a meadow and up a hill until they find a rock to serve as an altar. Miss Lonelyhearts is elected priest. Crouching over the lamb and holding the knife in the air, he works himself into a frenzy, chanting, "'Christ, Christ, Jesus Christ. Christ, Christ, Jesus Christ'" (p.19). He bungles the job, wounding the lamb and breaking the knife on the rock. The lamb crawls into the underbrush and the three friends, their hands covered with blood, flee the scene. Only Miss Lonelyhearts returns, later, to put the lamb out of its misery by crushing its head with a stone.

Much the longest of the four dreams, this one is an episode in its own right and provides some welcome background information which, if not historically exact, testifies to Miss Lonelyhearts' own understanding of his character. As in the first dream, he is in a commanding position,

this time "elected priest"; and, again, he puts on a convincing performance up to the point of actually executing his religious office. A playful parody of a spring rite is translated into a brutally incompetent slaughter. The conclusion of the dream suggests the awesome weight of responsibility that attends power: Miss Lonelyhearts must return and kill the helpless lamb in order to end its suffering.

Miss Lonelyhearts dreams his third dream about halfway through the novel. Between the second and third dreams are his visit to Betty's apartment, the episode with the clean old man, his date with Mary Shrike, and his rendezvous with Faye Doyle. This chapter, "Miss Lonelyhearts in the Dismal Swamp," contains his pawn shop dream, his explanation to Betty of why he can't forget the letters, and Shrike's special version of the classic methods of escape. Miss L has reached the nadir of his self-analysis. Accordingly, in his dream he struggles to give order to piles of trash: pawnshop discards and marine refuse.

He found himself in the window of a pawnshop full of fur coats, diamond rings, watches, shot-guns, fishing tackle, mandolins. All these things were the paraphernalia of suffering....

He sat in the window thinking. Man has a tropism for order. Keys in one pocket, change in another. Mandolins are tuned GDAE. The physical world has a tropism for disorder, entropy. Man against Nature...the battle of the centuries. Keys yearn to mix with change. Mandolins strive to get out of tune. Every order has within it the germ of destruction. All order is doomed, yet the battle is worthwhile.

A trumpet, marked to sell for $2.49, gave the call to battle and Miss Lonelyhearts plunged into the fray. First he formed a phallus of old watches and rubber boots, then a heart of umbrellas and trout flies, then a diamond of musical instruments and derby hats, after these a circle, triangle, square, swastika. But nothing proved definitive and he began to make a gigantic cross. When the cross became too large for the pawnshop, he moved it to the shore of the ocean. There every wave added to his stock faster than he could lengthen its arms. His labors were enormous. He staggered from the last wave line to his work, loaded down with marine refuse—bottles, shells, chunks of cork, fish heads, pieces of net (pp.51-52).
I have quoted from this dream at length because it encompasses so many of the themes and motifs central to the novel, and because it presents in dream metaphor the controlling dynamic of Miss Lonelyhearts' waking life. There is the ever-present refrain of devaluation, accompanied by the suggestion of misplaced commercialization: the goods in the pawnshop window have been sacrificed by their owners and are "marked to sell." They represent personal legacies of suffering. There is a reminder of the grotesque in the dreamer's belief that the inanimate world has a will of its own, "keys yearn" and "mandolins strive;" and that will is directed against man's efforts to keep the world in order and harmony. Equally grotesque is the notion that man's preference for order is merely a tropism, automatic, involuntary. The "battle of the centuries" is stripped of any pretensions to dignity and becomes something like two mechanisms locked in ineluctable embrace. This major theme of order versus chaos is nowhere in the novel so explicit as in this dream, Miss Lonelyhearts becoming a soldier in battle against entropy.

The issue of power, of control, is once again paramount. Miss Lonelyhearts sets to work shaping the surrounding detritus into arrangements that suggest some meaning; he groups old watches and rubber boots together in the shape of a phallus; experimenting with shape after shape, heart, diamond, even swastika, he finds that "nothing proved definitive" until he begins to use the cross shape. As the dream action makes clear, the "gigantic cross" can accommodate any amount of any kind of material. The only limits to its growth are Miss L's imagination and endurance. He can move it from the pawnshop to the ocean shore, but there he expends the remainder of his strength on the ever-increasing debris
brought in by the ceaseless waves. Nature wins again, but the dreamer demonstrates considerable resourcefulness and skill.

By way of dreams, West focuses on Miss Lonelyhearts' subjective state and makes it available to the reader. In the pawnshop dream West creates a dream metaphor that illuminates Miss Lonelyhearts' present dilemma and predicts the eventual outcome. The dreamer is surrounded by derelicts; he and they are, in fact, all on display together. The dreamer is a thinker; he speculates in terms of dualities, of opposites. He is also a doer; he acts energetically, he manipulates symbolic forms. But he is dissatisfied; he wants a definitive form, an absolute solution. He then chooses the cross shape and proceeds to enlarge it with the ever-replenished supply of garbage, staggering under his load. The dream is a comment on Miss Lonelyhearts' endeavor to find a saving order for his letter-writers and his conviction that the effort is futile. It reveals his hidden attitude about himself and his correspondents: they are life's refuse, he is an intelligence that manipulates them. And it sends a warning: if the dreamer persists in his present activities, he will be buried by the garbage.

Clearly, Miss Lonelyhearts' dreams are a major element in the characterization. West places them at strategic points in the narrative where their subjective content will illuminate and deepen the external situation. Sometimes a refrain is interwoven between the waking and sleeping worlds by the repetition of a word or phrase, such as "door-knobs," which are brought to life in the magic act of the first dream shortly after Miss L has been reminiscing on the deadness of the world, "...a world of doorknobs" (p.17); or the chant, "Christ, Christ, Jesus Christ," also introduced just before Miss L falls asleep the first time,
and repeated in the second dream at the ceremony to sacrifice the lamb. In every dream Miss Lonelyhearts is in a role that reflects upon and qualifies his conscious identity, especially his relationship with his correspondents: a magician putting on a performance, an elected priest botching a ceremony, a soldier in contest with the waves. In his waking fantasies Miss L plays roles, too: an anarchist with a bomb in his pocket, Havelock Ellis interviewing the clean old man, a stupid detective, Betty's fiance, a smiling saint. The thread of theatricality that is introduced in the first dream reappears frequently, carrying with it the implication of duplicity.

In his dreams Miss Lonelyhearts gets in touch with a wide range of power, and helplessness, that he is only partly aware of in his conscious hours. Although he feels inadequate on the job, in the company of Shrike, and as Betty's fiance, his dreams testify to a creativity and vigor that lie waiting to be tapped. Not only are his dreams themselves evidence of an inner strength, they are about control and its limits. Miss Lonelyhearts seems to be testing out ideas on religious authority, ethical responsibility, and an ideal harmonious order in his dreams much as it does in his conscious imagination. This same tactic is used by Motes and Hightower, and it reveals the same underlying preoccupation with power and helplessness: Hazel's dreams of closing coffins and of being "not dead but only buried" and on view in his Essex, Hightower's waking dream of the Confederate cavalry raid that takes on the spiritual authority of a harrowing of hell. All three men are looking for a means of extending their control over the unsatisfying present, and all three see religion as the most suitable sphere for that extension.
Memories, as well as dreams and fantasies, constitute an important resource in Miss Lonelyhearts' effort to discover a remedy for the present malaise. At moments of stress or confusion he draws upon the past for guidance. During the course of the novel Miss L recalls three vivid experiences from his childhood. The first occurs shortly before the first dream and after he has been rereading The Brothers Karamazov; it is a memory of himself as a boy in his father's church. The second comes to him as he listens to his friends' sour imitations of Shrike in Delahanty's, a memory of playing the piano while his younger sister danced. And the third happens during the interrogation of the clean old man; Miss L "felt as he had felt years before, when he had accidentally stepped on a small frog" (p.30).

Miss Lonelyhearts' memory of himself as a boy in his father's church is crucially important for an understanding of his predisposition to equate religion and power:

As a boy in his father's church, he had discovered that something stirred in him when he shouted the name of Christ, something secret and enormously powerful. He had played with this thing, but had never allowed it to come alive (p.17).

This "something secret and enormously powerful" he now thinks of as hysteria, something to be feared. Yet he has not given up his childhood fascination: "For him, Christ was the most natural of excitements. Fixing his eyes on the image that hung on the wall, he began to chant: "'Christ, Christ, Jesus Christ. Christ, Christ, Jesus Christ.'" It is immediately following this passage that Miss Lonelyhearts falls asleep and dreams of being a magician who commands doorknobs to bleed, flower, and speak.
Now we have an explanation for Miss L's early non sequitur as he finishes the letter from "Harold S.": "Christ was the answer, but if he did not want to get sick he had to stay away from the Christ business" (p.8). Miss Lonelyhearts' childhood religious experience continues to be visible in his adult imagination and to assert its primitive emotional strength whenever rational routine is inadequate, as it has become for him at the newspaper.

Miss Lonelyhearts' memory of his sister's dance amplifies his preoccupation with the need for order and harmony. In the dim light at Delahanty's Miss L notices that the mahogany bar shines like gold and that the glasses and bottles ring like bells when the bartender touches them together. This pleasant interlude seems to touch off the reminiscence of the earlier satisfying occasion:

One winter evening, he had been waiting with his little sister for their father to come home from church. She was eight years old then, and he was twelve. Made sad by the pause between playing and eating, he had gone to the piano and had begun a piece by Mozart. It was the first time he had ever voluntarily gone to the piano. His sister left her picture book to dance to the music. She had never danced before. She danced gravely and carefully, a simple dance yet formal....(pp.27-28).

The serenity of this scene leads Miss Lonelyhearts into a fantasy of children dancing: "Square replacing oblong and being replaced by circle. Every child, everywhere; in the whole world there was not one child who was not gravely, sweetly dancing" (p.28). As they did in his pawnshop dream, Platonic shapes dominate Miss L's contemplation of innocence and perfection in motion. Lost in his abstraction, he steps back from the bar, bumps into a man holding a beer, and is knocked to the floor by a punch in the mouth. A bar, after all, is no place for children sweetly dancing.
In truth, there seems to be no place, no sanctuary in Miss Lonelyhearts' world where a love for beauty and innocence are nurtured. His dreams are repeatedly smashed, like his jaw, by a reality which seems to him essentially malevolent, like a monster in a child's nightmare.

It is with something of a child's resentment at being mistreated that Miss Lonelyhearts, after leaving Delahanty's, joins with Ned Gates in the interrogation and abuse of George B. Simpson, "the clean old man." And it is in the midst of the old man's humiliation that Miss L relives the third memory from his boyhood:

Miss Lonelyhearts felt as he had felt years before, when he had accidentally stepped on a small frog. Its spilled guts had filled him with pity, but when its suffering had become real to his senses, his pity had turned to rage and he had beaten it frantically until it was dead (p.30).

Again we see the motif of the helpless in the hands of the powerful. The reaction of the boy to the wounded animal's suffering becomes the reaction of the man faced with the pathetic George B. Simpson and all the miserable letter-writers he represents. He moves from pity to rage to mindless violence; West leaves ambiguous whether Miss L's rage is for the victim's pain or because of his own, that is, whether he moves to end the frog's suffering or his own.

By way of memory, fantasy and dream Miss Lonelyhearts is casting about in his imagination for alternatives to the unwholesome, unfulfilling existence in which he finds himself. His imagination suggests these missing ingredients: a personal sense of worth and potency, meaningful harmony and orderliness, and religious seriousness.

One further source of encouragement is available to Miss Lonelyhearts in the form of religious models: his Baptist father and Dostoevsky's Father Zossima. These men displayed authority and power,
and they were able to communicate it to others. They serve as patterns in Miss L's experiment to recover a lost vitality.

From his father Miss Lonelyhearts inherits his "Old Testament look," the fleshless, ascetic face of "the New England puritan" (p.9). Although he chooses not to follow his father into the Baptist ministry, Miss L carries on within him the idea of vocation, the moral earnestness and the evangelical spirit which he learned as a child. The powerful emotionalism that he experienced in his father's church services, shouting the name of Christ, reasserts itself in his dreams. Clearly his persistent pursuit of a saving order where such sufferers as his letter-writers can find solace has its original impetus in his early family experience.

From Dostoevsky Miss Lonelyhearts gleans another religious model, the aged monk, Zossima, Aloysha Karamazov's mentor, who preaches love and forebearance:

"Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth....If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will at last come to love the whole world with an all-embracing love" (p.16).

West's inclusion of Zossima is an acknowledgment of the novel's debt to Dostoevsky, whose somber and ambiguous morality finds its American descendant in Miss Lonelyhearts. Possibly in the columnist's mind, and certainly in West's, is the aftermath of Zossima's death: a miracle is expected, and when, instead, the body decays rapidly and odoriferously, the suspicion that the elder's teachings were false gains support.
III

Upon reentering New York via the Bronx slums after the interlude in the country with Betty, Miss Lonelyhearts is relieved to find things as he left them: "crowds of people moved through the street with a dream-like violence;" he is not "cured," he is still "overwhelmed by the desire to help" the miserable (p.64). The chapter is very appropriately titled, "Miss Lonelyhearts Returns." He returns to the problem that has preoccupied him since the opening chapter. While the first two-thirds of the novel shows the young columnist recognizing the cultural malignancy and measuring himself against it, the final one-third is the record of his determined campaign against spiritual deadness. It is on his drive through the Bronx slum that he begins to formulate the rationale of his strategy: "Men have always fought their misery with dreams." Significantly, Miss L neglects to define the terms of his premise: he never distinguishes between unconscious, sleeping dreams and intentional aspirations. Indeed, he seems never to recognize a difference. He commits himself to helping the suffering and vows to work at being sincerely humble. He fails to accomplish any of the objectives of his program. The next morning he begins a column on Christ's suffering on the cross, but tears it up, deciding that "with him, even the word Christ was a vanity" (p.65). He works so hard at his humility that it becomes a source of pride, a "triumphant thing" (p.78). Miss Lonelyhearts' return is essentially a retreat to his world of fantasy and a repetition of earlier compulsive strategies.

There are foretastes of disaster throughout the novel. We have already considered the warning implicit in the dreamer's exhaustion at
the end of the pawnshop dream. Undoubtedly one of the reasons that Miss Lonelyhearts is so regularly disappointed is that his expectations are so high; he overextends himself to the point of collapse. His other dreams also carry messages of tasks unsatisfactorily handled. His dream of being a magician who, after successfully commanding doorknobs to speak, recites a Shrike blasphemy when he intends to lead the audience in prayer finds its real-life counterpart in Miss L's visit to the Doyles, as he tries to give them a healing message of love but instead delivers a Shrike-like diatribe in "a stage scream" (p.81). The refrain of theatricality that threads its way through the episodes hints at an undermining pretension and eagerness for make-believe inconsistent with a genuine religious commitment. The roles that Miss L easily takes up and discards, and his habit of relating to people only in specified roles, in clichéd exchanges (as he does with Shrike and in his column), are not behaviors that can be thrown off easily.

Miss Lonelyhearts' dramatics are an effective way of keeping people at a distance and maintaining control over the flux of experience, an important priority for him. He goes to Betty's apartment in Chapter Four in a panic, but when they are face to face he tries to cover his need for her reassurance by playacting and defensively discounting her response to him as "'bitterness,' 'sour grapes,' 'a-broken-heart,' 'the devil-may-care'":

But to his confusion, he found nothing at which to laugh back. Her smile had opened naturally, not like an umbrella, and while he watched her laugh folded and became a smile again, a smile that was neither "wry," "ironical" nor "mysterious" (p. 22).

Betty is not cliché-prone, nor does she talk in headlines and move in mechanical pantomime like Mary Shrike. And yet Miss Lonelyhearts rejects
her as a model, arguing to himself that "her sureness was based on the power to limit experience arbitrarily. Moreover, his confusion was significant, while her order was not" (p.21). The real reason that Miss L will not allow himself Betty's help is that his excessive need to be in control, to be right, to be vindicated prevents him from admitting the legitimacy of her order. He will not be solaced. And to the end of the novel Miss Lonelyhearts treats Betty as a symbol. In Chapter Four she was "Betty the Buddha," in Chapter Fourteen she is "the partydress," a symbol that he can manipulate without consequent responsibility: "He begged the party dress to marry him, saying all the things it expected to hear...." (p.92).

It is Miss Lonelyhearts' obsession with power, which he translates into the religious mode, that underlies his catastrophe, the same power that he cherished as a child in worship services. Every time Miss L experiences helplessness, his own or, vicariously, another's, he tightens his grip on his own personal conviction that he is in control. At the time the novel opens, his exposure to the letters, not to mention the preening Shrike, has him in a state of constant agitation. Every threat to his sense of competency, his gossiping friends, Betty's laughter, the humiliation of the clean old man, sets off the seesaw effect between his feelings of helplessness and his assertions of control. Miss L plays the hero by pitting himself, like David before Goliath, against the commercial enterprise, his employer, that is exploiting the genuine suffering of its subscribers. It never occurs to him that he is under no obligation to solve the problems presented to him by his letter writers. Some of the letters do not even request an answer or a solution: the grieving "Sick-of-it-all" has found some
outlet in writing and asks for nothing; "Broad Shoulders" wants to know that she is remembered. There are other alternatives than Shrike's empty homilies. But Miss Lonelyhearts is unsatisfied with any response short of a saving intervention. He is a dualistic thinker and his habitual paradigm is "either-or": either the letter-writers are betrayed by the newspaper or they are saved, either Betty is right or he is, either he is the perpetrator of the joke or its victim.

To maintain his connection with the strongest source of power he has ever experienced, Miss Lonelyhearts resorts to magic-thinking. It is magic thinking that the word Christ invokes a trance-like heightening of awareness, as it did when he was a child, when he stares at the ivory Christ on his wall, during his second dream, and in his final "religious experience." The same magic thinking assigns to the cross shape a "definitive," absolute power. Eventually, Miss Lonelyhearts' make-believe talismans include his bed, which he "rides" like a magic carpet into realms of perfect calm, and "the rock," which he has transformed from "the stone . . . in his gut" of Chapter 2 into his new identity with which he is able to withstand the harangues of Shrike and the drunkenness of friends. With the discovery of the rock Miss Lonelyhearts has conquered his unruly feelings of helplessness; he can even handle with poise the news that Betty is pregnant. He insists that they marry and that she have the baby: "He did not feel guilty. He did not feel. The rock was a solidification of his feeling, his conscience, his sense of reality, his self-knowledge" (p.92).

In the final episode Miss Lonelyhearts believes that he has experienced a union with God and that he is at last empowered to make the kind of saving intervention he has envisioned, to perform a miracle. His
acceptance of God's will, however, is peculiarly pragmatic: "He immediately began to plan a new life and his future conduct as Miss Lonelyhearts. He submitted drafts of his column to God and God approved them. God approved his every thought" (p.94). The columnist's magic thinking has reached its zenith. In his last act we can see images of previous scenes: Miss Lonelyhearts as a magician; Miss Lonelyhearts attacking the clean old man, imagining him to be all the letter writers; Miss Lonelyhearts hearing Doyle's story like a priest at Delahanty's, watching the cripple's uncoordinated hands drag some letter paper suddenly out of a coat pocket, too preoccupied actually to listen.

He rushed down the stairs to meet Doyle with his arms spread for the miracle.

Doyle was carrying something wrapped in a newspaper. When he saw Miss Lonelyhearts, he put his hand inside the package and stopped. He shouted a warning, but Miss Lonelyhearts continued his charge. He did not understand the cripple's shout and heard it as a cry for help from Desperate, Harold S., Catholic-mother, Broken-hearted, Broad-shoulders, Sick-of-it-all, Disillusioned-with-tubercular-husband. He was running to succor them with love. The cripple turned to escape, but he was too slow and Miss Lonelyhearts caught him.

While they were struggling, Betty came in through the street door. She called to them to stop and started up the stairs. The cripple saw her cutting off his escape and tried to get rid of the package. He pulled his hand out. The gun inside the package exploded and Miss Lonelyhearts fell, dragging the cripple with him. They both rolled part of the way down the stairs (pp.94-95).

This "priest of our time" establishes the developmental pattern that is the foundation for the mad preacher characterization: first, a profound discontent and dislocation that spurs this melancholy individual to unsuccessful remedies; secondly, a resort to imaginative resources -- dreams, memories and models -- that seem to offer a satisfactory resolution but contain the germ of destruction; finally, the capitulation to the defeat inherent in the mental metaphor created and nurtured in his
Imagination. Miss Lonelyhearts' world is dead to the suffering going on in it, suffering to which he is acutely alive and tries to combat by way of drink, sex and violence; he dreams of controlling and revitalizing that dead world, but this re-creation is a magic, not a sacred, one; the last of his many metaphors of self-definition, the rock, confirms that he has joined the dead world rather than conquered it. Different from O'Connor's and Faulkner's mad preachers though Miss L is in many details, he is more like them than not, and it is in this shared progression that the fundamental likeness makes itself felt.

Revealed through this patterned development is the all-important fusion of opposites that defines this character type. As Miss L's physical and emotional condition deteriorates, for example, his spiritual sensitivity flourishes, so that a chart of these two movements would show a steeply falling line from the frustration of the letters to the deadness of "the rock," and, correspondingly, a steadily rising line from the vicious parody of the "Anima Christi" to the lyrical experience of grace. Since these two states are defined in terms of each other (e.g., Miss L fears that "the Christ business" will make him "sick," and then when he is confined to his bed he believes that his illness is actually a "trick by his body" to alleviate a "more profound" spiritual disruption), a distinction between the religious and the psychological becomes, finally, impossible. The contraries upon which West has built his protagonist are not merely balanced against one another, but are fused inextricably. West may have discovered the value of this mixture in The Varieties of Religious Experience, where James himself concluded
that no definite distinction between the violently pathological and the genuinely religious could be drawn.\textsuperscript{91}

Mergers of opposites and irreconcileables fill the novel: the male-female in the young columnist's name; the animated inanimate, such as the obelisk, the alarm clock, and the mandolin; the inhuman, "composite" face of Doyle, representative of humanity; the pity-rage evoked by the letters, by the clean old man, by the wounded frog; the simultaneously sympathetic and ironic tone of the entire characterization which stays inside the columnist's consciousness, although in third person; the grotesquely wedded tragi-comic situation, a "joke" that Miss L believes has gotten out of hand and made a "victim" of its "perpetrator." It is all these mixtures, these mergings that Miss L resists. The man who abhors the random, the accidental, the irregular, and pursues the ordered, above all, the definitive, is a man, in Wolfgang Kayser's words, unable to orient himself in the physical universe. Kayser's emphasis on the meaninglessness necessary to the purely grotesque suggests one reason for Miss L's inflexible opposition to the incongruity, disconnectedness, and ambiguity of his physical and social world. The possibility that man's dreams, his aspirations, are a pointless tropism for order, as meaningless as the physical world's tropism for entropy, is unacceptable to him. He would prefer that the suffering of his letter writers be given a tragic interpretation than that it remain "within the sphere of incomprehensibility," the sphere of the

\textsuperscript{91}

grotesque and the absurd. Miss Lonelyhearts is swamped in ambiguity, and the appeal of the religious solution is in its comprehensive, symbolic design, the "definitive" cross shape in the pawn shop dream, which resolves all ambiguity, reveals the purpose of the seemingly accidental, and provides suffering with a meaning.

This character design is specially suited to accommodate "splendid discords and artful confusions" rather than harmonic synthesis or resolution. First in Miss Lonelyhearts, we see that principle of ambiguity that also controls the presentations of Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower: the genuine spiritual drive masked and expressed as psychological pathology; setting, the external world, given as an extension or mirror of this figure's interior upheaval; the grotesque furthering this merger of the inner with the outer, heightening the sense of anxiety and confusion, while preventing the identification of a cause for the disorder. In each case an intricate structure of interrelated contradictions works to produce stalemate rather than reconciliation, stasis instead of resolution. One indication of the deadlock is that the typical postures of all three men are those of immobility: Miss L at his desk or in his bed, Hazel, usually attempting to move simultaneously in opposite directions, also eventually withdraws to his bed, and Hightower spends twenty-five years in retreat behind his study desk. Contributing to this stasis are the regularly recurring self-destructive scenarios whose origins are traced to early family patterns and their emotionally charged

\[92\] Kayser, p. 186.
religious content. Miss L's relationships with the Shrikes and the Doyles are an elaborate comment on his ambivalent and intense commitment to the only role that has ever been meaningful to him. Despite all his strenuous efforts, naturalistic, ethical, moral, the mad preacher does not advance himself out of his dilemma, but insures his continuance in it. The explosion that ends Miss L's story and, presumably, his life is the inevitably violent consequence of the unrelieved pressures of his constitutive antitheses, a consequence of which he is both the victim and the perpetrator.
CHAPTER 4. GRANDSON OF A CIRCUIT RIDER

Alienation was once a diagnosis, but in much of the fiction of our time it has become an ideal. The modern hero is the outsider. His experience is rootless. He can go anywhere. He belongs nowhere. Being alien to nothing, he ends up alienated from any kind of community based on common tastes and interests. The borders of his country are the sides of his skull.

O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South"

Wise Blood was written twenty years after Miss Lonelyhearts and Light In August. Because it is, in part, a response to West's "portrait of a priest of our time," O'Connor's first novel fits naturally here between its predecessors. In many ways, Hazel Motes is an inverted copy of Miss Lonelyhearts: an unlettered, rural Southerner, fleeing Christ in the city of Taulkinham (a fine sobriquet for New

93 In his Introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, xii, Robert Fitzgerald says that Miss Lonelyhearts and As I Lay Dying are the only two works of fiction that I can remember her urging on me, and it is pretty clear from her work that they were close to her heart as a writer."
York). But essentially the two characters are alike: young men who are "Christ-haunted," who have a highly-developed sense of injustice, for whom, being men given to extremes, violence is an acceptable, even desirable alternative, and whose public quests have fatal private consequences.

Like Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes faces a dilemma which he attempts to resolve by calling on resources from his past. He has returned after four years in the army to find that his hometown has disappeared, that is, its population has dwindled to zero. He has become a displaced person, one of O'Connor's favorite character-metaphors, and embarks on a search for "a place to be." He goes to the city to begin a new life, and there he encounters the same commercial spirit that pervaded Miss Lonelyhearts' New York. Although his intention is to make a break with the past, especially his religious upbringing, in order to make a place for himself he begins to rely on the models of his childhood, particularly that of his grandfather, whose powerful preaching from atop his Ford automobile attracted the entire town and left an indelible memory in Hazel's mind. He meets with a succession of failures, among them his inability to disown his religious heritage and his failure to found a

94 Frederick Asals, in the final paragraph of "The Road to Wise Blood," Renascence, 27 (1969), 193, discussed briefly what O'Connor learned from West and says that Motes "became, in a sense, Miss Lonelyhearts in reverse."

church. His ultimate failure to place himself in the community is
dramatized in the final episode: Sick and in flight from his matri-
monially minded landlady, he stumbles into a ditch where, semi-conscious,
he is eventually discovered by two policemen and given a mortal blow
with a billy club.

I

In the opening chapter of Wise Blood, Hazel Motes is depicted as a
young man who has sustained a series of losses. He has seen every
member of his family, grandfather, brothers, father, mother, buried.
He has watched his hometown, Eastrod, dwindle and disappear. And he be-
lieves that he has lost his soul. His discovery of this last loss
brought him more relief than distress. It happened while he was in the
army, self-righteously rejecting an invitation to visit a brothel: his
fellow-soldiers peevishly retorted that he had no soul to worry about,
and Hazel came to believe them because he recognized his opportunity to
rid himself of a fearful possession. He had learned from his grand-
father's sermons that Jesus was a "soul-hungry" god who would "chase
him over the waters of sin" to claim his soul. Without a soul, Hazel
reasoned, he would cease to be a desirable prey. After lengthy consider-
ation, he felt satisfied that "the misery he had was a longing for home;
it had nothing to do with Jesus" (p.18). When he left the army "all he
wanted was to get back to Eastrod, Tennessee."

This longing for home is the thematic center of the novel's first
chapter. Even as Hazel rides the train away from the now deserted
Eastrod, his mind is fully occupied with memories of his birthplace:
"Eastrod filled his head and then went out beyond and filled the space that stretched from the train across the empty darkening fields" (p.11). If he had wanted to forget his loss speedily, Hazel would have found it impossible among his fellow passengers. Each of the secondary characters encountered by Motes serves as a reminder of home. First there is Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, a typical O'Connor matron, who repeatedly tries to strike up a conversation with the peculiarly-dressed young man sitting opposite her with such innocent remarks as "I guess you're going home" (p.9), and "Well... there's no place like home" (p.10). Hazel ignores her and goes in search of the porter, whom he recognizes as a native Eastrod Negro named Parrum. To Hazel's disbelief the porter disclaims any connection with the beloved hometown: "'I'm from Chicago,' the porter said in an irritated voice. 'My name is not Parrum'" (p.14). Even the three women with whom Hazel shares a table in the dining car serve to emphasize by contrast his Southern rural roots, their Eastern accents "poisonous" because foreign.

Hazel has a real gift for antagonizing and being antagonized by others. His interactions with those in his company work typically to set him at odds with them, to create a polarized atmosphere in which thesis and antithesis, point and counterpoint reverberate, expanding and deepening the issue at hand, in this case the varied meanings of "place" and "home." When Mrs. Hitchcock sees a price tag still stapled on the sleeve of Hazel's suit, bearing the figures $11.98, she feels "that that placed him" (p.9). Pushed by Hazel's obstinate silence to the extreme measure of asking point-blank, "Are you going home?" she is rewarded with a sour "'No, I ain't'" (p.11). Undaunted, she pursues the exchange of pleasantries, family connections, her visit to her
married daughter in Florida, her sister-in-law's brother-in-law from Taulkinham, until interrupted by Hazel's recalcitrant, "'You might as well go one place as another... That's all I know'" (p.11). Mrs. Hitchcock deftly resumes with another branch of her family, and Hazel counters with his trump card, designed to stop any conversation: "'I reckon you think you been redeemed'" (p.12). Now it is the sociable matron's turn to sit in silence as the intense young man places her from his perspective. She is mute long enough for Motes to repeat his challenge, but she quickly recovers with "yes, life was an inspiration" and the suggestion that they go to the dining car.

The country boy's inability or unwillingness to cooperate in polite civilities is further illustrated as he sits glumly at a table with three women who have finished their meal and are smoking cigarettes. After the cigarette smoke from the woman opposite him has blown in his face several times Hazel meets her eyes and announces, "'If you've been redeemed ... I wouldn't want to be.'" This unexpected attack is answered with a laugh by one of the women, which only intensifies Hazel's urgent need to declare his position:

"Do you think I believe in Jesus?" he said, leaning toward her and speaking almost as if he were breathless.
"Well I wouldn't even if He existed. Even if He was on this train" (p.13).

The urbane lady traveler meets Hazel's confession of unbelief in the same style that his fellow soldiers had answered his proclamation of belief:
"'Who said you had to?' she asked in a poisonous Eastern voice" (p.13). This rejoinder effectively kills the exchange, and as soon as Hazel can leave the table he resumes his pursuit of the porter whose assertion that he is from Chicago Hazel does not believe.
Rounding a corner in the corridor, Hazel again collides with Mrs. Hitchcock, this time physically, and is treated to a look at her less sociable side: "'Clumsy!'" she muttered, "'What is the matter with you?'" (p.14) (voicing a question the reader is silently asking). In his haste to escape from her, he runs headlong into the porter, knocking him down. Without a word of apology, before the man can even regain his feet, Hazel is demanding to be let into his berth and persisting in calling him Parrum. While the porter assists him with the ladder in stone-faced silence, Hazel continues to insist that he remembers him and his father, Cash Parrum. He believes that he has found someone who will have a personal interest in his discovery that Eastrod is no more: "'You can't go back there neither, nor anybody else, not if they wanted to'" (p.14). He finally goes too far when he tells his supposed townsman that Cash caught cholera from a pig and died; the porter curtly replies that his father was a railroad man, and Hazel laughs, as if he has heard a joke or a transparent lie. At this the porter jerks the ladder out from under "the boy," leaving him hanging onto his blanket.

With the kind of repetition that makes for both comedy and careful character development, the first half of the chapter takes on the flavor of a Punch and Judy routine while simultaneously establishing Hazel Motes as a man on serious business. Hazel's preoccupation with his lost home and with the impossibility of being "redeemed" displaces him from the present just as completely as the desertion of his hometown has left him physically displaced. Because he is mentally withdrawn, in a haze, as his nickname suggests, he does not interact with his fellow passengers sensibly. Rather he uses the people he encounters as dueling partners. There is no more communication between Hazel and Mrs.
Hitchcock than between Miss Lonelyhearts and Mary Shrike. Just as Miss L is in a rage of frustration over the undeserved misfortunes of his letterwriters and his inability to answer them in the opening chapter of the novel, Hazel is completely caught up in the pain of deprivation. The hostility he invokes with sulking silences, offensive words and heedless physical assault is a preparation for his increasingly destructive attacks on those he encounters in Taulkinham, and finally upon himself. Later he will run down and kill Solace Layfield with no more compunction that he has earlier knocked down the porter in the train corridor. When he is left struggling for a purchase in his upper berth by the fed-up porter, we have a foretaste of the scene in which he sits with his feet dangling over the side of an embankment after a patrolman has pushed his Essex to its destruction.

The first half of the chapter presents Hazel's public self, an individual whose behavior is puzzling in the same way that Miss Lonelyhearts' initial response to the letters, "Christ was the answer, but if he did not want to get sick, he had to stay away from the Christ business," is puzzling. In the second half of the chapter Hazel's private world is introduced and made to serve as the beginning of an explanation of the puzzle, all the while carrying forward the meanings of "home."

Miles Orvell's reading of Wise Blood examines the way "enclosing spaces" figure in "the complex of associations built around the meaning of 'home.'"\footnote{Invisible Parade: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1972), p. 80ff.} As Hazel settles into the enclosing space of his upper
berth, he discovers that his plans to watch the countryside go by at night will not be realized because there is no window. In his half-sleep he becomes aware of the similarity of the berth, with its curving ceiling, looking "as if it were closing" (p.14), to a coffin, and he remembers and then dreams of the coffins in which his relatives were buried. The dream-flashback sequence moves from berth to coffin, to the Eastrod of his boyhood, to his army tour of duty, to the dry goods store where he sheds his uniform, to the "skeleton of a house" that is left of his home, to his mother's abandoned chifforobe, and finally back to his mother's coffin, out of which, Hazel dreams, she flies at him in the shape of a bat. In claustrophobic terror Hazel awakes, only to have his nightmare continue as he sees the curved top of the berth, like his mother's coffin lid, "closing, coming closer closer down and cutting off the light and the room" (p.19). Orvell makes the point early in his book, placing O'Connor in the American romance tradition and comparing her imagination to Poe's, that "repeatedly her protagonists will hold in their minds an image of perfection as it existed in the past, one that is usually associated with a containing structure -- the house that is the first 'cocoon.'" Orvell, p. 37. In The Violent Bear It Away, young Tarwater leaves Powderhead after setting the house on fire, and returns to the burnt-out ruin in the last chapter. In "A Good Man is Hard to Find" the grandmother gets the family off the main road and into the hands of the Misfit in her search for an old plantation home remembered from her youth. Julian and his mother both treasure in their memories the once splendid and later decayed family mansion in "Everything That Rises Must Converge." In "Judgement Day" Tanner dreams of nothing but getting home, even if he has to go in a coffin.
protective "cocoon" becomes the suffocating coffin. And so the meanings of "home" begin to extend to the sinister, the threatening. On the night he returns to the vacant Eastrod and sleeps on the floor in the kitchen, a board falls out of the roof on Hazel's head. Just as the verbal dueling in the first half of the chapter stresses opposition, the clash of thesis and antithesis (the surly young man versus the complacent older woman, the uncouth Southerner versus the sophisticated Easterners, the white property-holder versus the Negro servant), the private revelation of the second half of the chapter is based upon interior polarization, Hazel's simultaneous desire for and fear of containing structure.

The implications of this ambivalence are worked through in the succeeding chapters of the novel. In Taulkinham Hazel will alternatingly seek out and flee from vehicles, rooms and relationships that represent containment. The ultimate symbol of human containment, the body, and particularly the skull, increasingly becomes the focus, the battleground of Hazel's predicament. O'Connor introduces this medieval motif in her initial description of Motes: "The outline of a skull under his skin was plain and insistent" (p.9). The description is repeated almost word for word in the last paragraph of the novel when Hazel has become a corpse. As O'Connor said about the modern hero as outsider, "the borders of his country are the sides of his skull." And so this

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98 The same note is struck in West's description of Miss Lonelyhearts' head as the mark of a priestly heritage, p. 9.

is the true arena of Hazel's conflict, his self-division, although it regularly spills out in symbolic skirmishes with those around him. Until he chooses to come to grips with this self-antagonism, Hazel continually experiences defeat at the hands of his pseudo-adversaries. His interactions with the porter exemplify this pattern: when Hazel wakes from the nightmare of his mother's closing coffin and lunges through the space between the berth's ceiling and the curtain rod, he sees the porter and calls to him for help and is not answered. In desperation he moans, "Jesus . . . Jesus," providing the misused porter with the last word in their long-running argument, "'Jesus been a long time gone'" (p.19), a taunting confirmation of Hazel's complete desertion.

II

By journeying to Taulkinham, Hazel Motes is endeavoring to meet the changed present head-on and on its own terms. He had expected to spend his life "in Eastrod with his two eyes open, and his hands always handling the familiar thing, his feet on the known track, and his tongue not too loose" (p.16). Now that this option is closed to him he decided to go to the city, "to do some things I never have done before" (p.11), as he explains to Mrs. Hitchcock, with a trace of a leer on his mouth. Hazel, like other O'Connor young men,\(^1\) is ready to be initiated into the mysteries of the city, and he seems to know what kind of initiation to expect. He begins by locating a prostitute with whom he stays for a few days. But her "obscene comments" about his performance and her

\(^1\) Nelson in "The Artificial Nigger" and Francis Marion Tarwater in *The Violent Bear It Away*. 
mutilation of his hat (she calls it "that Jesus-seeing hat") send him looking for another place to stay. The opening chapter has already established that Hazel's expectations are frequently to be overturned. His plans to exchange his old life, like his old hat, for one "completely opposite to the old one" are fruitless. He cannot freely enter into a new life while carrying so much baggage from the past.

O'Connor's Taulkinham is the equal of West's New York in its commercial spirit and grotesque atmosphere. When Hazel steps off the train his attention is completely absorbed in the signs and lights that "frantically" compete for the domination of the station: "PEANUTS, WESTERN UNION, AJAX, TAXI, HOTEL, CANDY" (p.20). He walks up and down the length of the station, holding his duffel bag "by the neck," turning his head from side to side to look at the signs, but with a "stern and determined" look that would suggest to no one "that he had no place to go." True to his melancholy nature, Hazel shuns the benches of the crowded waiting room; "he wanted a private place to go to." In this environment, Hazel's determination to find a place for himself becomes predictably ludicrous. The private place that he discovers in the "MEN'S TOILET. WHITE," a "narrow room" whose discolored walls are decorated with graffiti and lined on one side with a row of wooden stalls. Hazel chooses a stall with a door on which is written largely, in crayon, the word "WELCOME, followed by three exclamations points and something that looked like a snake" (p.20). O'Connor pointedly describes this modern version of a primitive inner sanctum as a "narrow box" where Hazel sits for some time, "studying the inscriptions." 101

101 This parody of an initiation rite recalls West's similar secularized rituals and temples: the speakeasy with its "armored door"
It is here that Hazel finds the address of the prostitute, Leora Watts, and the appreciative tribute "in a drunken-looking hand": "The friendliest bed in town!" (p.21).

Throughout Hazel's sojourn in Taulkinham, the theme of his displacement, his homelessness, is intensified as it appears in combination with the city's prevailing commercialism and grotesquity. As he pursues his course from one unsatisfactory place to another -- from the railroad station's rest-room to the prostitute's room, on the city streets, in his own car, at Mrs. Flood's boarding house -- it becomes more and more obvious that Hazel just does not fit in anywhere. For one thing, Hazel like Miss Lonelyhearts, is completely indifferent to money, the one common, binding interest of everyone else in the city. Virtually every human interaction in the novel involves a cash exchange, or an attempt to enact such an exchange. Hazel is tolerated by Leora Watts because he pays for her services. When Hazel walks downtown to acquaint himself with the city, he finds that, it being Thursday, the stores are open "so that people could have an extra opportunity to see what was for sale" (p.24). He stops where a potato peeler salesman has set up a cardtable on the sidewalk and is sedulously drawing a crowd, daring them to let such an opportunity pass them by. In this crowd with Hazel are Enoch Emery, who wants to buy but has only "a dollar sixteen cent" (p.27), and Asa Hawks and his daughter, Sabbath Lily. The potato peeler salesman becomes furious when Hawks, "jiggling a tin

where entrance is gained by pressing a concealed button; the "comfort station" where Miss L and Ned Gates find the "clean old man" seated on a closed toilet seat; the "private" phone booth where Miss L focuses his eyes on "two disembodied genitals" as he dials Faye Doyle's number.
and tapping a white cane in front of him" (p.25), begins to move among the crowd muttering "'Help a blind preacher. If you won't repent, give up a nickel. . . . Wouldn't you rather have me beg than preach?'" (p.26). "'These damn Jesus fanatics,'" the salesman yells, "'I got this crowd together!'" (p.26). Sabbath Lily also wants to buy a peeler, but like Enoch, she has less than the required "buck fifty." When, in order to make contact with the blind preacher by means of a gift to his daughter, Hazel hurriedly thrusts two dollars at the salesman, takes a peeler, and leaves without his change, he attracts the devoted attention of Enoch Emery, who follows him, panting, "'My, I reckon you got a heap of money!'" (p.27).

Hazel's money comes from his Army pension, payment for a wound sustained while he was in the government's service. He has no attention to spare for financial matters, however. Like Enoch, Hazel's landlady is fascinated by this unusual disinterest. She has seen her boarder drop money from his pocket and not pick it up. Mrs. Flood is a woman who "when she found a stream of wealth . . . followed it to its source and before long it was not distinguishable from her own" (p.116). She steams open the government envelope to learn the amount of Hazel's monthly check, and promptly raises his rent. It is when she discovers that, after providing for his few needs each month, Hazel throws away whatever money is left, that "she realized . . . that he was a mad man and that he ought to be under the control of a sensible person" (p.120).

The complete absence of venality in Hazel's character places him in favorable contrast with the likes of the potato peeler huckster, the cynical beggar, Asa Hawks, the grasping Mrs. Flood, and a host of the city's businessmen and women, but underlying Hazel's pecuniary
disinterest is a profound apathy for his own well being. The same kind of self-reduction is observable in Gail Hightower's contribution of "a small income inherited from his father" to a Memphis home for wayward girls; even when Hightower is no longer employed by the Church, "he continued to send . . . half of a revenue which in its entirety would little more than have kept him." 102

In O'Connor's Taulkinham, the human relationships that normally make for a community of "common tastes and interests." have been reduced, to borrow Cleanth Brooks' phrase, to the "cash nexus." 103 Human sexuality, which ordinarily broadens and strengthens the individual and produces the family as the basic unit of the community, in Wise Blood narrows itself to Leora Watt's bed. Hospitality, the generosity that allows individuals and families to become a community, must be bargained for at Mrs. Flood's boarding house. And religion, the community's affirmation of its relationship to powers and principles of universal scope, can be paid to go away in the person of Asa Hawks, or, as translated by Onie Jay Holy, "a real preacher . . . and a radio star" (p.86), can be reclaimed for a dollar. Like West's New Yorkers, who are trying to sustain themselves on the brightly packaged dreams of El Gaucho's and newspaper advertisements, on Blonde Beauty and love story magazines, the Taulkinham residents are restlessly looking for a bargain and entertainment. Unlike his grandfather, around whose car


103 In a paper delivered for Lectures in the Humanities Series, "Faulkner's Criticism of the Modern World," at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, March 17, 1974.
people had gathered "because he seemed to dare them to" (p.16), Hazel must go to the movie houses to find even an apathetic audience for his preaching.

The grotesque is particularly appropriate to Hazel Motes' story for the same reason that it is appropriate to Miss Lonelyhearts': neither young man is at home in his world. As Kayser makes clear in differentiating the grotesque from the tragic, the former "is primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe." This estrangement from physical reality is representative of the general tenor of the grotesque as a mode conveying the feeling of alienation. O'Connor suggests at the beginning of Chapter 3 that not only Hazel, but the entire community of Taulkinham is out of touch with the physical universe: above the heads of the Thursday shoppers the night sky is filled with

... thousands of stars that all seemed to be moving very slowly as if they were about some vast construction work that involved the whole order of the universe and would take all time to complete. No one was paying any attention to the sky (p.24).

Hazel's alienation, like Miss Lonelyhearts', is only partly the result of his own mental abstraction; the community he inhabits is clearly an estranged one into which he may fit himself at his own peril.

Most of the motifs and themes listed by Kayser in his concluding chapter as subject matter typical of the grotesque occur in Wise Blood: all monstrosities, including Apocalyptic beasts and demons, certain animals, the plant world, the underwater world, instruments of

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104 The Grotesque in Art and Literature, p. 185.
technology, the human body reduced to a puppet or mask, including the "grinning skull and moving skeleton" and the Dance of Death, and finally, the insane person. It may prove difficult to draw the line on what is to be excluded from the category of the monstrous in the novel, but certainly the shriveled mummy that so captivates Enoch Emery that he steals it from the park museum and delivers it to Hazel to be his "new jesus" (pp.79,100) epitomizes the concept. There is a combination of the monstrous, the animalistic and the mask in Enoch's final action, dressing himself in a gorilla suit, which he has taken by force from an actor, and becoming, in the narration, "it" instead of "he"; we last see "it" sitting on a rock staring across a valley toward the city. The ape has long been one of those animals considered particularly suitable to the grotesque, embodying, Thomas Wright remarks, "natural parodies upon mankind." It is funny, yet chillingly fitting, that Enoch Emery, the park guard who "hated" animals to that he visited the zoo cages daily with an "obscene comment" for each inmate (the monkeys in particular), should feel "rewarded" by "his god," the god of all mindless, rough beasts, when he takes on the trappings of a gorilla (pp.54,107-108). In the subplot of the lonely country boy repeatedly abused and abandoned by his father and "made" to come to the unfriendly city, the grotesque serves as reinforcement for the primary theme of displacement.

105 Kayser, pp. 181-184.

106 A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art (1865; facsimile rpt. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1968), p. 95. Wright makes a suggestive comparison of the words monkey and mannikin that is in keeping with Kayser's emphasis on the idea of reduced humanity.
Kayser singles out a few animals as especially appropriate for producing a sense of the strange and sinister in man—"snakes, owls, toads, spiders," as well as any kind of vermin.\(^{107}\) We remember the snake of hysteria and the wounded frog in Miss Lonelyhearts. In Wise Blood there is the "something that looked like a snake" (p.20) on the toilet door and the owl in the zoo that looks like an "eye . . . in the middle of something . . . like a piece of mop sitting on an old rag" whose Cyclopean gaze forces from Hazel the assertion "'I AM clean'" (p.55). "The grotesque animal incarnate, however," Kayser continues, "is the bat (Fledermaus), the very name of which points to an unnatural fusion of organic realms concretized in this ghostly creature."\(^{108}\) The fearsome bat, appearing in Chapter 1 as the climactic dream image in Hazel's reverie on his dead mother, is associated in his imagination with the possibility that her restless ghost, no "more satisfied dead than alive" (p.19), might visit the old Eastrod house. The emphasis on characters' animalistic nature, a staple of caricature and the absurd, is a constant in O'Connor's fiction. Thus we have Enoch-as-gorilla, and earlier his face described as "fox-shaped" (p.24), the lye scars on Asa Hawks' face giving him "the expression of a grinning mandrill" (p.25), "a cat-faced baby sprawled" on the shoulder of a woman listening to Hazel preach "as if he were in a booth at the fair" (p.82), and, of course, the names Hawks and Shoats for the two insincere street preachers.

\(^{107}\) Kayser, p. 182.

\(^{108}\) Kayser, p. 183.
Because the world O'Connor has created for Hazel Motes to move in is an out-of-joint world, the distortion that Kayser, and many others, see as fundamental to the grotesque becomes part of the problem against which he struggles in his attempts to define himself. The car Hazel buys because, as he tells the salesman, "I ain't got any place to be" (p.43), belongs in Kayser's category of tools and instruments of technology that take on a life of their own, and seem to exert their will against man's. The early descriptions of the car simply confirm that the inexperienced Hazel has bought a barely-functioning wreck, but later in the story the car's peculiarities are independent of the mechanical realm: "There were two instruments on the dashboard with needles that pointed dizzily in first one direction and then another, but they worked on a private system, independent of the whole car" (p.70); "The Essex had a tendency to develop a tic by nightfall. It would go forward about six inches and then back about four" (p.85). The car also becomes part of the coffin motif of the novel when Hazel sleeps in it one night and dreams that he is "not dead but only buried" (p.88). Similar to the car's sudden and unexplained reversals of direction are Hazel's own: befitting a man who "might as well go one place as another," he typically moves in one direction and then abruptly in its opposite.

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109 An excellent survey of scholarship on the grotesque is Francis Barasch's Introduction to Wright's A History of Caricature and Grotesque, 1968.

110 In "The Nature and Aim of Fiction" O'Connor specifies that "The hero's rat-colored automobile is his pulpit and his coffin as well as something he thinks of as a means of escape . . . the car is a kind of death-in-life symbol." Mystery and Manners, p. 72.
Hazel's many movements in reverse are reminiscent of the waste motions of the frustrated cripple, Peter Doyle. When the train pulled away from him at a junction stop, "he had run after it but his hat had blown away and he had to run in the opposite direction to save the hat" (p.20). Like his car, Hazel often seems to be controlled by some alien force, as when he momentarily takes on the appearance of a puppet in Chapter 1: "Haze got up and hung there a few seconds. He looked as if he were held by a rope caught in the middle of his back and attached to the train ceiling" (p.11). The issue of outside manipulation is obvious, too, in the performances of Solace Layfield, who is controlled like an automaton by a signal from Hoover Shoats, repeating "in exactly the same tone of voice" (p.91) his lines, faster and faster. Even more frightening than the loss of control to inanimate machinery or to a malignant puppeteer, however, is the loss of self-control exemplified in insanity. As Kayser says, "The encounter with madness is one of the basic experiences of the grotesque which life forces upon us."\(^{111}\) The madman replaces, reverses, or transposes, with incongruous logic, conventional standards and values to conform to his own expectations and abilities, so that even while he removes himself from the realm of responsible action, he is reassured, by illusion, that he is in command. Hazel's extraordinary attachment to his car--"Nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (p.64), he once tells Sabbath Lily--and his emblematic resemblance to it are symptoms of that obsession with a lost past that increasingly controls Hazel's actions and culminates in

\(^{111}\) Kayser, p. 184.
his murdering Solace Layfield, the talismanic car serving as murder weapon.

Hazel's struggle in an antagonistic society, like Miss Lonelyhearts', is ultimately a struggle to gain the ascendancy over the death-oriented controls in his own mind. As he takes his first ride in his car out into a countryside lined with "666 posts" and "'Jesus Saves'" signs, "he had the feeling that everything he saw was a broken-off piece of some giant blank thing that he had forgotten had happened to him" (p.44). By means of dreams, memories and flashbacks the reader gains partial access to the "giant blank thing" hidden in Hazel's interior. What we see of the spectre-like figures that move there--Jesus the merciless hunter, the hostile grandfather, dissatisfied mother and skulking father--explains much of Hazel's behavior. It explains, for example, why he is drawn to the repulsive Asa Hawks, that malignant parental figure, and through him, back into his original vocation of preaching, the role that, since a child, he has equated with power.

The dreams and memories that occupy Hazel as he lies in the train's upper berth offer a succession of views of closing coffins. The first is his grandfather's, which, "propped open with a stick of kindling," was watched from a distance by the boy Hazel, who thought: "he ain't going to let them shut it on him; when the time comes, his elbow is going to shoot into the crack" (p.15). But "when it was time to bury him, they shut the top of his box down and he didn't make a move" (p.15). When his seven-year-old brother is closed away in a small coffin, Hazel "ran and opened it up again. . . . because he had thought, what if he had been in it and they had shut it on him" (p.15). Hazel dreams that
his father tries to keep the top up on his coffin by propping himself up on his hands and knees; "If I keep my can in the air,' he heard the old man say, 'nobody can shut nothing on me,' but when they got his box to the hole, they let it drop with a thud and his father flattened out like anybody else" (p.15). The child's expectation that his grandfather's authority will foil death dwindles in the face of repeated experience, but the hope is still alive in Hazel's speculation that his mother's ghost will approve his protection of her chifforobe, the only piece of furniture he finds remaining in the family house. He secures it to the kitchen floor boards with cord and leaves a warning in each of its drawers. "THIS SHIFFER-ROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL MOTES. DO NOT STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED" (p.19). He imagines her ghost coming to the house with "that look on her face, unrested and looking; the same look he had seen through the crack of her coffin" (p.19). As the lid is closing on her coffin, Hazel watches its shadow cross her face, and it is this shadow that becomes the haunting bat, as Hazel imagines that his mother "might have been going to fly out of there" (p.19).

The next view into Hazel's interior life occurs in Chapter 3, and it follows immediately a scene in Leora Watt's bedroom in which the nervous Hazel's heart grips him "like a little ape clutching the bars of its cage" and Mrs. Watts' grin is "as curved and sharp as the blade of a sickle" (p.37). At the age of ten, Hazel was taken to a carnival by his father and sent to "a tent where two monkeys danced" while his father went to a more expensive tent advertised as "SINSational" and "EXclusive." Following his father and imagining that the tent contained "some men in a privy" or maybe "a man and a woman in a privy" (p.37),
he bargains with the Barker, finally gaining admittance by insinuating that "they were doing something to a nigger" (p.38). Standing on a bench to see over the heads of the men, the boy sees that "something white was lying, squirming a little, in a box lined with black cloth. For a second he thought it was a skinned animal and then he saw it was a woman. She was fat and she had a face like an ordinary woman except there was a mole on the corner of her lip, that moved when she grinned" (p.38). Just before he scrambles out of the tent Hazel hears his father's voice: "'Had one of themther built into ever casket . . . be a heap ready to go sooner!'" (p.38).

This episode makes explicit the links between a number of factors crucial to Hazel's story. Confinement, the flesh, sex, death, and penance all here converge in a highly charged family setting. Not only does his unsettling glimpse of a naked woman occur in a cheap carnival atmosphere, accompanied by his father's coffin humor, but the trauma extends into the religious sphere. As soon as the boy suspected that a woman might be inside the tent, he thought, "She wouldn't want me in there" (pp.37-38). And when he returns home afterwards his mother seems to know what happened just by looking at him. He hides behind a tree but can "feel her watching him through the tree" (p.38). His imagination transposes his mother to the casket in place of the fat woman, "a thin woman in the casket who was too long for it. . . . She had a cross-shaped face and hair pulled close to her head" (p.38). His mother comes toward him with a stick, asking "'What you seen?'" repeatedly, and as she hits him across the legs she intones, "'Jesus died to redeem you!'" (p.39). Under her grim gaze the boy "forgot the guilt of the tent for the nameless unplaced guilt that was in him" (p.39).
The next day the boy Hazel walks over a mile with rocks in his shoes (a strategy the adult Hazel returns to), thinking, "that ought to satisfy Him" (p.39). All life and pleasure are rendered contemptible by death. Jesus' meaning is narrowed to death's agency, and only suffering, the child thinks, can quiet Him and settle that unplaced guilt.

Hazel's last dream takes place in his car. He has spent many evenings preaching the Church Without Christ outside of movie houses, hoping Hawks will "welcome him and act like a preacher should when he sees what he believes is a lost soul" (p.80). But he has only managed to attract "a Lapsed Catholic" who wants to visit a whorehouse and Onie Jay Holy, who sees Hazel's idea of a new Jesus as lacking only "a little promotion" (p.87). Hazel is using the car as his house, and when he falls asleep on his pallet he dreams that "he was not dead but only buried."

He was not waiting on the Judgment because there was no Judgment, he was waiting on nothing. Various eyes looked through the back oval window at his situation, some with considerable reverence, like the boy from the zoo, and some only to see what they could see. There were three women with paper sacks who looked at him critically as if he were something--a piece of fish--they might buy... Then a woman... stopped and looked in, grinning. After a second, she... indicated that she would climb in and keep him company for a while, but she couldn't get through the glass and finally she went off. All this time Hazel was bent on getting out but since there was no use to try, he didn't make a move one way or the other. He kept expecting Hawks to appear at the oval window with a wrench, but the blind man didn't come (p.88-89).

At this point in the story, before Hazel discovers that Hawks only pretends to be blind, he is, consciously or not, expecting to be rescued from his own emptiness by the preacher. The dream echoes previous images of impotent confinement as well as the side-show motif: Hazel is on display, like the mummy in the glass case, like the many corpses in
their coffins, and like the woman in a box at the carnival; indeed, the
grinning woman herself appears. Hazel is meeting with no success in
his attempt to live a changed life in the city. His experience con-
tinues to present itself to him as fragments of some great blank thing
that he cannot quite recognize, but which separates him from the goal of
placing himself.

III

What we see of Hazel's past and the state of his imagination
focuses our attention on the overriding power that death holds over him.
And not only through the cumulative weight of the deaths of his family
members, although that would be enough, but also the strong anti-life
drives visible in the repugnance of sexuality, his indifference to
money and his stubborn refusal to be cared for, to be fed (when Hazel
does eat, it is mechanically, or "with a wry face" (p.121), and he has
trouble keeping his food down). One of Kayser's major conclusions about
the grotesque is that it "instills fear of life rather than fear of
death."¹¹² In Miss Lonelyhearts it is the brutal chaos just beneath
the surface of everyday order that makes life itself an ungovernable
menace. In Wise Blood life and the living are so ugly and so corrupt,
so carefully lacking in any mitigating humanity, that death might very
conceivably be better. What old Mason Tarwater tells his great-nephew

¹¹² Kayser, p. 185.
and protege could as easily be Hazel Motes' belief: "The world was made for the dead." 113

And yet there was a power, an authority, a vigor in Hazel's grandfather and mother, the two religious models of his childhood. Hazel had decided early that "he was going to be a preacher like his grandfather" and when he was drafted he almost chose to evade the call by shooting his foot, since a foot was not necessary to a preacher: "A preacher's power is in his neck and tongue and arm" (p.16). When he did go to the army, it was because "he trusted himself to get back in a few months, uncorrupted. He had a strong confidence in his power to resist evil; it was something he had inherited, like his face, from his grandfather" (p.17). From his mother, who "wore black all the time and . . . dresses . . . longer than other women's" (p.38), Hazel inherits a Bible and a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles. When his army companions invite him to go to a brothel, Hazel puts on his mother's glasses for added authority. Even after Hazel believes that he has no soul, the Bible and glasses remain "in the bottom of his duffel bag. He didn't read any book now but he kept the Bible because it came from home. He kept the glasses in case his vision should ever become dim" (p.18).

Inseparable from their strength, however, is a hostility of despair that father and daughter bequeath to the one surviving family representative. That "waspish old man who had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (p.15) would single his grandson

out during his sermons: "He had a particular disrespect for him because
his own face was repeated almost exactly in the child's and seemed to
mock him" (p.16). Calling him a "mean sinful unthinking boy... with dirty hands" (p.16), the grandfather used the grandson as an ex­
ample of the extremes to which Jesus would go to secure souls, turning
his sermons into something more like a curse for Hazel. The boy begins
to see "Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild
ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark"
(p.16). And finally into the dark he goes, blinding himself with lye
and telling the curious Mrs. Flood that "if there's no bottom in your
eyes, they hold more" (p.121), wrapping his chest in barbed wire and
walking daily with gravel in his shoes.

Hazel's end, like Miss Lonelyhearts', has been the subject of con­
siderable diverse critical scrutiny. Both novels live and resonate
along tensions built upon extremely polarized dualities, contradictory
characterizations and equivocating styles. It is to be expected, then,
that their protagonists' actions will be paradoxical. Hazel's self-
mutilation and death cannot be explained simply, either in terms of a
theological framework or in psychoanalytical categories. To do so, in
fact, would be to fall prey to the same kind of either-or abstractions
that mark Hazel's failures. For he does fail, in the same areas and
for similar reasons as Miss Lonelyhearts. He is an abysmally incomplete
human being whose failure to find some vital, healing place for himself
stems from persistent magic thinking, masquerading, and vengeful with­
drawal from humanity.

114 This is a common family interaction in O'Connor's fiction.
Hazel's abstraction is a constant throughout the novel, only growing more pronounced as the story moves on, and as his connection with the people around him grows more tenuous. Hazel's preoccupations cause him to see what he expects to see, and so he insists that the porter is an old neighbor, talks to an owl's eye, and believes that Sabbath Lily, "since she was so homely, would also be innocent" (p.63). Hazel's magic thinking might best be exemplified by the talismanic objects--his hat, the Bible, his mother's glasses, his Essex--upon which he relies. With these artifacts Hazel controls and protects his identity, the existence of his vanished home, a bequeathed omniscience, an armored sanctuary. But a more serious dependence, and one that includes the area of masquerading, is Hazel's identification with his grandfather. He returns to his childhood commitment to be "like his grandfather," not in the substance of his sermons, but in the trappings, posture and antagonistic style. And he takes on this role in a futile attempt to win the attention of another faulty model, Asa Hawks. Hazel's substance as a human being is increasingly given over to the shadowy regions of his mind where he seems to lie trapped in a metaphor. When Hazel sees his mirror image in the mechanical performance of the Prophet, Solace Layfield, "hollow-chested . . . his neck thrust forward" (p.91), his submerged self-hatred surfaces: "If you don't hunt it down and kill it, it'll hunt you down and kill you" (p.91). It is after Hazel has lost the protection of his car that he blinds himself with lye, following the example of the retired evangelist, Hawks, and withdraws himself from his previous activities and from those he has known, rarely speaking or eating. In response to Mrs. Flood's queries about his self-abuse he replies "'I'm paying. . . . It don't make any difference for what.'"
The extent to which Hazel's complete abstraction has removed him from life is underscored when, after he has died in the squad car on the way back to the boarding house, neither the police officers nor Mrs. Flood can tell that he is now, in fact, a corpse.

Just before Hazel set out for his last painful walk, Mrs. Flood offered to marry him and thus provide him a perpetual home: "'Nobody ought to be without a place of their own to be,'" she counseled him; "'I got a place for you in my heart, Mr. Motes'" (p.124). Although searching for "a place to be" since the opening pages of the novel, Hazel flees her offer; indeed, he has been beyond such a remedy from the first. The mad preacher's preoccupation allows for no resolution in his life. In her Preface to the second edition of Wise Blood, O'Connor startled many readers by writing that "Hazel Motes' integrity lies ... in his not being able to ... get rid of the ragged figure ... in the back of his mind." Her choice of the word 'integrity', applied to this arrogant, blasphemying murderer, is just the sort of calculated discrepancy consistent with her antithetical characterization. She continues,

Does anyone's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that usually it does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen.

O'Connor is using her language, as is her custom, in both a strict and a suggestive sense. Her protagonist possesses the absolute unity of a man who is unable to change. His triumph, she tells us, lies in this inability, or it may be a paralysis, of will. Judging by some of her unpalatable spokesmen for humanistic optimism, Onie Jay Holy and, from The Violent Bear It Away, Rayber, there was never any likelihood that
Motes would be allowed to discover any moderate or healing alternative. An escape from that ragged figure would be a spurious happy ending. Hazel Motes suffers the same fate as do Miss Lonelyhearts and Gail Hightower: being absolutists, they cannot accommodate the degree of incongruity, disproportion, and ambiguity their worlds present, and their imaginative resources, called in to resolve the internal warfare, can supply them only with models and images of death. When the dust of the battle clears, there will be no victor; the many wills at conflict within Hazel Motes are so extreme in nature that they leave the battleground deserted of all but the dead.
Man knows so little about his fellows. In his eyes all men and women act upon what he believes would motivate him if he were mad enough to do what that other man or woman is doing.

Light in August

In Gail Hightower's story the career of the mad preacher is extended beyond the climactic defeats of Miss Lonelyhearts and Hazel Motes. Hightower is first mentioned in Chapter 2 of Light In August as "the fifty-year-old outcast who has been denied by his church" (p.42). We learn that twenty-five years ago he was the minister of one of Jefferson's principal churches and that now "the exminister lives alone, in what the town calls his disgrace" (p.42), but the circumstances of that defeat are not revealed until Chapter 3, and the sources and depths of Hightower's earlier failure are not discovered by either himself or the reader until the penultimate chapter of the novel. In 1932, before the disastrous week-end that is the focus for the several stories of the novel, Hightower is living in retreat. He has seemingly achieved that peace so painfully lacking in the lives of Miss Lonelyhearts and Hazel Motes. He explains his acceptance of his fate to Byron Bunch: "all that any man can hope for is to be permitted to live quietly among his
fellows" (p.64). This life-stance must seem very sensible to a man who, in 1907, as a young minister, experienced the same sense of loss, conflict and defeat that brought Miss L and Hazel to their deaths. As Faulkner demonstrates in continuing Hightower's career beyond that early catastrophe, the exminister may be a survivor, but the terms of his survival are life-denying; he continues to operate under the same principles that brought about his original downfall.

Many critics have commented on Faulkner's pervasive "feeling for the past as the arbiter of present destinies."\textsuperscript{115} Faulkner himself, when questioned about the title of \textit{Light In August}, explained that he had associated the late summer sunlight with a continuing legacy of ancient cultures, "a luminosity older than our Christian civilization. . . . that luminous lambent quality of an older light than ours."\textsuperscript{116} Like Miss L and Motes, Hightower relies on a power from the past to redeem the present, and like theirs, his failure rests in his reliance on a model from the past to the exclusion and denial of his responsibilities to the people in his present. Hightower's euhemerus is his grandfather, whose daring raid on the Yankee stores in Jefferson the grandson reenacts on his own "raid" on the sensibilities of the Jefferson church members and townspeople fifty-five years later. He pursues the pattern laid down by his grandfather to its finale, being abducted by Klansmen and left for dead. At this juncture the crusading young preacher passes


from the scene, just as finally as did Miss L and Hazel Motes. After him comes the recluse, the old counselor who thinks that he has paid and is at peace, who thinks, "'I am not in life anymore!'" (p.263), who, in fact, is still held in thrall every evening by a visitation of his grandfather's cavalry unit, thundering soundlessly through the street just beyond his study window. In the characterization of Hightower, as in the characterizations of Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, Faulkner explicitly delineates his hypothesis that "no man is himself, he is the sum of his past." 117

To lend force to the principle that the individual will, and therefore individual destiny, is predetermined, Faulkner introduces a particularly dour Calvinism as the guiding religious outlook for most of the novel's characters. McEachern, Hightower's father, Calvin and Nathaniel Burden, all instill in their offspring a particularly virulent religious heritage that includes, among other things, an expectation and acceptance of violence, clannish fanaticism, and chopped logic unrivaled in literature since Scott's highland presbyters. Calvin Burden, himself the son of a New England minister from whom he ran away at the age of twelve, tells his children that everyone else can "'go to their own benighted hell. . . . But I'll beat the loving God into the four of you as long as I can raise my arm'" (pp.212-213). It is not only in the church itself, whose music carries the plea "for not love, not life . . . demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant music" (p.322), that violent destruction is sanctioned; more potently the impulse to "crucifixion of themselves

117 Gwynn and Blotner, p. 84.
and one another" (p.322) is learned in the family and communicated from parent to child. In O'Connor's families, the particular disrespect that the older generation holds for the younger frequently stems from the recognition of a striking physical resemblance that seems to mock or challenge the superior wisdom of the senior. Faulkner shares with O'Connor the perception that the most far-reaching hostility is that reserved for members of one's own family. In particular, children treated as objects of ownership (McEachern examines the five-year-old Christmas as if he were "a horse or a second-hand plow" [p.124]), or as receptacles of a family obsession (Nathaniel Burden tells the four-year-old Joanna that the Negro is "the curse of every white child that ever was born and that ever will be born. None can escape it.... Least of all you." [p.122]), or as visible representatives of an abstract state, what the fifty-year-old Hightower realizes that he has been since he was eight years old, children treated, in other words, as anything but unique individuals grow into adults who confirm the pessimistic parental expectations. Like West and O'Connor, but in greater detail, Faulkner explores the influence of the elemental family unit on the imagination and decisions of the mad preacher, tracing his reduced humanity to the powerful, fatal models and metaphors chosen in childhood.

When Faulkner began writing the novel that became Light In August the working title of the manuscript was Dark House, and an opening scene showed Hightower at his study desk and presented his family
history. As Faulkner developed the counterpoint that was to govern the "series of pieces" of his narrative, he changed the title from a metaphor of darkness to one of light, and he moved the disclosure of Hightower's early life to the next-to-last chapter where it would work as a sympathetic antithesis to the tragedy of Christmas' story. He retained the introduction of Hightower in the darkened study, but replaced the childhood flashback with an episode from early manhood. So that before we know of the boy's fear and hatred, even before we know the old outcast as counselor and confidant, we learn of the young minister's passionate intensity and failure. In the character of Hightower the stages in the life of the mad preacher are taken through two complete cycles, the first of which begins in 1907 when the young seminary graduate arrives in Jefferson.

Faulkner is at pains that the first extended view of Hightower come not from authorial prerogative or through the restricted outlook of some single character or even from Hightower's own memory; the story is a consensus view shaped by the community at large and passed on by several townspeople to the curious Byron, who adds his own thoughts and evaluations to the narrative as he receives it. How appropriate this method is to the account of the young minister's brief tenure becomes clear as the tale resolves itself into a conflict between what the community expects of a minister and what the young newcomer expects from the town.

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From the moment of his arrival at the Jefferson depot, Hightower's attitude strikes the townspeople and the Presbyterian elders as astonishingly inappropriate. He did not, in the traditional Protestant sense, receive a "call" from Jefferson so much as he chose the town and "pulled every string he could" (p.52) to be sent there. He steps off the train in a state of excitement that the townspeople interpret as "a horsetrader's glee over an advantageous trade" (p.52). The elders of the church immediately begin "trying to talk down his gleeful excitement with serious matters of the church and its responsibilities and his own" (p.52). Hightower's clash with the elders is similar to Hazel Motes' run-in with Mrs. Hitchcock: partly it is simply youth vs. age, self-conscious intensity vs. self-satisfied passivity, but also there is the deliberate distancing, the refusal of the young men to actively engage with people as individuals. The elders correctly read Hightower's excitement as his desire to live in the town "and not the church and the people who composed the church, that he wanted to serve. As if he did not care about the people, the living people. . . ." (p.52).

Hightower is soon in a situation similar to Miss Lonelyhearts', unable to meet the demands of his job. His sermons suffer from the same distancing that marks his personal relationships: there is in them "something . . . faster than the words in the Book; a sort of cyclone that did not even need to touch the actual earth" (p.53). Equally unsatisfactory, and for the same reasons, is his marriage, which all the evidence suggests is never consummated. The sterility that pervades both the environment and the human relationships in Miss Lonelyhearts Faulkner locates in the person of the preacher himself. The town believes "that if Hightower had just been a more dependable kind
of man," both as minister and husband, the wife "would have been all right too" (p.53). When she begins to stay away from the church services, the congregation suspects that her husband does not even notice her absence, perhaps does not even remember that he has a wife.

The growing disharmony between minister and congregation displays itself in the kind of incongruity that we have seen is a hallmark of the character of the mad preacher. In Miss Lonelyhearts and Wise Blood this incongruity is intensified through being made grotesque; in Light in August the discrepancy between the way things are and the way they ought to be is handled as a more ordinary affair. The minister behaves oddly and the church members gossip. Particularly do the ladies of the town and of the congregation figure in this phase of the discord. The church ladies soon quit going to the parsonage because Mrs. Hightower is never there to greet them. During the wife's stay in a sanatorium the neighbor women bring Hightower food and report to one another and their husbands on the "mess" and on the minister's slovenly eating habits. After her return the church ladies resume their calls at the parsonage and are satisfied that the minister's wife is now what they "had wanted her to be all the time. . . . sitting quiet and humble, even in her own house, while they told her how to run it and what to wear and what to make her husband eat" (p.56).

Not only is it "natural" that the "good women" of the community act as the arbiters of morals and truth, it is necessary to the story's design. One element of the antagonism that eventually results in Hightower's disgrace, already noted, is youth vs. age; another is male vs. female, an opposition that helps structure the entire novel. While they are implicated in the ensuing misfortune, it is not the townswomen,
but Hightower's wife, who is his decisive adversary. Byron recognizes Hightower's instrumentality in making an enemy of his wife and muses, "that is why women have to be strong and should not be held blameable for what they do with or for or because of men, since God knew that being anybody's wife was a tricky enough business" (p.53). In a dramatic confrontation during the Sunday morning service the young minister's wife makes what is probably her last attempt to get through to her husband.

In the middle of the sermon she sprang from the bench and began to scream. . . . she stood in the aisle now, shrieking and shaking her hands at the pulpit where her husband leaned with his hand still raised and his wild face frozen in the shape of the thundering and allegorical period which he had not completed. They did not know whether she was shaking her hands at him or at God (p.55).

In this tableau, set in the midst of the congregation, the dualities and incongruities central to the conflict are concentrated. The man and woman face one another across the length of the auditorium, both with lifted hands and contorted faces, mirror images of madness, imploring to be understood, both swept up in and irrevocably separated by that allegorical cyclone of dogma and defeat, unable "to touch the actual earth" (p.53). The congregation may be "astonished and dubious," and his wife may be driven to the point of emotional collapse, but Hightower is impervious to the deteriorating present, much the way Miss Lonelyhearts, once he has become "the rock," is impervious to Shrike's taunts and Betty's tears. Even at this early stage of the narrative it is clear that somehow, for Hightower, the very town itself is a sanctuary that no violence can disturb. Jefferson holds the same place in his imagination that Eastrod holds in Hazel Motes'. Hightower's continuing "excitement," his glee and his incomprehensible sermons reach back to a
Civil War incident that occurred in Jefferson in which his grandfather, a cavalryman, was killed. It is even now obvious to the townspeople that Hightower is obsessed with this distant moment in the past; his problem, they say, was "being born about thirty years after the only day he seemed to have ever lived in—that day when his grandfather was shot from the galloping horse" (p.53). Light In August has its "obsessive environments," like Miss Lonelyhearts and Wise Blood, but Faulkner makes clear, just as he did with the motif of sterility, that in Hightower's case, the obsession is in the mind of the observer.

There are minor differences between the young Hightower and the protagonists of the other two novels: for Miss L, the need to create imaginative, impregnable defenses comes about with sudden severity and out of his immediate world, while Hightower, like Hazel Motes, brings his obsession with him to his new home. The basic similarities, however, are all intact in the pattern Hightower follows. Drawing upon personal resources, he has found a powerful figure in his own family history who, for him, redeems the paltry present. He attempts to make this glorious heroism available to the people of Jefferson in his sermons and everyday conversation. The cavalry officer becomes, in Hightower's exegesis, a metaphor for the divine. He substitutes his personal vision of salvation for the accepted, codified vision. The effect of this heroic analogy on his listeners is "puzzlement," "consternation," and, eventually, "outrage." The enmity of the congregation does not seem to be caused merely by the unorthodoxy of the preacher's message, but at least equally by its underlying confusion. When he is in the pulpit his dogma becomes "full of galloping cavalry and defeat and glory," and when he is on the street talking about the Confederate
raid, "it in turn would get all mixed up with absolution and choirs of martial seraphim" (p.54). Hightower fails to demonstrate that his vision is simply a new dimension, analogous and integral to the prevailing moral order. This compelling insight has fixed his attention on a point in time in 1862, when the bravery of his grandfather "matched the moment," and the people living with him in the present feel cheated.

It cannot be overemphasized that Faulkner allows for no definitive interpretation of the Hightower-Jefferson conflict, a conflict which structures itself on the polarities of youth and age, male and female, the living and the dead, theological authority and individual creativity. In the entire chapter there is not one line from Hightower's sermons or "wild" conversation in his own words. When Byron hears the story it is already twenty-five years old and has become a local myth. If the young preacher was wild, it seems apparent that the church members were self-righteous and malicious. It seems just as likely that the listeners were unwilling to hear an allegory combining transcendent human valor and ignominious defeat located so close to home, as it does that Hightower could not render his vision coherently. Even when the tensions arising from the conflict are brought to a climax in Mrs. Hightower's death and the minister's subsequent resignation, they are not ultimately resolved. The townspeople, briefly relieved and also sorry, "as people sometimes are sorry for those whom they have at last forced to do as they wanted them to" (p.60), are stunned to learn that Hightower has bought a small house and refuses to go away.

With the ordinary, legitimate avenues of authority stymied, the vigilante element of the community endeavors to complete the coercion begun by the ex-minister's own church. The masked men frighten
Hightower's Negro cook into quitting and saying that "her employer asked her to do something which she said was against God and nature" (p.61). When he then hires a Negro man to cook, the klansmen whip the man and throw a brick through Hightower's study window. Tied to the brick is a note "commanding him to get out of town by sunset" (p.62). When these tactics get no response, they carry Hightower off into the woods where he is eventually found, "tied to a tree and beaten unconscious" (p.62). This final phase of the young minister's story introduces another polarity central to the novel's structure, that of white vs. black. The opposition of the races, which is a crucial issue in the lives of Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden, gradually becomes, as the individual strands of the larger story are interwoven, a metaphor for division. Just as the Civil War battle he is not even old enough to remember represents the self-destructive inner war Hightower never quite completes, the issue of racial antagonism is introduced whenever the conviction of necessary destruction is carried out of the home circle and visited upon others.

Thus the first cycle of Hightower's story completes itself with something like a sense of reconciliation. He will not take legal steps against the terrorists and he will not leave, and the town at last relents. After Byron hears the story to its conclusion, he reflects that it was "as though . . . the entire affair had all played out the parts which had been allotted them and now they could live quietly with one another"(p.62). The note of theatricality that Faulkner introduces here is another of the hallmarks of the mad preacher that we have observed in some detail in our readings of Miss Lonelyhearts and Wise Blood. Like West and O'Connor, Faulkner uses this motif to indicate
a reduced humanity. Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes, and Gail Hightower all witness and participate in community rituals more noteworthy as exercises in manipulation than for their efficacy in identifying and enhancing what is best in the people of the society. Byron's insight goes straight to the heart of the conflict between individual free choice and predetermined, fated destiny. As performers in a drama, the inhabitants of Jefferson, all of them, are less than fully human. They have sacrificed, abandoned some measure of their individual responsibility and integrity and chosen to "play out the parts which had been allotted them." As the church elders read the script, Hightower "was just born unlucky"; "There was nothing against him personally, they all insisted" (pp. 59-60). And Hightower's copy of the script corresponds in essentials with theirs, derived from the same cultural heritage and carrying the additional urgency of the grandson's pursuit of his fate, so that he is able to accept the death of his wife, the loss of his church, his reduced income and his status of disgrace with stoic disinterest. He refuses even to register anger at the accomplices in his defeat, telling Byron, "They are good people. They must believe what they must believe, especially as it was I who was at one time both master and servant of their believing. And so it is not for me to outrage their believing nor for Byron Bunch to say that they are wrong" (p. 64).

II

The second cycle of Hightower's story follows the same pattern as the first. Now a fifty-year-old recluse and confidant of Byron Bunch,
he again faces a dilemma which the resources and powers from his past are inadequate to resolve. The old counselor cannot persuade Byron to disassociate himself from Lena Grove, to leave Jefferson, "leave this place forever, this terrible place, this terrible, terrible place" (p.275); he cannot give Mrs. Hines her grandson "just for one day. . . . Like it hadn't happened yet" (p.340); nor can he prevent Grimm from murdering Christmas in his own house. Yet there are differences between this second defeat and the first. Hightower's vision of life and his loyalty to his experience of value enable him, this time, to travel beyond his defeat, to transcend the myth he has lived by and glimpse a new, more complete vision of human relatedness.

The tumult that breaks in upon Hightower's carefully preserved isolation occurs during a period of slightly more than a week in August, 1932. Lena Grove arrives in Jefferson looking for the father of her soon-to-be-born child on Saturday, the day the town has discovered the fire and murder at the Burden house. It is Byron, Hightower's one human contact, who brings the news of the week-end disasters and complications to the small, dark, smelly house on Sunday evening. Byron began visiting the recluse almost seven years earlier, shortly after hearing the story of the minister's disgrace. The still-young mill hand is a man intent on staying out of harm's way: he works steadily all week at the planing mill, even on Saturdays, and on Sundays he leads the choir at an all-day country church service. Two or three nights a week he sits in Hightower's book-lined study, as at the feet of a wise master, conversing, it can be supposed, on good and evil, and the ways of man. Byron, an observant and thoughtful student of the human scene, possesses Faulkner's all-important criterion of character--
what Olga Vickery, borrowing from Henry James, calls "the heart of the figure in the carpet" of Faulkner's fiction— the inquiring mind:
"The most important thing is insight, that is, to be—curiosity—to wonder, to mull, and to muse why it is that man does what he does." In search of insight, Byron asks Hightower, soon after their evening dialogues begin, why he stays on in Jefferson within hearing of the church that disowned him. The old counselor answers Socratically, with a question: why does Byron work on Saturday afternoons instead of joining the other men in recreation? Because Byron does not know, then, why he keeps so busy, his answer allows Hightower refuge in his sense of fate. "'I don't know,' Byron said. 'I reckon that's just my life.'"

"'And I reckon this is just my life, too,' the other said" (p.65). Later Byron discovers a truer answer.

When Byron comes to Hightower's house on that Sunday night, a conspicuous change in his weekly routine, he needs assistance, counsel, guidance. But in order to explain his problem to Hightower, he must tell him a great deal that will trouble him, Byron feels, something he "ain't going to want to hear and . . . hadn't ought to have to hear at all" (p.68). These two constants, the question-and-answer mode and Byron's apologetic posture, shape the dialogue that continues between the two men through the rest of the novel. From beginning to end, even when he has set himself a course he knows that his confidant cannot


120 Gwynn and Blatner, p. 191.
approve, Byron is respectful, deferential and conciliatory. It is because of the esteem he feels for Hightower, greater esteem than the older man feels for himself, that Byron calls on him for assistance. And it is in his determination to meet the responsibilities that come his way, to do the good that lies before him, that Byron drags Hightower, full of "shrinking and foreboding," "denial and flight," back into life. In one of the paradoxical reversals that constitute the novel's principal aesthetic movement, the good disciple teaches the needy master a lesson in moral commitment.

In Chapter 3 the story of Hightower's past is presented in a frame set in present time. The chapter opens with Hightower looking out of his darkened study window on Sunday evening, across the little yard and beyond his darkly humorous, self-carpentered sign announcing:

Rev. Gall Hightower, D.D.
Art Lessons
Handpainted Xmas & Anniversary Cards
Photographs Developed (p.50).

And it closes with the unexpected arrival of Byron, whom Hightower does not at once recognize, so preoccupied is he with his departing evening vision, "the echo of the phantom hooves still crashing soundlessly in the duskfilled study" (p.65). Chapter 4 details the events of the weekend that Byron, in his need to decide what to do about Lena, is led to repeat to the immobile but increasingly agitated Hightower. Lena's arrival and the object of her journey, the bootlegging activities of Brown and Christmas, the identifying scar near Brown's mouth, the belief that Christmas is Negro, the discovery of the fire and Joanna Burden's decapitated body, the efforts of Brown to collect the reward money: these disclosures the older man at first receives tranquilly,
"as though he were listening to the doings of a people of a different race" (p.70). Gradually, as the interlocking connections reveal themselves and as Byron's personal interest in Lena becomes apparent, Hightower's expression takes on the quality of "shrinking and denial" (p.73), of "denial and flight" (p.77), until his face is "suddenly slick with sweat" (p.78). He sits rigidly behind his desk, "his attitude . . . that of an eastern idol" (p.78) while Byron tells him of the discovery of the body, Brown's accusations and the ensuing chase. He keeps his voice "light and calm" (p.78) but at the end of Byron's recital "the sweat is running down his face like tears" (p.87).

Hightower can foresee the terrible consequences that will ensue if the town captures the man they believe is a Negro and the murderer of a white woman. "'Poor man. Poor mankind!'" (p.87), he says. He has also had the first hint that he may be called upon by some of these people, whose doings are as remote to him as those of "a different race," to become involved in their struggles. Lena is interested to know if this preacher friend of Byron's is "still enough of a preacher to marry folks" (p.77). It is when Byron repeats her inquiry that Hightower's posture becomes rigid, and the "expression of denial and flight" on his face becomes definite. He cannot foresee that this will be the least of the demands put before him in the coming week, that Byron will bring him more than a story of betrayal, violence and vengeance, and will request of him more than a theoretical discussion of good and evil. As long as he can, Hightower will cling to the rigid posture of protest and denial that his past disappointments have taught him.

There is a series of questions, or challenges, that Byron brings to Hightower, like the query about the rejected minister's remaining in
Jefferson, to which Hightower replies in a negating fashion. As he
listens to Byron's explanation of his provisions for Lena's lying-in
and his desire to "listen to all the advice he can get" (p.263), Hightower thinks, "'I am not in life anymore . . . there is no use in even
trying to meddle, interfere. He could hear me no more than that man
and that woman (ay, and that child) would hear or heed me if I tried
to come back into life'" (p.263). When Byron asks him point blank,
"'What do you advise?'" Hightower immediately responds, "'Go away.
Leave Jefferson'" (p.269).

That is on Tuesday. On Wednesday morning the denial continues.
While Hightower is buying his groceries he learns from the storekeeper
that the dogs have picked up Christmas' trail, and he becomes panicky,
thinking "'I won't! I won't! I have bought immunity. I have paid. I
have paid'" (p.270). It is as yet unclear what precisely is the
subject of his protest, but he seems to be in dialogue with his con­
science. As he walks home in the August heat his thinking "is like
words spoken aloud now: reiterative, patient, justificative: 'I paid
for it. I didn't quibble about the price. No man can say that. I
just wanted peace; I paid them their price without quibbling' . . . .
Then sweat, heat, mirage, all rushed fused into a finality which abro­
gates all logic and justification and obliterates it like fire would:
I will not! I will not!" (pp.271-272). That evening Byron enters
Hightower's house "completely changed" (p.272). He has made a deci­
sion "which someone dear to him will not understand and approve, yet
which he himself knows to be right" (p.274). Hightower, although he
has told himself that there is no use in his trying to make himself
heard, argues strenuously against Byron's commitment to Lena. Some
of the most-often quoted Faulkner "misogyny" comes from these pages. Perhaps Hightower presses the case against marriage so hard because it is important for him to believe that his wife was the agent of his downfall in Jefferson, and surely he is apprehensive of losing Byron's attention. Furthermore, Hightower's assessment of Byron's temperament is characteristically fixed, admitting no possibility of change. However, when Byron returns on Sunday, he is no longer asking questions; he wants Hightower's help with the Hines, and he tells the tearful, reluctant, querulous old man, "But you are a man of God. You can't dodge that!" (p.319). In his habitual style, Hightower protests:

"I am not a man of God. And not through my own desire. Remember that. Not of my own choice that I am no longer a man of God. It was by the will, the more than behest, of them like you and like her and like him in the jail yonder and like them who put him there to do their will upon, as they did upon me, with insult and violence . . ." (p.319).

Byron is pushing Hightower out of his customary refuge as distinguished sage. And when he brings the Hines to Hightower's study that night, he has a plan for intervening in and forestalling the approaching tragic denouement. "'It's a poor thing to ask!'" (p.341), Byron says, but the town would believe him if Hightower were to say that Christmas was with him the night of the murder. Byron has found a way of rewriting the script that Hightower and the town have followed. Hightower himself ironically acknowledges his disciple's new talent: "'Ah, Byron, Byron. What a dramatist you would have made!'" (p.341). But he is not ready to give up his long-held position of recalcitrant protest and denial: "'It's not because I cant, dont dare to . . . it's because I wont! I wont! do you hear? . . . Get out of my house! Get out of my house!'" (p.342).
Hightower's struggle with the painfully intrusive present closely corresponds to those of Miss Lonelyhearts and Hazel Motes. Like them, Hightower is brought face to face with a present reality in which moral values are in ebb and violent alternatives are gaining the ascendancy. Like theirs, his response to the threatening present is argumentativeness and rigidity. He also suffers from the same dichotomized perception of experience that produces Miss Lonelyhearts' preoccupation with the metaphors of sickness and health, and Hazel Motes' obsession with being clean and unclean. The polarities that run through all three novels are age-old: youth vs. age, male vs. female, the individual vs. the community, life vs. death, good vs. evil; the tragedy of the mad preacher is that he cannot transcend these either-or categories. The dichotomized perception of the world that lies behind Miss L's pawnshop dream, "Man against Nature . . . the battle of the centuries," and Hazel's assertion to the owl in the zoo, "I AM CLEAN," distorts Hightower's view "of the familiar buildings about the square" as he walks home after his upsetting encounter with the storekeeper on Wednesday, causing him to see "a quality of living and palpitant chiaroscuro" (p.271). Caught between vying contraries, like Miss Lonelyhearts and Motes, Hightower is overwhelmed by his sense of powerlessness, and so, like them, depends upon the past for an explanation and vindication, as he does, in tears, when Byron reminds him that he is still a man of God, and as he does each evening when he sits down to await the arrival of his grandfather's cavalry, believing, "'There remains yet something of honor and pride, of life'" (p.52).

The past that gives meaning to Hightower's life, the parental figures, the religious intensity, the death and deadness, also bears
a resemblance to those of Miss Lonelyhearts and Hazel Motes, but there is more of it. He has the past of 1907, in which he sees himself as victimized by the Jefferson community, which accounts for his present status of outcast; and he has the past of 1862, the date of his grandfather's fatal attack on the Yankee stores located in Jefferson, which Hightower's imagination has apotheosized. In addition, there is the past of Hightower's childhood, particularly the autumn of 1890 when the eight-year-old boy finds his father's patched Confederate uniform in an attic trunk. It is after the beleaguered Hightower, wakened before dawn by Byron, has successfully delivered Lena's baby and permitted himself to enjoy the warmth and glow of that triumph, thinking, "'Life comes to the old man yet!'" (p.355), and it is after he does tell the lie for Christmas in a futile attempt to prevent his murder, after these affirmative departures from his habitual recalcitrance that Hightower, sitting at his study window at twilight, lets his mind go back to that childhood past in which his first crucial decisions were made.

There are two sources for what I have been calling Hightower's life script: his own early experiences, as he remembers and interprets them, and the stories told him by the Negro cook, Cinthy. When he was born, in 1862, his father was fifty and his mother past forty, an invalid for twenty years. His parents and Cinthy, who had been his grandfather's slave, Hightower thinks of as phantoms. He himself, he reflects, thus became the child of merely visible representatives of an abstract state. More real to the boy is his grandfather, who died before Gail, his namesake, was born. This "ghost," for all his violent exploits, held no terror for the child, while "the father which he knew and feared was a phantom which would never die" (p.418).
Hightower's father was a son much like the generations of sons in Joanna Burden's family, consciously living a life in rebellion against his own "lusty and sacrilegious" father, yet carrying on fundamental family patterns. He was "a man of Spartan sobriety beyond his years, as the offspring of a not overly particular servant of Chance and the bottle often is" (p.414). Gail I was a Bourbon-drinking, non-attending Episcopalian; the teetotaling son began preaching in a country Presbyterian church when he was twenty-one. The father owned slaves; the son was an abolitionist "almost before the sentiment had become a word" (pp.413-414). But like the father, the son went to war, and while there he taught himself the profession of medicine, just as the father had taught himself law. The son's idealism, Gail II muses, prevented him from seeing any paradox in his taking "an active part in a partisan war and on the very side whose principles opposed his own" (p.414), and this is "proof enough that he was two separate and complete people, one of whom dwelled by serene rules in a world where reality did not exist" (p.415). Hightower thinks of his father's "uncompromising conviction" as propping him upright "between puritan and cavalier" (p.415). The father's idealism also caused his wife hardships: she could have no Negro help nor could she accept aid from neighbors, since "it could not be repaid in kind" (p.409), and Hightower grows up believing that his mother's invalidism was the result of the inadequate food that "she had had to subsist on during the last year of the Civil War" (p.409). Perhaps what Hightower most resented about his father was that he was a successful survivor of the war. While his grandfather perished and his mother withered, his father prospered in "rude health." The man's well-being made him a "stranger, a foreigner. . . .
an enemy," in the house where the mother and child lived "like two small, weak beasts in a den" (p.416). Crouched beside his mother's bed, the sickly boy could feel his father's presence fill the room with "unconscious contempt" and frustration.

The normal and relatively transient feeling of helplessness natural to the experiences of childhood are intensified for Hightower by his very close relationship to his dying mother. The "physical betrayal" of her poor health he connects with his father's "uncompromising convictions," and he allies himself with her in sympathetic illness. Hightower's memory of his mother parallels in several significant ways the haunting quality that Hazel Motes attributes to his mother. Both women are spectre-like in their gauntness, their thin faces, and Mrs. Hightower has "blue, still, almost skeleton hands" (p.416). Most memorable for both men are their mothers' eyes. Hazel, it will be remembered, believes that his mother can see through the tree he hides behind. Hightower remembers "the two eyes which seemed daily to grow bigger and bigger" and the same look of dissatisfaction that Mrs. Motes wore to her grave; her eyes grew "as though about to embrace all seeing, all life, with one last terrible glare of frustration and suffering and foreknowledge. And when that finally happened, he would hear it: it would be a sound, like a cry" (p.416). The boy can feel his mother's eyes "through all walls" and finally he believes that they are the very house, "dark and all-embracing" (p.416), within which he and she dwell. The melancholy and helpless adult, living out his days in morbid idleness in the dark, untidy, stale-smelling little house, is duplicating the way of life familiar to him from his childhood.
His memories of his parents, and what they represented to him, reveal the source of Hightower's unusually acute facility for abstraction. No mean talent, the ability to abstract is the necessary equipment of the rational man, and Hightower's skill in this area, revealed in his conversations with Byron and in his solitary ruminations, is pronounced. But his earliest use of this gift is dominated by the defeat and frustration so pervasive, so threatening in the household of his birth. His father's "uncompromising convictions" and preserved uniform, "unbelievably huge, as though made for a giant" (p.410); his mother's dark, engulfing eyes, his memory of her (inaccurate, he realizes later) as always bed-ridden, "as without legs, feet" (p.416); these abstractions of his personal history form the core of the paradox that Hightower struggles in and with for the rest of his life. The affinity for abstraction that seems to be his greatest talent and his fatal weakness serves two contradictory purposes: it establishes a common bond with, and allows him to participate in, the lives of the all-important parents; simultaneously, through abstraction the child can distance, separate, remove himself from the painfully personal, his father's cold contempt and his mother's imminent death. He can secretly steal himself away from the dangerous parental domain, as he does when he investigates the old trunk in the attic or listens, "rapt," to Cinthy's tales in the kitchen. Yet, in the very act of insulating himself from injury, he is digging deeper into that mystery that wounds and torments him. When he examines the blue patch on his father's old Confederate jacket, it is with "horrified triumph" and "sick joy" (p.411) just as he listens to Cinthy's account of the "hundreds" of Yankees killed by his grandfather in "half dread and half delight"
(p.418). So it is that Hightower exchanges a living, but feared and hated, father for a dead grandfather, harmless because "just" a ghost.

Significantly, Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower all consciously reject their fathers as desirable models (even while carrying on some prominent fatherly conviction, style, or occupation), choosing instead some figure who is even more powerful than the father. Hightower's ruminations point to his desire to eliminate or circumvent his father by not merely imitating, but by being his own grandfather: "'It's no wonder that I had no father and that I had already died one night twenty years before I saw light'" (p.418). Hightower's imaginative conception of his grandfather as cavalryman has that same "poetic" quality that Miss L recognizes as the goal of the "tales" of people like Mary Shrike, for whom "parents are also a part of the business of dreams." Like them, Hightower learns as a child to fight his misery with dreams. The dream, the story itself, told and retold, exaggerated, made to fit, is a predictable, comforting standard against which the random intrusions of his father and the failing health of his mother can be made subordinate, even decorous. And if the story requires, as payment for this redemption, that the defeat and death of the hero be repeated by his avatar, the dreamer believes that he thereby shares in the glory of the story. Since the heroic euhemerus can be imitated, but never surpassed, the paradigm allows for repetition, but no development. Thus has Hightower come to believe that his life is fated, predestined; whatever occurs has been, as he says, "reserved for me."

Now that Faulkner has made the disgraced preacher's story complicated enough to meet his standard for truth, at last he is ready to show us Hightower, from his own point of view, as a seminary student
and fiancée, minister and husband. Now we have been prepared for the full and magnificent rendering of the cavalry raid which, until now, has remained a second- or third-hand mystery and unsatisfactory explanation of Hightower's tragedy. His own recollection confirms the town's general impression, recorded in Chapter 3 but unsubstantiated until now, as it registers the successive conflicts and retreats in which Hightower engages on the road to his "destiny." As he recalls the stages of his life, the boy who preferred stories of the dead to the miseries of the living; the student who believed that the sheltering seminary would guarantee "his future, his life, intact and on all sides complete and inviolable, like a classic and serene vase" (p.419); the lover who substituted, for three years, the "beautiful. . . . face which he had already created in his mind" for the "small oval narrowing too sharply to chin and passionate with discontent" (p.420); the fiancée who quietly thought that it was well that love was put into books, because "'Perhaps it could not live anywhere else!'" (p.421); the husband who is so engrossed in telling his fantasy of the superior dead that he does not "hear [his wife] at all" (p.425); the minister who is so engrossed in looking at the town of his dreams that he does not see the needy church members; the character of the man comes more clearly into focus. The portrait is a consistent and meticulous rendering of melancholy in each of its developmental periods. Looking back over the phases of his life, Hightower "sees himself a shadowy figure among shadows, paradoxical, with a kind of false optimism and egoism" (p.426). Most importantly, it is not simply Faulkner's design of Hightower's life and character that is unveiled in this reminiscence, it is Hightower's design for his life that has been, all too
accurately, fulfilled, even while its author disclaimed responsibility. It is Hightower whose desire to go to Jefferson kept him "working for that since he was four years old" (p.422). It has been easier to believe that he was led, predestined to meet disgrace in Jefferson at the hands of the same people who had killed his grandfather, but he now recognizes the hand of destiny as his own, arranging to have himself "called" to Jefferson, plotting his own defeat, "with insult and violence," the consummation of his personal civil war.

Hightower has reached a new way station on his "destined" path. The crises he has just passed through brought with them opportunity as well as danger. The old recluse did find it within himself to act affirmatively, to enjoy both the profit and the loss of those who "learn the despair of love" (p.342): he serves as Lena's midwife, he tells a ludicrous lie for Christmas; he loses Byron's company. Now as he surveys the life of the Gail Hightower whom he believed to be so powerless, he is leading himself to the penetration of his soul's secret charade and to a new vision of his place in the human family.

Faulkner opens Chapter 20 on a descending note with a return to the theatrical motif: "Now the copper light of afternoon fades; now the street beyond the low maples and the low signboard is prepared and empty, framed by the study window like a stage" (p.408). Hightower's life-long preoccupation with human abstractions and analogs now provides him with an insight that uncovers the fictitious side of his idealism. As he remembers the faces of his congregation, his audience, he sees reflected in them, as in mirrors, himself, "a figure antic as a showman, a little wild: a charlatan preaching worse than heresy, in utter disregard of that whose very stage he preempted" (p.428).
In the outraged faces and the omniscient "Face Itself" Hightower reads judgment, chastisement, and, in the same way he always protested to Byron, and even to himself, or his conscience, he now continues this endless dialogue with the Face. He argues that he should not be held responsible for what was "beyond my power" and the Face responds that his intentions were impure, selfish. "Is that true?" he thinks.

'Could that have been true?' (p.428) Ruefully concluding "how ingenuity was apparently given man in order that he may supply himself in crises with shapes and sounds with which to guard himself from truth" (p.419), he now considers the possibility that the young minister was a wiley actor in disguise:

He sees himself offer as a sop fortitude and forbearance and dignity, making it appear that he resigned his pulpit for a martyr's reasons, when at the very instant there was within him a leaping and triumphant surge of denial behind a face which had betrayed him, believing itself safe behind the lifted hymnbook, when the photographer pressed his bulb.

He seems to watch himself, alert, patient, skillful, playing his cards well, making it appear that he was being driven, uncomplaining, into that which he did not even then admit had been his desire since before he entered the seminary. And still casting his sops as though he were flinging rotten fruit before a drove of hogs: the meagre income from his father which he continued to divide with the Memphis institution; allowing himself to be persecuted, to be dragged from his bed at night and carried into the woods and beaten with sticks, he all the while bearing in the town's sight and hearing, without shame, with that patient and voluptuous ego of the martyr, the air, the behavior, the How long, O Lord until, inside his house again and the locked, he lifted the mask with voluptuous and triumphant glee: Ah. That's done now. That's past now. That's bought and paid for now (pp.428-429)

Even from this unflattering insight Hightower does not draw back. After all is said and done, is even this self-martyrdom unforgivable, since, "'I was young then,' he thinks." (p.429) Intent, as he has been all alone, on justifying himself, he again picks up the thread of his argument: "'And after all, I have paid. I have bought my ghost,
even though I did pay for it with my life. And who can forbid me doing that?" (p.429). In the eagerness of carrying his point home, High-tower at last stumbles upon the fallacy of his logic: "It is any man's privilege to destroy himself, so long as he does not injure anyone else, so long as he lives to and of himself". He stops suddenly. Motionless, unbreathing, there comes upon him a consternation which is about to be actual horror" (p.429). Faulkner is using the metaphor of a wheel running in sand for Hightower's thinking here, a wheel gradually ceasing to make progress and, instead, spinning in the rut that it is digging for itself. The circularity of his logic brings Hightower, after all these years, face to face with his complicity in his wife's despair and destruction. Now the wheel of thinking "turns on with the slow implacability of a medieval torture instrument" (p.430), on which Hightower is breaking himself. He pursues the logical implications of his instrumentality, his compliant possession by his grandfather:

'Then, if this is so, if I am the instrument of her despair and death, then I am in turn instrument of someone outside myself. And I know that for fifty years I have not even been clay: I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed. And if I am my dead grandfather on the instant of his death, then my wife, his grandson's wife . . . the debaucher and murderer of my grandson's wife, since I could neither let my grandson live or die . . .' (p.430).

Hightower has progressed to the heart of the mystery of his own character. Not only does he find himself culpable, but he realizes that in abdicating his self-determination in favor of his grandfather, he has allowed himself to be used by the dead as an agent of destruction and shame while, by implication, transforming the valiant hero into a "debaucher and murderer." The bitter irony implicit in the story of the
dashing soldier killed in an act of petty thievery by one of his own people, the irony that Hightower has enjoyed as so fitting for the finale of a war story, now renews itself in the mind of the grandson, who, in refusing to live his own life, in building his life on that story, has abused himself and those closest to him, including his grandfather's beloved memory.

Hightower's insight suggests that not only do the dead inevitably influence the living, but that the dead can also be affected by the living, that there is a continuum of interrelationship that death does not interrupt. In the aftermath of his torturous discovery, the wheel of his thinking, relieved of its weight, whirls fast and smooth, transforming itself, this time, into a faintly glowing halo, and Hightower experiences that merging of identities, of the living with the dead, that is Gabriel Conroy's New Year's vision in James Joyce's "The Dead." The halo is a circle of faces, faces that are clearly distinguishable and also quite similar, faces that are at peace, "as though they have escaped into an apotheosis" (p.430): his wife's, those of townspeople, members of his old congregation, Byron's, Lena's, Christmas', Grimm's, and his own is among them. The face of Christmas is actually a composite of the scapegoat and Grimm, the executioner, and it is confused because, as the wheel turns, the two faces "strive ... to free themselves from one another, then fade and blend again" (p.431). As Hightower recognizes the mutuality of their identities and the futility of their eternal enmity he collapses and thinks that he is dying.

This new vision of human interrelatedness comes as though it were some kind of reward for Hightower's courage, for, at least, his persistence. For all his melancholy, Hightower, and the other mad
preachers, do seem to be men who are concerned with truth. Under scrutiny, though, every mad preacher is revealed as a character convinced, or in the process of convincing himself, that he already possesses the truth (remember Miss Lonelyhearts reading the letters and thinking "'Christ was the answer'" and Hazel Motes' assertiveness on the train). Hightower's new vision is a measure of the growth the old counselor has allowed himself, but it is not the herald of a new life. In the halo itself yet remains his conviction that fate's wheel supplies the motion of life. And the new vision does not supplant the old, but is merely its precursor, because as Hightower leans exhausted on the window sill, he hears them, "this last left of honor and pride and life" (p.431), and even when the ghost riders are gone, "it seems to him that he still hears them: the wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves" (p.432).

III

Hightower's disgrace and defeat recapitulate, are inherent in, his model. Like Miss Lonelyhearts and Hazel Motes, his effort to revitalize a transcendent and redemptive power from the past becomes, instead, a confirmation of defeat. Each novel carefully leaves ambiguous the question of whether the failure is to be pitied or admired, that is, whether the men failed on one level but triumphed on another, but there is no question that they failed in what they set out to do, and were responsible for considerable additional suffering as well. And their failures are all prepared for by their choice of models—Miss L's Dostoevsky and Father Zossima, Motes' grandfather and
Asa Hawks, Hightower's "sacrilegious" grandfather. For what fascinates the young preachers, besides their models' power, is their futility, their deaths. Their overriding melancholy stems from this fascination, which has granted to death ultimate power and usurped their commitment to life and the living.

The forces of death are awarded considerable scope in Light In August, but not everyone is ready to surrender to them. An especially clear perspective of the terms of Hightower's failure, and indirectly of Miss L's and Motes', emerges from the contrasting persistence of Lena Grove. Her story winds through the dismal Jefferson anthology with a disarming simplicity and strength which is sometimes comic, sometimes touching, but always a breath of fresh air. And yet Lena's history is not circumstantially different from Hightower's, Joanna's or Christmas'. Her childhood, too, is marked by the death of her parents and physical deprivation. Nor is she either exceptionally virtuous or insensible. As a child she had her wishful games and deceptions: she hoped that wearing shoes on her occasional visits into town would identify her as a town dweller. When she is deserted by Lucas Burch and her elder brother calls her whore, her "patient and steadfast fidelity" (p.6) in Burch's promise to send for her could be read as naivete, stubbornness or stupidity. But at least as important as her fidelity is her vitality: she acts on her belief that "a family ought to be together when a chap comes. Specially the first one. I reckon the Lord will see to that" (p.18). Like the other major characters, Lena has a theory of a transcendent design, and she works as hard as they do helping the Lord accomplish what she believes to be his purpose. And like them, her expectations are realized: everyone
who meets her, bringing with them whatever presumptions, and regardless of their estimate of her morality or her intelligence, are moved by her need and her good faith to do their best for her. Lena's story is usually seen as the extreme counterpoint to the life and death of Joe Christmas, and it does work that way, but in the structure and meaning of the novel as a whole, her journey and labor are most significant in their similarities to the struggles of the tragic figures. The themes, technique and structure of the entire novel are inherent in the first chapter, in which Faulkner begins to tell the story of Lena Grove.

A major, unifying theme of *Light In August* explores the interdependent connections between man as a creature of sensations and man as a creature of faith, because it is what is believed about what is seen and heard that is the pivotal point, the axle, of this novel of religious perversion and living sacrifice. Hightower calls it the "ingenuity" by which man selects the "shapes and sounds with which to guard himself from truth." That "older light than ours" is also a more savage and uncompromising light. While he is showing us Lena on her journey, Faulkner uses Chapter 1 to demonstrate how the flux of perception directs the individual's formation of belief as well as the convergence and divergence of communal belief. To this end he employs multiple

points of view, both through external dialogue between characters and internal dialogue within the mind of a single character. The first chapter also serves as the initial piece of the framework of the novel, which is finished in Chapter 21 with the furniture dealer's account of Lena, her purpose of uniting the fragmented family unit accomplished, continuing her journey on into Tennessee.

The interaction of belief and experience that Faulkner examines repeatedly and in great detail, from the most mundane to the most extraordinary, is rooted in sensory perception. Again and again in the first chapter he illustrates how seeing and hearing do more than supply man with practical information. When combined with that "ingenuity" that Hightower possesses and recognizes, sight and hearing can be dissociated from their matter-of-fact function and factual sources and extended in the support of a belief, a judgment or an illusion. This ingenuity is at work when Lena hears Armstid's wagon approaching, its sound coming to her "as though it were a ghost travelling a half mile ahead of its own shape" (p.7), and she imagines herself, as though she had mounted on its sound, "riding for a half mile before I even got into the wagon . . . and . . . when the wagon is empty of me it will go on for a half mile with me still in it" (p.7). Dissociated perceptions are also emphasized in the repeated instances in which Lena and the country folk see each other without seeming to look" "Apparently Armstid has never once looked full at her. Yet he has already seen that she wears no wedding ring" (p.10); or fail to listen, to hear: when Armstid and Varner in turn attempt to prepare Lena for disappointment, they realize that she is not listening, "'She would not have believed the telling and hearing it any more than she will believe the
thinking that's been going on around her . . . It's four weeks now, she said" (p.21).

The sense of suspended motion, and with it, time, that such a disassociated, or heightened, perception can produce is essential to Faulkner's atavistic focus. Lena and her journey over the "backrolling" roads in the "identical and anonymous" wagons, the mules themselves "limpeared avatars," must be apprehended "like something moving forever and without progress across an urn" (p.6). Destiny, foreordained and repeated, must seem to lie in the road itself which is simply a string prepared for a bead, or "already measured thread being rewound onto a spool" (p.7). The contradictory movement-in-stasis insists that "though the mules plod in a steady and unflagging hypnosis, the vehicle does not seem to progress. It seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and forever" (p.7). Importantly, though there is no "semblance" of progress, though the advance is "infintesimal," Lena and Armstid do "draw slowly together as the wagon crawls terrifically toward her" (p.10). As Lena sits in the last creaking wagon, "fields and woods seem to hand in some inescapable middle distance, at once static and fluid, quick, like mirages. Yet the wagon passes them" (p.24). As Faulkner insisted in his Nobel Prize speech, progress does occur.

The first chapter establishes a world in which physical reality and the unfavored people laboring in it are imbued with an aura of the inevitable, the "inescapable"; and yet the people, by their efforts, can progress. The progress they make is dependent on their beliefs, which they first construct from their perceptions of this world, and, in turn, use as a tool to shape their experience according to the
desired design. There are differing opinions as to the source of the design; it may be Providential, or impersonally fated, cultural, or even a malignant power, such as the "Player" who takes Percy Grimm through his moves like a "pawn." Belief itself is a constant, but the kinds of belief are legion, and their multiplicity produces a continually diverging and conflicting interpretation of the meaning of the world and humanity's place in it.

There are two areas of conflict that are particularly important throughout the novel for the shaping power they exert on belief, and that receive, in turn, much of their turbulent momentum from fixed beliefs. These are the perpetual antagonism between men and women, and the chorus of interior voices present in any single character's mind. In the first chapter there is one instance that combines both. Armstid has taken Lena up onto his wagon and learned of her mission and the willing help she has received along the way:

"Womenfolks too?" From the corner of his eye he watches her profile thinking I don't know what Martha's going to say thinking, 'I reckon I do know what Martha's going to say. I reckon womenfolks are likely to be good without being very kind. Men, now, might. But it's only a bad woman herself that is likely to be very kind to another woman that needs the kindness' thinking Yes I do. I know exactly what Martha is going to say (p.11).

This is the first of many masculine beliefs about the female personality that will fill the first chapter and the entire novel, beliefs that categorize, and in so doing, emphasize a determination to be separate from and superior to women. In addition to demonstrating the male/female dichotomy, the paragraph is notable for the interior dialogue by way of which a judgment or belief is produced. With single quotes and italics Faulkner indicates that multiple points of view exist inside individuals as well as between individual characters.
The debate is the posture of habitual resort that structures both the public and private efforts to thrash out the truth of an ambiguous situation. Most of the time, though, no very unusual discoveries result from the dialogues; the truth that is found is the truth that the debater is prepared to see. Lena is the occasion for the external and internal debate of Chapter 1, but she is not its true subject. Virtually everyone she meets comments on the "shape" she is in and infers that she has been deserted, but their dialogues form themselves around more familiar assumptions and judgments. Armstid knows "exactly" what his wife will say and muses on the disloyalty of the members of "the woman race"; Martha limits herself to "'You men'. . .'You durn men'" (p.15); Jody Varner mentally aligns himself with Lena's brother and the jealousy of "fatherblood" (p.23). Lena's presence and her story provide an opportunity for everyone to take sides, to verify to his or her personal satisfaction an old hypothesis, and the reader quickly realizes that no authoritative version will be provided, that comprehension can come only out of the multiplicity of beliefs, and that those beliefs will tend to polarize themselves.

As Lena's story is first mediated through the reciprocal, though warring, points of view of the Armstids, her departure is warmly and humorously colored by the intermediary agency of the furniture dealer and his wife, whose sparring is only play. So long as the novel been submerged in darkness, violence and death, that the reappearance of Lena, still traveling, in Chapter 21 carries with it the welcome shock of waking in daylight from a nightmare. It is a relief to return to the hopeful girl of twenty chapters ago and to find that her purpose has been accomplished, her baby born and the fractured family unit
rejoined. This is Faulkner's final interweaving of the past and the present, a structural principle that he began with the opening lines of Chapter 1 as Lena sits, watching the wagon approach and thinking about her travels of the last month, and before that, her childhood trips to Doane's Mill. The chapter shifts from present to past and back again, occasionally hovering in that zone of suspended time and motion, that region of "ghosts," "hypnosis" and "mirages" that seems to insist that past and present are one.

Every theme, technique and structural basis for Light In August is established in its first chapter, indeed, like the stories of Christmas, Joanna Burden, and Hightower, in its beginning to its end. Why then does Lena prevail and these others succumb to the forces of death? Clearly the past itself is not the villain. Lena has a past that is much less than ideal, but she does not allow it to condemn her. Byron discovers the key, happily in time for himself, during his dialogues with Hightower; when the younger man began visiting the old counselor, both of them seem to feel that their lives have happened, rather than been chosen. "'But I know now why it is,' Byron thinks:"

'It is because a fellow is more afraid of the trouble he might have than he ever is of the trouble he's already got. He'll cling to trouble he's used to before he'll risk a change. Yes. A man will talk about how he'd like to escape from living folks. But it's the dead ones that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and don't try to hold him, that he can't escape from' (p.65).

It is Byron's ability to learn, with Hightower's help, the strength of man's preference for the familiar, no matter how unsatisfactory, and his courage to "risk a change" that empowers him to walk out of the script of his "austere and jealous country raising" (p.42) and to travel with Lena right out of Yoknapatawpha country. Joanna Burden and Joe
Christmas and Gail Hightower also come to recognize their reliance on familiar childhood patterns, but they cling to the tragic roles that "the dead ones" have taught them.

For the characters whose allegiance is to the forces of death, and this includes Miss Lonelyhearts and Hazel Motes, life lacks all spontaneity; all the moves are blocked out in advance, and there is a desperate sense of futility that arises from their infinite repetition of a past decision. This death orientation is often an explicit message from a parent, or grandparent, as it is for Hazel Motes, Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas. It seems a curse they dare not ignore, because it somehow makes them dear, "elect." For Miss Lonelyhearts and Gail Hightower the sovereignty of death is inferred; it makes sense of an otherwise absurd existence. Their commitment to defeat is a continuing confirmation of the bereavement they have suffered. The infinite repetition that underlies their life designs is captured in images of continual movement without progress: for Miss Lonelyhearts, the competition with the waves; for Hazel Motes the succession of closing coffins; for Joanna the falling black shadow in the shape of a cross; for Hightower the cyclone and the wheel and his grandfather's now nightly ride, "like a tide...like the crater of the world in explosion" (p.431). Another indication of their devotion to death is their adversary stance. In battle, as on the stage, the conventions govern the action, and death is expected, sanctioned, even glorified. Even if it is fictitious, as Hightower concedes Cinthy's rendering of his grandfather's last ride may have been, the meaning it lends to life is "too fine to doubt...Because even fact cannot stand with it" (p.424). The paradox that Faulkner introduced in Chapter 1 with Keats'
urn gathers its full significance in the interwoven stories of these living sacrifices, who are led to the altar of their fathers in the train of an idea. In Hightower's final chapter, into which all these dark tales funnel, the superiority of the dead is made explicit. Their vitality is such that "even fact cannot stand with it"; Hightower shares Mason Tarwater's recognition of the ubiquitous power of the dead, "'The world was made for the dead. Think of all the dead there are,' he said, ... as if he had conceived the answer for all the insolence in the world." Hightower offers the same kind of explanation to his young wife: "And so is it any wonder that this world is peopled principally by the dead? Surely, when God looks about at their successors, He cannot be loath to share His own with us" (p.425). Nor is it any wonder that the dead claim their own, leaving only their legends alive behind them: the death of Joe Christmas, which is witnessed by some of the townsfolk, "soaring into their memories forever and ever" (p.407), is already becoming legend in the explication of Gavin Stevens.

Hightower is the only one of the mad preachers to step outside the barren corridor of polarized living, if only briefly. In the act of midwifing Lena's delivery Hightower integrates what has been for him, and most of the characters, a persistent male-female opposition. And when he returns home, glowing "with purpose and pride," this suggestion of androgynous triumph is continued with humorous shading. Thinking, "'If I were a woman, now. That's what a woman would do: go back to bed to rest'" (p.355), Hightower selects from his library shelf "food

122 The Violent Bear It Away, p. 312.
for a man," *Henry IV*, but when he sits down to read it outside in his sagging deck chair, he does fall asleep, "almost immediately." It is as if to underscore the wrongheadedness of Hightower's wasted life that Faulkner shows him reentering the current of life using the very combination of talents that the father he rejected had used successfully. The abstraction that results in the badly dichotomized character begins, as we have already seen in detail with Miss Lonelyhearts and Hazel Motes, with a refusal of the uniquely personal relationship and a preference for categorized, typical, predictable, static exchanges. Hightower at an early age decided to refuse to recognize his resemblance to his father, "who had been a minister without a church and a soldier without an enemy, and who, in defeat had combined the two and become a doctor. . . . As though [he had] seen in the smoke of cannon as in a vision that the laying on of hands meant literally that" (p.415). At the age of fifty Hightower has a taste of the kind of achievement his father, for all his paradoxical convictions, wrested from defeat.

"Because a man ain't given that many choices," Byron reminds the old counselor. "You were given your choice before I was born" (p.320). And Hightower's suffering lies in his keen knowledge, his seeing so clearly that he chose "not love, not life" and the self-crucifixion native to "his own history, his own land, his own environed blood" (p.322). It was that choice to partake of his grandfather's death that gave him such purposefulness as a young minister, the same purposefulness that Percy Grimm, another youth born too late for a war and "not late enough to have escaped first hand knowledge of the lost time when he should have been a man" (p.394), gains, "his life opening before him, uncomplex and inescapable as a barren corridor, completely
freed now of ever again having to think or decide," all in exchange
simply for "his own life" (p. 395). Like Quentin Compson who, in the
name of the "family's honor and doom" prefers "some presbyterian con-
cept of . . . eternal punishment" to losing his sister: "But who loved
death above all, who loved only death, loved and lived in a deliberate
and almost perverted anticipation of death as a lover loves and deli-
berately refrains from the waiting willing friendly tender incredible
body of his beloved,"123 Hightower is the quintessential self-conscious
Southerner. There is in Hightower what Robert Penn Warren has identi-
fied as a Southern reader's response to Faulkner's grimmer scenes: "a
perverse and perhaps self-indulgent delight, which you yourself recog-
nized, in the dark complications of Southern Life, a reflexive response
to an unidentified tension and a smouldering rage beneath the surface
of Southern life."124

A backward-looking visionary, he is our window on the dark compli-
cations of Southern life and on that perverse and self-indulgent
suffering characteristic of the mad preacher. When he finally moves
beyond the merely self-conscious, Hightower is stricken, like Miss L,
who is forced to examine the values by which he lives, like Hazel Motes,
who discovers that when his eyes "are empty, they hold more," by the
sight of himself in all his culpability. His reflexive response, like

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124
"Introduction: Faulkner: Past and Future," Faulkner: A
Collection of Critical Articles, ed. Robert Penn Warren, Twentieth
their's, has been to dissociate himself from life's tensions and rage and their attendant sense of helplessness; but he was, in fact, never the helpless victim as he protested to Bryon. With Hightower we watch the mad preacher's facade fall away, the alibis, the daydreams, the belief that his life has happened to him rather than been created by himself. He has been the guiding power, the stage manager of his own distress, he reluctantly acknowledges. The responsibility for his wasted life, which he has variously placed at the door of the church professionals, his wife, the townspeople, he now accepts as his own. His worship of his grandfather became not emulation but abdication. Because he underestimated the living and gave precedence to the imagined excellence of the dead, he is now trapped in that shadowy existence of his first choice. After a glimpse of the communion possible among the living, Hightower is reminded by the return of the thundering ghost squadron that his longstanding bargain with death continues.
CHAPTER 6: ARTFUL CONFUSIONS

Something weird and lurid in their apprehension of the sacrificial system, a true sense of the mind's world, can continually be felt in the seventeenth-century mystics. I call it ambiguous, not from any verbal ingenuity of its own, but because it draws its strength from a primitive system of ideas in which the uniting of opposites (of savior and criminal, for instance) is of peculiar importance. Of course, you may as well say it is ambiguous to use any idea which involves fundamental antinomies; the idea of relation itself, very likely; but I am here concerned only with ambiguities which are of literary interest and can be felt as complex when they are apprehended.

William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity

Contemporary (Western) man's most crucial dilemma is perhaps his inability to accept a theological view of nature while at the same time being unprepared to commit himself to a scientific-pragmatic view of it. Thus many people are caught between one system of thought which is too primitive for them and another which is too complicated.

Thomas Szasz, The Myth of Mental Illness

One cannot study the stories of the mad preachers--Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower--without being struck by the number of crucial incidents in their plots that are left in suspension, unresolved. West concludes his novel, leaving Miss Lonelyhearts lying half-way down a stairway, without specifying that his protagonist, in fact, dies. Most
critics write from the assumption that he does die, some even speculating on the effect this tragic scene will have on Betty and her yet-to-be-born child. But Richard Chase and Alfred Kazin wrote from the same assumption about Hightower until Faulkner stated flatly, "'He didn't die.'"

Many interpreters of these novels have been moved, no doubt, by the same impulse toward order that motivates Miss L to arrange the skyline, to supply resolutions, but West, O'Connor and Faulkner carefully avoid that impulse. It is never authorially settled, for example, that the porter in the first chapter of *Wise Blood* is a Parrum or a case of mistaken identity. There are many such deliberate omissions in *Light In August*: we don't actually see Christmas kill Joanna, and it is never known exactly how Gail Hightower I dies because the woman with the fowling piece is only an interpolation made by Gail II; similarly, the exact circumstances of Mrs. Hightower's death can only be inferred. It is the effect of death, for Hightower as for Motes, that counts. The details of any account can be made consistent with the felt meaning.

The exercise of judgment that is required of these characters in the absence of fact and in the face of a multiplicity of interpretations is a basic issue that we have seen explored by theorists in psychology and theology as well as literature. The feelings of loss and confusion that lie behind the analyses of Buber and Tillich, of Menninger, Maslow and Szasz are rendered both through theme and technique in the stories of the mad preacher. That is to say, while Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower individually live through

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loss, confusion and the search for a meaningful order that has been the
cultural experience of mid-twentieth-century America, the artistry that
shapes their stories is contrived to embody just this absence of clarity.
By way of shifting and uncertain point-of-view, mixed tone, circuitous
time shifts, the employment of the grotesque, West, O'Connor and
Faulkner made certainty impossible. In short, the fiction is designed
to do more than show the reader disorder, it is designed to take him
through the experience of dislocation, to leave him without any com-
fortable assumptions.

Such a deliberately skewed craftsmanship R. W. B. Lewis has called,
in evaluating Faulkner's earlier fiction, "an ultimate duplicity, the
best account of the world that honest genius has been able to construct--
the poetry of unresolved dualism, with every virtue and every value
rendered instantly suspect by the ironic coexistence of its forceful
contrary."126 While "unresolved dualism" is a useful description of
the habitual adversary posture of the mad preacher, Wolfgang Kayser's
extensive investigation of the merger of incompatible worlds goes even
farther toward explaining the motive for such an adversary stance.
The need to identify the divine, the good, the true and distinguish
it from the demonic, as Tillich demonstrated in his analysis of the
word holy, may seem to require the complete exclusion of the demonic.
When the opposite values of an ambiguity are merged in a single unit,
whether the unit is a word, a metaphor, a symbol or a character, the
result may be grotesque, that is, there may be a sense that "the natural

126
The Picaresque Saint: Representative Figures in Contemporary
order of things has been subverted."127 The potential misunderstanding and anxiety that such contradictory combinations give life to can be necessary to the beauty of an artistic work, as Empson demonstrates, particularly when the art is an expression of the "most complicated and deeply rooted" notions of the human mind.128

The scale, or spectrum, that runs from the primitive and 'deeply rooted' to the sophisticated and 'complicated' is one of the most clearly defined coefficients of the insane-religious pairing. We can remember Cassirer's analysis of the progressively sophisticated stages of man's apprehension of the "Word and the mythic image," from the most primitive conviction of their existence as actual and active beings, to the realization of their "ideal" instrumentality, and we can understand that Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower, with greater or lesser self-awareness, are continually shaping their worlds in keeping with their most "holy" symbols. The primitive man in each of these preachers courts violence as a resolution of his felt conflicts, while the sophisticated man seeks to distinguish the truth from the illusion of his experience. For example, when Miss Lonelyhearts, in the persona of Havelock Ellis, interrogates the Clean Old Man for an explanation of his perversion--"Every one has a life story" (p.31)--twisting his arm until he screams, he is acting out his ambivalent desire both to destroy and to understand: "He was twisting the arm of all the sick and miserable, broken and betrayed, inarticulate and

127
The Grotesque in Art and Literature, p. 21.

128
Seven Types of Ambiguity, pp. 195, 227, 233.
Impotent....of Desperate, Broken-hearted, Sick-of-it-all, Disillusioned-with-tubercular-husband" (p.31). In the character of the mad (disordered, unrestrained, intense, angry, melancholic) preacher (public advocate, advisor) West, O'Connor and Faulkner map the 'weird and lurid' territory of the mind where brutal drives and moral aspirations coexist.

In the encounter between Miss L and the Clean Old Man a third dimension, one beyond but including the opposition of the psychological and the religious, and essential to a complete interpretation of the mad preacher, emerges. This dimension is the fictive, the story-telling capacity which is fed by both the 'primitive' and the 'sophisticated' faculties. Throughout Miss Lonelyhearts the confused young columnist is bombarded with stories--the letter writers' laments, Shrike's parodies, barroom anecdotes, family "histories," newspaper, magazine, movie and advertising clichés, Dostoevski--all detailing the ageless conflicts and man's unending inhumanity, and none offering a lasting resolution. Hazel Motes is surrounded by similar stories, and Gail Hightower, whose early career is presented entirely through collective narration, finds himself sweating through the stories of Lena, Joe Christmas and the Hineses. All around the mad preacher are people who have fictionalized their lives. And although a religious motif appears in most of these fictions, the true subject is not religion, any more than it is disease. No orthodox, systematized manner of approaching the holy is left unattacked. It is the private process of locating and claiming belief, conviction and judgment, not their ready-made, abstract existence, that makes itself the thematic center of each novel.
II

It is possible to say, drawing from their own statements, that West, O'Connor and Faulkner are all moralists. For example, in a letter to M. K. Abernethy, the editor of Contempo, West called Miss Lonelyhearts "a moral satire."129 O'Connor repeatedly wrote of the union of "the moral sense" and "the dramatic sense" that occurs for the writer of the greatest fiction, and of that "moment in every great story in which the presence of grace can be felt."130 In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, as well as in talks with university students, Faulkner urged young writers to learn the moral virtues and "to save man from being desouled."131 It would be a mistake, however, to evaluate their fiction as a tool of a moralizing urge. Rather, the moral spirit resides within and is disciplined by the fiction.

West discussed this aesthetic priority in letters written to Malcolm Cowley and Jack Conroy during the weeks The Day of the Locust was being published. "When not writing a novel," he explained to Cowley, "--say at a meeting of a committee we have out here to help the migratory worker--I do believe it [the theory of human progress] and try to act on that belief. But at the typewriter by myself I


130 Mystery and Manner, pp. 31, 118.

131 Faulkner in the University, p. 245.
can't."  

Although he said that he had "no particular message for a troubled world (except possibly 'beware')," he had to "believe that there is a place for the fellow who yells fire and indicates where some of the smoke is coming from without dragging the hose to the spot." West was preparing himself for the possibility that The Day of the Locust would be a commercial failure, as had been his previous three novels, and he was assessing the validity of his aesthetic vision. His own upbringing and schooling, he realized, shaped that vision and constituted "too powerful a burden for [him] to throw off—certainly not by an act of will alone." Unable to "contrive" a fiction to carry a theoretical conviction, he took heart in the example of Balzac, who "kept his eye firmly fixed on the middle class and wrote with great truth and no wish-fulfillment," and thereby was the ultimately greater radical.  

O'Connor, like West, placed her artistic confidence in the eye of the writer and repeatedly voiced her skepticism about the secondary applications of that vision, whether intended or inferred, moral or sociological. "The storyteller," she warned, "must render what he sees and not what he thinks he ought to see." Writers and readers

132 Quoted in Martin, p. 336.
133 Quoted in Martin, pp. 335-336.
134 Quoted in Martin, pp. 335-336.
135 Quoted in Martin, pp. 335-336; 392-393.
136 Mystery and Manners, p. 131.
alike may prefer "spiritual purpose" or a "hazy compassion," and there is a persistent effort to "drain off," as O'Connor phrases it, "a statable moral" or "a statable social theory that will make life more worth living." Behind all such efforts she sees the "wish to eliminate from fiction, at all costs . . . the mystery" proper to it.  

No more to her, a communicant of the Catholic Church, than to West, a skeptic of Jewish heritage, was it possible to make fiction a handmaid, as she put it, to the demands of "social order, liberal thought, and sometimes even Christianity."  

From Faulkner a comparable estimate of the fiction writer's function is heard. Even while he urges young writers "to save the individual from anonymity before it is too late and humanity has vanished from the animal called man," he is wary of becoming, in his profession of writer, a "judge." Speaking of the vulnerability of the artist's gift, he speculates, "If he began to preach or proselytize or pass judgment . . . the fire might go out." Faulkner shares with West and O'Connor the attachment to individualized reality and a hatred of "the mystical belief, almost a religion" that individual man is insignificant beside those "same double-barreled abstractions" that have gone

137 Mystery and Manners, pp. 130-131.
138 Mystery and Manners, p. 46.
139 Faulkner in the University, p. 267.
140 Faulkner in the University, p. 267.
ringing through history. He was willing to go so far as to say "maybe the writer has no concept of morality at all, only an integrity to hold always to what he believes to be the facts and truths of human behavior, not moral standards at all." If the writer can be thought of as working for man's betterment, he concludes, it is only indirectly.

In demonstrating the essential similarity of Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower by calling them 'mad preachers' I was guided by their creators' stated purposes and their shared artistic outlook. All three writers chose to combine the polyvalent notion of madness with the didactic advocacy proper to orthodox religion, to coordinate and expand upon the suggestive parallels of the seemingly alien so that they overlap, coincide, become functions of one another. West specified that his sources for Miss L., 'a priest of our time,' were saints' legends and case histories. O'Connor chose to transmit her 'anagogic vision' in the grotesque person of a "prophet-freak." Faulkner wanted to render "a luminosity older than our Christian civilization" in the person of a man of God who "destroyed himself" while wanting "to be better than he was afraid he would." The dilemma of the mad preacher, which, in part, is to find a way to give reality to his extraordinary vision of the world he inhabits, invites a

141 Faulkner in the University, p. 242.

142 Faulkner in the University, p. 267.

143 Mystery and Manners, p. 118.

144 Faulkner in the University, pp. 199, 45, 75.
comparison with the acknowledged goals and methods of the artist who created him. O'Connor states this relationship explicitly: the writer's "prophet-freak is an image of himself."145

The 'artful confusion' of the mad preacher, as we have seen, is of his own making. It is amply plain that, whatever the powerful forces working to confound him, this individual's agency in defining himself and choosing a destiny must outweigh circumstance and heritage. The mad preacher's career, then, is a dramatic statement of his artist's effort to render an 'honest' account of what he sees. Their joint concern is to transmit successfully their private vision to others. Their experience of reality, baldly stated, will be ridiculed, exploited, ignored, but for a time they persist, experimenting with rhetorical forms in an effort to be understood. As long as their emphasis lies in the external world and the battles waged there, both the mad preacher and his author present a theatrical appearance. When the extraordinary experience is claimed as an internal reality, a fresh authority emerges. Eventually Miss Lonelyhearts, Hazel Motes and Gail Hightower stop preaching and start listening. They leave their chaotic activity and theatrical contests with the people around them and attend to their own intimate sights and sounds. In each case this return to a privately meaningful reality corresponds to the artist's refusal to say what he 'thinks he ought to' rather than what he sees. After all, the mad preacher can logically advocate nothing. As a proselytizer he is bound to be a failure. He is best employed in speaking to those amazingly routine contradictions from which we all choose our destinies.

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145 Mystery and Manners, p. 118.
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