

The Cold War's Influence on Flannery O'Connor's Novel *Wise Blood*

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American author Flannery O'Connor published her first novel, *Wise Blood*, in 1952. This novel is much like her short stories in terms of craft. Set in the South, *Wise Blood's* shifting narration takes readers on the journey of protagonist Hazel "Haze" Motes. Injured in the army, and now back without any family alive, he sets out to create a church without Christ. Haze encounters multiple characters in the city of Taulkinham that embody and symbolically represent those of the South. These include Haze and other major characters of the novel: Enoch, Sabbath, Hoover Shoats, Solace Layfield and Asa Hawks. O'Connor provides a physically grotesque representation of a South with dark scenes and deformed characters throughout the novel. Despite characters in *Wise Blood* being symbolic, they are nevertheless flat. O'Connor uses these characters to reveal how the South is losing its religious roots and identity; it is becoming commercialized, secular, lacking real Christians and straying away from religion. But what would lead an author to write so many Southern gothic texts about a South in need of redeeming?

Many scholars and readers of O'Connor immediately note her devotion to her own Catholic faith as the driving force for her Southern gothic works. However, when one looks at events taking place in America, and specifically the South, at the time of publication of *Wise Blood*, O'Connor's motivation for and message within her novel becomes more evident and complex. Most significantly, O'Connor was living and writing during the Cold War era (1941-1991). The Cold War Era left many Americans and lawmakers fearful of Communism, what many refer to as the Red Scare, and as Jon Lance Bacon notes in, *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture* (1993), O'Connor was certainly not in favor of Communism (4). However,

O'Connor "refused to ignore problems at home" (Bacon 4). Problems and concerns of the era in her region included: lack of religion, racism, segregation, and a nostalgia for the South filled with agriculture and less of the urbanization that was invading the landscape. John Hayes in his essay, "The "Christ-Haunted" South: Contextualizing Flannery O'Connor" paints a picture of the concerns people like O'Connor had in the South as he describes how the government and states recruited national corporations into the South, large cities crept in like Atlanta, and the "ties to rural life were barely visible" (48). The urbanizing South became what Hayes calls a "magnet for outsiders" (49). O'Connor was concerned that the South was forgetting its important identity as it was urbanizing and commercializing. O'Connor was very much a regional writer in a nationalistic era. Many citizens feared a World War III, Marxist ideas taking away the freedoms of the United States and the threat of atomic weapons. There was a race around the world to be the best and most powerful nation.

While agreeing that O'Connor's works do not ignore the problems at home, it is important to see that what was going on in the United States at the time of *Wise Blood's* publication as it reveals an author influenced by her times to preserve America (specifically the South) from the looming threats of Communism. This regional writer gave her audience a look into Southern America during a time where she'd seen it filled with issues and in a time where America needed to be a nation that was collectively strong yet also collectively different. Or in other words, a nation that was not completely uniform, a nation that freely held its unique cultures and identities across regions and states. A close reading of *Wise Blood* with the context of the time period reveals O'Connor's message to her readers. *Wise Blood* symbolically represents the South of the time and the people within. Readers begin to understand and see

through *Wise Blood* how the South was a synecdoche for the United States. O'Connor's narrative reveals issues worth fighting for in her region like: false Christians recruiting and influencing more than real Christians are, sinful opportunities taking hold in the religious South, and individuals losing faith in God and being easily influenced by outsiders, which she understands as important to America at large. she reveals the South can be redeemed to a place that will uphold the safety and freedoms of America and prevent the looming threats of Communism from invading the entire country.

Contextualizing O'Connor in the Cold War Era

America in the 1950s during the time of the Cold War era was a place of much anxiety and worry. Almost a decade into America resisting Communism and just two years after president Truman sent American troops to fight in the Korean War, O'Connor publishes *Wise Blood* (Bacon 1). When considering that O'Connor lived in the South (Milledgeville, Georgia), it is important to also know what Bacon points out about rural life during the Cold War. He writes, "Rural life...was identified with the American way of life" (9). Ralph C. Wood in *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (2004) also references this notion. As he puts it, "'The American Way of Life' became the talismanic phrase for hailing all that was virtuous about our system of government and for damning all competing systems" (15). Wood argues that O'Connor was "deeply concerned about the homogenizing ethos of the Eisenhower era" (15). In other words, she was concerned with the push to make things uniformed in the nation; she saw the greatness and uniqueness of the religious South fading away and the emphasis on commercialization and secularization invading her region.

During the Cold War, there was the ever present concern that Communist ideas could be spreading within the homeland. There was a fear proposed by organizations and lawmakers, such as The American Legion that this possible indoctrination of Communist ideas in the nation was targeting the Southern, agricultural region. The South became a place during this era that was a “synecdoche for the United States” (Bacon 9). The pastoral setting of the South was symbolic of “the American way of life” in that it was historically self contained and agricultural. The South was symbolic of how the nation wanted to not be invaded by Communism. However, as O’Connor observed in the region, the South was becoming more uniformed and invaded. Outsiders were beginning to seek opportunity in the South, and its identity was fading into the rest of the urbanized U.S. Understanding how important this region was in such a pro-American time in the U.S. is key to unlock O’Connor’s political message in *Wise Blood* (and other of her works) about the need to redeem the South.

During the Cold War Era, lawmakers pushed for the community of American artists and intellectuals to serve their country by painting America in good light (Bacon 43). Contrary to this, O’Connor does not paint the American South gloriously. Bacon points out that “O’Connor was one of the few to break with the consensus and criticize U.S. society. She called attention to the discrepancy between an idealised ‘American way’ which politicians cite frequently as evidence of U.S. cultural superiority, and the social realities produced by this merger of politics and culture” (3). Although O’Connor was fearful of war in her homeland and was against Communism, she was also against the calls made by lawmakers of the time to represent America the way they wanted it represented. The United States House of Representatives even formed a

committee called the The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Bacon quotes U.

S. Representative George Dondero in 1949, who said:

Modern art is Communistic because it is distorted and ugly, because it does not glorify our beautiful country, our cheerful and smiling people, and our great material progress.

Art which does not portray our beautiful country in plain, simple, terms that everyone can understand breeds dissatisfaction. It is therefore opposed to our government, and those who create it and promote it are our enemies. (44)

O'Connor was the kind of author Dondero did not support, the author who was distorting the setting and characters in her stories like that found in *Wise Blood*. She also leaves readers shocked, reflecting, and curious about her ambiguous endings. However, O'Connor was not an enemy of her country; she was against turning away from protecting America, just as this representative was. She chose a route in her art to not be political in the ways in which lawmakers wished. Dondero argued that breeding dissatisfaction in readers was wrong.

However, as mentioned above, O'Connor was a regional writer and as Bacon notes, "Her status as a Southern, Catholic writer, the very status that meant her removal from the literary mainstream, meant a great deal more. It gave her a position, a territory, from which she could criticize U.S. society" (60). In other words, O'Connor was able to separate herself to successfully critique the U.S. and yet shine a light on the issues of great concern that she saw in her beloved South. She took a "tough love" approach when it came to protecting the country.

In a 1957 essay by O'Connor, from *Mystery and Manners* titled, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," O'Connor gives us more solid ground for understanding her writing.

O'Connor makes her choice of writing clear when she says, "The country that the writer is

concerned with in the most objective way is, of course, the region that most immediately surrounds him..." (28). She is indeed concerned with the South that her stories are set in, and continues to reveal her interest in a changing South. This essay, a response to a *Life* magazine article which asked about authors' works on conveying joy goes on to say, "The anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that everyday we are getting more and more like the rest of the country" (28-29). O'Connor was concerned with the South conforming to dominate American culture.

"The American way of life," which the South represented for many Americans, was becoming less of that symbol. Wood picks up on O'Connor's distaste for the changing America of the 1950's. He writes how this was a time of advertising and triumphs like that of the automobile. He continues, "O'Connor was openly allied with other critics of this consumer-centered call for conformity and homogeneity..." (15). One may begin to analyze O'Connor's concern over American consumerism as a negative view towards Capitalism, which could then be interpreted as possible support for Marxist ideas. However, O'Connor's thoughts and opinions are much deeper than supporting or disagreeing with Capitalism or Communism. One must continue to remember her allegiance was to her faith. She was critiquing the negativity she saw from commercialization and urbanization filling the South and the impact this had on keeping religion at its core. Her opinions are as complex and contradictory as her novel's ending. Readers see O'Connor's critique of the changing South in *Wise Blood* as, will be noted later on, this novel is filled with critiques of materialism and the rest of the urbanized country invading the rural South.

Readers of “The Fiction Writer and His Country” can also see what feels like a direct response to lawmakers and the rest of the country who would be critiquing her works at the time. As she notes, “It may well be asked, however, why so much of our literature is apparently lacking in sense of spiritual purpose and in the joy of life...” (31-32). O’Connor goes on to say, “for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that” (32). One can agree with many critics that O’Connor sees everything in relation to her faith. O’Connor’s main concern in her writing was not driven by politics, but politics of her time influenced her in understanding how the South was declining in morality, which was a concern for many during the Cold War era. O’Connor assures readers that there is an importance to write on redemption. She claims, “Redemption is meaningless unless there is a cause for it in the actual life we live, and for the last few centuries there has been operating in our culture the secular belief that there is no such cause” (33). O’Connor was aware of secularism creeping into the South, and if there was a time when there was cause for redemption, the time had come when O’Connor wrote and published *Wise Blood*.

Redemption was not only O’Connor’s wish, it was a desire of many in America during the Cold War era. A nationwide religious revival took place during this time period (Bacon 64). Evangelists like Billy Graham preached to the thousands around the nation. All three branches of the United States government promoted the nationwide revival as well (Bacon 65). Post World War II, the U.S. sought to make religion its foundation with actions such as adding “under God” to the pledge of allegiance, making “In God We Trust” the national motto, and imprinting the phrase on every U.S. coin (Hayes 51). There was a concerted effort to promote religion in Americans’ everyday lives. Hayes quotes Will Herberg from his 1995 book, *Protestant*,

Catholic, Jew saying that religion was known as “the American way of life”, “...It is the American Way of Life about which Americans are admittedly and unashamedly ‘intolerant’” (Hayes 51). Once again, the phrase “the American way of life” pops up in American culture. Religious revival in America during the Cold War era associated religion with “the American way of life.”

Not only was this phrase of “the American way of life” being used to compare to the South, but also it was closely tied to the religious identity of America, and the South was and still is the heart of religion, “The Bible Belt.” Philip Muehlenbeck in his book, *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (2012) writes on how religion became a major focus of the Cold War era as he explains this time period of nuclear threat “raised the ultimate questions of life and death, and of the very meaning of life” (xii). Muehlenbeck also makes it clear that Communism was seen as a threat to freedoms such as the freedom to worship, making Marxist ideology, Atheistic Communism (xiii). Americans saw Communism as “not only a rival political and economic system of belief, but also an entire religious scheme complete with martyrs and missionaries, saints and sinners, sacred texts and dogma, dreams of redemption, and even an implied eschatology. The Cold War was in this sense a rare moment when Americans faced a theologically alien enemy” (47). The United States and the Soviet Union viewed the Cold War through a “religious lens” and all three United States leaders that Stalin would deal with (Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower) created U.S. Foreign Policy around religious terms. Muehlenbeck quotes such religious concern from president Roosevelt as he said in his 1939 State of the Union Address, “Where freedom of religion has been attacked, the attack has come from sources opposed to democracy,...Where democracy has been overthrown, the spirit of free

worship has disappeared. And where religion and democracy have vanished, good faith and reason in international affairs have given way to strident ambition and brute force” (xiii).

President Truman, in office during publication of *Wise Blood* constantly referred to the Cold War as a fight between “morality of belief and the immorality of unbelief” (xiii). O’Connor, an author living everyday in her faith and one who lived in a region known for its strong grip on religion would undoubtedly connect to and pick up on her country’s leaders initiatives to fight for religion in efforts to keep Communism at bay.

It becomes clearer with such a revival even pushed by the nation's government that O’Connor saw an opportunity to help not only save America from foreign invasion of Communism but the dire need for someone to reveal the cracks and tears in the religious South, which upheld the “American way of life.” She saw her region breaking apart and as someone very religious, fearful of Communism, and writing about the South, she took the unexpected opportunity to help preserve American freedoms, not painting the South as pristine and gorgeous but revealing a need for redemption in the South, the synecode for America. As a result, we see her efforts as a writer to warn her readers about the need for religion to be back to the core of the South from her very first Southern gothic novel, *Wise Blood*.

Cold War Context in *Wise Blood*

Given the historical context above I plan to show how the era’s influence on O’Connor appears in her first novel, *Wise Blood*. This text is a religious novel filled with the theme of redemption and blindness versus seeing. I challenge readers to consider how this novel should be read through the larger historical context of the Cold War, and argue that her religious arguments within this book cannot be divorced from the era. I claim that religion is not the sole issue

driving O'Connor's motive. The Cold War was a perpetual part of her life that would influence her greatly as someone who not only lived in the south, but was very devoted to religion as well. In this section of my paper I will explain how characters of this narrative are symbolic Southerners, some of whom represent possible threats approaching the South. Next I will discuss the importance of setting and how it reflects the South at large and movements with the United States at publication. Lastly, I will analyze symbolic actions that take place, what they cause, and the warning they serve to O'Connor's readers during the Cold War era.

At the focal point of this novel is the journey of main character Hazel "Haze" Motes who embodies citizens of the South who are losing their faith and are in need of redemption. Haze, with his hazy views on religion is a metaphor of the Southerners in O'Connor's region and time. He does not have a clear vision or handle on what he truly believes. While in the army, Haze is wounded by shrapnel the army claims was taken out of his chest, however, "he [feels] it still in there, rusted, and poisoning him..." (18). The shrapnel not only physically poisons Haze, it symbolizes the poison of his heart and soul into one of bitterness as the army sends him back into the desert, forgetting him. This forgotten, small poisonous object slowly invades his body mirroring the small elements of secularization pervading the region. Over time, religion fades away, worldly sin replaces it, and for a region that embodies "the American way of life" the possibility of Communist influence begins. Without much thought, one of the few possessions Haze has and values is an old Bible. As Haze wears a new suit and hat that lingers over his eyes, physically representing his actions to shield the truth, his taxi driver says, "You look like a preacher. It's a look in your face somewhere" (27). His appearance and possessions reveal the

truth that he believes in Jesus deep within, but stays blind to it all, much like the South shields their eyes to the truth that darkness is creeping into the landscape.

Through Haze, O'Connor is able to critique the urbanization of the region and what it is doing to the area's religious stronghold. Lewis A. Lawson in "O'Connor and the Grotesque: *Wise Blood*" (1991) explains that O'Connor "had no interest in Haze Motes as a human being". Haze is a rather flat character as his sole purpose is to mirror the South's people in need of redemption so that their freedoms to worship remain. Lawson writes, "[Haze] was conceived, and his creator would have insisted that he remained, as an exemplum, as a vehicle whose attitudes and actions would personify a spiritual view which she wished to reveal" (303). Lawson argues that O'Connor's view and use of Haze was to make him an "exemplification of the deadly effect that Southern Fundamentalism could have on the soul, warping and terrorizing it so completely with its perversion of Christian doctrine that the soul in rebellion reject entirely the idea of orthodox Christianity" (303). Although one can argue Haze may not be a believer because of too much fundamentalism, it is unclear. What is clear in this novel is that Haze lost his faith and instead of easily finding it once he returns home, he struggles to ever believe in salvation again with a lack of religious revival in the area. Hayes offers more detail in what O'Connor would have been criticizing through Haze. He first describes uptown religion, which was "the religion of the propertied, white classes of the new South..." (52). O'Connor saw uptown religion as one that focused too much on the "cultural dominance"(52). There is then folk religion which "was the religion of a marginalized group- the poor- and as a Catholic, O'Connor may have felt some kinship in marginality, but much more importantly, it was in folk religion that O'Connor saw a Christianity as devout, passionate, and uncompromising as her

own” (53). To explain, O’Connor, being a minority of the South because she was Catholic, felt a deep connection to folk religion and seen it as the most genuine. Characters such as Hoover and Asa in *Wise Blood*, who are negative and hindering to Haze’s redemption encompass the uptown religion described by Hayes. They are filled with the worldly instead of being filled with faith. Genuine Christians, the traditional Southern folk Christians are not active and nowhere to be found to redeem Haze in the novel. O’Connor shows through Haze’s ease in leaving his faith that the South has taken a wrong turn.

As a foil to Haze is the character Enoch who O’Connor uses to reveal how Christians should be resilient. Enoch is not initially influenced by outside, foreign voices. As a Taulkinham native he contrasts with Haze’s defiance to be a believer and do as Jesus would want. His character is not religious, however he is faithful. Enoch hears Haze on the street exclaim his new church needs a new Jesus, “one without blood to waste, and it needs one that don’t look like any other man...” (140). Hearing this leads Enoch’s blood to tell him to steal the city museum’s shriveled, dwarf mummy to give to Haze, as the new Jesus he seeks. He follows and obeys his “wise blood” unwittingly, which is alluded to be symbolic of God’s voice. His eyesight is also poor, so he is left to rely on his “wise blood” for guidance. In other words, Enoch listens to the interior voice, the voice of God instead of what the exterior voices say. Unlike Haze, Enoch never questions the voice inside of him (God’s voice). Much like the Biblical Enoch, the novel’s Enoch walks by faith and as a result, he unknowingly becomes the catalyst for Haze’s eventual redemption.

Along with a religious use of Enoch, O’Connor ties in the politics of the time as she leaves Enoch lost in the modern world. Enoch is never redeemed like Haze. He embodies those

who lack religion and result in allowing the secular world to be his desire instead of faith. As mentioned above, Enoch does show readers a person of faith by listening to God, but he does so blindly in a way that he never realizes it is God. He allows the opportunities of modernity to overtake any opportunity he had of redemption. Ronald Emerick, in his essay “*Wise Blood: O’Connor’s Romance of Alienation*”, explains it as the following, “Unlike Haze, however, Enoch comes to represent modern man separated from religious faith and reduced to an animalistic state...For Enoch there is no salvation in *Wise Blood*” (278). Consumerism within the modernizing South dehumanizes Enoch. He models how Christians should follow their faith, however, he also models the lack of revival and concern results in Christians easily fading away like Enoch.

Non-native character Asa Hawks provides readers with a grotesque and mysterious outsider who illustrates atheistic ideas and people invading the Bible Belt. He puts on the facade of a believer. He appears genuine and appealing. However his true ambitions to earn an extra dollar and lie to the natives are as scary as the Cold War politics’ warning about atheistic Communism trying to influence the religious South. Described as a blind preacher who is dark, deformed with “curious scars” and eyes covered with black glasses, Asa passes out religious tracts on the sidewalks and catches Haze’s attention early in the novel. Asa presents harsh words to Haze saying, “I can see more than you! You got eyes and see not, ears and hear not, but you’ll have to see some time” (50). This statement reveals the seriousness of Haze’s denial of religion. He can physically see, but O’Connor is warning that he is more disadvantaged than someone who is blind, because he is spiritually blinded. He cannot even see that Asa is actually a false witness, pretending to be blind. Already strayed away from believing, Haze wonders why this

preacher does not witness to him more. As he expresses, “What kind of preacher are you...not to see if you can save my soul?” (104). As Haze believes Asa to be a real preacher, the lack of witnessing from him shines a bad light onto real Christians. The false witness is all too common in the real world and O’Connor reveals how they can be dangerous and send skeptics like Haze into more disbelief. On the other hand, Asa’s character points out a hope in Haze. Asa’s eyes are covered by his dark glasses and are deformed. They are described as, “...one eye a little smaller and rounder than the other” (108). This contrasts well with Haze’s that are, “...the color of pecan shells and set in deep sockets” (4). The narrator goes on to note that “their settings [are] so deep that they [seem]...almost like passages leading somewhere...” (4). His eyes are not covered completely and hidden to truth like Asa’s. They hint to a soul wanting and searching for answers, but as O’Connor reveals through Asa, people like Haze stay unredeemed and blind when they encounter frauds such as Asa.

Asa’s presumed daughter, Sabbath Hawks exposes to readers how easy the South in 1952 can be preyed upon and the need for revival to catch dangerous individuals such as Sabbath from ruining the religious region and thus ruining the synecdoche of America. Initially, Haze sees Sabbath as an innocent woman he can seduce and make impure. With a lack of real wisdom, Haze is blind to the fact she is out to seduce him. Her keen sense and hawk-eyed vision gives her the ability to prey upon Haze similar to how those with Communist agendas could easily prey upon citizens within the South. Her desire to undermine believers and make economic gain is an attack on Christians and reflective of the fears and politics of the era as heard from speeches like Roosevelt’s speech above on religion being attacked by Communism.

Similar to how Haze is being preyed upon, the Southern setting of this novel is preyed upon itself. The setting in which these characters reside and will perform grotesque, redeeming actions is a very deliberate and important component when reading this novel not only considering O'Connor's religion but the greater historical context of the time. The majority of this novel occurs in the fictional town of Taulkinham, TN, creating an allegorical town for the setting of this novel filled with symbolism. As the train Haze is taking towards this town stops in his hometown of Eastrod readers catch a glimpse of the change that has happened to his small town after being in the Army for four years; "Now there were no more Motes...Turning in the road, he saw in the dark the store boarded and the barn leaning and the smaller house half carted away, the porch gone and no floor in the hall" (15). The entire Motes family is deceased and the small town of Eastrod is decaying and dark. As Haze finds his old home, O'Connor describes it as "dark as the night...the fence around it had partly fallen and that weeds were growing through the porch floor, he didn't realise all at once that it was only a shell, there was nothing here but the skeleton of a house" (20). O'Connor uses Haze's absence over time to reflect the changes of this small Southern home place, much like the changes occurring all over the region in her time. Haze's house and the South are just skeletons of what they once were.

O'Connor continues to use the allegorical town to reveal areas in the South with Christians blinded to the secularism and outsiders invading her region. She reveals Christians who are too preoccupied to have the revival the nation desired at the time. False preachers and witnesses are rampant in Taulkinham, and as stated earlier, Haze represents citizens of the time who are already questioning their faith. Haze once dreamed of being a preacher of the gospel. The Southern town in this novel is being invaded with false indoctrination, similar to the fears of

the time in relation to Communist indoctrination invading the South. O'Connor sets the Cold War era scares and ideologies early on in her novel. As Haze finds himself in a crowd around a potato peeler salesman readers see the allusion to commercialization filling the streets of small towns in the South. To attract attention to the blindness of the citizens in her region, O'Connor has this salesman refer to false preacher Asa and his daughter Sabbath passing out religious pamphlets as, "These goddam Communist foreigners!" (37). This salesman who is obviously from the South reflects the political fears of Atheistic Communism within everyone of the time. Yet, he also reveals the blindness of Southerners who fail to see through people like Asa and Sabbath who are not actual Christians. This local fails to notice that preoccupation in marketing and sales limits him from understanding what is most important. He is not in touch with his faith. As one sees reflected in the setting of *Wise Blood*, O'Connor takes the unpopular path to continue her tough love approach in saying through this novel that the citizens of the era are failing to notice their faithfulness to commercialization instead of revival.

The Cold War era's push for religious revival to keep the "American way of life" in tact and Communism away resulted in "nonmilitary forms of warfare" that initiated the use of "propaganda, media, and the arts" (Muehlenbeck xiii). Readers see the allusion to such as Haze passes by billboards towards town that tell, "Jesus Loves him" and "to repent", reflecting possible efforts of a religious revival O'Connor would be witnessing, but the words prove irrelevant without Christians doing work to redeem. The lackluster work of Christians in this novel is apparent and speak loud about O'Connor's efforts to reveal it happening in the real world. As a Catholic, O'Connor's own faith was opposed to Communism. As Muehlenbeck writes, "Pope Pius XII (pontiff from 1939 until 1958) and Pope John Paul II (1978–2005) were

themselves staunchly opposed to the Soviet Union and steered the Vatican in a fiercely anti-Communist direction” (xv). The religious environment of the United States pushed for missionaries. President Truman “encouraged the American people to put their freedoms and rights into practice by attending religious activities and paying more attention to religion” (Muehlenbeck 95). The lack of witnessing to individuals like Haze, and the slight efforts such as religious media on billboards reveal a region in need of redemption and revival themselves as the city's secular activities are more attractive than the free gift of grace.

The city of Taulkinham is filled with new urbanization the South would be seeing in the 1950's and with it came opportunity for less religious influence which all was a concern for someone trying to uphold a free and safe country. As someone who has strayed from his faith in Christ, Haze is free to commit many sinful opportunities set before him. As Hayes elaborates, “The new excitements of the city, with its movie theatres, neatly cut suburban lawns, cruising automobiles, shape the mood and drama of *Wise Blood*...” (50). Haze encounters all the new that has invaded the South. John F. Desmond in his chapter titled, “In Defense of Being” in Henry T. Edmondson's book, *A Political Commentary to Flannery O'Connor* (2017) describes the city citizens as:

A violent, lost people, they are mesmerized by such diversions as movies, bestiality, and lurid sex, as personified by Enoch Emery and Sabbath Lily Hawks. Self-interest, sentimentality and cynicism govern the social order, subverting any ethic of charity and love. Taulkinham is O'Connor's version of Voegelin's “closed world.” (177)

Desmond supports the argument that within *Wise Blood* readers begin to see the city in which Haze visits as symbolic of what the South was becoming, and O'Connor uses it to warn of the

destruction taking place in the South during an era in which it needed to hold strong. The U.S. as represented by the crumbling South is falling apart. Haze and his journey to preach the church without Christ in Taulkinham, to live a life without religion haunts him much like O'Connor sees the lack of faith beginning to haunt the South and the rest of the country.

Significant to O'Connor's concern of an urbanizing South leading to a more secular region, and thus a vulnerable United States to the terrors of Communism, is the latter half of *Wise Blood*. As Haze follows Solace to the scene of the eventual murder, O'Connor describes the setting as the outskirts of town with moss hanging over trees, no sounds but crickets and tree frogs and on a lonesome road (204). The action of Haze going outside of the city to an untouched landscape is illustrative of O'Connor's political message to seek the traditional, agricultural South that is not invaded by corporate, non-religious ideas and activities.

How Haze comes to the grotesque and shocking murder in the incorrupt outskirts of town and eventual redemption is all built up from key symbolic actions by key characters of the novel. The first major event to analyze is Enoch stealing and delivering the mummified, new Jesus to Haze. It takes the dramatic and grotesque visual of the mummy to send Haze into the beginning of his own revival. At the moment of seeing the new Jesus, the truth that he believes in salvation becomes more clear to him. The mummy visually represents the grotesque life he has been living. As Enoch arrives the morning after Sabbath seduces Haze, she takes the mummified "new Jesus" Enoch tells her to give to Haze, in as her child, much like the Virgin Mary is given a child from God. The sight of Sabbath holding the grotesque Jesus is the moment where Haze visually sees the twisted way he is living. It is at this point that O'Connor uses Sabbath as the one who reveals to Haze his own denial as she says, "...you didn't want nothing but Jesus!"

(188). Sabbath tells Haze what he cannot see for himself, that the truth he desires, is the real Jesus. This pivotal moment within the novel is vivid and violent as Haze throws out the mummy. Margaret Earley Whitt in her book, *Understanding Flannery O'Connor* (1995), says that O'Connor's "use of violence was her way of 'returning [her] characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace'" (11). To elaborate, O'Connor creates vicious scenes within her stories to play out in text what she would be seeing as violence that could easily happen within her country in the times she was writing.

Hoover Shoats provides the next eye opening event for Haze and that is through Solace Layfield. Solace is Hoover's prophet who mirrors Haze physically and spiritually. Haze begins to see someone who is just like him: "...the resemblance in their clothes and possibly in their faces" is enough for him to view a mirror image of disgust and lies that Haze has been preaching (204). Haze is so disgusted that as he follows him into the countryside he demands him to take off his hat and suit that reminds him too much of his own lost self. This quick confrontation leads to Haze running over and murdering Solace. Haze realizes that Solace is preaching what he does not believe in. As he says, "What do you get up on top of a car and say you don't believe in what you do believe in for?" (205). This is crucial since it reveals Haze has been doing the same false preaching. The murder reveals to readers the horrid consequences that come to doubters like Haze when Christians fail to witness and keep false prophets away. Haze's fury over the mummy, Sabbath's comment, and his disgust of Hoover and Solace all begin to open his eyes towards the truth, but it will come to the point of breaking a commandment to find redemption and believe.

Readers can be assured that despite such a heinous act, Haze finds salvation. Haze returns back to his room he rents from Mrs. Flood where he does what Asa Hawks failed to do many

years ago, blind himself. Haze's decision to blind himself proves that he has been redeemed by Jesus. Some, such as John Lawrence Darretta in his book *Before the Sun Has Set* (2006), interpret the ambiguous ending as one where Haze does not receive grace. However, readers can be confident of his redemption by remembering Asa's words as he told his reasons for attempting to blind himself, "...to justify his belief that Jesus Christ had redeemed him" (108). Asa fails to trust God within and follow through with blinding himself. However, Haze is able to blind himself reflecting his acceptance of Jesus Christ. As Hayes argues, "although he [Haze] tries to thoroughly revoke his rural past, Hazel Motes cannot do it...For O'Connor the religious tradition that couldn't be shaken off was a good thing, one of the genuine merits of the South" (56). To elaborate on Hayes' remarks, a genuine merit of the South is that the religious tradition cannot be shaken off, it can be redeemed. The action of blinding creates no other options for Haze but to look towards the interior and listen to God's influence.

Despite being redeemed, Haze punishes himself for his actions. Slowly over time his body thins and he becomes sick. O'Connor invites readers to recall the beginning of the novel where the narrator revealed Haze has shrapnel in his chest slowly poisoning him. He has been redeemed, but pays the price for his sin. The end of Haze's life begins to foreshadow a country wasting away if it does not redeem itself in a more proactive manner. O'Connor uses the further consequences Haze faces to reveal something him and those like him could avoid if they begin a revival in the religious South. Haze wears rocks in his shoes and wires in his ribs to additionally feel pain and physically pay for his actions. These consequences to his body provide imagery for the consequences America could pay if it keeps on its current path.

Mrs. Flood, who takes care of him, reiterates Sabbath's comments telling him, "You must believe in Jesus or you wouldn't do these foolish things" (227). After Mrs. Flood confronts Haze and his lack of paying rent and being productive, he runs off only to be found days later by police and brutally hit by them over the head. As he is returned to Mrs. Flood, he lays dying and she sees "him moving farther and farther away, father and farther into the darkness until he [is] the point of light" (236). Mrs. Flood sees in his eyes truth and redemption that can be brought to all. This scene reassures readers once more that the series of events that made Haze see the light, and begin work of sending a lost soul like Mrs. Flood into a path towards redemption.

The ambiguous ending to *Wise Blood* leaves O'Connor's audience curious and reflecting beyond the last page. Perhaps O'Connor's political opinions and thoughts are just as ambiguous as her Southern gothic texts. When attempting to analyze her works many focus on her Catholic faith as the driving force for her message of redemption. However, as laid out in the beginning of this paper, she lived in an important time of American history, the Cold War era, that must be considered when reading and analyzing her works. This larger historical context reveals more of O'Connor's political message within. The Red Scare gave motivation for her to write about the region losing its faith. She took the opportunity to use her artistic ability to create a story of redemption and revival being key.

Through the characters, setting, and violent actions within the novel, O'Connor attempts to open the eyes of her readers and warn them of what is to come if they do not begin a religious revival in the South. Haze sought to create a Church without Christ, and his plans fell apart, his life fell apart, and finding redemption was nearly a miss. O'Connor warns that a Church without Christ for Haze is like a country, specifically the religious South, without Christ. It is one that

can fall apart, pay for its sins, and nearly miss any chance of redemption. O'Connor feared a nation without faith and viewed the South as valuable in keeping freedoms such as religion alive. This was a large and difficult. Even O'Connor writes in her author's note to *Wise Blood*, "Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen". Indeed *Wise Blood* was not conceived simply, but the mysteries within the novel can begin to be solved when read within the larger historical context of the Cold War.

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