

Running head: THE GROTESQUE AND MYSTERY

Fyodor Dostoevsky's and Flannery O'Connor's Use of the Grotesque:
Irrational or Mysterious?

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2008

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Abstract

Both Fyodor Dostoevsky and Flannery O'Connor used the grotesque to portray their beliefs about human nature. Both believed that mystery is a crucial element of truth and humanity's understanding is limited. Although they employed the grotesque differently, the similarities of their style stem from the similarities of their beliefs. O'Connor often referred to Dostoevsky's artistry and his theology, and she was influenced by both. A comparison of Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Hazel Motes in O'Connor's *Wise Blood* reveals the similarities in what each author believed about humanity's capability to understand truth. What both authors believed about human nature, and the limitations of every aspect of humanity, particularly human reason, led to their use of the grotesque.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's and Flannery O'Connor's use of the Grotesque:
Irrational or Mysterious?

On April 27, 1963, Flannery O'Connor wrote in a letter to "A" that she intended to "read Dostoevsky this summer" (Fitzgerald, *Mystery and Manners* 515). In other letters, in book reviews, and even in the margins of her favorite books, she often made reference to Fyodor Dostoevsky. In an interview with Robert Donner, she said that she "returned to [him] at regular intervals" (qtd. in McMillian 16). Once, in a discussion about suffering with Louise Hardeman Abbot, O'Connor asked, "Wasn't it Dostoevsky . . . who worked out his salvation through his epilepsy?" (qtd. in Abbot 13). She frequently referenced his artistry and his theology, and her stylistic intent is similar to his in many ways. Like Dostoevsky's novels, her stories are considered grotesque. Her use of the grotesque is abrupt and startling, while his is detailed and psychological. Although they employ the grotesque differently, the similarities of their style stem from the similarities of their beliefs. What both authors believed about human nature—and the limitations of every aspect of humanity, particularly human reason—led to their use of the grotesque. The characters in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and O'Connor's *Wise Blood* demonstrate the grotesqueness of any epistemological extreme.

In *A Handbook to Literature*, C. Hugh Holman writes, "interest in the grotesque is usually considered an outgrowth of contemporary interest in the irrational, distrust of any cosmic order, and frustration at our lot in the universe" (206). Because of Dostoevsky's and Flannery O'Connor's style, critics often argue that they saw reason as antithetical to faith. The portrayal of grotesque situations, some critics assume, reflects each author's skepticism toward human reason. Neither Dostoevsky nor O'Connor, however, was

opposed to the use of reason in the quest to know and understand truth, but rather both were concerned with an unhealthy reliance on rationalism at the expense of other forms of knowing. Both saw the impossibility of perfection in any sphere of human life.

O'Connor saw evidence of this in Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, Prince Myshkin. In her copy of the Fall 1956 issue of *Cross Currents*, O'Connor marked Romano Guardini's analysis of the Prince: "The existence of Prince Myshkin would seem to be a direct verification of this axiom: the highest values raised to their maximum, but incarnated in an existence which is incapable of affirming itself in this world" (qtd. in Kinney 171). Perfection is unattainable for humanity; in the quest to know, every faculty is limited. Both authors recognized that mystery is a crucial component of truth. An examination of their grotesque characters demonstrates that they believed reason is necessary yet limited in the quest to know. Both authors employed the grotesque, which is conducive to mystery, because they recognized the severe limitations of every aspect of humanity—not just rationality.

Maria Bloshteyn, who draws stylistic parallels between Dostoevsky and O'Connor in her article "Dostoevsky and the Literature of the American South," describes the grotesque: "The common usage of the word in literary criticism . . . includes both the notion of combining things that do not belong together—harking back to its original use in decorative art, where 'grotesque' implies a fantastic merging of disparate elements—and the notion of something that is being distorted or exaggerated" (8). O'Connor deliberately presents the absurdity that results when any type of human knowledge is taken to an extreme, and then juxtaposes it with grace. Carson McCullers, who recognized that the Southerners were "indebted to the Russians" for their grotesque

approach, describes the technique as “a juxtaposition . . . of the whole soul of man with a materialistic detail” (252-53). The misuse of human reason is one such detail. Yet O’Connor and Dostoevsky emphasized the irrational in order to show the limitations of rationality, not to discredit reason entirely. O’Connor explains that the grotesque portrays “man forced to meet the extremes of his own nature” (qtd. in Holman 207). She saw absurdities in any form of knowledge taken to an extreme. She writes, “To be able to recognize a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Mystery* 44). She presented freaks because she had some conception of the whole man—the man who integrates each aspect of his humanity into his quest to know. Although every type of human understanding is limited, as both O’Connor and Dostoevsky recognized, reason and faith, in the proper context and with a proper recognition of human limitations, together lead toward truth.

Dostoevsky on Reason

In a letter to Natal’ia Dmitrievna Fonvizina in 1854, Dostoevsky concluded with the words, “. . .if someone proved to me that Christ is outside the truth and that in reality, the truth were outside the Christ, then I would prefer to remain with Christ rather than with the truth” (qtd. in Banerjee ix). Many scholars of Dostoevsky have interpreted his words to mean that he “could never fully subordinate reason to faith” (Svintsov 78); others have assumed he saw an unavoidable conflict between reason and faith. Joseph Frank concludes that he sides with “the irrational of faith against reason” (qtd. in Scanlan 5). Critics often cite Ivan Karamazov and his poem on the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* as the definitive expression of Dostoevsky’s pitting reason against faith. An examination of Dostoevsky’s views and Ivan’s predicament, however, reveals

that Dostoevsky had a more complicated understanding of the relationship between reason and faith. Ivan's argument is not merely the argument of a rationalist who refuses to accept beliefs that do not coincide with his adherence to Euclidean logic; instead, Ivan's predicament stems from the source of his knowledge. In his quest for truth, he denies essential ways of knowing. Ivan's view results in tension because it has an improper basis. In Ivan, then, Dostoevsky is not presenting the opposition of reason to faith; rather, he is warning against the dangers of reason when it is not rooted in faith.

Understanding the Russian words that are translated into English as "reason" and "truth" clarifies Dostoevsky's intent in his letter. In *Dostoevsky the Thinker*, James P. Scanlan describes the distinction between two words translated as "reason": "Two Russian words—*razum* and *rassudok*—are typically both translated as 'reason', but . . . they are not perfect synonyms. *Razum* . . . signifies an epistemologically higher, freer, more capacious application of the rational faculty, whereas *rassudok* . . . signifies a more limited, narrowly calculating, 'rationalistic' application" (6). Ivan Karamazov tends to rely on *rassudok* in his argument, and Dostoevsky is concerned with this sort of reliance on reason. In her book *Dostoevsky: The Scandal of Reason*, Maria Nemcova Banerjee, who holds a Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literature from Harvard and has written and translated Russian Literature extensively, draws a distinction between two Russian words describing truth. Earlier in the letter to Fonvizina, Dostoevsky wrote, "In such moments when, thirsting for faith like 'withered grass,' you find it, because in sorrow 'the truth' (*istina*) is unveiled into light" (qtd. in Banerjee x). In this part of the letter, Dostoevsky uses *istina* for "truth." This word, Banerjee notes, "derives from the Spiritual lexicon, where it defines the absolute ontological value of divine revelation" (x). In contrast, when

Dostoevsky discusses Christ as “outside the truth,” he uses the idea of *veritas*, which refers to “a categorical statement that stands or falls by virtue of logical argument” (Banerjee x). Dostoevsky is perhaps recognizing in the letter that belief in Christ may often fall outside the realm of reason; the mysterious elements of truth are known not through the intellect but through faith.

Epistemological Extremes and the Brothers

Each of the brothers in *The Brothers Karamazov* is concerned primarily with one method of knowing. Ivan relies on his intellect, and, although he recognizes that the sphere of human reason is limited, he uses human logic as justification for his disbelief in God. Both Dmitri and Alyosha rely on the heart rather than the intellect as they seek knowledge, yet they focus on very different aspects of the heart: Dmitri, like his father, is concerned with the sensual and the emotional, Alyosha with the mystical. As the brothers seek to understand truth, they each carry their own tendency to an extreme. Dostoevsky does not condone any extreme; rather, he warns his readers of them all. By showing how each extreme suggests the grotesque, Dostoevsky demonstrates that no single approach can explain truth in its entirety. Ivan’s poem on the Grand Inquisitor and Dmitri’s dream about “the wee one” portray an epistemological systems that are too narrow, but Dmitri eventually accepts grace and balances his perception of truth.

In a letter to his brother in 1838, Dostoevsky wrote, “What do you mean precisely by the word *know*? Nature, the soul, love, and God, one recognizes through the heart, and not through the reason... We are earthborn beings, and can only guess at the Idea—not grasp it by all sides at once...” (qtd. in Sandoz 44). Dostoevsky believed human understanding of infinite truth is limited, and reason, like other forms of knowing, reveals

truth only in part. The heart, not just the mind, is necessary in the pursuit of truth. As a boy, Dostoevsky was heavily influenced by Blaise Pascal who wrote: “We know truth, not only by reason, but also by the heart, and it is in this last way that we know first principles . . .” (qtd. in Terras 44). Dostoevsky recognized that knowledge of truth requires reason, but he knew that faith is crucial for understanding the most important things. He wrote, “Reason is a tool, a machine, which is driven by spiritual fire. When human reason . . . penetrates into the domain of knowledge, it works independently of the feeling, and consequently of the heart” (qtd. in Sandoz 44). In *The Brothers Karamazov*, then, Dostoevsky is not faulting Ivan for his reliance on reason, but rather for his reliance *solely* on reason. Like the other brothers, he misuses his own approach to knowledge because he fails to temper it. Ultimately, Dostoevsky is seeking a balance, both in the use of reason and in the recognition of its limitations.

Ivan Karamazov and the Misuse of Reason

From the beginning, Ivan, like Dostoevsky, recognizes that reason is limited. Before he shares his poem on the Grand Inquisitor, he discusses his understanding of life with Alyosha: “If God exists and if he indeed created the earth,” he challenges Alyosha, “then, as we know perfectly well, he created it in accordance with Euclidean geometry . . .” (Dostoevsky 235). In the beginning of their discussion, Ivan tries to incorporate truth into his Euclidean understanding. Although he recognizes its limitations, he uses only his reason in his quest to know. He argues that those “geometers and philosophers” who dare to challenge Euclid and “dream that two parallel lines . . . may perhaps meet somewhere in infinity” deal with questions that are “completely unsuitable to a mind created with a concept of only three dimensions” (235). He tells

Alyosha to “never think about it . . . most especially about whether God exists or not” (235). He admits that the nature of his mind makes understanding of spiritual things impossible. When he talks about questions of God, he admits: “I humbly confess that I do not have any ability to resolve such questions, I have a Euclidean mind, an earthly mind, and therefore it is not for us to resolve things that are not of this world” (235). Because reason cannot comprehend the whole truth about God, Ivan imagines that his disbelief is justified. Rather than allow the limitations of reason to hint at the infiniteness of God, Ivan uses reason as an excuse for his indignation.

Like Ivan, Father Zosima understands the limitations of reason, but unlike Ivan, he responds by seeking truth through other means. Reason, he seems to suggest, cannot reveal truth apart from faith and other virtues, such as love. In Father Zosima’s conversation with the “lady of little faith,” Dostoevsky describes the necessity of love in the pursuit of knowledge. As the lady struggles with the problem of suffering and the uncertainty of what follows death, she wavers in her faith. “How can it be proved?” she asks. Zosima answers, “One cannot prove anything here, but it is possible to be convinced.” “How? By what?” she continues. “By the experience of active love,” he replies. “The more you succeed in loving, the more you’ll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul...” (Dostoevsky 56). Zosima admits that her limited human perspective prevents unquestionable proof. But, if she will love others and enter into their lives, she will understand more fully the truth of God.

Dostoevsky is concerned with the mystical experience, which is closely connected to his “awareness of love as a way of knowing” (Neuhaus 78). In Zosima’s later talk about prayer and love, he says that creation “lives and grows only through its sense of

being in touch with other mysterious worlds” (Dostoevsky 320). He warns, “If this sense is weakened or destroyed in you, that which has grown up in you dies. Then you become indifferent to life and even come to hate it” (Dostoevsky 320). Father Zosima draws a parallel between loving and knowing. “Love all God’s creation,” he says: “If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in each thing” (Dostoevsky 320). Ivan does not experience this love for others. Instead, he, like Rakitin, claims to love mankind abstractly. Such love is devoid of an element of selflessness, which distances him from the rest of humanity and prevents him from accepting the more mystical aspects of faith. “Much on earth is concealed from us,” the elder concludes, “but in place of it we have been granted a mysterious sense of our living bond with the other world...and the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other worlds” (Dostoevsky 320). Here Father Zosima recognizes that knowledge incorporates a mysterious element that stems from another world. Love, not reason, hints at this mystery. Ivan’s search for truth is limited epistemologically; he is unable to gain the knowledge he could through love and suffering because of his insistent reliance on his intellect.

Alyosha also warns Ivan of the importance of love in the attainment of knowledge. When Alyosha says, “I think that everyone should love life before everything else in the world,” Ivan asks, “Love life more than its meaning?” Alyosha answers, “Certainly, love it before logic, as you say, certainly before logic, and only then will I understand its meaning” (231). Alyosha’s answer describes the precise point where Ivan struggles. He cannot incorporate anything other than reason into his epistemology. His intellect alone must explain the truth; he does not *know* in any other way. Scanlan argues that Dostoevsky “disputed the claims of reason to serve as the ultimate epistemological

authority on all questions: ‘There is something higher,’ he told a correspondent in 1877, ‘than the conclusions of reason [*rassudok*]’” (5). Ivan errs, then, when he imposes his own mental capacity onto the actions of God and tries to reconcile His ways with reason. He notes that innocent children are “punished for their fathers who ate the apple—but that is reasoning from another world; for the human heart here on earth it is incomprehensible” (Dostoevsky 238). Because he can make little sense of the suffering on earth, he says, “It’s not God that I do not accept, you understand, it is this world of God’s created by God, that I do not accept and cannot agree to accept” (Dostoevsky 235). When Ivan tries to apply his Euclidean logic to prove the injustice of God’s nature, he oversteps reason’s ability. Not only does he misuse reason, but he misuses his recognition of the limitations of reason. Ivan acknowledges the limitations of the intellect but still insists that the ways of God align with his intellectual understanding.

Ivan’s insistence on reason, which stems from rebellion rather than an honest search for truth, obscures his search for understanding and creates fragmentation. According to Vyacheslav Ivanov, “‘Euclidian’ reasoning is concerned only with form: the comprehension of essence is a property of love alone. Only love can say ‘Thou art’ and thus affirm the existence of the beloved” (qtd. in Sandoz 45). Ivan’s rationality prevents him from understanding his existence in its entirety. His Euclidian reasoning distances him from his humanity; in short, it divides his essence and causes fragmentation. He cannot reconcile the contradictions within himself because his “irrational rationality,” in the words of Richard John Neuhaus (78), creates contradictions he cannot resolve. In despair, Ivan exclaims, “Oh, with my pathetic, earthly, Euclidean mind, I know only that there is suffering, that none are to blame . . . but that is all just

Euclidean gibberish, of course I know that, and of course I cannot consent to live by it! What do I care that none are to blame and that I know it—I need retribution, otherwise I will destroy myself” (Dostoevsky 244). Suffering poses a problem to Ivan that his reason, inconsistent because of its incompleteness, cannot solve. “Moreover,” Leatherbarrow concludes, “Ivan’s Euclidean mind cannot accept a harmony that can accommodate, without apparently *correcting*, the brutal moral discords introduced into this world by mankind’s cruelty and inhumanity” (55). Suffering leads Ivan toward rebellion rather than dependence on God. His rationality stems from the wrong source and results in the wrong response. He desires to rework the universe and usurp God rather than to love those who are in need.

Ivan’s problem, then, is essentially epistemological. Reason is limited yet still crucial in the pursuit of knowledge, but Ivan employs it poorly and thus learns little. Because he relies solely on reason and imposes his will onto his conclusions, Ivan misuses reason. As he talks with Alyosha, he exclaims, “I don’t want harmony, for love of mankind I don’t want it. I want to remain with unrequited suffering. I’d rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, *even if I am wrong*” (Dostoevsky 245). His demand for proof is empirical; he is concerned not with honest reasoning but with determining truth for himself. For him, the suffering of children that he sees with his eyes disproves the existence of God because he cannot reconcile the two with his strict use of logic. Banerjee writes, Ivan’s “Euclidean mind arbitrarily confines reason to the geometry of the finite world to suit a will that craves rigorous symmetry of the act of retribution” (xv). As an empiricist, he is concerned first with what he perceives, and he perceives only what he wills to be true. He continues: “I don’t understand

anything, and I no longer want to understand anything. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I wanted to understand something, I would immediately have to betray the fact, but I've made up my mind to stick to the fact . . .” (243). Ivan knows that he must expand his empiricist use of reason in order to understand. Essentially, he is “an intellectual in bad faith. He is fully aware of using the incongruity of applying the standards of the Euclidean mind to take measure of a universe he admits may have other dimensions” (Banerjee 97). He knows he cannot understand the truth of the universe merely by “sticking to the facts”; he knows that an understanding of truth at some point requires faith in the unseen, but he refuses to relinquish his demand for empirical evidence.

Banerjee argues that Ivan's adherence to a Euclidean understanding of truth derives more from his will than from Euclid (97). Anna Schur Kaladiouk likewise notes that Ivan's empiricism interferes with an honest use of reason: “Because from the standpoint of the scientific method, the empiricist fixation on facts is related to an improper use of reason, Ivan's tortured relationship with God [is not correlated] to his excessive rationalism, as is usually suggested, but to his insufficient reliance on reason” (419-420). Ivan admits that there is much he cannot understand and then willfully refuses to change his method of knowing. “He may not acknowledge it,” Banerjee writes, “but his commitment to the procedures of his own Euclidean mind is an arbitrary act of self-limitation” (97). He is unable to understand the whole truth because he limits his way of knowing. He does not seek to understand truth to the extent he can with his intellect—or his heart.

Father Zosima's words before he dies serve as a response to Ivan's poem. He contrasts the people's faith in God with their superiors' faith in reason—reason that attempts to describe truth in its entirety. He says, “For though the simple man is depraved, and can no longer refrain from sin, still he knows that his rank sin is cursed by God and that he does badly in sinning . . . Not so their betters. These, following science, want to make a just order for themselves by reason alone, but without Christ now” (315). He is opposed to reason that relies solely on science and denies Christ. Scanlan describes an instance when Dostoevsky “mentally addressed” an “imagined ‘liberal’ who argued that individuals would willingly give up their freedom in a socialist order.” Dostoevsky told the young man that his “rationality is completely irrational” because of his pretension to “total, perfect rationality” (Scanlan 8). Neuhaus describes Ivan's imbalanced epistemology as “irrational rationality,” just as Dostoevsky accuses his liberal's ideas of being irrational because they emphasize reason and disregard other methods of discovering truth. Scanlan continues, “In accepting reason without giving it a monopoly on human thought, Dostoevsky adhered to a distinguished Russian philosophical tradition that, in the words of A.A. Ivanova, ‘consists not in denying reason [*razum*] but in denying absolute rationalism [*ratsionalism*]’” (8). Ivan cannot consent to live by the truth he does not understand empirically and logically. His rationality is irrational and his unhealthy reliance on reason exacerbates his lack of understanding and his despair.

When Ivan leaves essential aspects of humanity out of his epistemology—when he fails to incorporate love or virtue in his quest to know—there are serious implications. For Dostoevsky, “what is called science is unscientific and irrational . . . when it refuses

to take seriously faith and that to which faith points” (Neuhaus 78). As his conversation with Alyosha continues, Ivan begins to see his own irrationality and gives way to despair. He becomes overwhelmed by all the absurdities on earth: “I somehow have a headache, and I feel sad,” he confesses to Alyosha (238). Later, after he talks to Smerdyakov, he again despairs. Smerdyakov describes what he learned from Ivan’s belief that “everything is permitted,” a belief that stems from his disbelief in mystery. “It was true what you taught me, sir,” he tells Ivan, “because if there is no infinite God, then there’s no virtue, either, and no need of it at all” (Dostoevsky 632). Even after his terrifying discussion with Smerdyakov, Ivan feels compelled to help Dmitri. He cannot explain his compulsion. “In the haunting account of Ivan’s dialogue with the devil,” Neuhaus notes, “the devil taunts Ivan with the fact that his Euclidean rationality cannot account for his determination to help his brother” (79). Ivan is unable to reconcile the contradictions in the universe, but he is also unable to reconcile the contradictions within himself, and this haunts him. The devil recognizes Ivan’s problem: “[L]ike you, I myself suffer from the fantastic, and that is why I love your earthly realism. Here you have it all outlined, here you have the formula, here you have geometry, and with us it’s all indeterminate equations!” (Dostoevsky 638). The reality of the devil—or the supernatural—cannot be outlined by Ivan’s formulas. As the elder predicted, Ivan, in exasperation and despair, grows to hate life.

On the surface, Ivan’s argument is convincing, but he cannot apply it practically. By the end of the book, Alyosha, in contrast, has peace and is able to comfort others because of his approach to truth. After Ilyushechka’s death, his friends are comforted by Alyosha’s speech. He encourages the boys to remember and tells them, “Ah, children, ah,

dear friends, do not be afraid of life! How good life is when you do something good and rightful!" And the boys eagerly reply, "Yes, yes!" (Dostoevsky 776). Love and suffering have enabled Alyosha and the boys to live lightly even in difficult circumstances. Like Ivan, they, too, have reason to despair, but, because they understand with more than just the intellect, they do not.

Dmitri Karamazov and Grace

Dostoevsky's warnings are not directed solely at reason, as the juxtaposition of Ivan's story with Dmitri's and Alyosha's proves. The emotional and mystical aspects of humanity are similarly dangerous if taken to an extreme or cultivated in isolation. The problem for Dostoevsky is that each of the brothers carries his tendency to an extreme. Dostoevsky does not condone any extreme; rather, through his grotesque characters, he warns his readers of them all. Dmitri responds to his dream about "the wee one" with "all his Karamazov unrestraint" (Dostoevsky 508). While Dmitri, with his natural proclivity for the mystical, is able to accept miracle and eventually embrace faith, his passionate, emotion-ridden response to life is subject to limitations similar to Ivan's intellectual response. When his hands are drenched with Grigory's blood, Dmitri begins to despise his nature. "There is no higher order in me," he concludes as he remembers his earlier verse that proclaimed, "Glory to the highest in me!" (Dostoevsky 405). Dmitri recognizes the severe limitations of the noblest in him; he sees himself as a "disorderly insect" unfit to live life. He is, according to Leatherbarrow, "prepared to destroy himself for the sake of a higher harmony, for he feels his own existence is a stain upon that divine order" (51). Dmitri finally understands what Alyosha tried to express to Ivan after his poem: "Brother, you asked just now if there is in the whole world a being who could and would have the

right to forgive. But there is such a being, and he can forgive everything, forgive all and for all... [I]t is on him that the structure is being built” (Dostoevsky 246). Alyosha eventually recognizes the correct basis for responsibility and reason—unlike Ivan. The structure is built on Christ. Dmitri’s acceptance of grace, which he knows he does not deserve, enables him to have joy in the midst of sorrow and understand that suffering can redeem him.

As Dmitri accepts his suffering and the truth about God, he gradually experiences a change of heart; he begins to understand freedom. Through his suffering during the trial, he begins to relinquish his egoism and love the earth, as Zosima had pleaded. He has always been passionate and emotional, never bound by his intellect, but only through suffering are his intense emotions channeled into compassion for others. His memory of the wee one transforms him and he suddenly responds to pain with a longing to bear it all and so spare this wee one. As he begins to recognize his own sins, his inborn passion quickly becomes a passion for his fellow humanity and for life. He asks, “Why are the people poor . . .?” (507). His question stems from the “tenderness” that is welling up in his heart, unlike Ivan’s questions, which stem from an intellect resentful and skeptical of the reasons for suffering. The baby’s cry does not cause Dmitri to create an indictment against the creator of the child; rather, it cultivates selfless feelings within him, as he “wants to weep, he wants to do something for them all, so that the wee one will no longer cry...” (Dostoevsky 507). “He who loves people,” Zosima had wisely observed, “loves their joy” (360). As such selfless sensitivity toward others is cultivated, there is perhaps another truth here: he who loves people is compassionate toward their pain. Dmitri’s

recognition of the truth—both about the existence of God and about his own sins—spurs him toward compassion. The freedom he experiences stems from the truth and from love.

Ivan's discussion with the devil, whether real or imagined, serves as a contrast to Dmitri's dream. One shows the ultimate result of a life focused solely on reason, and the other an emotional life that is being transformed through suffering. Dmitri can accept his place among humankind; Ivan cannot. When he shares his poem with Alyosha, Ivan concludes in anger and defensiveness. Dmitri, in contrast, wakes from his dream attuned to the simple joys of living—in the very midst of despair. He wonders who has done a kind deed and given him a pillow for his head, and he looks at those accusing him and says simply, "I had a good dream, gentlemen" (Dostoevsky 508). He does not find the sadness of the dream "good," but rather he revels in the joy it has given him. He has been spurred to compassion and he somehow feels reconnected to humanity. The suffering of a child leads Dmitri toward transformation, but such suffering leads Ivan to demand justice. Ivan's idea that "all things are permissible" stems directly from his unbelief (Terras 74). Because of his lack of faith, he is unable to accept suffering. Terras notes that suffering is possible only with the acceptance of faith. Smerdyakov is also overcome by his guilt, unable to handle his suffering, and ultimately kills himself.

Both brothers sense the idea of responsibility for suffering in different ways. Dmitri's frees him to accept suffering—for himself and others; Ivan's torments him. Ivan's Grand Inquisitor thinks usurping God's order, robbing the people of their freedom, and sacrificing his own freedom will rid humanity—and especially children—of suffering. Dmitri recognizes his participation in the suffering common to man because he recognizes what the Grand Inquisitor could not: his freedom has permitted his belief. In

the Grand Inquisitor, Dostoevsky demonstrates that “freedom must be grounded in truth, which is ultimately the truth of love, of redemptive suffering, revealed in Christ” (Neuhaus 80). Until Ivan surrenders his intellect to “the truth of love,” he can never accept suffering or Christ. He never employs his intellect appropriately because he relies on reason apart from faith.

Freedom and a Balance of Extremes

Dmitri’s acceptance of grace grants him freedom Ivan never experiences. The main concern of the Grand Inquisitor is not “the conflict between reason and faith,” but rather “the inextricable relationship between freedom and truth” (Neuhaus 79). Because Ivan disregards essential methods of knowing, he remains in bondage to his intellect, unable to understand crucial elements of truth. Dostoevsky accepted that much of truth is shrouded in mystery and thus obscured from the intellect, but “such sentiments did not lead Dostoevsky into a total alogism, such as would cause him to reject reason and science altogether as sources of knowledge of reality; he accepted both within their limits” (Scanlan 16). In Dostoevsky’s view of reality, “faith and reason are his two modes of access to the truth of an afterlife.... [I]n faith the loving soul freely accepts its own spiritual essence and acknowledges its eternity. Reason, on the other hand, can range the natural world for evidence and can certainly consider, among other things, the consequences of beliefs” (39). Although they function differently, faith and reason both play a role in Dostoevsky’s epistemology. But, before truth can bring freedom, both reason and faith must coincide with an understanding of grace.

Dostoevsky, then, does not disregard reason entirely. While the relationship of reason to faith is complex and something he could never fully understand, his portrayal of

Ivan is not a statement against rationality, but rather a depiction of rebellion against God and the bondage that results from a lack of faith. For Dostoevsky, love is “a sufficient condition for the consolidation of faith”; it encourages faith, which in turn leads toward truth (Scanlan 240). In the brothers, Dostoevsky presents fragmented humanity, and, in doing so, he warns against the dangers of taking any aspect of knowledge to an extreme. Mysticism, love, and reason each have a necessary role in man’s quest to understand the universe. Ivan fails to experience freedom because he rejects any aspect of truth outside the realm of his logical projection; he rejects truth in its entirety. Dostoevsky is not rejecting the use of reason that stems from a proper source and results in correct action. Ivan’s struggle stems from his reliance solely on reason at the expense of other types of knowing.

O’Connor on Reason

In Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*, Hazel Motes abuses reason in similar ways. Critics of O’Connor, like critics of Dostoevsky, often argue that she viewed reason as contradictory to faith. Jane Carter Keller writes that O’Connor believed “reason in men is by definition corrupt and can only be depended upon to lead to self-deception” (263). Anthony Di Renzo draws a similar conclusion from *Wise Blood*: “People must literally blind themselves to earthly reality, as Haze does, in order to see what lies beyond reason” (27). O’Connor’s use of the grotesque, however, did not stem from a mistrust of reason; rather, she considered rationality a crucial—although limited—faculty in understanding the truth. Her letters and essays, as well as the characters of *Wise Blood*, reveal that she believed earthly reality, as perceived by the senses and understood through reason, does not contradict faith, although faith permits acceptance of mystery, which is beyond

human understanding. Two contemporary Catholic theologians have defined the relationship of both reason and faith to truth: “Reason is relative to truth; it is a way of knowing truth: understanding it, discovering it, or proving it. Faith is also relative to truth; it is a way of discovering truth” (Kreeft and Tacelli 33). In *Wise Blood*, Hazel Motes’s journey to truth requires both reason and faith; his intellect and his wise blood—which compels him to believe—enable him to acknowledge the limitations of his empiricism and the futility of his Church Without Christ.

Like Kreeft and Tacelli, O’Connor believed that reason is crucial in the quest to understand truth. In a letter to Alfred Corn, she writes, “I believe what the Church teaches—that God has given us reason to use and that it can lead us toward knowledge of him, through analogy.... To believe all this I don’t take any leap into the absurd. I find it reasonable to believe, even if those beliefs are beyond reason” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Letters* 479). Yet, at the same time, she recognized that “the virtues of faith . . . reach beyond the limitations of the intellect” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Mystery* 158). Mystery is a crucial component of truth, and it can be recognized only through faith. In another letter, she writes, “Mystery isn’t something that is gradually evaporating. It grows along with knowledge” (Fitzgerald, *Letters* 489). Greater knowledge, she recognized, does not diminish mystery; it increases it. Knowledge acquired through reason furthers an understanding of truth by furthering the recognition of the existence of mystery. “Much of my fiction,” she admitted, “takes its character from a reasonable use of the unreasonable” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Mystery* 109). Her grotesque stories demonstrate a “reasonable” use of a seemingly unreasonable style; her recognition of mystery—not skepticism toward reason—contributes to her style. She continues, “The assumptions that

underlie this use of it, however, are those of the central Christian mysteries” (109). Grace is one such mystery, and it is an important part of the truth Hazel finally accepts.

Although reason is necessary in the pursuit of truth, as Kreeft and Tacelli recognize, the mysterious aspect of truth lies outside the realm of reason. Donald A. Hardy writes, “O’Connor is not so much opposed to the intellect as opposed to the misuse of the intellect” (8). Her concern is the same as Dostoevsky’s. In the pursuit of knowledge, reason is misused if it is relied on too heavily or if it is ignored altogether. An unhealthy reliance on reason overlooks mystery, while disregard for reason prevents the recognition of incongruities. In *Wise Blood*, Enoch Emery ignores reason entirely and indulges the whims of his blood. Sabbath Lily Hawks, in contrast, uses her intellect to deny her need for grace. Both demonstrate an unhealthy extreme, and neither ever embraces truth. Hazel’s wise blood, in contrast, propels him toward truth; it insists that he believe. He recognizes his need for grace—and thus accepts truth—only after he has used his intellect to recognize the contradictions of his claims. In each character, O’Connor portrays the grotesque extremes of rationalism and other forms of knowing when used outside their proper context.

Hazel Motes and the Misuse of Reason

As a child, Hazel views reason as antipodal to faith and a threat to his empirical perception of truth. He desires to “stay in Eastrod with his two eyes open, and his hands always handling the familiar thing, his feet on the known track” (O’Connor 16). The Jesus figure “moving from tree to tree in the back of his mind” motions him “to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown” (16). He is

afraid that the “wild ragged” Jesus who beckons him into the unknown will ask him to forsake his current way of knowing. Faith, he believes, cannot coexist with his current understanding of the world. If he were to accept faith and then “suddenly know it”—by focusing on what he perceives through his senses or reason—he would drown. At school, he learns “to read and write but that it is wiser not to” (17). Like faith, reason and learning pose a threat to the young Hazel. They suggest the existence of things he cannot see. Because he wears his mother’s glasses while he reads, his eyes, from which he derives his understanding of the world, grow tired quickly. Learning complicates his empirical perceptions. The reasoning he learns at school, like the faith he is taught from his mother, muddles his desire to remain close to the familiar “with his two eyes open” (16). Both hint at something he cannot explain entirely with his senses.

His empiricism, in contrast, enables him to believe only what he can see and ensures his self-reliance. He relies on himself to avoid sin and thus escapes his need for the Jesus preached by his grandfather, the Jesus who “would die ten million deaths before he would let him lose his soul” (O’Connor 16). When he leaves for war, he trusts himself “to get back in a few months, uncorrupted” (17). In the army, however, he is exposed to new ideas and decides to rid himself of his soul, to “be converted to nothing instead of to evil” (18). His resolve is still empirical; he is determined to “decide through an act of the will what is true and what is untrue” (Keller 267). By the time Hazel returns home, he no longer reads his mother’s Bible; he saves her glasses only in case “his vision should ever become dim” (O’Connor 19). He is concerned solely with what he can see and uses his will to deny intangible concepts such as sin and his soul. According to Keller, “What Motes is doing is not *reasonable*; he is depending upon the strength of his will to enable

him to see what he wants to, rather than what actually exists” (268). When he disregards his soul, he tries to escape the idea of mystery. “As a countrified Karamazov,” Ralph C. Wood writes, “Hazel also acts out of Ivan’s belief that, since God is dead, all things are permitted” (*Christ Haunted* 169). His belief in nothing frees him from belief in sin. Hazel claims to rely solely on his senses for his own understanding and his own salvation.

He founds the Church Without Christ on the same principles. Throughout the novel, he reiterates the importance of tangibly understanding truth through the senses: “I’m member and preacher to that church where the blind don’t see and the lame don’t walk and what’s dead stays that way” (O’Connor 101). He tells the boy at the filling station that it is “not right to believe anything you couldn’t see or hold in your hands or test with your teeth” (208). He denies the existence of sin and thus obviates his need for redemption. He preaches that “there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn’t the first two” (101). When he decides the Church Without Christ needs a “new jesus,” he is looking for someone who is “all man” and satisfies the demands of his empiricism: “Come into the Church Without Christ,” he urges his listeners, “and we’ll all be saved by the sight of him” (141). He is concerned only with what is tangible; he is not sincerely seeking truth. Like Ivan’s, Hazel’s insistence on empirical evidence does not stem from an honest pursuit of truth, but rather a determination to will himself to believe only what he can see. He ignores what his conscience and intellect could show him.

While Hazel insists that he believes only what he sees, his eyes contradict him. They seem to look beyond the superficial. Sabbath likes his eyes because “they don’t look like they see what he’s looking at but they keep on looking” (O’Connor 105). He

has the innate ability to see more than the physical. His eyes reveal much about the existence of his soul, too. Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock finds herself “squinting at his eyes, almost trying to look into them . . . Their settings were so deep that they seemed, to her, almost like passages leading somewhere” (4). Although he denies the existence of his soul, his eyes lead somewhere beyond their sockets. They reflect his wise blood, which guides him toward truth throughout the novel. Asa Hawks, in contrast, does not pursue truth at all. A hawk has extraordinary vision naturally, and Hawks must work to frustrate his natural ability. He claims to be unable to see, and his assumed blindness has taught him nothing. According to Sara Prasad Rath, Hawks is a “comic caricature of Haze: one pretends blindness and claims to see; the other sees and pretends blindness to everything” (254). Hawks’s denial of his vision leads him away from, not toward, truth. Hazel uses his vision to examine the world around him and the depth of his eyes reveals his ability to discover the invisible. Although he tries to deny his soul, his wise blood does not permit him to escape truth permanently, even when he wills to the contrary. His wise blood necessitates his search for truth.

From the outset, Hazel’s problem is essentially epistemological; like Ivan, *how* he knows—not *what* he knows or that he seeks to know—creates the problem. His reliance on his senses at the expense of other types of knowing prevents him from recognizing truth. Gary M. Ciuba writes that, for O’Connor, “failure to go beyond the face value and glimpse the infinite value in the human face sins against both art and religion” (73). Hazel’s problem is not with what he has learned from his senses, but rather that he insists nothing is true except what he has learned from them. In *Mystery and Manners*, O’Connor writes, “Fiction begins where human knowledge begins—with the senses”

(42). The material world was significant because it hinted at the spiritual. Yet, she believed an artist also must penetrate “the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality” (157). According to Ciuba, O’Connor believed that failure to move beyond surface appearance was “one of the dominant errors of the modern world” (73). She was concerned with Hazel’s failure to look for truth beyond the visible. She once wrote, “For the last few centuries we have lived in a world which has been increasingly convinced that the reaches of reality end very close to the surface, that there is no ultimate divine source, that the things of the world do not pour forth from God” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Mystery* 157). Because she believed in an “ultimate divine source” for material things, she believed that the senses alone are unable to discover all of truth.

Hazel first begins to recognize problems with his epistemology when he realizes he has been deceived; he learns he cannot always trust appearances. When he tires of Mrs. Watts, he decides to “seduce Hawks’s child” (O’Connor 106). He judges her character by her appearance: “He wanted someone he could teach something to and he took it for granted that the blind man’s child, since she was so homely, would be innocent” (106). Later, when Sabbath tells him she is a bastard, he has a hard time believing her: “‘How could you be . . .’ he started and saw the red embankment in front of him and pulled the car back on the road” (116). Throughout the discussion, he cannot move beyond his visual impression of her. “You must be mixed up,” he tells her and reminds her six times that her daddy blinded himself (116). When he discovers the truth about her father, Hazel again recognizes the dubiousness of relying solely on his vision. The moment he sees Asa Hawks’s eyes, his “expression seemed to open onto a deeper

blankness and reflect something and then close again” (162). His expression is blank at first; he is not sure how to integrate his newfound discovery into the framework of knowledge he has created. Hazel begins to see—although not yet admit—the limitations of his sensory-based knowledge, and he begins to evaluate some of his conclusions with reason.

When Sabbath tells him she is a bastard and questions whether or not she can be saved in the Church Without Christ, Hazel assures her she is no different from anyone else: “There’s no such thing as a bastard in the Church Without Christ,” he says (O’Connor 120), again ignoring the existence of sin. Yet Hazel is no longer convinced by his own words. As he answers Sabbath, “something in his mind was already contradicting him . . .” (120). He cannot reconcile the inconsistency of his own ideas. Sabbath asks him, “Ain’t my feet white, though?” (120). But Hazel is preoccupied with his thoughts and does not look at her feet. He begins to gauge his beliefs by something other than his eyes and use reason to examine his assumptions. As the incompatibility of his beliefs becomes apparent, “the thing in his mind said that the truth didn’t contradict itself and that a bastard couldn’t be saved in the Church Without Christ” (120). At this point, however, Hazel decides “he would forget it, that it was not that important” (120). Although he tries to deny the consequences, he begins to use his intellect in his quest to know.

As he talks to “the sleepy looking white boy” at the filling station, Hazel again begins to see the unreasonableness of his beliefs. Even as he talks, he tries to convince the boy—and himself—that “it [is] not right to believe anything you couldn’t see or hold in your hands or test with your teeth” (O’Connor 208). He still attempts to deny the

existence of the unseen, yet he tells the boy what he has only recently realized: “He had only a few days ago believed in blasphemy as the way to salvation, but that you couldn’t even believe in that because then you were believing in something to blaspheme” (208). His intellect has shown him his contradiction. Ralph C. Wood writes, “Gradually Hazel comes to see that all denials are parasitic, that his bitter negations are only in relation to positive truth, that he must espouse a gospel of nothingness in his own self-invented ‘Church Without Christ’” (*Christ-Haunted* 168). As he watches the boy work, he begins to “curse and blaspheme Jesus in a quiet and intense way but with such conviction that the boy paused from his work to listen” (O’Connor 208). He becomes more vehement in his blasphemy because he is beginning to realize that there is indeed someone to blaspheme; his “bitter negations” imply “positive truth” (Wood, *Christ-Haunted* 168). At the filling station his irrationality becomes obvious to himself. Despite constant efforts to believe only what he can prove through his senses, Hazel begins to see the conflicts inherent in his method of knowing.

On the morning Enoch brings the “new jesus,” Hazel jolts awake, determined to “move immediately to some other city and preach the Church Without Christ where they had never heard of it. He would get another room there and another woman and make a new start with nothing on his mind” (O’Connor 185-86). Although in Taulkinham he has a room, a woman, and a car from which to preach the Church Without Christ, he has far too much on his mind. He hopes a move will help him escape his troubled intellect. He has tried to deny his conscience and ignore reason, but they have come close to destroying the will he has invested in the Church Without Christ. He has preached about a “new jesus,” a man who would look different from everyone else yet have no extra

blood, a man who would require faith in nothing but what is seen. Earlier in the book, when he first sees the shrunken man in the MVSEVM, Hazel fixes his eyes on him and tries—empirically—to fit the mummy into his understanding of the world. As he watches Hazel, Enoch notices Hazel’s gaze and his “two clean bullet hole” eyes that are reflected in the glass (94). He uses his eyes as he tries to understand. When Sabbath appears holding the mummy and Hazel sees it for the second time he “lunged and snatched the shriveled body and threw it against the wall. The head popped and the trash inside sprayed out in a little cloud of dust” (188). Just as he has preached, his “new jesus” has no blood to spare, and suddenly he is struck by the futility of his preaching: “When he sees the shrunken man . . . he realizes that his own literal words preached on the street are an exact description of his call for a ‘new jesus’” (Whitt 22). He once relied solely on the truth he understood with his eyes; now he despises what he sees. Margaret Early Whitt writes that suddenly “Motes understands that what he has called for is not what his church needs, and not what he needs or believes” (22). He throws his mother’s glasses out the door behind the mummy; what he has seen has shown him the absurdity of his beliefs, and, paradoxically, he now begins to recognize that he cannot rely merely on what he can see. In a letter to “A,” O’Connor writes, “That Haze rejects the mummy suggests everything. What he has been looking for with body and soul throughout the book is suddenly presented to him and he sees it has to be rejected, he sees it ain’t really what he’s looking for” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Letters* 404). The same morning on which he is determined to escape from reason Hazel finds himself thrust into greater awareness of his unreasonableness.

While the mummy shows Hazel the emptiness of his claims, his car demonstrates his misuse of reason (Allen 268). As Wood writes, the Essex enables “individualist autonomy” and “perpetual isolation” (*Christ-Haunted* 169). His car, which associates his individualism with his use of his intellect, reveals much about Hazel’s view of rationality: he attempts to use reason, like his empiricism, only to demonstrate his reliance on himself and insist that nothing is true except what he wills to be true. As Neuhaus writes of Ivan Karamazov, Hazel’s use of reason is irrational because he employs it dishonestly, ignoring both its warnings and its limitations. His car, which has served as a mirror of his capacity for reason, is filled with holes and leaks that nearly prevent it from running. When one mechanic tells him “It can’t be done,” Hazel immediately looks elsewhere for help (O’Connor 110-111). He believes a man who tells him “he could put the car in the best shape overnight, because it was such a good car to begin with” (111). Hazel is able to recognize the problems with his car and lists many superficial problems for the mechanic: “he wanted the horn made to blow and the leaks taken out of the gas tank, the starter made to work smoother and the windshield wipers tightened” (110). Yet he does not heed the warning and continues to insist on the trustworthiness of the car, just as he continues to insist on the consistency of his own beliefs, despite the fact that he has repeatedly been confronted by their illogicality. When he leaves the second mechanic, certain the car is “in honest hands” (111), he trusts a mechanic who tells him something contrary to what he knows. Hazel ignores obvious problems with both his car and his intellectual framework. Both offer freedom, but when he uses them outside their proper parameters only to gain what he wants, he loses the freedom he could gain from each. The misuse of his car mirrors the misuse of his intellect.

Hazel again recognizes the severe limitations of what he preaches when he sees himself in the face of Solace Layfield, his double created by Onnie Jay Holy. What he tells Layfield after he knocks his car into the ditch is true of himself, too: “You ain’t true. What do you get up on top of a car and say you don’t believe in what you do believe in for?” (O’Connor 205). Whitt argues that Layfield’s death is “the turning point on Motes’s road to salvation” (23). Not only does he insist that Layfield is an impostor, he begins to recognize that he is, too. He no longer believes what he preaches, and “when he kills Layfield, he symbolically kills his own Church Without Christ” (23). After he runs over the false prophet, Haze gets out of the car and sees that the “Essex stood half over the other Prophet as if it were pleased to guard what it had finally brought down” (206). His car, which is “the symbol of rational design” (Allen 268), has destroyed the false prophet, and the death of the prophet mirrors Hazel’s own story. Reason has destroyed his Church Without Christ and shown him the inconsistencies of his own beliefs. His rationality has “finally brought down” his façade. Yet his story mirrors Layfield’s in other ways, too. Ciuba describes the death of Layfield: “Lying on the ground, bloody but at last wise, Layfield gasps out, ‘Jesus.’ He . . . says the prayer in faith as a sign that at last he has gone beyond hollowed words to find true solace in the Word itself” (74-75). His double finally gains wisdom when he is covered in blood. Reason shows him the inconsistency of his claims and then his blood shows him his need to confess. As he lies on the ground covered in blood, he gurgles his confession to Hazel: “Stole theter car. Never told the truth to my daddy . . .” (O’Connor 207). After accepting the truth, he realizes his need to confess. Both Layfield’s blood, which now urges him to believe, and his intellect, which shows him his former deceit, are crucial in his recognition of truth. Both are also crucial

in Hazel's eventual acceptance of truth. As Layfield dies, he is a much truer reflection of Hazel than when he stood on the street and preached.

Reason shows Hazel that his beliefs are unfounded, but he does not respond appropriately to his discovery. Rather than acknowledge the absurdity of the claim he makes to the false prophet, he uses the strength of his car to destroy him. Like the hypocrite in Matthew seven, Haze is concerned with the "mote" in Layfield's eye but refuses to acknowledge the plank in his own (Whitt 17). He relies on reason to justify his anger toward the false prophet, yet he still does not admit that his words apply more appropriately to himself: "Two things I can't stand," he tells Layfield, "—a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is . . ." (O'Connor 206). He accuses Layfield of falsity when his own claims are far more spurious. He is beginning to see the unreasonableness of his Church Without Christ, yet he still preaches contradictions. He mocks Layfield's confession, telling him to "shut up" (207). After Layfield dies, Hazel examines his car. Little damage is done; he sees that "the bumper had a few spurts of blood on it but that was all. Before he turned around and drove back to town, he wiped them off with a rag" (207). He quickly removes the blood from his car, just as he attempts to separate his wise blood from his reason. He does not temper one with the other or recognize that both are necessary in the discovery of truth. Rather than taint his reason, he tries to separate it from the lessons he learns from his blood. He is unmoved by the blood of his double just as he is attempting, through his misuse of reason, to be unmoved by his own wise blood.

The boy at the filling station tells Hazel that his Essex will probably not get further than twenty miles "if he went slow" (O'Connor 209). Hazel, still denying the truth, exclaims, "[T]his car is just beginning its life" (209). He begins his journey

quickly, but before long he “had the sense that he was not gaining ground” (209). He tries to ignore the sign that reads “Jesus died for YOU,” but his car seems unable to move further down the road (209). Like his car, reason, with all its imperfections, cannot take him any further. He has ignored truth—the truth he has heard from mechanics and his own intellect. When Hazel asks why the patrolman stops him, he says “I just don’t like your face” (210). Hazel’s arbitrary insistence on appearances suddenly becomes obvious to him. The patrolman’s response is appropriate, Ciuba notes, because after “[h]aving taken the world at face value, [Hazel] is himself taken at face value” (78). He is again confronted with problems in his epistemology. When he admits that he can no longer take things at face value, he begins to accept the things he has learned through reason and his wise blood—and he is finally prepared to accept truth in its entirety.

Hazel Motes and Grace

Until now, reason has been crucial as Hazel’s wise blood has gradually turned him toward truth. His intellect has disturbed him, but he has tried to ignore his inconsistencies and deny the irrationality of his claims. When the patrolman pushes his car over the embankment, Hazel loses his false pretensions to intellect: he can no longer hide behind denials and contradictions, just as he cannot hide behind the green windows of his car. Both are deceptive and distort his view of the world around him. The patrolman asks him, “Was you going anywheres?” and Hazel finally answers honestly, “No” (O’Connor 211-212). Like his car, his reason can take him no further. When he first met Sabbath, he told her, “nobody with a good car needs to be justified,” still insisting that he relied on no one but himself (109). When he loses his car, reason shows him the futility of his former beliefs. J.O. Tate describes the car’s significance: “If ‘nobody with a

good car needs to be justified,' it follows . . . that anyone without a good car *does* need justification" (qtd. in Gentry 141). Hazel recognizes his need for justification as he stands on the embankment above his car. Reason shatters his claims to truth, just as his car destroyed Layfield's claim to be Hazel. Through reason he understands his need for justification, but the means of justification—grace—is outside his intellectual framework.

As his car shatters beneath the embankment, Hazel examines the entire scene. He looks up at the sky, not down at his car: "His face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing and beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth into space" (O'Connor 211). He comprehends more than he ever could from inside his car; he sees "depth after depth." When he relinquishes reason, he discovers grace. Temira Pachmuss, author of "Dostoevsky and America's Southern Women Writers: Parallels and Confluences," describes Dostoevsky's style: "Dostoevsky uses the eerie, the gloomy, and the ambiguous to present images of a purgation that may ultimately result in illumination" (115). In *Wise Blood*, O'Connor uses the same technique. Hazel moves from the gloomy and ambiguous to illumination. Allen writes, "The embankment, like the door opening into empty space in Haze's room out of which he had thrown the 'new jesus,' represents the limits of man's powers: the point past which reason fails him" (268). Reason cannot explain the mystery of grace; the mysterious aspects of truth are known through faith. Hazel's "knees [bend] under him" as he looks at the sky which is "alive with a burning mercy, a purging peace" (O'Connor 211; Wood *Christ Haunted* 169). Like grace, the peace and mercy Hazel recognizes in the sky cannot be described with his intellect, but his intellect has played a crucial role in his recognition of his need for grace. When he

employs his intellect honestly, he recognizes that truth does not exist merely in the realm of the visible. His wise blood then makes faith possible, encourages him to discover the reality of sin and his soul, and enables him to accept mystery.

In Hazel, then, intellect and wise blood work together to bring him to truth. He begins to understand grace, as does Dmitri Karamazov, when he learns to temper his proclivity toward one epistemological extreme. His blinding is penance; he pours quicklime into his eyes, ties barbed wire around his chest, and walks on broken glass and gravel because he recognizes truth. When he was a boy, Hazel filled his shoes with stones and small rocks and attempted to purge himself of the guilt he felt for his sins. Yet, “Nothing happened” (60). He takes the rocks out of his shoes as a boy because “his self-saving act produced no divine response” (Wood 168). At the end of the book, however, he continually punishes himself because he recognizes the mysterious elements of truth. “However abnormal or unreasonable it might be,” Hardy writes, “Haze’s self-blinding is the central gesture in *Wise Blood* that makes contact with mystery” (83). Like Layfield, Hazel first understands truth and then recognizes his need for penitence. Wood writes, “These drastic acts of *ascesis* are not self-justifying sacrifices meant to earn Motes’s salvation; they are deeds of radical penance offered in gratitude for the salvation that has already been won for him at the Place of the Skull” (*Christ Haunted* 169). He has spent years denying the truth, and he finally recognizes, as he admits to Mrs. Flood, “I’m not clean” (O’Connor 228). He tells her he walks on rocks “to pay,” but, as Woods notes, his reason and his wise blood have brought him to a place where he is overwhelmed with “gratitude for the redemption already wrought in him” (*Christ Haunted* 169). He has recognized the truth, and his self-blinding is his response to grace.

Hazel's concept of grace differs significantly from Dmitri's, however. When Hazel accepts grace, he recognizes that his former approach to truth and his previous claims about a "new Jesus" were wrong, merely an attempt to avoid the truth he did not want to recognize. Just as his intellect was crucial in his understanding of truth, it is crucial in his response to grace. Hazel's outlook on life still entails a strong connection to the past; while he accepts the truth of redemption, he recognizes that he was wrong and outwardly expresses his remorse. His memory—what he knows of the past—conflicts with what he now understands, and he rejects who he was in the past. Dmitri, in contrast, responds to grace eagerly. Grace awakens in him a desire to live. He discovers how he, a passionate man, can respond to life in a Christ-like way. Dmitri's understanding of grace frees him and he looks outward and forward, but Hazel's, while it provides freedom from the lies he once preached, causes him to look backward with regret. When Dmitri accepts grace, he relinquishes his control over others, even his own life. His response is mostly relinquishment, while Hazel's is recognition. Both now understand the truth of their sin and the truth of grace, but each finds one aspect more graspable in accordance with their previous tendency in the search for truth. Both characters must recognize that they cannot understand truth in its entirety as long as they rely on one method, and their acceptance of grace demonstrates their temperance of any single epistemological approach. In their ultimate acceptance of truth, they do not disregard their own proclivity but rather strike a balance. Their response to grace, however, reveals that they still tend toward one approach. Dmitri's response is emotional, Hazel's intellectual. Dostoevsky did not finish the story of the brothers; if he had, Ivan's story would have perhaps ended similarly to Hazel's: the intellectual might have accepted truth with an extreme mortifying of the

flesh. While Hazel's concept of grace differs from Dmitri's, his response, like Dmitri's, demonstrates that he still favors one epistemological approach but has balanced it in his recognition of grace.

Other Extremes and the Need for Balance

Mrs. Flood, in contrast to Hazel, likes to "see things" and has no concept of grace (O'Connor 222). She does not seek out truth, either intellectual or spiritual, but instead lives for pleasure, unable to "look at anything steadily without wanting it" (218). As she ponders Hazel's blinding, "it occurred to her suddenly that when she was dead she would be blind too" (211). She contemplates death only transiently, however: "She recalled the phrase, 'eternal death,' that the preachers used, but she cleared it out of her mind immediately, with no more change of expression than the cat" (211). She resents the way the government uses her taxes and feels "justified getting any of it back that she could" (218). Her selfish reasoning demands justice; she has no concept of the grace Hazel has experienced. She does not employ her reason in an honest search for truth, and she does not "like the thought that something was being put over her head" (222). Like Hazel when he first comes to Taulkinham, Mrs. Flood relies on what she can see, but she does not grapple with things beneath the surface or understand her need for grace.

Hazel tells her, "If there's no bottom in your eyes, they hold more," and she responds with a blank stare, "seeing nothing at all" (226). When Hazel is first confronted with Asa Hawks's eyes, his face, although blank, still "reflect[s] something" (162). What he has seen is a shock to his understanding, but he begins to realize that he must accept different forms of knowing. Mrs. Flood, in contrast, looks for nothing more. For most of the book, her face remains entirely blank. Hardy describes her: "Mrs. Flood is a type in

O'Connor, a type that is obsessed with clarity of rational vision, no matter how incapable of that rationality she might be. That character type is also blind to spiritual vision, even when it sits in the presence of Christian grace" (116). Thus, in O'Connor's characters, a limited understanding of transcendent truth often coincides with a misuse of rationality. Mrs. Flood, who is incapable of perceiving the unseen Hazel sees despite his scarred eyes, lacks understanding because of her failure to use her reason and her lack of faith. Her story reiterates that knowledge and faith are both crucial elements in the quest for understanding. O'Connor, however, does not leave her hopeless for, as Ciuba notes, "She peers into [Hazel's] face . . . and tries to penetrate the deep tunnels of his eyes Although Mrs. Flood has not yet attained Haze's beatific vision, she has at least become dissatisfied with her former way of reading the world" (79). O'Connor hopes to create the same dissatisfaction in her readers; her characters serve not as warnings against rationality, but rather as warnings against acquiring knowledge through the senses or the intellect or "blood" at the expense of other forms of knowing.

The juxtaposition of Enoch Emery's story with Hazel Motes's further demonstrates O'Connor's beliefs about human reason. Like Hazel at the beginning, Enoch takes things at face value and seeks understanding only through his "wise blood"; he knows in only one way. Both Enoch and Hazel possess "wise blood" and, while the blood presents the possibility of faith, their blood ultimately serves a different function as they each attempt to make sense of the world around them. Kreeft and Tacelli expand on their earlier definition of faith: "Faith begins in that obscure mysterious center of our being that Scripture calls the 'heart.' *Heart* in Scripture (and in the church fathers, especially Augustine) does not mean feeling or sentiment or emotion, but the absolute

center of the soul . . . where the Holy Spirit works in us” (31). Enoch relies on instinctive feelings and emotions embedded in his “wise blood,” but the wise blood in Hazel serves as a reminder that, despite his best efforts, he cannot ignore his soul. His wise blood eventually enables his faith in the unseen.

Throughout the book, however, Enoch’s wise blood, which disregards reason entirely, is little more than “bestial instinct” (Ciuba 75). He waits for his blood to direct him, assuming that “what he didn’t know was what mattered” (O’Connor 131). He believes the things he could learn from reason are superfluous, and he ignores them. He relies instead on “the mystery beyond his understanding” (129). He focuses on what he does not know, at least through his intellect, while Hazel attempts to focus on only what he does know. Enoch acts rashly because he refuses to temper his impulses with reason. His unbridled wise blood leads him to accept several misconceptions about truth. After he delivers the “new jesus” to Hazel, he cannot “get over the expectation that the new jesus was going to do something for him in return for his services” (193). He hopes the compulsion from which he acts will somehow make much of him, but he does not realize what Hazel finally learns: truth will require him to sacrifice all he has. When he puts on the outfit of an ape, Allen writes, Enoch buries “the image and likeness of God” (275). The elements of humanity from which he tries to extricate himself each reflect the image of God to an extent and equip him to understand truth. When he denies the use of his reason and relies solely on his “wise blood,” he indulges his desires and fails to pursue truth properly. Enoch’s failure to employ his reason prevents him from seeing his unreasonableness. His story ends with him looking at the horizon. But unlike Hazel after he loses his car, Enoch sees no further than the “uneven skyline of the city” (O’Connor

200). Hazel's gaze "penetrates deeper, into the heavens" (Allen 269), but Enoch restricts his way of knowing and never sees beyond his own limitations.

Like Dostoevsky, O'Connor believed that the blood and the soul are not the only means of attaining truth; reason and logic are crucial as well. Truth is known with both the mind and the heart. Sabbath Hawk's story demonstrates the grotesqueness of a fragmented life, and the conclusion of her story stands in stark contrast to Hazel's. When she first sees Hazel, she reads him well: "That innocent look don't hide a thing, he's just pure filthy right down to the guts, like me. The only difference is I like being that way and he don't. Yes sir!" (O'Connor 169). She claims she is unaffected by her own filthiness. She has relied on the Church's claim that a bastard cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, and, because she believes her soul cannot be saved, she hopes her sin is excusable. Unlike the other characters, Sabbath attempts to rely solely on reason. In her letter to Mary Brittle in the newspaper, she attempts to justify her lifestyle with her intellect. She uses reason, but her argument is based on the lie she has believed about her soul: "I shall not enter the kingdom of heaven anyway so I don't see what difference it makes" (117). Sabbath's inquiry demonstrates that she is not honestly seeking truth—or love. She hopes for a reasonable excuse to ignore the truth that would require her to act differently.

Sabbath tells the story of an unmarried woman who hates her baby and uses a stocking to hang her up in the chimney. After the fact, memories "didn't give her any peace" and "everything she looked at was the child" (O'Connor 48). Because of her fervency in telling the story and her obsession with other stories like it, Wood finds it "completely plausible to believe that Sabbath Lily and some anonymous lover have killed

their bastard baby” (*Gospel of Life* 325). In her second letter to Mary Brittle, she claims to be adjusted to modern life and unaffected by the state of her soul, but her stories reveal otherwise. Although she denies it, she is haunted by a dream just as Hazel is. While Hazel is bothered by the figure of Jesus in the back of his mind, Sabbath cannot rid her conscience of a baby that Jesus has made “beautiful to haunt her” (O’Connor 48). Just as Hazel has killed a man, she has killed a baby, but she does not discover the grace he does. She attempts to explain away the dreams that still haunt her, but she cannot overcome guilt or regret with reason. After Hazel blinds himself, Sabbath “had hung around pestering him for a few days and then she had gone off; she said she hadn’t counted on no honest-to-Jesus blind man and she was homesick for her papa” (219). She refuses to accept Hazel’s unreasonable actions because they signify faith. Instead, she wants to go back to the familiar and to the lies of her father. Her selfish reasoning never thrusts her toward truth. Like Hazel, she is irrational because she disregards other forms of knowing. Perhaps O’Connor would give Sabbath the same warning she gave Alfred Corn in a letter: “Satisfy your demand for reason always but remember that charity is beyond reason, and that God can be known through charity” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Letters* 480). Wholeness makes rest possible, but because Sabbath bifurcates reason from other forms of knowing, she never experiences wholeness and thus never lives up to her name. She denies her tortured conscience and never admits her need for grace.

Grace, Mystery, and the Grotesque

In her stories, O’Connor “moves at last to the suprarational—to the mystery that transcends reason” (Askin 60). As evidenced in Hazel’s journey toward truth, O’Connor believed rational processes are necessary in the quest to know, but she recognized that

reason cannot explain mystery. The characters in *Wise Blood* rely on one way of knowing at the expense of others, and the results are grotesque. Enoch dons the outfit of an ape and is estranged from his fellow humanity, while Sabbath desperately clings to the mummy because she recognizes something in it. Hazel must learn to use his reason appropriately, and the lessons he learns, although he denies them at the time, are crucial on his journey to truth and his ultimate recognition of grace. Leaving reason out of the equation entirely is dangerous, as Enoch Emery's story demonstrates. At the same time, relying solely on reason is impossible, and Hazel must relinquish his car, the symbol of his intellect, before he can accept grace, the part of truth enshrined in mystery. As Kreeft and Tacelli write, both reason and faith are essential in the acquisition of truth, but, as O'Connor reiterates in her letters, mystery is a significant component of truth, a component that is always beyond reason. In a letter to "A," she describes the relationship between the head and the blood: "As for the blood and the head business, the blood and the head work together and what is not first in the blood can sometimes reach it by going first through the head and what is wrong in the blood can sometimes be tempered by the head" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Letters* 522). Thus, while O'Connor recognized and portrayed the irrational side of humanity, her grotesque style is not a result of skepticism toward reason. Instead, she sees reason as crucial in humanity's quest to know. Like other forms of knowing, it is limited and dangerous when taken to an extreme, but rightly employed it can prevent absurd assumptions and lead toward truth.

Both Dostoevsky and O'Connor were concerned with the irrationality of an epistemology rooted in rationality, but they were not opposed to a tempered use of reason. Hazel, like Ivan, is initially unable to comprehend truth not because he uses

reason in his attempt but because he relies on one method of knowing and his pursuit of truth is thus limited in scope. The mysterious aspect of truth was crucial for both authors. In the margin of a book, O'Connor writes, "the grotesque is naturally the bearer of mystery, is dangerous" (qtd. in Kinney 76). Dostoevsky and O'Connor both recognized that faith is necessary for knowing and understanding mystery, particularly the mystery of grace, which both authors present to the most unlikely—and grotesque—characters. Intellectual understanding, while important, cannot comprehend grace, which is hinted at through love, faith, suffering—and the grotesque. By presenting Ivan's story in the context of the other brothers, Dostoevsky suggests that the mysterious nature of truth requires more than one epistemological approach. Henry T. Edmondson describes O'Connor's view of fiction: "Good fiction . . . does not always produce a lucid, unambiguous view of the world; on the contrary, it may leave 'the reader with a deeper mystery to ponder when the literal mystery has been solved'" (6). Through her grotesque stories, she hoped to portray the mysterious elements of truth. Her use of the grotesque, like Dostoevsky's, demonstrates her recognition of mystery.

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