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LAMB, MELINDA
THE GROWTH OF A DESIGN: FRANK O'CONNOR'S
STORY CYCLES.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT
GREENSBORO, PH.D., 1979

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THE GROWTH OF A DESIGN: FRANK O'CONNOR'S
STORY CYCLES

by

Melinda Lamb

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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1979

Approved by


Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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March 16, 1979
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March 16, 1979
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O'Connor, who judges the merits of a literary genre by ethical values embodied in it, the form of the story cycle becomes a vessel for preserving the household gods of the novel of the last century until the modern world can relearn the values of the middle-class morality reflected in it.

The relation between literature and morality is paramount in O'Connor's work, and it is the cause for his naming the nineteenth-century realistic novel as the greatest of all possible forms; the word "novel" does not even apply to "autobiographical" fiction of the twentieth century which does not embody sound social and ethical principles. A short story by itself can express alienation and loneliness, and it is here that most of O'Connor's critics stop. According to O'Connor himself the modern storyteller's theme must be loneliness. But a story cycle gives the writer scope to criticize the failures of the modern world, and perhaps even to begin the reform of a temporarily confused middle-class society.

Thus O'Connor's theory of art is pragmatic: the writer should be a moralist and a reformer determined to help reweave a strong new social and ethical fabric for future generations. O'Connor is a reactionary in the face of modern "autobiographical" writing at the same time that he thinks of himself as a writer in the vanguard of a new and healthy realistic literature. The bridge between the nineteenth-century realistic novel and the realistic novel of the future is composed of Frank O'Connor's story cycles. While this extraordinary critical position reveals that

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Directed by: Dr. Robert Watson. Pp. 273

Criticism on Frank O'Connor's short fiction since his death in 1966 generally draws upon a nucleus of assumptions--that the Irish storyteller's thematic interests take precedence over formal ones, that his style belongs to the realistic tradition of an earlier age, and that the themes themselves belong to a modern romantic tradition. By characterizing O'Connor as a realist in style and as a romantic in theme his critics are able to reconcile some of O'Connor's own claims to be a realist and a romantic, a liberal and a conservative, a reactionary and a writer in the vanguard of the newest literary developments.

There is another approach to his stories that accounts for some of the contradictions, and at the same time reveals an intimate relationship between O'Connor's form and his content: that approach involves the consideration of his stories as forming larger groups, or cycles. A story cycle in its simplest definition is a volume of independent stories whose sum is greater than the addition of its parts. The story cycle is a form O'Connor praises in the work of Ivan Turgenev, whom he credits with the discovery of its usefulness in reflecting a society suffering from dissociation and alienation, a society that to O'Connor is as unhealthy as the world of the nineteenth-century realistic novel is healthy. For

nearly all modern writers are out of step except O'Connor himself, the position is at the heart of his major contribution to modern literature--a coherent body of story cycles, united in content and form to express O'Connor's vision of reality.

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INTRODUCTION: O'CONNOR'S DESIGN

Since Frank O'Connor's death in 1966 there has been growing critical interest in his short fiction, although he also wrote plays, novels, poems, autobiography, biography, and works of criticism. There is general agreement among his recent critics--as there was among critics during his lifetime--that O'Connor is primarily a short story writer whose successes in this genre far overshadow the achievements of his other work. There is also general agreement that O'Connor's thematic interests take precedence over formal ones, an opinion fostered by O'Connor himself, who vitriolically criticized writers he felt "loved literature too well," including four he said should never have been writers: Ben Jonson, Gustave Flaubert, Henry James, and James Joyce. They "cared more for its form than its content and adopted toward it the fetichistic attitude of impoverished old maids inheriting ancestral mansions."¹ Very little, in fact, has been said about O'Connor's style except that it belongs to the realistic tradition of an earlier age. Gerry Brenner, the first critic to attempt

¹ Frank O'Connor, The Mirror in the Roadway (New York: Knopf, 1956), p. 224. All further references to this work are in the text.

a comprehensive analysis of O'Connor's stories, comments in 1967 that "Frank O'Connor's kind of storytelling is not modish just now . . . he writes in the manner of the nineteenth century realists, stories which in plot and action interest him more than symbol, sensitivity, and experimentation."²

There is also general critical agreement that while O'Connor's style is realistic and subservient to theme, the themes themselves belong to a modern romantic tradition. Brenner explains that the content "shows his leanings upon the romantic tradition by placing instinct and irrationality above judgment and rationality."³ Another critic focuses on thematic concerns to show how O'Connor is "the D. H. Lawrence of his own day."⁴

By characterizing O'Connor as a realist in style and as a romantic in theme, his critics are able to some degree to account for the inconsistencies of his own self-analyses. In his two major works of criticism, The Mirror in the Roadway and The Lonely Voice, O'Connor refers to himself both as a realist and a romantic, a

² Gerry Brenner, "Frank O'Connor's Imprudent Hero," Texas Studies in Literature and Language (No. 10, 1968), p. 457.

³ Ibid., p. 458.

⁴ Deborah Averill, "Human Contact in the Short Stories," in Michael/Frank (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 28.

liberal and a conservative, a reactionary and a writer in the vanguard of the newest literary developments. There are even contradictions between his definitions of the modern short story and those he writes himself.

There is another approach to his stories that accounts for some of the contradictions, and at the same time shows an intimate relationship between O'Connor's form and his content; that approach involves the consideration of his stories as forming larger groups, or cycles. A story cycle in its simplest definition is a volume of independent stories whose sum is greater than the addition of its parts. It is a form O'Connor recognizes in the work of another Irishman, George Moore, whose The Untilled Field is in turn influenced by the parent of the story cycle--and one of O'Connor's favorite books--Turgenev's A Sportsman's Sketches. O'Connor develops his own particular form of the story cycle in six volumes published over a period of twenty-five years. When his stories are considered as part of this larger design, then a greater unity between content and form becomes apparent. This approach to O'Connor's stories is consistent with the fact that throughout his lifetime he was obviously fascinated by style, and spent the major part of his last years pondering a theory of the novel and short story in which method plays a paramount role. This approach is also consistent with the fact of O'Connor's intense awareness of the possibilities

for every sentence in a story to the extent that he spent years revising stories written as long as twenty years before, completing, in the case of "The Little Mother," as many as fifty versions.

Elements unifying the story cycles have not gone unnoticed by O'Connor's critics; most of them have been noted separately, particularly the repetition of characters from one story to the next, and from one volume to the next; notice has also been taken of O'Connor's tendency to group variations on a single theme, and to arrange stories according to the chronological age of the narrator. But all of his critics have stopped short of looking for a unifying story cycle. A reason for this hesitation may stem from O'Connor's own refusal to discuss his stories as cycles, although he acknowledges and analyzes them in the works of several other writers including Turgenev, George Moore, Sherwood Anderson, Babel, Hemingway, Joyce, and Mary Lavin. His widow, Harriet O'Donovan, continues to deflect students from considering his stories as composing cycles when she comments in her preface to a posthumous collection of his work:

He believed that stories, if arranged in an "ideal ambience," could strengthen and illuminate each other. This unity was only partly preconceived; he continued to create it as he went along. He never wrote a story specifically to fit into a gap in a book, nor did he change names or locations to give superficial unity. Rather it was as though the stories were bits of a

mosaic which would be arranged harmoniously so that the pattern they made together reflected the light each cast separately. Ultimately this unity probably sprang from his basic conviction that the writer was not simply an observer; "I can't write about something I don't admire. It goes back to the old concept of the celebration; you celebrate the hero, an idea."⁵

Indeed, the early attempts at cycles reflect a unity that is only "partially preconceived," and among the numerous editions of his stories there are many that obviously are collections and nothing more. Of the thirteen volumes of stories published during his lifetime, only six are involved in his development of a cycle form. And yet the existence of story cycles in O'Connor's canon helps explain contradictions in his criticism, and even in his autobiography, that are otherwise impossible to resolve. The fact is that in O'Connor's early criticism he makes idealistic claims for the significant role he expects of literature in the twentieth century, and for the significant role he sees for himself. In his twenties he anticipates a great age just ahead for literature as the repository for man's highest moral values, for the writer as a kind of spokesman for those values, and as a teacher of his readers. Even late in his career O'Connor, though gradually less demanding of the writer as teacher, tells an interviewer

⁵ Harriet O'Donovan, preface to Collection Three (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1969), p. viii.

that a writer must never be merely an observer; "I think the writer should be a reformer."⁶ O'Connor in his youth sees the writer as an exalted guide to readers who have lost their religious and social moorings as a result of the fragmentation of the nineteenth-century middle class society. The highest form of literature, he expounds in The Mirror in the Roadway, is the nineteenth century realistic novel, whose form is the best vehicle for expressing the daylight world of moral certitude. As the moral confusion of the twentieth century grows, it becomes increasingly difficult for anyone to write a novel. (O'Connor himself tried two times in the early years of his writing career, but gave it up.) Instead, the best vehicle for the expression of the twentieth century writer is the form of the short story, and the best theme is loneliness. When the wayward middle classes regain sight of their moral "mission," then a new realistic novel will be possible. This is the position he maintains in his last comments on the novel and story, written after completing his experiments with the form of the cycle. The cycle is important in his theory as a vehicle for moral teaching, at the same time reflecting the writer's attempts to begin a reintegration of ideas leading to the scope of the novel.

⁶ Frank O'Connor, "Frank O'Connor" by Anthony Whittier, Paris Review, XVII (Autumn-Winter, 1957), 63.

This theory places O'Connor as a writer out of the mainstream of the literature of his age. As modern writers express revolt from earlier values and literary standards, O'Connor expresses revolt from modern writers. Thus he can see himself as a reactionary in the face of the work of his contemporaries, at the same time as he is in the vanguard of a new realistic literature. He describes the movement from realism to romanticism and back as part of a great perennial swing of a cultural pendulum from two extremes, the realistic extreme of Mansfield Park, and the romantic extreme of Northanger Abbey. His choice of novels, both by Jane Austen, indicates his own preference for the realistic Mansfield Park as opposed to Northanger Abbey, a parody of the gothic novel.

A corollary to his theory of the cultural pendulum is the personal struggle that an individual of any era must experience internally between the poles of human nature, judgment and imagination. Just as a period of history is recognizable as being dominated by judgment or imagination, so is an individual writer. For O'Connor, the relative value of an era or an individual writer is gauged by the outcome of that battle between judgment and imagination. Moral judgment dominates the finest realistic novels of the nineteenth century; imagination dominates the finest autobiography of the twentieth century. O'Connor points out that what is generally accepted by critics as the modern

novel, is not the novel at all, which needs a middle class society to support it; instead, a modern "novel" is primarily a product of the imagination, therefore bearing little resemblance to the kind of work it is the writer's purpose to produce. A writer cannot be a reformer if he is locked in the processes of his own imagination. The writer exalted in O'Connor's theory is a moralist, a teacher, and a protector of the household gods of the potentially strong middle class society, even when that society has been temporarily dispersed. The curious thing about his criticism and autobiography is its aim to prove the value of the serious mission of a writer like O'Connor to an audience he feels is listening, instead, to the inner voices of Faulkner, Woolf, and O'Connor's rival, James Joyce. The aim of his youthful arguments is to demonstrate how a writer like himself is worthy of the name of teacher to a great number of readers with a clouded moral vision; the aim of his mature criticism is to exalt the modern short story writer who must express "the morality of the lonely individual soul" (The Mirror in the Roadway, p. 257).

The gulf that emerges between the early ambition and the final achievement accounts for many contradictions in O'Connor's criticism and autobiography; more are accounted for by the recognition that, even in the face of defeat, O'Connor is not willing to give up what he feels to be a

single-handed conflict. If he cannot shorten the swing of the pendulum on its way back to Mansfield Park, he can develop a way to protect the moral ideals of the wayward middle classes, until those values can be safely relocated in the pages of a realistic novel. In the meantime the safest place for moral value and comment is the form of the short story, and his own unacknowledged story cycle.

While arguing in The Lonely Voice that the single theme possible to the modern short story writer is an expression of his loneliness and that of the "submerged population group" he represents, O'Connor quietly continues to champion the writer as reformer, aware that the few herbs and apples of his original mighty ambitions are gathered in the form of the story cycle. Only in the cycle does he approach the unity he tries to manufacture in his criticism and in his autobiography. It is in the form of the story cycle, his major contribution to modern literature, that he achieves his finest design.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1903 Born in Cork, Ireland, on 17 September, Michael Francis O'Donovan, to Minnie and Michael O'Donovan.
- 1914 Decides to leave the Trades School of Cork, after brief encounter, and after being refused for college preparatory examination
- 1917 Joins the First Brigade of the Irish Republican Army, with ambitions of writing an Irish version of The Cossacks.
- 1922 Takes the side of the Irish Republican Army at the outbreak of the Civil War, assigned to propaganda unit.
- 1923 Begins life as a prisoner at Gormanstown Internment Camp, teaches Gaelic in camp.
- 1912-1928 Prepares for job as librarian in Carnegie Library Trust, assigned to Sligo, Wicklow, Cork.
- 1925 First article in "Literature and Life" series: "Literature and Life, the Poet as Professional," Irish Statesman, 3 October 1925.
- 1928 Moves to Dublin as librarian, forms friendships with George Russell, Lennox Robinson, and eventually, William Butler Yeats.
- 1931 Guests of the Nation, first volume of stories.
- 1932 The Saint and Mary Kate, first novel. Wild Birds' Nest, translations from Gaelic.
- 1935 Appointed to Board of Directors at Abbey Theatre.
- 1936 Bones of Contention, stories.
Three Old Brothers, only volume of original poetry.
- 1937 Begins collaboration with Hugh Hunt, produces "The Invincibles" at Abbey. Adapts "In the Train" to stage. Begins broadcasting for Radio Eireann.
The Big Fellow, only biography, of Michael Collins, leader of Free State forces through Irish Civil War.
- 1938 Lords and Commons, translations from Gaelic.

- 1938 Produces "Moses Rock" and "Time's Picket" at the Abbey.
 (cont) Radio debates with L. A. G. Strong.
 Resigns as librarian; involved in ecclesiastical
 divorce case of Elizabeth Bowen Speaight, whom he
 later marries.
- 1939 Resigns from Board of Directors of Abbey Theatre.
Fountain of Magic, translations from Gaelic.
- 1940 Dutch Interior, last novel (banned on 10 July).
- 1941 The Statue's Daughter produced in Ireland. Working
 with the BBC in London.
- 1942 Three Tales (Cuala).
- 1944 Crab Apple Jelly, story cycle.
- 1946 Selected Stories. The Midnight Court, translation
 from Gaelic (banned on 30 April).
- 1947 Irish Miles. Art of the Theatre. The Common Chord,
 story cycle (banned on 12 December).
- 1948 Road to Stratford. Separated from his wife.
- 1949 Leinster, Munster, and Connaught.
- 1951 Traveller's Samples, story cycle (banned on 20
 April). Teaches at Northwestern University
 and Harvard.
- 1952 Divorce. Death of his mother on 10 November.
- 1953 The Stories of Frank O'Connor. Marries Harriet Rich.
- 1954 More Stories.
- 1956 Mirror in the Roadway.
- 1957 Domestic Relations, final cycle.
- 1959 Book of Ireland. Kings, Lords and Commons, transla-
 tions from Gaelic.
- 1961 An Only Child. Teaches at Stanford University where
 suffers a stroke. Returns to Ireland.
- 1962 Awarded DLitt. from Trinity College, Dublin.

1963 Little Monasteries.

1964 The Lonely Voice. Collection Two.

1966 Death on March 10 in Dublin: burial 12 March, Dean's
Grange.

PART I

THE MANUFACTURE OF A DESIGN: O'CONNOR'S LITERARY
CRITICISM AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I

O'CONNOR'S EARLY CRITICISM, 1922-1945

O'Connor's concentration on the development of a story cycle spans about twenty-five years from the publication of his first volume of stories, Guests of the Nation (1931), to the last published cycle, Domestic Relations (1957). For several years during that period, however, O'Connor considered himself primarily a poet, and for several more, a dramatist; he also took a turn as a novelist, a biographer, and a translator of Gaelic verse. His experimental jumps from one genre to another reflect little continuity in style or theme, but the one underlying preoccupation distinguishable in all of O'Connor's work is present, the will to teach.

The criticism of these early years also reflects this preoccupation, sometimes couched in an excited prose that makes it seem an obsession. Many of his early newspaper articles published in The Irish Statesman share the title "Literature and Life," and share the purpose of explaining the possibilities for the great effect that literature can have upon its readers. After this series O'Connor participated in a number of radio broadcasts on Radio Eireann and the BBC, in which he eagerly speculates upon the future of literature in Ireland, a future so

bright that it promises rejuvenation of the entire moral outlook of a dogma-ridden society.

Besides the use of newspapers and radio, O'Connor's crusade was also taken to the Abbey Theatre where he became a member of the Board of Directors in 1935 and managing director in 1937. Out of this experience came several plays, most in collaboration with Hugh Hunt, but all embodying O'Connor's belief that only a drama reflecting the immediate surroundings of its specific audience can have an impact. Any drama of an earlier period belongs to a "museum" and to academic literary historians. These ideas he gathered into essays for The Bell, a periodical edited by his friend and fellow Corkman, Sean O'Faolain. But it is only in his first book of criticism on the nineteenth century novel that the foundations of his mature criticism are easily discernible. Towards An Appreciation of Literature was published in 1945, a little book of hardly more than fifty pages, but it shows a break with the method of assault O'Connor uses during the early years. By 1945 O'Connor had experienced several setbacks of his early plans: he learned that those energetic methods were having little effect on his audience that he could discern, that one of his books was banned in Ireland, that he had been ousted from the Abbey Theatre, and that the Catholic Church felt his habit of criticizing the Church for the country's backwardness could do real harm to the moral well-being

of Irish readers. It is characteristic of O'Connor's single-minded vision that his rejection in Ireland did not change his ideas, only his method of presenting them.

Essays on "Literature and Life"

In O'Connor's earliest newspaper articles he repeats the title "Literature and Life." He expresses opinions on "Literature and Life, the poet as professional," "Literature and Life: Heine," "Literature and Life: Egan O'Rahilly," and among many more "Literature and Life: the evocation of the past--Proust." Writing with eagerness and enthusiasm O'Connor is deeply intent upon expounding his ideas to an audience, and on speculating about the kind of effect he may expect to have upon an audience. Among the many attempts to earn money during these years, O'Connor tried to teach, whether it was through propaganda for the Irish Republican Army, or as a travelling teacher of Gaelic, or as a librarian who feels libraries have an obligation to institute programs for teaching literature along lines of increasing complexity. Even when he was placed in an internment camp as an I.R.A. prisoner after the Civil War of 1922, O'Connor's first activity was to help organize classes with himself teaching Gaelic.

His aim to educate others is an offshoot of O'Connor's own exalted ideas of literature developed in his early childhood. As a child of a charwoman and a laborer with

a propensity for drinking, O'Connor was frustrated in his own desire for education; he came to think of it in capital letters as the only way to extricate himself from his family's stunning poverty. By the time he was fourteen his desire for an education was heightened by a sense of desperation, particularly since he had failed in trade school after having failed his hopes for a college preparatory course. Writing half a century later in his autobiography, O'Connor recalls his early yearnings for an education.

Apart from any natural liking I may have had for education, I knew it was the only way of escaping from the situation in which I found myself. Everyone admitted that . . . The difficulty was to get started. It seemed to be extremely hard to get an education, or even--at the level on which we lived--to discover what it was . . .

I was always very fond of heights, and afterwards it struck me that reading was only another form of height, and a more perilous one. It was a way of looking beyond your own back yard into the neighbors'.¹

After years of writing about literature O'Connor never forgot the phrase "Literature and Life" which came to be part of his explanation of literature's purpose. Literature is the repository for man's highest values. One of O'Connor's colleagues after he became a teacher in the

¹ Frank O'Connor, An Only Child (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), pp. 117-18. All further references to this work are in the text.

United States was Richard T. Gill, who comments on the persistence of O'Connor's ideas, and the recurrence of the phrase that appeared in his earliest essays.

When Frank O'Connor was teaching at the Harvard Summer School in the early 1950s, he sometimes spoke of establishing a permanent school of writing in the United States. It typified his feelings about Americans. He thought they were wonderfully talented, imaginative people, well worth any effort put into them. He also thought they were badly in need of instruction about literature and life. The dual attitude persisted through the ten years he spent intermittently in this country.²

The early essays about literature and life are memorable only for the intensity of his feelings about the exalted role of literature in the twentieth century, and the important role that the writer as teacher must perform. As his reputation began to grow in his own country, O'Connor welcomed the opportunity to reach a larger audience through radio broadcasts, not only reading his own stories in performances that became popular, but also discussing his ambitions for the role of literature in Ireland. Two broadcasts, particularly, are significant for the extravagant claims in his arguments. In one broadcast, a debate with L. A. G. Strong, O'Connor answers affirmatively to the question "Should Provincial Writers Stay at Home?" In a

² Richard T. Gill, "Frank O'Connor in Harvard," in Michael/Frank (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 38.

second debate headed "Classic or Best Seller?" he professes a belief in the intuitive powers of an uneducated Irish audience to recognize the best in literature, so that the best becomes the most popular.

In "Should Provincial Writers Stay at Home" transcribed for publication in The Listener, O'Connor identifies the writer as a teacher who is only able to reach his audience by first living among them. He says that an Irish writer, if he is to fulfill the purpose of a writer, must literally dig his heels into Irish soil before he begins to write. When Strong makes objections to the literalness of the argument O'Connor persists in the necessity for staying at home; unless an Irish writer remains in the country where his audience lives, then he is unable to feel the "contention" that his writing evokes. And unless an Irish writer can evoke this feeling of contention from the social and religious institutions he criticizes, then he is not doing his job. Staying at home produces in O'Connor "the feeling that I'm helping to mould the opinion of a new generation."³

He argues that all of the really good writers have stayed at home; there was J. M. Synge who could not make

³ L. A. G. Strong and Frank O'Connor, "Should Provincial Writers Stay at Home?" The Listener, March 1939, p. 591.

any progress on a new play until he actually returned to the Aran Islands to write. The result, O'Connor points out, was Playboy of the Western World. L. A. G. Strong's guffaw does not deter O'Connor from a sober report that nothing came of the dramatists who did leave home, George Bernard Shaw, for example. Shaw wanted "to change the face of the world" but could not have any effect on his proper audience, his Irish one. But W. B. Yeats, who only wanted "to improve the speaking of verse" at the Abbey Theatre, created a national theatre.

The best writers, O'Connor continues, must also keep in mind that their provincial audience is ignorant, and that a degree of indirection is vital to the art of persuasion. The audience needs to be persuaded of the important relationship between literature and life. O'Connor's goal is also to re-educate Irish writers to that important relationship.

O'Connor: You see the amount of influence one can have in a small country is limited. One doesn't admit isms, one conceals ideas, one remains more essentially the artist.

Strong: I've never yet heard of an Irishman concealing his ideas.

O'Connor: I used the wrong word--I should have said "disguises" ideas, as Turgenev disguised ideas when he was attacking slavery in Russia.

Strong: Yes, I've seen several plays at the Abbey in which the ideas were most effectively disguised.

O'Connor: Unfortunately, that's the danger of writing for a provincial audience--one leaves out the ideas. But the character of the audience becomes a portion of the work. Because of

that whatever one writes has a sense of life. Life seems to have slipped out of modern literature.⁴

O'Connor gets the sharpest disagreement from Strong when he predicts that "one day we hope to influence opinion sufficiently to create a public conscience which the politicians will not be able to command." Until this remark Strong reacts to O'Connor's statements with good humor, even though he himself chose to leave the Ireland of his boyhood to write in England, which by O'Connor's standards means defeat. Strong wants to know how, precisely, O'Connor expects to create through his writing a "public conscience" for the Irish audience. O'Connor's remark is more prophetic of his own experience than it is an effective answer to Strong's question. He exclaims "My goodness, man, don't they ban us? Isn't that a proof that we're working on them?"⁵ Within two years O'Connor's novel, Dutch Interior, was officially banned in Ireland, and he himself was on his way to the first of many retreats from Irish soil, this time to work in England for the BBC.

Yet when Strong and O'Connor meet again for a radio debate O'Connor's crusading spirit is more buoyant than ever. He declares in their debate called "Classic or Best Seller?" that the times are really ripe for the popular recognition

⁴ Ibid., p. 592.

⁵ Ibid.

of the relation literature has to life. O'Connor opens the discussion with the rallying declaration that "I want the writers to get down to the people; the people are ready for them."⁶ Although there are supposed to be three people discussing criteria for judging the ephemeral and the permanent in contemporary literature, O'Connor ends any argument in a long, passionate speech on the innate good sense of his audience, "the raw, new middle class we're working on." If they are only allowed to see the best of art then they will respond wholeheartedly to it.

The public, of course is never allowed to see the good stuff. It's two years since Yeats' death and to Dublin's shame not one of his great plays has been produced there, and yet you meet people who tell you: "Oh, the public doesn't want it." How can the public tell whether it wants it or not when it's never given the chance to see it? . . .

If only the public, the decent little shoemaker in Cork who has worked like a devil for thirty years to support an invalid wife, or the typist in Birmingham who works into the night for love of her job, only knew the savage hatred of them that is expressed by a Hollywood film or the average Wild West story, they would burn every cinema and bookshop to the ground. "That's what the public wants." According to this practice the public, the little shoemaker, is fit for nothing higher than the worst we can give them. That's one thing democracy has got to do for itself; it's got to restore its own self-respect.⁷

During O'Connor's experience at the Abbey Theatre, one marked by sharp feuds over its management, he produced one

⁶ Frank O'Connor, L. A. G. Strong, and Desmond Hawkins, "Classic or Best Seller?" The Listener, November 1940, p. 665.

⁷ Ibid.

play that he felt justified his ideas about reaching a contemporary audience with "living drama" as opposed to "museum drama." With the help of Hugh Hunt O'Connor adapted one of his best short stories, "In the Train," to the stage. When the curtain went up he was deeply gratified to hear a murmur of approval from the audience, even before a character spoke a line. The scene was an Irish railway coach, and at the center of the stage was a big, Irish policeman, who resembled the policemen theatre-goers met on the way to the Abbey.

His deep desire to win a response from his audience leads him to the extreme position of his essays on "The Art of the Theatre" appearing in The Bell. In these essays he argues the good sense of banning all "museum drama" from the stage, except maybe the stage of university theatres with an audience of history students. Remembering his own failure as producer of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard before leaving his hometown of Cork, he announces that "A real man of the theatre would be horrified at the thought of a London production of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard."⁸ His argument is that the contemporary English or Irish audience has never heard of rubles, samovars, or versts, so the words destroy the life on the stage.

⁸ Frank O'Connor, "The Art of the Theatre, II.--The Writer," The Bell, April 1945, p. 53.

The individual reader, reading a story by Chekhov, can re-read meditate, look up unfamiliar words or facts, till he has an adequate picture of the situation in his mind; an audience cannot; and every line which doesn't explain itself at once to a thousand people is dead. A play taken over from another period, another language, another form of society, is about as sensible as a speech of Marshal Stalin's taken over by Mr. Churchill would be. You can no more repeat the effect of Macbeth than you can repeat the effect of Lincoln's Gettysburg speech.⁹

While this is perhaps the deepest corner any of his arguments on literature and life gets him into, he never completely abandons his ideas on the theatre. The subject of the drama becomes a minor one, as O'Connor moves on to a subject closer to his heart, and to the development of his theories as a story writer. His last attempt to educate the "raw, new, middle class" of Ireland through criticism is Towards an Appreciation of Literature, a study of the nineteenth century novel that promises to educate the reader without the methods of direct attack O'Connor uses in his essays on literature and life.

Towards an Appreciation of Literature

What distinguishes Towards an Appreciation of Literature (1945) from the essays and broadcasts that come before is O'Connor's attempt "to get down to the people" rather than to say that writers should be doing it. After twenty years of essay writing, O'Connor has not found an

⁹ Ibid.

appreciable change in Ireland's moral climate, or even in the general level of education. Instead of talking about becoming a teacher in his literature, O'Connor becomes a teacher in his criticism. And the subject of his first lecture is close to the heart of his developing theories on the novel and short story. By 1945 O'Connor has given up the writing of poetry (except his "collaborations" with early Gaelic poets through translation); he has given up the writing of drama, and of the novel. By 1945 he has come to think of himself as a story writer, and has embarked on his most serious experiments to enlarge the form which he hopes to make "the repository of moral value." Towards an Appreciation of Literature is designed to "mould the opinion" of an audience he covets for his own stories. Through the art of persuasion he attempts to prove that the nineteenth century realistic novel is the highest form of literature. It is only in a later critical work on the short story that he connects the nineteenth century novelist's motivations with his own.

The tone of his lecture is persuasive; at times it is even brotherly, because he identifies his reader with himself as a boy in Cork, when he had no one to help him choose a book from the Carnegie library. He imagines his reader to have an education in no areas except those areas all Irishmen know too much about, politics and religion. The reader is an "autodidact" who needs some maps to the

city of literature, and a sympathetic guide to help him interpret them.

In his brotherly manner O'Connor recounts his own difficult experience in trying to educate himself, and he promises to make it easier for the reader than it was for him. He would very much have liked a guide because

the city of literature is just as big and complicated as any other capital, and a man can be just as lonely there. It has its sharks and bores, its snobbish quarters and stews, and a great many quiet suburbs where all sorts of obscure and attractive people live.¹⁰

During the journey O'Connor points out that the high road leading to the best part of the city is the realistic novel of the nineteenth century, and luckily for himself and the autodidact, it is by far the most easily accessible road for the uneducated reader. The novels are easily read because the idiom is still comprehensible without footnotes, and the entertaining stories are about everyday lives of everyday people not too very different from the autodidact.

After pointing out that even so complicated a city can become familiar when all the streets are named, he explains that there is a second approach to sorting out the books in the Carnegie library.

¹⁰ Frank O'Connor, Towards an Appreciation of Literature (Dublin: Metropolitan, 1945), p. 7. All further references to this work are in the text.

Literature then has two dimensions, a dimension in time which is history, and a dimension in space which is contemporary literature. From the first we derive our standards, our sense of what is important and what is of merely temporary significance, from the other the living impact of contemporary thought which is too confused to allow us to do much more than guess at what is important in it and what is not, whose writers are people relatively as well as absolutely like ourselves, and in whom we do not have to separate the incidentals of period, race, and profession. Without that I doubt if one can appreciate literature at all. (Towards an Appreciation, p. 49)

The further back in history a reader goes to select a book, the more difficulty he will have in comprehending the writer's purpose. To help sort out the complicated shifts in custom and value the reader should choose good criticism to help him understand this foreign literature. There is only one exception to the rule, criticism on Shakespeare. Shakespeare is the one writer who is powerful enough to reach through the ages and give the reader a sense of his greatness while the reader knows practically nothing about him. This statement is the beginning of the one major digression of the essay, and the one point where a genuine autodidact immediately loses the brotherly guide. The digression enlarges upon O'Connor's claim that "I cannot think of one single critical work on Shakespeare which I could recommend" (Towards an Appreciation, p. 33). In this section of the essay O'Connor explains some of his ideas on Shakespeare's work later appearing in his critical study, Shakespeare's Progress (1948). The digression has no

relevance to the overall intention of educating a reader in search of advice, and is aimed at critics with whom O'Connor is in violent disagreement.

Except for this one case of Shakespeare, O'Connor says that no matter which direction the reader may travel from the nineteenth century novel, backwards into the eighteenth century or forward into the twentieth, he will run into difficulty. The eighteenth century, particularly, is filled with pitfalls because the writers are dedicated to a social ideal of conduct that transcends literature. Writers like Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope all seem to be talking double talk, unless they are put in their proper places in the giant jigsaw puzzle of the century. But even after the student does read the required amount of history, he finds that there is still something wrong with these writers, because the age lacks the healthy balance of the nineteenth century. Although O'Connor goes into no detail in this essay, he criticizes the eighteenth century on the basis of a theory developed in later critical analyses. The eighteenth century writers suffer from an overdose of judgment at the expense of their imaginative powers.

Under all the superficial contentment with their lot it is hard not to feel that men of letters were profoundly unhappy. How can one ignore the fact that Cowper, Swift and Johnson, all three religious men, were either deranged or overthrown by insanity? The attempt at self-discipline, the approximation to classical standards had been going on for such a very long time, and become

so much more exacting that it actually seems to have distorted the intellect of men who could not hold themselves on so tight a rein. (Towards an Appreciation, p. 44)

As O'Connor looks at the literature on the other end of the nineteenth century, he finds trouble ahead for the autodidact, but for the opposite reason that plagues the eighteenth century writers. The happy balance of the nineteenth century is again lost because these writers, instead of holding themselves on "too tight a rein," have thrown the reins down altogether, and bolted into the inner world of the imagination, where there is no social reality to restrict the writer's freedom. But neither is there much in the works of these writers that is relevant to the moral development of the autodidact. For the twentieth century writer, "the essential realities of literature are not contained in the conscious mind at all, but in the memory and the subconscious mind from which the writer dredges them" (Towards an Appreciation, p. 51). The modern writer turns to autobiography rather than to the novel, and the convoluted style reflecting his mental processes is bound to create problems for the inexperienced reader.

There is another difficulty for the reader of twentieth century fiction, and it can prove a dangerous one. The high road of realism leading through the nineteenth century turns into a dark side street as it nears the twentieth century, and it leads to the dead end of

naturalism. The naturalist, says O'Connor, is deserving of censure because he refrains from moral comment, breaking the cardinal rule "That, then, is literature, not a substitute for life but a completion and an explanation, which, if it always lacks the intensity of real experience, frequently makes up for it in profundity" (Towards an Appreciation, p. 13). The naturalist's theory leads him to the mistaken belief that literature can be a substitute for life, and he consciously refuses to accept the responsibility of the writer, who is a moralist.

I have always suspected that that theory of writing must have originated in a painter's studio, for it is by its very nature unliterary. Literature, as I shall have occasion to remind you, is a frightfully impure art. A painter can paint a good-looking poisoner without bothering his head about whether or not he approves of poisoning on principle, but there is always something freakish about a writer who refrains from moral judgment and feeling. (Towards an Appreciation, p. 26)

The most "freakish" writer O'Connor introduces to his reader is James Joyce, whose work is alluded to several times throughout the essay, often because of his "abnormal" style akin to that of the naturalist, but mostly because he is a man of questionable moral value. Throughout the rest of O'Connor's writing career he makes a habit of linking a "pictorial" style like Joyce's, Flaubert's, Henry James's and even Ben Jonson's, with a lack of sturdy moral principle. These are the writers who "loved literature too well." Joyce is probably the worst of the lot, because he combines

the worst faults of the twentieth century writers in his two major characters, Stephen Daedalus and Leopold Bloom in Ulysses.

It is at this point that we begin to perceive the rent in our civilization; either the mind turns inwards looking for the richness it has lost, which produces autobiographical writing, or it looks at the bank holiday crowd with distasteful objectivity. Ulysses combines the two, the introspection of Stephen Daedalus and the spiritual emptiness of Mr. Bloom. (Towards an Appreciation, p. 57)

But the heart of O'Connor's introduction to literature is showing his reader the best of literature, the nineteenth century novel. The basis for his evaluation is that at bottom the novel is the repository of moral value, because it is a reflection of the healthy middle classes of the century who held Christian ethics in highest esteem. He begins his study with the works of his favorite novelist, Jane Austen, promising that the reader can also receive lessons from her in "good breeding and literary taste." More than that, she has a beautifully clear conception of moral excellence, and offers the best in literature.

. . . this simple clear workmanlike ethic gives it [the novel] a characteristic note of deep human feeling which may perhaps preserve it from the fate of Elizabethan tragedy, forever sunk because of its moral anarchy. It is a profoundly serious art--sometimes as in Tolstoy's Sevastopol we get the impression that never before has so grave a subject been adequately treated;--is respectful of human life and dignity, and from the very beginning has been the normal medium for the expression of humanitarian sentiment. (Towards an Appreciation, p. 18)

If O'Connor has convinced his reader that he should take a copy of Pride and Prejudice out of the Carnegie library, then he has accomplished the purpose of his introduction to literature. The entire essay reflects a sobered re-evaluation of his early claims for the writer whose audience is "the raw, new middle class." It is a concession on O'Connor's part that the job of acting as a guide to his audience is much harder than he at first imagined. It is not yet an admission that the audience he wishes to influence in Ireland may never respond to his work with even a small measure of the approval he originally anticipated. That comment does not come until his final book of criticism on modern fiction, The Lonely Voice. In the meantime he continues his search for the best form in which to make his voice heard, and in his criticism he turns to a new audience. Instead of his autodidact, or the little shoemaker and secretary of Cork, he addresses his fullest ideas about the development of modern literature to students at the Harvard Summer School of 1953 and 1954, from these lectures developing his major critical statement, The Mirror in the Roadway.

CHAPTER II
THE MAJOR CRITICISM, THE MIRROR IN THE ROADWAY
AND THE LONELY VOICE

In The Mirror in the Roadway, published within a year of O'Connor's last story cycle, Domestic Relations (1957), he explains a theory of imagination and judgment that is also an organizing principle in his story cycles. The theory performs two functions in the book of criticism: first, it shows how the history of literature is built upon shifting relationships between the imagination and judgment, the two essential poles of human nature; and second, it shows how an individual in any age can reach maturity by establishing the proper balance between imagination and judgment. The key to the theory is a definition of what the "proper" balance may be. As O'Connor suggests in Towards an Appreciation of Literature, a proper balance belongs to the nineteenth century novel, in which judgment plays the dominant role.

The third important function of the theory, both in the criticism and the story cycle, is to show how the individual who achieves the proper relationship between judgment and imagination is also endowed with the understanding of a moralist. O'Connor points out the best writers according to the best moral values, which resemble his own; in his

final story cycle he shows how one character struggles toward maturity, and is able to comment wisely on the other characters; he, too, possesses O'Connor's moral values. O'Connor embellishes the theory with observations that are also part of the story cycle. The faculty of judgment is a masculine principle, and the faculty of imagination is a feminine one; judgment produces an image of objective reality, and imagination an image of subjective reality. When the two are united, then an individual is capable of perceiving truth, the moralist capable of teaching it.

The Mirror in the Roadway is an elaboration of O'Connor's observation in earlier criticism that the ideas of order in eighteenth century literature are unfortunately weighted with an over-supply of judgment, the writers suffering from the restraints of "too tight a rein." Twentieth century writers confront the chaos of unbridled imagination, and while free of objective reality, lack the power of judgment. The nineteenth century novel is the pinnacle of man's literary achievement because it reflects the healthy moral standards of a Protestant middle class ethic. O'Connor's study of the novel shows how the pendulum of history swings through the nineteenth century away from romantic excesses of Northanger Abbey at the end of the eighteenth century, and toward the realistic world of Mansfield Park, a novel O'Connor finds a little too heavy with the weight of judgment. The books are used by O'Connor to

represent two extremes, with literary history forever swinging between them. By the end of the nineteenth century he shows how the pendulum again approaches Northanger Abbey. Summing up the change, he describes how the pendulum works, and at the same time, where his own preferences lie.

It is hard to trace the collapse of the classical novel without first realizing how the educated classes themselves were split during the eighties and nineties of the last century. If one takes England, there are, on the one hand, the scientific optimists like Shaw who believed that scientific progress was the real key to man's continued existence; and on the other hand the symbolists like Wilde and Yeats who had no belief in progress. The latter were bored by the novel as they were by the tendentious poetry of the late Victorians, and the alternative was there, in their own fantasies. Jane Austen had drawn back in horror from the romantic excesses of Northanger Abbey; the young writers at the end of the century were bored and disgusted by the tedium of Mansfield Park. Neither can ever die. Northanger Abbey is in all of us from our earliest dreams of pleasure and power; the Gothick castles are not in history, but in our imaginations. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 251)

It is that preference that causes O'Connor the difficulties he encounters when he carries his explanation of literary history into his second major critical work, The Lonely Voice. His explanation of how moral truth is apprehended makes a gothic castle of the imagination of no value to the moralist. O'Connor, the moralist, is unable to follow the pendulum swing to Northanger Abbey. His argument forms a circle that does not give him an outlet in the twentieth century. The moralist needs a strong middle class ethic from which to draw his moral inspiration, and he needs

at least a "raw, new, middle class" to whom he can comment. In The Lonely Voice he reports he must place his back against the wall of history where his one defense must be "the morality of the lonely individual soul."

In neither critical study, however, is there evidence that O'Connor is content with the authority of one lonely, individual vision. His trump card in The Mirror in the Roadway is his theory of the imagination and judgment as it refers to individual development. Choosing among the writers whose work and lives he discusses in his study, he finds that the best ones experience conflicts very like his own. Jane Austen, Ivan Turgenev, Anthony Trollope, and Anton Chekhov have the highest moral values, by his judgment. Austen and Turgenev suffer from too great a love for the imagination, and must exorcise the excess from their lives and work. O'Connor describes in his autobiography how he painfully, gradually struggles with his imagination to bring it under the guidance of his masculine judgment. Trollope and Chekhov, the saints of literature, suffer from dreadful feelings of inferiority, not unlike those O'Connor describes in his autobiography.

O'Connor's theory of imagination and judgment does not receive the same lengthy treatment in The Lonely Voice as it does in The Mirror in the Roadway. He simply says which story writers are cock-eyed romantics (most of them), and refers to their immaturity as readily as he cites his own

maturity as the criterion of his judgment. This accounts for a recurring tone of irritation in the study, but it also relieves O'Connor of the burden of "proving" how his morality of the lonely individual soul makes it possible for him to judge his standards as superior to those of any other lonely individual soul among twentieth century writers. In his theory of the imagination there is little room for relativism.

The underlying conflict in his two major works of criticism is one that concerns authority. How can O'Connor, the moralist and teacher, win credence for his teaching when it relies on a Protestant middle class creed that is not dominant in his own age, a creed taking its authority from a religious impulse no longer playing a dominant role in society? In theory O'Connor identifies his own voice with one, individual, lonely writer's. In practice he demonstrates that he does not believe it. Still applying an essentially Christian creed, judging writers by their sense of goodness and badness and forgiveness, O'Connor professes his belief in his own authority beyond any he has been able to prove. When the values he repeatedly admires in other writers consistently resemble his own, and the techniques he admires in others consistently resemble his own, then the greatest value of his criticism becomes apparent, its effectiveness as a guide to his own art.

The Mirror in the Roadway

The problem of authority is not one that concerns O'Connor during his early years as a critic; he places confidence in future events to justify his faith in the "raw, new middle class," with their innate ability to respond to the best in literature and to improve accordingly the quality of their moral vision. Realizing later that his audience has not responded with epiphantic understanding to his scheme for them and for himself as a teacher, O'Connor begins another strategy, to initiate the "autodidact" to the long process of education, taking care that the high road of nineteenth century realism is clearly marked for its moral superiority. But in 1957 O'Connor's own struggle with the short story cycle is near an end, and he turns his attention to an audience that is better than any he has approached before; he prepares lectures on his favorite subject, the nineteenth century novel, for a lecture series at the Harvard Summer School of 1953, 1954.

He calls his study The Mirror in the Roadway after Stendhal's observation that a novel reflects reality like a mirror placed on the high road of society; the form of the novel he treats is "incomparably the greatest form of modern arts, greater even than the symphony with which it has so much in common; greater perhaps than any other popular literary form since the Greek theatre" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 3). The purpose of his study is to point out the

organizing principles upon which this great art was formed, how it came to be, and why it disappeared. It is an inductive survey of the form, intended to introduce the novel to his students. To outline the direction of his examination O'Connor expands Stendhal's metaphor to show how writers shift their own positions in relation to the mirror, so that only a few of the eighteen writers included in the study understand Stendhal's meaning, including at times, Stendhal himself. The ones who understand it best refuse to distort through their imaginations what the mirror image of the novel should show. Jane Austen is a writer who "is aware of people as objects in a way that cannot be compared with the awareness of any novelist before or of more than a few after her" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 98). Stendhal is also capable of holding up the mirror to the world around him, but his heated imagination finally frees him from objective reality through a retreat into history and a world he creates to suit himself.

For whereas in The Red and the Black he had collided with contemporary reality with every ounce of his energy, in The Charterhouse of Parma he does with historical material what Balzac did with contemporary material: comes at it from an angle so close that we are scarcely aware of an impact. The external reality as described is identical with the imaginative conception of the characters. . . . While there is something agonizing for the reader in Julien's attempts at imposing his imagination on a life that he does not consider life, Fabrizio's difficulties are solved for him before the book begins. In this atmosphere heavy with irony there is no particular importance about

anything he could do . . . Everything is too easy; there is no harsh reality that stops anyone dead. Imaginative freedom, the quality for which the dramatist has to struggle, is only a burden to the novelist. His characters are best determined and delimited; his prisons are best bolted and barred. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 57)

The "inductive method" thus gives way almost immediately in O'Connor's description of the first two novelists he chooses. The next step of O'Connor's discussion of the novel includes the writers who begin to hold up a "distorting mirror" to reality; they are Dickens, Balzac, Gogol and Thackeray, all of whom allow their imaginations to overstep the boundaries of their judgment. The second major group of novelists, in turn, react against the excesses of these writers, and two of them, at least, return to the novel proper. Reacting against the writers of the "distorting mirror" are Turgenev, Tolstoy, Flaubert and Trollope, but the two who succeed in writing true novels are Turgenev and Trollope. Tolstoy leaps from reality into his own imagination, and Flaubert moves down a dimly lit side street that leads him, and eventually a number of other writers, to the dead end of naturalism. Neither of them keeps to the main road of realism; Tolstoy's moral judgment is marred by the tyranny of his own imagination, while Flaubert refuses the writer's obligation of moral comment. Flaubert is the more culpable of these two writers, not because he introduces an adulteress into the novel but because he falls in love with her himself.

In the third group of novelists are several in whom the pendulum swing toward Northanger Abbey is already discernible. They are Dostoevsky, Henry James, Hardy, and Chekhov, who dwell in the "desolation of reality." Only one of these writers remembers the mirror and its proper function; he is Chekhov, one of the two genuine saints of literature. It does not distress O'Connor that Chekhov is not a novelist; in The Lonely Voice he shows how the writers of moral vision must preserve that vision in the short story form during the journey through an age dominated by Northanger Abbey. After Chekhov, the story of the nineteenth century novel is at an end, and O'Connor's last group of writers step behind the mirror, and produce figures of the imagination unlike any reflected in Stendhal's mirror in the roadway.

The organization of his book is designed to show that Jane Austen "is probably the greatest of English novelists," (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 12), while the last writer he discusses, James Joyce, is by comparison, one of those "abnormal" men who should never have turned their minds to writing at all. The analysis of Joyce in The Mirror in the Roadway is among the milder attacks O'Connor makes upon his fellow Irishman, yet he still maintains that Joyce's metaphoric style is dangerous to the well-being of humanity; in this style

man himself is reduced to a metaphor, a step that is openly taken in Finnegan's Wake, and the Aristotelian philosophy with which we began has gone out the window. From Bloom, who cannot even defecate without illustrating something, it is only a step to H. C. E., who is merely a metaphor in the mind of God and has no personal existence.

Like the atom bomb, this can result only in the liquidation of humanity and humanity has no choice but to retrace its steps and learn the business of living all over again. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 312)

By the end of O'Connor's tour of the nineteenth century novel, it is clear that his own "Aristotelian philosophy" of the novel is also "out the window," and other organizing principles are at work in his analysis. The inductive method announced in his "Preliminary" to the study is questionable, not only because of his own value judgments, but because the major novelists are not all represented. Nowhere in The Mirror in the Roadway does O'Connor discuss, for example, George Eliot. While his criteria for judging the novel are not "Aristotelian," neither do they rely on the innate good sense of Irish shopkeepers and shoemakers. In the "Preliminary" to his study where he isolates attributes of the novel by his "inductive" method, he also indicates that he is capable of throwing in his lot with only a few of the writers he analyzes; the reasons are moral.

First, he offers a brief history of the novel's sources, which lie in the birth of the Protestant middle class society during Shakespeare's time. The novel was actually born when a character in Beaumont and Fletcher's

Knight of the Burning Pestle demands a hero from his own trade; "I will have a grocer and he will do admirable things." But the impact of the middle class creed was also developing elsewhere:

It was in the Lowlands rather than in England that the middle classes established themselves politically, and pictorially their attitude was fully expressed in Dutch genre painting. Except for the moral passion which is literature's main contribution to the arts, a Dutch interior might be chosen as the ideal of the nineteenth-century novelist. Dutch painting clarifies what we can already discern in the remains of the middle-class Elizabethan theater. The novel, when it came, would be primarily domestic and civic, would concentrate on the study of society and the place of the individual in it, and on the structure of the classes, professions, and trades rather than on the mythological or historical past. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 12)

Because of their preference in material--daily life, middle class customs--it was necessary that the treatment of the subjects "would be realistic rather than romantic, prosaic rather than poetic" (Mirror in the Roadway, pp. 12-13). The reader of the novel also required verisimilitude, truthfulness with regard to characters and with regard to fact. O'Connor's list of attributes of the novel adds up to "a profoundly serious art," and he repeats his descriptions from Towards an Appreciation of Literature about the "clear, workmanlike ethic" and "the note of deep human feeling as satisfying to our unspoiled moral sense as is the gleam of tiles in a Dutch painting to our unspoiled aesthetic sense . . ." (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 14).

At the end of his "Preliminary" to the study O'Connor confesses that the attributes of the nineteenth century novel have convinced him that the form is the best of art that man can produce, because its values are the most useful guides for any individual's life. His criterion for judging the works of eighteen writers is the moral value system he has come to admire in the nineteenth century novel.

In fact, I am afraid that the truth is that I am not only a nineteenth-century realist, but also a nineteenth century liberal. I am not sure that either realism or liberalism is a good thing in itself, but at least I believe that they are aspects of the same attitude of mind. I have an idea that conservatism and romanticism may be aspects of the same attitude of mind. I even fancy that symbolism and naturalism in literature, fascism and communism in politics, represent substantially similar attitudes. And being, as I am, a realist and liberal, I must maintain in my mild, muddled, liberal way that, on the whole they seem to me bad attitudes. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 16)

This method of analyzing novelists and their work accounts for O'Connor's preference for nineteenth century novelists as opposed to the "autobiographers" of the twentieth century. Demonstrating his method at the end of the "Preliminary" section of the book, he gives an example of the "humanitarian sentiment" characterizing the novel. He offers a very simple, foolproof way of determining a writer's moral soundness, by his reaction to a common practice of nineteenth century penal codes, the public executions and floggings of convicted criminals. "Nothing so clearly reveals a man's ultimate attitude to human life,"

O'Connor says, as the response to this practice: the great day of the novel has not yet arrived "when Swift howls for Defoe's ears," (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 14); the great age of the novel is at an end when D. H. Lawrence argues against abolishing the death penalty in Sea and Sardinia. O'Connor quotes Lawrence with disapproval, and then adds:

Forgive an old-fashioned liberal, and bear with him a little, but I do not like that tone. I do not like it at all. As a liberal, I hate to raise my voice, but I really must say that I think, in the words of Mr. Woodhouse in Jane Austen's novel, that "that young man is not quite the thing." (The Mirror in the Roadway, p. 16)

And yet the antipathy on O'Connor's part for writers of the twentieth century as opposed to those of the nineteenth century does not isolate his authority for elevating Turgenev above Tolstoy, Trollope above Flaubert, and Jane Austen above nearly everyone else. O'Connor's criterion for most of the value judgments he makes in The Mirror in the Roadway derive from a theory he only alludes to once, and then in a short paragraph in the introduction. His one oblique allusion to the central authority for his judgments merits quotation in full:

For some years I have been working on the problem of dream language, not as a psychologist, but as a writer interested in the problem of language. This study seemed to me to support none of the existing psychoanalytical theories. Instead, it seemed to emphasize the classical distinction between judgment and instinct, which in dreams is represented by the metaphor of father and mother.

Naturally, I have no desire to take sides in the eternal dialectic. The purpose of dreams is mainly to keep these two forces in balance, and conflict occurs only when one or the other is threatened. It helps us to understand certain writers in whom the conflict is visible--for instance, Jane Austen and Turgenev--and has no other importance. (The Mirror in the Roadway, p. v)

Thrown away in the phrase "and has no other importance" is O'Connor's theory of the masculine judgment and feminine imagination. It is the tool he uses to elevate the work of Austen above the work of Balzac and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and Henry James, and most of all, above that of James Joyce. It is the corollary to his theory of the cultural pendulum applied to individual writers, and it gives him the lever he needs to show his Harvard Summer School audience that their popular lions of literature in 1953, James Joyce at their head, are the writers who need to be toppled so that humanity can "retrace its steps and learn the business of living all over again."

The Mirror in the Roadway is the first of O'Connor's two-part apologia for his own vision of reality, and he begins his task by showing how his own conflict between imagination and judgment, the conflict that finally gives him the power of recognizing moral truth, is identical with the conflict found in the greatest writers in the history of literature.

The conflicts between imagination and judgment he finds most interesting are those in the lives of Jane Austen

and Ivan Turgenev, whose works are elevated above most of the other writers analyzed in the study; while they both suffer from different experiences in their personal lives that dictate the form their conflict takes, it comes to the same thing in both writers, and to the same thing in O'Connor's life and work. All three writers approach the conflict between imagination and judgment with a bias in favor of judgment, which is proper for the moralist, and which makes them the writers they are, and of the quality they are. Yet each of them "loved poetry too well."

O'Connor explains Austen's conflict, supplying autobiographical information from his own imagination when none is available from history. He finds sufficient material in facts of Turgenev's life to corroborate his judgment of the conflict, and he spends two volumes of his own autobiography explaining the route that the conflict between imagination and judgment takes in his life, therefore in his works.

In his analysis of Austen and Turgenev, he studies their works, isolates the elements of the conflict, turns to biographical data to prove it, and again uses the facts of their lives to prove his analysis. The very circularity of the arguments reveals the intensity of O'Connor's own struggle, to the extent that he is willing to defend his own glaring misinterpretations of his favorite writers, to show he is just like them. The fanciful literary heritage he creates for himself is a way of proof by numbers. At the

same time his attraction to these writers is due to very real identifications with themes and techniques similar to his own.

Jane Austen's conflict between imagination and judgment becomes so acute that it is finally the one subject of all of her writing. Since "Contradictory desires are the basis of all character drawing in literature," (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 92) O'Connor finds it appropriate that Austen habitually creates characters dominated by the faculty of judgment, and characters who are motivated by their imaginative faculties. It is a natural corollary to the "classical distinction" he alludes to in the study's introduction, and Austen understands the psychology of it by creating female characters of imagination and male characters of judgment. The unfortunate outcome, as O'Connor sees it, is that the male characters are pallid "father figures." But Austen herself has greatest respect for the faculty of judgment, as she should have as a moralist of her stature, and as a writer of her comic talents. Her attitudes suit her perfectly for the job of writing realistic novels that are by nature weighted on the side of comedy and of judgment.

Pointing out these two principal attributes of the novel he finds that they impose unfortunate limitations on the form, since they exclude tragedy. Yet nowhere in his criticism or in his own writing does O'Connor show any

interest in tragedy, a word he sometimes uses to mean pathos. Nevertheless, he says in the "Preliminary" to The Mirror in the Roadway

The principal drawback, as I see it, is that by appealing to the intelligence instead of the imagination, it tends to break down the old classical division of comedy and tragedy, and that because comedy is so very much the art of intelligence it weights the scales in favor of the comic writer. It is not for nothing that Jane Austen is probably the greatest of English novelists, or that a real tragedy is an exceedingly rare thing in the novel form. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 12)

Setting the stage for the major conflict in her writing, Austen first takes the precautions that greatly contribute to her success as a master of characterization. She sharply restricts the area in which her characters move, actually to a world bounded by "fifty miles of good road" as she has a character in Sense and Sensibility remark. This allows the writer the opportunity to insure verisimilitude through direct observation. Austen knows practically all that there is to know about her characters, and she can achieve the first rule of the nineteenth century novel, a rule she made up herself--to require strict truthfulness in regard to characters and truthfulness in regard to facts. The extent of these self-imposed restrictions is apparent in a refusal to record even one private conversation between two men, since she never heard one. O'Connor explains how this is related to her central subject:

The reason for this was not primarily artistic. It was because the author's subject--her obsession, one might say--was the imagination, and she could observe this only by isolating it in the manner of a scientist. Her verisimilitude is of an entirely different kind from that of any other novelist, for it has something about it that is reminiscent at the same time of a scientific technique and of a ritual. Truth as it is perceived by the judgment is her aim, and everything that would disturb this is eliminated. (Mirror in the Roadway, pp. 19-20)

Another characteristic of her writing meets with O'Connor's approval (and imitation) concerning her use of point of view. The wise comment that separates the realists from the naturalists is best achieved by allowing the writer a chance to speak in his own voice, or at least to have a reliable character to speak for him. Austen gains the freedom for her own comment by slipping in and out of the minds of most of her characters, remaining detached from them all. It is executed so well that in a book like Pride and Prejudice "Because Elizabeth Bennet is the heroine, most readers will tell you offhand that the story is told from her point of view," when in fact Austen maneuvers to present her "own standards which are never entirely left out of the picture" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 28). He finds in Austen a writer who would be as impatient as himself with placing an unfair burden on the reader to analyze symbol and metaphor in order to learn the writer's meaning. O'Connor imagines Austen's horror at the thought of having to present Elizabeth Bennet's attraction to Darcy

by sending her out in a field to wring the neck of a wintry peacock. Laurentian indirection is a step towards the defeat of the moralist who needs to make sure that his meaning is absolutely clear.

Yet for all of Austen's virtues she makes mistakes, even with point of view, as in the case of Emma. The heroine of this book is a product of Austen's growing sickness, caused by her own fear of the imaginative powers within herself.

The subject of Emma is a bad one, for it is a closed circuit; everything of importance takes place within the mind of the principal character, and this mind is a fantastic one, incapable not only of seeing events accurately, but also of judging itself and its own motives. Everything depends upon the reader's ability to perceive immediately when Emma starts to go wrong. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 34)

This process is a "flattery for the knowing type of reader" but it can easily confuse the Irish shopkeeper, shoemaker, and typist.

For all her virtues Austen mars her work and her life through a rigid determination to repress the imaginative side of her nature. The explanation is simple:

She does so because the moralist and the artist, the judgment and the instincts, are always at war in her, and she never really distinguishes between respect, which is the goal of the moralist, and affection, which is the goal of the artist. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 26)

In O'Connor's estimate Austen had to draw her heroes from

the masculine side of her own character, "the side she respected." The problem with this is that the heroes who unbendingly represent judgment do so "in spite of the fact that in real life they must have had fantasies to contend with" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 26). The sad thing for the reader is that the heroes become "father figures" and are never really as interesting as the vibrant characters of imagination. This is what Austen tries to achieve in her best book Pride and Prejudice, but fortunately she lacks the strength to carry out her plan. In Pride and Prejudice "exceptionally and providentially

Jane Austen walks out on moralizing and permits the judgment to have faults of its own, as with Darcy's pride, which causes as much tribulation as though it had been a fault of the imagination. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 29)

Austen's determination to betray her own nature makes one of her major works Mansfield Park, a major failure. In this case Austen's sickness causes her to create two imaginative characters, Mary Crawford and her brother Henry, who are villains. The problem is that the villains are much more likeable than the good characters of sense, the insipid Fanny Price, and the dull Edward Bertram. The task of convincing the reader to condemn the attractive characters is too much, even for Austen's great talent.

What she tried to do is make us respect Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram and dislike Henry and Mary Crawford.

Edmund is in love with Mary, which is natural enough, as she is the only woman in the book whom any sensible man could be in love with. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 29)

Fortunately for Edmund, he does not overlook some of Mary Crawford's flaws that O'Connor does not identify. Mary Crawford is willing for Edmund's older brother to die, so that Edmund will inherit enough money for him to support Mary in London, where he does not want to live, so she can enjoy the social life there, which he does not like. The "good" characters of Fanny and Edmund are both culpable in their displays of "sense" because their natures have not been allowed to develop properly. There are parallel explanations for Mary Crawford's character, which was not given the proper boundaries through childhood lessons of conduct. But these O'Connor ignores, as he ignores the design of Pride and Prejudice.

O'Connor finds the most convincing argument for his theory of Austen's repression of the imagination in the plans for a play to be put on by the residents and guests at Mansfield Park. The "bad" characters want the play, and the "good" characters have proper reactions against it. But Fanny and Edmund are not so much against a play as they are against the freedom it affords Edmund's married sister for a flirtation with a handsome playboy among the actors. They fear she will become attracted to him, which she does, and even run away with him, which she does. But for

O'Connor the circumstances reveal that Austen loves theatricals herself, and to gain control over her dangerous imagination, she must condemn them. Unable to find a good reason for this in her life, O'Connor offers a possibility from his own imagination.

As Lionel Trilling points out, it is not that Jane Austen was not familiar with amateur theatricals, for she had had them in her own home. No, theatricals here, like landscape and poetry in the earlier books, are not things the author dislikes, but things she likes far too well. It is as though at some time that gifted girl with her passion for the arts had had ducks and drakes played with her feelings by some talented hanger-on of literature and the theater. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 31)

The argument of Austen's growing sickness is carried through discussions of Emma, Persuasion and Sanditon until O'Connor concludes she made a sad discovery about one of her good characters; "it was not fancy but judgment, that had put Anne Eliot's life astray." This outcome is a "natural sequel to the restraints she [Austen] had imposed on herself in youth, the revenge of her imagination on her judgment" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 41).

This analysis of Austen--ingeniously conceived and ingeniously adapted to the individual works--seems difficult to place within the framework of The Mirror in the Roadway, since it tends to show that her achievement is less than merits his original claims for "the greatest English novelist." But despite her faults, her preeminence is secured by the even greater faults O'Connor discovers in

others. Balzac and Dickens, though they expand the scope of the novel to give a panorama of society, succumb to worse faults than Austen--they allow their imaginations to distort the mirror in the roadway.¹

It should not be distressing, then, to find that his second favorite writer suffers from greater bouts of self-deception than Austen. Not only does Turgenev try to exorcise his love of poetry from his work in order to strengthen his judgment, but he complicates his difficult task by secretly wishing that the cruel Russia of the past will triumph over the progressive Russia he postulates for the future. All of this has to do with a masochistic tendency developed over the years by his mother's tyranny. It is also a source of his feeling he is weak-willed and romantic. But, as with Austen, he has virtues that far outshine his flaws.

First, his characters are not dwarfed by a great panorama of society; Turgenev, like Austen does not make

¹ Answering David Cecil's defense of the exaggerated characters in Dickens--"exaggeration is a sign his imagination was working"--O'Connor retorts "Is it not on the ground that the statements he made are, if anything, less than the truth? What indeed is the purpose of referring to the truth at all in such a context if the only criterion is the imagination?" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 72).

Balzac fares worse than Dickens, as O'Connor calls him a "mystic." "Because of some psychological quirk, he refused to distinguish between fancy and fact, imagination and reality, intuition and judgment" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 88). The vehemence of O'Connor's criticism is revealed in his making imagination stand at the opposite pole of reality. Neither of these imaginative writers achieves the moral excellence of Austen's work, he concludes.

excessive use of the "local color" belonging to Dickens and Balzac.

Turgenev and Tolstoy are orderly writers, as Stendhal and Jane Austen are orderly writers. Though they use local color in the same way as Balzac, they use it with economy and grace. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 128)

Local color, in O'Connor's terms, is a device invented by Sir Walter Scott to enlarge the surface of his mirror. But it is a dangerous technique because

The narrative line of a story is a horizontal one, a line through time, but the true story-teller simultaneously creates a vertical, spatial movement about it without interrupting it. Every development in the art of Scott's use of local color to Joyce's dissociated metaphor has this end in mind. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 129)

Thus the static, poetic quality of A Sportsman's Sketches is achieved through local color, but in the hands of a lesser writer the descriptive language begins to exist for its own sake. And that is where Flaubert's influence begins to take over. Fortunately, O'Connor finds Turgenev soon reacting against Flaubert's influence, and in the novels he retrieves some of Austen's qualities. There are, at any rate, no Mr. Tulkinghorns or Père Goriot's in Turgenev's work. He is content when

People meet, talk in a civilized way about subjects of civilized interest, fall in love, and either marry or separate. They do not commit murder or suicide. The emotions evoked by them are reflective and philosophical rather than dramatic or violent. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 132)

The comment could as easily apply to a story by Frank O'Connor, including the comment on what O'Connor finds to be one of Turgenev's best works, Smoke. "No character in it exceeds the dimensions of everyday life, and even the duel scene is leveled out to a mood of semi-comedy" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 142).

And yet Turgenev's novels, unlike Austen's, usually begin in the wrong place, using "organic form" rather than the "essential form" of the novel proper. In essential form, the characters' lives are presented as they unfold in a chronological order. Other than using the wrong form, Turgenev does know how to limit his observation to characters he knows; he represents scenes of daily life to reveal the highest values of man, and he refuses to stray from the "integral truth" by exaggeration of character or excesses of local color. All of these characteristics endear him to O'Connor.

Turgenev is also of value to O'Connor as he demonstrates the novelist's conflict between imagination and judgment. In On the Eve, for example, Turgenev creates a poet who is irresponsible, and a man of action (judgment) who despises poetry. At times, however, O'Connor catches Turgenev out for falsifying his determined pattern of praising the man of action and judgment, and criticizing the silly poet. Insarov, the man of action, has no time or respect for poetry; no great man of action should think of poetry, but

there is a scene when Insarov goes into raptures over the folk ballads of his country.

In those very contradictory impressions we catch a glimpse of the conflict in Turgenev himself, a conflict that distinctly resembles the conflict in Jane Austen. She distrusts poetry (by which she is obviously deeply attracted), seeing it as a way of weakening the judgment; Turgenev distrusts it as a way of weakening the will. He found it difficult to make a hero of a man who did not love poetry, but impossible to believe that a man who loved poetry as he did could not be a hero. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 138)

While Austen and Turgenev suffer in their conflict between imagination and judgment, they endeavor to subordinate imagination to the moralist's faculty of judgment. If they had entirely succeeded, they would have ceased to write as the tension of their art would inevitably have collapsed, either that or their work would have descended into sermon. The imaginative faculty fires the artist's vision, but without judgment there is no relation of the artist's world to objective reality or truth.²

But the tendency of O'Connor to turn literary history on its ear is one he explains himself in terms again, of Jane

² Tolstoy, in O'Connor's scheme is like Balzac in that the imagination finally breaks the circuit with reality. He accepts no standard of judgment but trusts instead to his imagination. He "seems to have lived in revolt against the very idea of a father, accepts no authority other than that of his own blind instincts. Or so it seems, but it is not quite so simple as that." The main difference between Turgenev and Tolstoy, which elevates Turgenev above his countryman is that Turgenev is a democrat, a liberal and a rationalist. Tolstoy begins with a violent conservatism that ends in complete anarchy. (Mirror in the Roadway, pp. 150-51)

Austen:

She brooded in the way of a creative writer rather than in that of a scholar; that is, she read her own problems into the work she studied in a way that any academic critic would properly shun, but precisely because of this her criticism has to be understood if we are to understand her creative work. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 18)

With some maneuvering O'Connor is able to satisfy himself that Austen and Turgenev are among the great writers of the nineteenth century because their struggle between judgment and imagination puts them on the side of judgment, and thus they are moralists like himself. Had he recognized Turgenev's criticism of the men of action like Insarov in On the Eve, and Basarov in Fathers and Sons, he might have connected Turgenev more closely with the pendulum swing toward the relativism of twentieth century literature. But, essentially, O'Connor approves of Turgenev's moral vision, and of his confidence in the men of judgment who require future events for the justification of his ideas of order. O'Connor approves of Austen's moral order, which resolves itself into proper marriages, with her personal conflict only sometimes blurring her otherwise crystal-clear vision. When he comes to the next great writer of the century, Anthony Trollope, O'Connor admits to a difficulty of assessment he experiences with no other writer in his discussion of the novel. Trollope appears to live in a stable, middle class society, yet his moral judgments are withheld.

Trollope is not in O'Connor's opinion the "typical mid-Victorian gentleman" that one critic says he is, yet he is still a writer who has not been forced to express "the morality of the lonely individual soul" that Chekhov and O'Connor as short-story writers must proclaim. O'Connor finds that Trollope and Chekhov share a "saintly" compassion that prevents them from imposing "preconceived" codes of conduct on their characters. In Trollope's world there are characters like Phineas Finn, who marries for the wrong reasons; Lady Glenora Palliser, who is tempted to commit adultery; and Mrs. Proudie who realizes after years of marriage that she has been a bad wife. Trollope refuses to censure them. O'Connor concedes that Trollope may seem a "typical mid-Victorian" in conservative attitudes toward social and clerical institutional change, but his "saintly" compassion prevents him from condemning the conduct of his "bad" characters. O'Connor delights in quoting his favorite line from Trollope's work: "'With such censures I cannot profess that I completely agree.'"

O'Connor steps aside from defining Trollope's moral position by deciding that Trollope is not a moralist at all. He sets Austen and Trollope side by side to explain their differences.

If one compares the realism of the two writers, one finds, I think, the quality that has kept Trollope so popular. She writes from a preconceived idea of conduct, where he does not. She is a moralist; Trollope is

whatever the opposite of a moralist may be. Though Cecil declares that his standards were those of "the typical mid-Victorian gentleman," . . . I do not for an instant think it is true. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 167)

His difficulty in discussing Trollope's moral values is akin to his distress over calling himself a writer of one man's lonely morality, when he is simultaneously sure that it has a validity beyond the trap of relativism laid for him at Northanger Abbey. He says that Austen has a "preconceived idea of conduct" while Trollope, living in a middle class Protestant world, allows his characters to create their own standards of conduct. Thus Trollope is not a moralist. Throughout his criticism O'Connor uses phrases like "idea of conduct," "ethical code," as synonyms for "morality." He finds that "Not only is Trollope not a moralist in Jane Austen's sense, he even loathes the sort of moral consistency she admires" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 169).

It is a difficulty that becomes more acute when O'Connor attacks characters in his own stories who are afraid, for example, to face Irish social pressures in order to acknowledge their illegitimate children. O'Connor approaches the dilemma with the compassion he identifies in Trollope and Chekhov, but he does not hesitate to judge the intolerance and fear that causes the suffering. While he can label himself a "reformer" and a "moralist," he finds that neither of these terms applies to Trollope.

Instead, Trollope's deep sense of compassion causes him to suspend moral judgment. This compassion "rather than realism represents Trollope's true quality as a novelist. Not merely loyalty to the facts, but loyalty to a certain attitude to the facts, to a humility and passivity in the face of life" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 172).

It is through this compassion that O'Connor is able to identify with Trollope, and recognize him as one of the great writers of the century. His description of how Trollope learned compassion sounds familiar to a reader of O'Connor's autobiography. O'Connor says that Trollope must have grown up with a terrible sense of inferiority imposed on him by acute poverty in childhood, along with the "desperate gloom" stemming from a desire for a better life without knowing how to achieve it. Trollope was a man "who had himself been badly mauled by life and who experienced an almost physical terror of doing the same to others" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 171). While the compassion that attends Trollope's insight into the right and wrong-doing of his characters' lives inspires O'Connor with a "fanatic" admiration for the writer, the "humility and passivity in the face of life" baffles him. He concludes that for all of Trollope's insight into his characters' lives, he could never fathom his own character. This is apparent from his own lack of self-consciousness, which to O'Connor, marks

Trollope for genuine sainthood. Having the proper balance between judgment and imagination, having the power of the moralist, Trollope refrains from using it, and he fails in the job of "reformer."

With Chekhov, the last of the great nineteenth century writers, O'Connor has no difficulty in discerning the moralist. Like Trollope and O'Connor, Chekhov grew up with a sense of inferiority, because he was born "a slave's son." Chekhov's value system is easier to understand than Trollope's because his morality calls for reform, and he clearly analyzes and judges the moral guilt of his characters. He also has a sense of the future re-emergence of a strong middle class society that will religiously adhere to the highest moral ideals of the middle classes, with Chekhov's teachers and scientists protecting those ideals in the meantime.

While O'Connor is unable to find this optimistic tone in Trollope, he can praise Chekhov's aim to "attempt a synthesis of a world that is already falling into chaos about him" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 253). O'Connor, too, identifies closely with what he believes is Chekhov's idea of future social coherence. In the meantime they both must turn to the short story because

the short story is the art form that deals with the individual when there is no longer a society to absorb him, and when he is compelled to exist, as it were, by his own inner light. (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 253)

Too, Chekhov has the "belief in a God who represents culture and knowledge, and a devil who represents ignorance and passion" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 255) which also shows his bias on the proper side of the conflict between imagination and judgment. Chekhov and O'Connor can recognize "the short-story writers' morality of the lonely individual soul." It is surely a comfort to O'Connor that by the end of the pendulum swing across the nineteenth century he can find a kinship with a moralist like Anton Chekhov, can find similarities between them both and Anthony Trollope, and can see how all of their work is in a line of descent from Turgenev and Austen, in whose worlds it is easy to tell the good people from the bad people.

The Lonely Voice

In the final section of The Mirror in the Roadway O'Connor shows how twentieth century writers, for the most part, follow the pendulum swing away from realism and liberalism; they turn towards romanticism, symbolism and fascism, or they are attracted to conservatism, naturalism and communism. All these attitudes find roomy accommodations at Northanger Abbey. Lamenting what he finds to be the inevitable darkness at this extreme of the pendulum swing, he stalwartly maintains that the only way to tell the truth in literature is to unite man's subjective nature

with objective reality. In the twentieth century, however, he can find no authoritative voice stronger than his own to reaffirm this truth. In his conclusion he quotes Christ's reply to the Doctor of the Laws, who asks which of the commandments is the most important: "and Christ replied by quoting the first two; 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God' and 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor,' and added 'there is no commandment more important than these.'" O'Connor interprets the question as the "age-old" one about subjective and objective truth:

Christ's reply, if I understand it, means merely that reality is inapprehensible; that if we keep our minds and hearts like clear glass, the light of God shines through us, but that we can be certain of God's presence within us only by the light it sheds on the world outside us. That, in fact, Truth is subjective and objective, and there is no truth greater than that. (The Mirror in the Roadway, p. 316)

While the conclusion of the book is not a logical conclusion to O'Connor's arguments, it gives, at least, a tone of finality to the question of relativism that troubles his thought in The Mirror in the Roadway. In The Lonely Voice, his next critical work, there is no talk about the necessity of making one's mind and heart like clear glass, and once more he promises an inductive study of the modern short story form, an analysis of its components, and an evaluation of the work of eleven story writers.

Again, however, the "Aristotelian philosophy" of The Mirror in the Roadway is thrown "out the window" as O'Connor introduces a set of rigid requirements for a definition of the modern short story form. First, the short story has only one theme, human loneliness, and this theme divides the form sharply from the world of the nineteenth century novel. (He settles the problem of a writer like Turgenev, who is credited with a volume of stories and with several novels, by pointing out the stories are about loneliness, and the novels about men in society.) The basis for his argument is the theory of the cultural pendulum; in the daylight of nineteenth-century realism a writer was supported by the values and customs of a Protestant middle class; but in the dim light of the twentieth century the Protestant middle class has broken up into many "submerged population groups," and a writer can speak only for the segment of society he chooses for his subject. While the populations are varied--Chekhov has his doctors and teachers, Sherwood Anderson his Midwestern provincials, Maupassant his "sexual population," and O'Connor his Irish provincials--the theme must always be the same for any story writer, the loneliness of the respective submerged population, and the isolation of the writer who speaks for it. The conditions creating the submerged populations immediately separating the short story from the novel include the waning of religious

belief, the rise of Freudian psychology, the holocaust of world war, in short, those conditions dispersing the cohesive, Protestant society of the nineteenth century middle classes.

Sherwood Anderson's writing is a good example of the sort of story possible to the modern writer. The stories in Winesburg, Ohio are about a submerged population suffering from the "defeat inflicted by a society that has no goals and no answers." Summing up the central theme of all short stories O'Connor explains

there is in the short story at its most characteristic something we do not often find in the novel--an intense awareness of human loneliness. Indeed, it might be truer to say that while we often read a familiar novel again for companionship, we approach the short story in a very different mood. It is more akin to the mood of Pascal's saying: "Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie."⁴

The tone of O'Connor's explanation is despondent, understandably so, in the light of his earlier hopes for the writer as a moral guide; the voice of the teacher is drowned out, the audience dispersed, and a reader hears in

⁴ Frank O'Connor, The Lonely Voice, a Study of the Short Story (Cleveland: World, 1963), p. 19. All further references to this work are in the text. While O'Connor asserts that the single theme is possible to the modern story writer, he adds this qualification: "I have admitted that I do not profess to understand the idea fully: it is too vast for a writer with no critical or historical training to explore by his own inner light, but there are too many indications of its general truth for me to ignore it altogether" (Lonely Voice, p. 19).

the story an echo of his own cry of loneliness. The purpose of the modern story writer is far removed from O'Connor's first optimistic plans for himself and his Irish population; the tone of despondency becomes stronger whenever the Irish audience, in particular, is mentioned. O'Connor observes that it is far more difficult for the Irish artist in the twentieth century to succeed than it is for anyone else; his loneliness is apparently more acute than that of writers of other nationalities. Noting a general geographical distribution of the novel and the short story, O'Connor says that his country "which had failed to produce a single novelist, had produced four or five storytellers who seemed to me to be first rate."

Searching for a reason he says

I have traced these differences very tentatively, but--on the whole, as I now think, correctly--to a difference in the national attitude toward society. In America as in Czarist Russia one might describe the intellectual's attitude to society as "It may work," in England as "It must work," and in Ireland as "It can't work." A young American of our own time or a young Russian of Turgenev's might look forward with a certain amount of cynicism to a measure of success and influence; nothing but bad luck could prevent a young Englishman's achieving it, even today; while a young Irishman can still expect nothing but incomprehension, ridicule, and injustice. Which is exactly what the author of Dubliners got. (Lonely Voice, p. 20)

It is small consolation for the moralist, and O'Connor finds that most modern Irish writers learn their limitations the hard way. An Irish writer who does attempt a novel must conclude one of two things: that as a writer

he must emigrate, or he must fall into a heavy, contemplative resignation. That is because the teachers and priests are not heard as they should be. In Ireland

There has been no development comparable with the development of the short story, such as would even make it possible for a critic to speak of the Irish novel, and the reason is plain. There is no place in Irish life for the priest or the teacher, no future for them but emigration as in Moore, or resignation as in Corkery. (Lonely Voice, p. 206)⁴

The statement supports the conclusion of his own second attempt at the novel, Dutch Interior. The central (autobiographical) character is a failed artist who with self-pitying resignation decides to live in Ireland and take care of his mother. (The novel was published, and banned, in Ireland near the time that O'Connor emigrated to England.) What is most important about his claims for the story and novel in Ireland is that they are not supported in his own short stories whose themes are not restricted to one lyric lonely cry; nor does a typical character in one of O'Connor's stories follow the definition of the one kind of character possible in the modern short story. A representative character for the short story

⁴ O'Connor refers to George Moore's The Lake, and Daniel Corkery's The Threshold of Quiet, neither one approaching the quality or scope of Joyce's Ulysses. O'Connor does not include this work in a discussion of the Irish novel, because by his definitions of novel and story, Ulysses is nothing more than an absurdly long short story.

is Akakey Akakeivitch of Gogol's The Overcoat, a poor copying clerk who loses his happiness when he loses his overcoat. This character is a "grotesque," a character at too great an extreme from normality for any possible identification between him and the reader. The clerk is "the first appearance in fiction of the Little Man, which may define what I mean by the short story better than any terms I may later use about it" (Lonely Voice, p. 15). An effective way of presenting the theme of loneliness "is to take the mock-heroic character, the absurd little copying clerk, and impose his image over that of the crucified Jesus, so that even while we laugh we are filled with horror at the resemblance" (Lonely Voice, p. 16). There is no one human enough for the reader to identify with "unless it is that nameless horrified figure who represents the author" (Lonely Voice, p. 17).

Thus the character of a short story represents another dividing line between the novel and the story. In the novel there is always some identification between the reader and at least one character; that identification, says O'Connor, invariably leads to some concept of normality. The concept of normality leads to some relationship between reader, character, and society as a whole. As he shows in The Mirror in the Roadway, this process of identification means there is common agreement on the definition of "normality," and the writer has his podium firmly built

from which to deliver his moral comments. But O'Connor does not make application of his definition of theme and character of the short story, even for the duration of the book's introduction.

He says the lonely dreamers of Winesburg, Ohio fit his definition, as well as the artists and priests of Moore's The Untilled Field. But his next example of the modern story is Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants," and it is a poor story, O'Connor suggests, because the characters are not normal.

Hemingway's story actually gives a more genuine sense of characters "wandering about the fringes of society" than Moore's characters in The Untilled Field, but O'Connor believes otherwise. He says that Hemingway does not understand what a "submerged population" is; his characters do not seem to have jobs, or homes, and they are always drinking, or going on big game hunts, or pursuing some other form of "recreation." In short, they are not like everyday people, and O'Connor criticizes the story because the characters are not real enough to excite the reader's "moral imagination." What seems to annoy O'Connor the most is that the subject itself is immoral. The two characters in the story are discussing the possibility of an abortion, about which O'Connor has solid moral judgments. In the chapter on Hemingway's work O'Connor returns to the story in more detail:

What has happened to the familiar element in it; if this girl, Jig, is not American, what is she? Does she have parents, a job, a home to go back to, if against all the indications she decides to have this baby? And the man? Is there any compelling reason why he should feel that an abortion is necessary or is he merely destructive by nature? (Lonely Voice, p. 167)

The only commendation O'Connor has for either of these characters is that the girl's hesitation to agree to an abortion suggests she may have had "some kind of moral upbringing." Rather than applying his "Aristotelian" definition of a short story to evaluate "Hills Like White Elephants," he returns to the same questions of The Mirror in the Roadway: are the writer's moral standards up to those of O'Connor, and therefore are his characters moral?

In his discussion of "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" he loses patience entirely, and his tone becomes sarcastic, this time because Hemingway's subject has no relevance to the business of living. The reader must become aware that Hemingway's personal unhealthiness prevents him from writing about pertinent subjects "if one is not to emerge from one's reading without a ludicrously distorted impression of human life" (Lonely Voice, p. 168). It is clear from the majority of O'Connor's analyses of short stories and short story writers that Northanger Abbey has been unable to trap him into "a ludicrously distorted impression of human life." O'Connor's characters are like those of Trollope described in The

Mirror in the Roadway: they rise "out of a flat plain of normality," whether O'Connor can objectively define normality or not. He simply knows what it is. As Richard Ellman comments of O'Connor's criticism, "He thought he was stating conclusions that nobody in his right mind could miss."⁵

O'Connor discusses a third aspect of the modern short story, its lack of "the tone of a man's voice speaking," then turns his back on the definition in his criticism and fiction. Modern writers have created such "artistic" stories that the tone of a man's voice speaking is lost; it is another manifestation of the writer's sense of alienation. Once, stories were part of an oral tradition, in the days of a coherent social community, and the speaking voice was present. In Ireland the art was practiced by the "shanachie" who began stories in the way that The Lonely Voice begins, as O'Connor quotes: "'By the hokies, there was a man in this place one time by the name of Ned Sullivan, and a queer thing happened him late one night and he coming up the Valley Road from Durlas'" (Lonely Voice, p. 13). The speaking voice has gone out of the short story because it has become a private art, and the writer, O'Connor says, is almost shyly hesitant to intrude on the solitary reader by his fireside. The Russian writer,

⁵ Richard Ellman, "Michael-Frank," in Michael Frank, p. 25.

Leskov, is O'Connor's example of the public storyteller with the tone of addressing a whole community of listeners. When a later writer, Rudyard Kipling, uses a public tone, O'Connor criticizes it as false. But in Bones of Contention, O'Connor's second volume of stories, he attempts to get the "tone of a man's voice speaking" back into the story by imitating the shanachie as part of his single-minded purpose to reach a large audience. (Although experiments with the "shanachie" generally do not work, O'Connor later tries a more successful approach to the tone of a man's voice speaking.)

These three elements--theme, character, tone of voice--distinguish the short story from the novel. These three elements in O'Connor's writing have no resemblance to his definition of the modern short story. In his own work he does not generally treat the story form as a vehicle for a lyric cry of loneliness; he does not create mock-heroic characters which he imposes on the figure of the crucified Jesus, or Moses, or any of the figures he mentions as proper to the storyteller's method; and he does not write with the tone of the "horrified" author communicating that horror and loneliness to the solitary reader. A general introduction to the stories of Frank O'Connor begins with a reversal of his definition of the modern short story.

In his hands the theme of loneliness becomes a demand for communication, a demand accomplished in the

manner of the realist, the moralist, and the liberal he identifies himself with in The Mirror in the Roadway.

His stories most characteristically involve a criticism of individuals--everyday, normal, people who do their best to cope with their families and neighbors and priests, and who are always recognizable as full-bodied human beings; there is not one Akakey Akakeivitch in the nearly two hundred stories in O'Connor's canon. These characters, however, are not as 'normal' as they should be; there is something lacking in themselves and in their society. They are in need of moral guidance, which O'Connor points out through the application of his theory of the personal conflict between imagination and judgment. His characters do live in a coherent middle class society, the values have staled, the religion is dogmatic, the social customs are rigid, and the characters are, therefore, unable to achieve the proper balance between imagination and judgment. Often in a story by O'Connor there are women of imagination and men of judgment who are attracted to one another, but because they are locked in their separate worlds they do not form lasting friendships. A happy marriage like Elizabeth Bennet's to Mr. Darcy is out of the question. Marriages do occur, but more often than not, characters choose the wrong partners. Similarly, he describes relationships among friends, brothers, parents and children, where in some way the conflict between imagination and judgment is a losing one.

The theme of loneliness is part of O'Connor's world, but the moralist in him knows what is to be done about it. The reader hopefully can recognize O'Connor's "tone of a man's voice speaking," his own voice as a moralist, or that of a reliable narrator's (but not the shanachie of early stories). From this voice comes the comment on the moral condition of the characters and the world around them. In O'Connor's final, and most successful, story cycle the narrator becomes reliable before the reader's eyes, as he matures from one story to the next, struggling for the proper relationship between his own imagination and judgment. He finally matures into a moral individual who recognizes that relationship, making him capable of being a writer like O'Connor.

The question is, then, why O'Connor wages a subversive battle in The Lonely Voice, creating a gulf between his definition and his practice. An answer to the question is suggested in a discussion of his three favorite writers, Turgenev, Chekhov, and Mary Lavin, all of whom share the moral values he celebrates in his criticism and stories, and who are pitted against the other writers in his study who have been mesmerized by the motion of the cultural pendulum. These writers all experiment with two forms of the short story, the "conte" and the "nouvelle," and it is through the second form they are able to expand the writer's perimeters toward the novel, sometimes finding the elements

necessary for composing a story cycle, the next best thing to Mansfield Park when the rest of the world is living at Northanger Abbey.

O'Connor treats the two terms with the same lack of respect he has for practically all of the other terms of literary criticism--and of critics--he mentions. The terms "conte" and "nouvelle," as they are applied in The Lonely Voice have little resemblance to their uses in French literary history. They are even terms he finds distasteful, as is apparent from his frequent remarks about their inadequacy, and from his willingness to alter their meaning as it suits his context.⁶ Yet there are real distinctions he wishes to make about two kinds of short story, one of them he feels to be of far greater value for his own purposes, and for the purposes of literature in general. While he experiments with both forms, he prefers the nouvelle for its shared characteristics with the novel.

In his definitions of conte and nouvelle, he begins by saying that they have three things in common, the same

⁶ He remarks of the conte, "Now, 'Yermolai and the Miller's Wife' is a short story, a conte, if you can stand the French term" (The Lonely Voice, p. 25). Of the nouvelle, he says "In his later stories Turgenev returned to the earlier form he had used, that of the nouvelle. Because we so badly need a term for it we should perhaps ignore the unfortunate connotations of the word and simply say 'novelette' to describe the short novel or the long short story" (The Lonely Voice, p. 52).

three characteristics all short stories have distinguishing them from the novel. Again, ignoring literary tradition, he says that the conte and nouvelle are entirely modern forms, developed to take the place of the novel when that form was obliterated by twentieth century "permissive romanticism" and "autobiography." Neither the conte nor the nouvelle flourished when there was a strong middle class society to support the novel. Their theme is loneliness, their character is the "Little Man," and the writer's voice is "horrified."

These differences he calls "ideological," and then he describes formal differences the ideological ones impose on the conte and nouvelle in contrast with the novel. They cause the writer to struggle with the concept of time. The "essential form" of the novelist must be replaced by the "organic form" of the story writer.

If the novelist takes a character of any interest and sets him up in opposition to society, and then, as a result of the conflict between them, allows his character either to master society or to be mastered by it, he has done all that can be expected of him. In this the element of Time is his greatest asset; the chronological development of character or incident is essential form as we see it in life, and the novelist flouts it at his own peril.

For the short-story writer there is no such thing as essential form. Because his frame of reference can never be the totality of a human life, he must be forever selecting the point at which he can approach it, and each selection he makes contains the possibility of a new form as well as the possibility of a complete fiasco. (The Lonely Voice, p. 21)

So far, there is no difference between the conte and the nouvelle, and they are both very different from the novel. But then, O'Connor shows that the conte is an "artistic" form descended from the kind of writing Flaubert liked best, "pictorial" writing originating in a painter's studio. In The Mirror in the Roadway he describes the "horizontal line of long narrative fiction" that is different from the story's design. " . . . the true story-teller simultaneously creates a vertical, spatial movement about it without interrupting it. Every development in the art of Scott's use of local color to Joyce's dissociated metaphor has this end in mind" (Mirror in the Roadway, p. 129). The conte is the more compact of the two kinds of story, and it takes a conscientious artist to suggest "Past, present, and future" of his characters' lives through this "vertical, spatial movement." As Maupassant defines the conte in his preface to Pierre et Jean, it is a form limited to from one hundred and fifty, to two hundred lines; according to this definition O'Connor says it is "too rudimentary a form for a writer to go very far wrong in; it is rarely more than an anecdote, a nouvelle stripped of most of its detail" (Lonely Voice, p. 26).

A conte by O'Connor's definition is a short story in which

the whole narrative has been concentrated into one single episode, by telescoping the events of several years back

into those of one night with the aid of flashback and of indirect narration. Except when it is used by a very scrupulous artist, this is an exceedingly dangerous device, because not only does the combination of exposition and development confuse and weary the reader, but the whole may be something quite different from the sum of its parts . . . if I had to write the story of "Yermolai and the Miller's Wife" I should have preferred the form of the novelette, beginning at the beginning . . . (The Lonely Voice, p. 53)

Elaborating on the dangers of the conte in the hands of not very scrupulous people such as Hemingway, Mansfield, Joyce, and others, he shows how the form of the nouvelle (or its interchangeable term, novelette) is often more appropriate, and he occasionally outlines how the stories should be rewritten. Even Turgenev, one of O'Connor's favorite writers, does not escape having a story or two rewritten as O'Connor thinks it should be handled. The danger of the conte is not primarily an artistic one, although he says often that a writer must be more of an artist to write a conte than a novel because there is so little time to correct errors that are immediately and glaringly apparent. The real danger of the conte is that it is often chosen by a writer who loves literature too well, who may forget the moral purpose of fiction.

The nouvelle, although he does not say so in his definition, is one that can be built in the direction of a novel. The difference between a story and a novel is

not one of length. It is a difference between pure and applied storytelling, and in case someone has still

failed to get the point, I am not trying to decry applied storytelling. Pure storytelling is more artistic, that is all, and in storytelling I am not sure how much art is preferable to nature. (The Lonely Voice, p. 27)

In the practice of his own stories, and in his evaluation of the stories of the eleven writers in his study, he demonstrates his doubts about "how much art is preferable to nature." The first writer he discusses is Turgenev, whose contes in A Sportsman's Sketches he admires, although he suggests how some of them should be rewritten in the form of a nouvelle. A nouvelle, despite his statements to the contrary, is a form for expanding the scope of a short story; there is time for more incidents to suggest the daily development of a character's life, to give the writer an opportunity to approach "essential form" rather than "organic form." And yet as O'Connor develops his own version of the nouvelle, he leaves out "local color." There is only time for O'Connor to present the most important thing to him in art, the development of the character's perceptions of imagination and judgment, and to show how their proper balance can reveal a moral universe.

O'Connor says Turgenev improves his writing when he turns from the conte to the nouvelle. In the conte he creates a static, poetic quality with some of the characteristics of an essay. The lyric quality of Turgenev (the frustrated poet as O'Connor sees him) is less apparent

in his nouvelles, and his best nouvelle is "Old Portraits." The reader looks in vain for the lonely grotesque figure wandering about the fringes of society, the horrified voice of the writer, or a cry of loneliness, lyric or otherwise.

It is written casually in the manner of reminiscence, and only careful reading will show how carefully it is constructed. Its subject is the eighteenth century, which Turgenev loved, and it is represented through the characters of an old couple that illustrate everything that Turgenev thought wonderful in that wonderful century. They are described lightly, gaily, and one settles down to enjoy another tale like Gogol's "Old Fashioned Landowners" with its delightful Bob and Joan portraits of an ingenuous old couple. Then the old man dies, and suddenly the whole mood of the story deepens in that extraordinary scene which no other writer of fiction in the world could have written. The little domestic jokes of the first section are repeated with an almost unearthly poignancy. (The Lonely Voice, p. 60)

There are "few writers who had as much of the essential stuff of humanity in them as Turgenev" O'Connor concludes. He then moves on to another favorite writer, Anton Chekhov, who also uses the form of the conte, but some of his best work is in the form of the nouvelle. Neither Chekhov nor Turgenev is to be blamed for his work in the conte; they were living in an age that was just beginning to explore Gogol's discovery. But "The telescoping of a whole life story into the experiences and comments of a couple of supernumeraries is a device that has been so overworked that my own inclination would be to scrap it and tell the story . . . in chronological order, without frills and flourishes" (The Lonely Voice, p. 50).

A story coming very close to O'Connor's definition of a conte is Chekhov's "Misery." It is a story about the deep loneliness of a cab driver whose son is dead, and who can find no one to tell his grief to. There are real people in the story who see him briefly: "the old cabby's customers in 'Misery' are people very like ourselves, busy, wrapped up in their own concerns, and if they break the old man's heart with loneliness it is as we ourselves might do it" (Lonely Voice, p. 84). O'Connor is more concerned about Chekhov's "probing of moral guilt" in the story than in the theme of loneliness. The moral concern places Chekhov high on his list of great writers. As in the case of Turgenev, O'Connor prefers Chekhov's nouvelles. "The Duel" "which as far as length goes could be regarded as a novel" (Lonely Voice, p. 90), has the theme of "moral slavery." O'Connor's explanation of the story ends any pretense of his adherence to the definition of the short story with which the book begins. It is significant for the recurrence of words like "decent," "ethics," "liberal," and "conscience."

In terms of Christian ethics Laevsky is incapable of committing a mortal sin, but the venial sins he commits all the time are infinitely more destructive than any mortal sin could be because he can suppress them from his conscious mind and go on believing himself to be a man of honor, a cultured man, a liberal, and a humanitarian, while in reality he is not even a decent human being. Only those who feel that they are not subject to venial sins can afford to hold him up to ridicule. Chekhov, who is examining his own conscience,

does not. Through the doctor, Samoylenko, who is the key to the whole story, he recognizes that whatever baseness they may commit, Laevsky and Nadyezhda Fyodorovna are fundamentally decent people and incomparably superior to the thousands of nonentities by whom they are surrounded. (Lonely Voice, p. 92)

In The Mirror in the Roadway O'Connor characterizes Chekhov as the first writer to recognize the modern theme of loneliness and express the morality of the lonely, individual soul. When he becomes engrossed in his examination of Chekhov's nouvelle, he quotes Chekhov on the subject of the writer's purpose. O'Connor says "What reveals the moralist, the prose writer as opposed to the poet, is the qualification of 'what is highest'--that 'which is more important than happiness or unhappiness.'" (The single quotes identify Chekhov's remarks.) O'Connor adds

You may order the dinner but you must foot the bill; you may in the last resort do whatever seems right to you, but you must accept responsibility for it in this world and the next. (Lonely Voice, p. 96)

The phrase "morality of the lonely individual soul" implies something different from his original definition. The writer may recognize shifting mores, sympathize with the sinner, and re-evaluate the sin but it is clear that the "morality of the lonely individual soul" has a direct pipeline to traditional Christian ethics. Chekhov, Trollope and Turgenev all understand goodness, badness, and above all, compassion and forgiveness. O'Connor may celebrate the

unorthodoxy of Chekhov's judgments, and the lack of a morality in Trollope, but neither strays far from the "unorthodoxy" akin to that of Christ's compassion for Mary Magdalene.

The last writer O'Connor approves of in his study is Mary Lavin, by whom his "lonely" position may someday be vindicated. Lavin is an Irish story writer with the tendencies of a novelist. Of course, she cannot write a novel at Northanger Abbey, but O'Connor finds in her work of the 1950s an indication that the pendulum is beginning to swing back in the right direction. For one thing, she has some of the masculine qualities of judgment that elevate Jane Austen to the highest level of literature. Her values, he says, make her much more of a novelist in her stories than other Irish writers, and her technique "verges--sometimes dangerously--on the novelist's technique. That has its advantages of course" (The Lonely Voice, p. 211). Lavin writes with an "authenticity and solidity" that make the work of other Irish writers seem "shadowy" by comparison. She writes of everyday events in the lives of everyday people, and, best of all, she "has the novelist's preoccupation with logic, the logic of Time past and Time future." O'Connor also remarks that, to her credit, she has no sexual peculiarities.⁷

⁷ O'Connor makes the discovery that the writers existing "behind the mirror" are sexually abnormal, like

Although O'Connor does not expect one writer to effect miracles--he can tell that from personal experience--he finds reflected in her mirror "the calm gray even light of the novelist." Ireland still has not reformed, so Lavin will not have her proper audience, but her work is headed back toward Mansfield Park. One of the ways he can predict her direction is her choice of the nouvelle over the conte.

Her most important work will, I fancy, be neither in the novel nor the short story pure and simple. In the former she will be defeated by Irish society, whatever standard of values she chooses to judge it by, in the latter because in it she can never fully express her passionate novelist's logic. I should guess that her real achievements will all be done in the form of the "nouvelle," in which she has done her finest work till now. But it will be a very different sort of nouvelle, as different from "Frail Vessel" as "Frail Vessel" is from the nouvelles in Tales from Bective Bridge, more expansive, more allusive, more calligraphic. (Lonely Voice, p. 212)

He finds in her work the material "of a long novel of provincial life." She cannot write it yet, because society is in the state it is, but the value of that future work may be comparable with the work of realists and moralists who

Gide, Proust, Lawrence, and Joyce, among others. It is one indication that they live on the dark end of the pendulum. "They wrote autobiography more or less thinly disguised as fiction. Another characteristic of this quartet is that none of them seems to have been sexually normal. Gide and Proust remained homosexual for their entire lives; Lawrence showed strongly marked homosexual tendencies, while Joyce's work covers practically every known form of sexual deviation. The only subject that none of them could apparently treat was normal heterosexual love." (The Mirror in the Roadway, p. 270)

lived in an earlier age when the best of literature was like a mirror in a roadway.

Of the other writers in O'Connor's study of the short story, little needs to be said. He does not stop to explain his theory of the relation of imagination to judgment, nor how a proper balance within a writer can validate his judgments--he simply refers the reader to The Mirror in the Roadway. He judges the story writers on their moral weaknesses, with his judgments falling most harshly, perhaps, upon the head of Katherine Mansfield. She did not have the makings of a writer to begin with because she was a clever, spoiled, malicious, self-destructive, probably homosexual, false personality (The Lonely Voice, pp. 130-40). Her style is a reflection of her personality and the "artistic" influences by writers like Joyce who

were also attempting a magical approach to literature by trying to make the printed page not a description of something that had happened but a substitute for what had happened . . . (The Lonely Voice, p. 142)

O'Connor is careful to point out some excellence in writing of all the writers he discusses, as in the case of Maupassant; but even the writer's talent cannot compensate for a morality turned on its head. Hemingway is too empty spiritually to define morality; Babel falls before his fascination for Cossack power; and all but Turgenev, Chekhov, and Lavin lose their moral balance.

And yet The Lonely Voice can be defended as an honest work of criticism, even though O'Connor begins with a definition of the short story that is insufficient and contradictory in the light of the rest of the book. The gap between O'Connor's definitions and his own work is understandable in relation to the gap between his early ambitions and his final achievements. The Lonely Voice is a work of hindsight, after his own experiments with the story and story cycle are at an end. Thus when O'Connor says the modern story writer is lonely, he tells the truth; when he says the story writer is not appreciated by the large audience in need of his moral comment, he expresses his own conviction. It is true, even in the face of opposition he finds for his belief in the moral purpose of literature, that O'Connor never stops in his attempts to win the "raw, new middle class" of Ireland. His stories criticize, encourage, attempt to reform the Irish people he knew and loved.

If his analysis of the short story does not describe his preoccupation with a story cycle, it may be because his final cycle, Domestic Relations (1957) does not fulfill his original design expressed in that early crusade for the writer as moralist and reformer. The Lonely Voice, an apologia for his own form of writing, is designed to illustrate why his achievement could not be greater in a

world in the midst of spiritual confusion, with the cultural pendulum swinging in the wrong direction.

His two major works of criticism, The Mirror in the Roadway, and The Lonely Voice, are O'Connor's exercises in the manufacture of a design. In The Lonely Voice he returns to his first argument in the earliest essays on literature and life; since he is unable to prove his authority for his judgments, he leaves it for a later age, one with the clear vision of daylight, to vindicate him in his judgments. That design is of so much importance to him that he must reveal it, not only in history, but also in his own personal conflict between imagination and judgment. The two volumes of his autobiography, An Only Child and My Father's Son apply the techniques of his criticism to the facts of his life, resulting in the manufacture of yet another design, this one relying on his theory of the personal conflict between the two poles of man's nature, and the proper balance that can produce the best kind of writer.

CHAPTER III

THE FEMININE AND MASCULINE PRINCIPLES:

O'CONNOR'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Frank O'Connor was born in 1903 in the poorest section of Cork to Minnie and Michael O'Donovan. He was named Michael for his father, his middle name was Francis, and his mother's maiden name was O'Connor. By dropping the name Michael in favor of Frank, and O'Donovan in favor of O'Connor, he managed to obliterate any identification with his father in his pen name. The first volume of the autobiography, An Only Child, is about the significance of his relationship with his mother, his rejection of his father, and the relevance of their natures to "the classical distinction between judgment and instinct, which in dreams is represented by the metaphor of father and mother" (The Mirror in the Roadway, p. v). His disdain for symbolism of the kind he criticized in the work of D. H. Lawrence apparently did not extend to symbolic designs for his own personal history. An Only Child explores the principle of the feminine imagination from two approaches; first, as it is exemplified by Minnie O'Donovan and by her friends, and second, as it becomes the motivating principle of Ireland's "Troubles" of 1922 and the ensuing civil war. My Father's Son explores the masculine principle of judgment, though

not as it is exemplified by O'Connor's father, Mick O'Donovan, whom O'Connor characterizes as a slow-minded man, and a drunkard. Instead, he describes a series of men who attracted him as "father figures"; at the end of My Father's Son he chooses the man most suited to represent the masculine principle in the metaphor of his parentage. In a perfect order of things the masculine and feminine principles unite to create their sympathetic, moral offspring, in this case, the writer Frank O'Connor.

As his pen name suggests it took him a considerably shorter time to begin his career as a writer than it did to work out his metaphorical genealogy. The choice of a pen name points to the nature of his personal conflict between imagination and judgment. Analyzing his own conflict as similar to that of Austen and Turgenev, he finds that he, also, loved poetry too well. Under the influence of his mother, the imaginative side of his nature developed far in advance of his judgment. The story of the conflict in his art involves a gradual and painful development of the faculty of judgment. When his powers of judgment had him securely on the way to maturity, the next step was the realization he was not suited to be a poet, and he eventually abandoned that form in favor of the short story and for a while, the novel. In the same way that his critical works should be read as other than objective

studies of writers and their work, the two volumes of his autobiography should be read as other than a source for biographical information, of which there is actually very little.

An Only Child was published in 1961, five years before his death and four years after his story cycles were complete. My Father's Son was published in 1968, after O'Connor's friend, Maurice Sheehy, edited the nearly completed manuscript. Thus the autobiography, like the criticism, is an explanation of a theory already worked out in detail through years of writing experience. Any biographical material not necessary to the development of his design seems to have been left out; biographical material not contributing to the design--if the treatment of Austen and Turgenev in The Mirror in the Roadway is any indication--was altered. The theme is the growth of an artist as he struggles to understand the relation of literature to life; his moral standards, his social conduct, his friends, mentors, and enemies are all assigned to their places in the construction of that design on which O'Connor intended to base his authority as a writer.

An Only Child

The frontispiece of An Only Child is a photograph of Minnie O'Connor O'Donovan taken a few months before her death when she was in her eighties. A second photograph in

the text shows Minnie in her early twenties holding her infant son. Part I of the autobiography describes her nature as imaginative, spontaneous, and truthful--as truthful, that is, as her apprehension of objective reality could allow. Part II is about her three neighbors, also women dominated by the principle of the feminine imagination, and shows the varying degrees of communication with their faculties of judgment. These women are evaluated by O'Connor according to his theory of imagination and judgment as it applies to personal development. Together the two parts occupy the first half of An Only Child to define what he means by the feminine imagination, and how that side of his own nature dominated his childhood and adolescence; his father, who should have been his model for the faculty of masculine judgment, was a failure in finding any communication between the two extremes of his own nature. He was also "a conventional and slow-minded man," and a poor provider for his family, all of which O'Connor was prepared to make concessions for, had it not been for the occasional displays of extreme cruelty to his family during drinking bouts. O'Connor never forgot these harsh times, and perhaps never forgave them. Whatever his final judgment of Mick O'Donovan may have been, O'Connor discards his real father very early as a "father figure" and model of the masculine judgment.

Parts III and IV of An Only Child are about another kind of experience with the feminine imagination, O'Connor's involvement with the Irish Republican Army during the conflict against England that ignited the Irish Civil War of 1923. O'Connor's account of the political and military facts of the period are peripheral; the Irish Civil War was to him an example of the feminine imagination completely divorced from the faculty of judgment, and imposed on the outside world. As sanity slowly and painfully reestablished itself in Ireland, the "romantic improvisation" of the war was quelled by the aid of masculine judgment.

Both halves of An Only Child trace O'Connor's growth from a world dominated by the faculty of imagination to one that brings him closer to what he believes to be the proper balance between the two elements of human nature. The war experience marks the beginning of his recognition that the faculty of judgment must protect and guide the delicate but powerful faculty of imagination.

The biographical facts reported in An Only Child are interspersed throughout the book to illustrate the central thematic concerns, many of the incidents revealing experiences that were painful to the young Michael O'Donovan who was sometimes hungry, sometimes threatened by violence from his father, and always in need of his mother's protective assurances. And yet the tone of the reminiscences is usually genial, at times even comic, which is the same tone

he develops for the autobiographical material of his stories. The total effect is one of acceptance, not the acceptance of resignation but of resolution. O'Connor found he had discovered in his early years a very satisfactory definition of the feminine imagination, and he was able to add to that a developing sense of judgment taught him by his war experience.

The design is suggested by the factual material O'Connor chooses to report first, not the facts of his own childhood, but those of his mother's, facts he brooded over throughout his own childhood, and facts that were sometimes transformed into material for his fiction. O'Connor's mother was an orphan in the peculiarly Irish way that meant her mother was still alive; when Minnie's father died her mother was not able to support her family, and all three children eventually found their ways into orphanages. O'Connor spends considerable energy and care in the detailed re-creations of his mother's suffering, particularly her perceptions of her sister, Margaret, who died in the orphanage, but not before a virulent fever had left her crippled. With the same intense sympathy O'Connor describes Minnie's temptation to kill herself after a cruel employer starved her, marred her beauty, and threw her out of the house where she had worked as a maid. With the eye of a story writer he notices the horrified reactions of people on the streets who saw her in her lice-infested

rag. O'Connor's "moral imagination," as he calls it in The Mirror in the Roadway, is kindled to a blaze as he vilifies her employers and praises her saint-like gentleness and courage. His moral imagination is also at work in the description of her experiences as a housekeeper in the pleasant home of a handsome "well-to-do" bachelor who, O'Connor is sure, would have proposed to the beautiful Minnie O'Connor were it not for the embarrassment of marrying his housekeeper.

These minutely related experiences of Minnie's youth do not cohere into a full-length portrait of the artist's mother, nor even into a credible character. But then, his aim is a definition of the feminine imagination, with his mother as the most satisfactory of his examples. As he explains in The Mirror in the Roadway the feminine imagination must develop through conflict with external reality, thus building strong bonds with the masculine judgment. The portrait of O'Connor's saint-like mother embodies all the qualities of a highly sympathetic, spontaneous, sensitive nature, but her own cruel childhood caused the feminine imagination also to form a protective envelope separating her from the realities that would, otherwise, have destroyed her.

O'Connor, throughout his childhood, was drawn to her nature, encouraged to develop his own imagination under her influence, and this situation, as he judges it,

caused the stunting of the natural development of his masculine judgment. Choosing carefully the incidents he relates about her character, he adds them up to a definition of the imaginative faculty, showing Minnie O'Donovan to be a woman of "Mozartean temperament" like so many of the female characters in his stories. The temperament "consists of a certain unworldliness that makes them get the worst of any bargain" (An Only Child, pp. 5-6). He particularly admired the lightheartedness of her nature, mostly because he could not experience it in himself.

One of the things I have inherited from my mother's side of the family is a passion for gaiety. I do not have it myself--I seem to take more after my father's family which was brooding and melancholy, and violent, but I love gay people, and books and music. (An Only Child, p. 5)

Besides her gentleness, gaiety, and fidelity--she steadfastly refused to leave her husband against O'Connor's entreaties--Minnie O'Donovan had the sympathy that made her a favorite among her acquaintances as a confidante. An important quality of the feminine imagination is that of being a good listener, and of sympathetically responding to other people's experiences. O'Connor recalls an example of this power during a trip they took late in her life.

She woke very early with a passion for tea, and when we were staying in a London hotel I made a deal with the chambermaid to bring it to her when she herself came on duty. When I called for her at nine o'clock Mother had acquired the material for a full-length novel

of life in Devon from the maid. On the same morning I had an interview with my agent, and left her sitting in Trafalgar Square. When I returned forty-five minutes later, a good-looking woman was sitting beside her. Mother had got the material for another novel. By that time she knew as much about the life of ordinary people in England as I would learn in years. . . Naturally, with that sort of mind she loved novels, particularly Victorian novels. (An Only Child, p. 82)

The ability to sympathize is one of the greatest assets of the healthy imagination, but it also had the failing of making her, at times, gullible.

If something appeared to be so, or if she had been told it was so, then she believed it to be so. This, as every psychologist knows, leads to disillusionments, and when a juvenile delinquent is disillusioned we describe it as a traumatic experience. So far as I could see, up to her death practically all Mother's experiences were traumatic, including I am afraid, her experience with me. And some small portion of her simplemindedness she did pass on to me. (An Only Child, p. 46)

The gaiety, fidelity and sympathy, all excellent qualities of the feminine imagination, may be weakened by the belief in appearances, as O'Connor explains its possible kinship with gullibility. Worse than that, it sometimes helped her avoid a confrontation with objective reality. And no realist, no moralist, can step aside from this responsibility. An example of her ability to blank out unpleasant reality was on the occasion of O'Connor's involvement in a divorce court struggle over the privilege of visiting his children.

When my wife and I separated, the only indication I had of Mother's feelings was when I looked at my photograph album one day and saw that every single photograph of my wife had been destroyed. Where she had been photographed with me or the children her picture had been cut away. It was not all malice, any more than the destruction of her own pictures was all vanity. I am certain it went back to some childish technique of endurance by obliterating impressions she had found too terrible to entertain, as though, believing as she did in the world of appearances to make them seem right, but in time it came to affect almost everything she did. (An Only Child, p. 42)

O'Connor's own early reliance on the feminine imagination is related to the strengths and weaknesses he notes in his mother. Incidents of his childhood are briefly alluded to, sketched in only a few sentences, but they are the incidents described and analyzed in his story cycles. The autobiography shows how Minnie O'Donovan fostered his reliance on the feminine imagination, hurrying the development of that faculty above the faculty of judgment, but also sealing the imaginative energy in an envelope that kept him from the graver effects of their poverty and family life, and also kept him from the normal development of judgment.

Yet the analysis of Minnie O'Donovan's character is insufficient for O'Connor's purposes of suggesting the great range of personalities relying on the imaginative faculty. There are literally scores of characters in his fiction developed upon his theory. In the autobiography he chooses three of his mother's friends to isolate varying relationships of the imagination with judgment. The three

contrasting personalities are significant for the manner in which he arranges them according to a hierarchy of moral excellence. Minnie O'Donovan, of course, takes the highest place in his affection and in her embodiment of the imaginative faculty; the other characters are ranged on varying levels beneath her. It is one of his favorite techniques in his short stories for presenting a moral perspective.

The most intimate friend of Minnie O'Donovan was Minnie Connolly, another saintly character O'Connor turns into the fictional one of Dona Nobis in his first novel, The Saint and Mary Kate. Minnie Connolly, like his mother, loved to read fiction, to become involved with the characters as if they were neighbors with whom she could sympathize. But unlike his mother, Minnie Connolly exhibited the nascent quality of the novelist's "passionate logic." Her imagination was some degree closer to objective reality than his mother's, and she was able to act upon her judgments. Minnie Connolly

had a fierce, combative, masculine, intellect, which, if it had been trained, might have made her a formidable logician or philosopher, and she would have had no hesitation about telling the pope himself where he went wrong. (An Only Child, p. 106)

But she no more than Minnie O'Donovan could have been a novelist. Minnie Connolly had no aesthetic sense; a novel, any novel would do to ignite her imagination. Her nature puts her second only to Minnie O'Donovan as a representative

of the feminine imagination. She, too, had learned the quality of sympathy through poverty and loneliness, when she had lived in an insane asylum where her malady was diagnosed as "religious mania." But when she was released she entered the objective world with her umbrella cocked to attack anyone she found abusing helpless dogs or cats or horses, and she had the power to engage her sympathetic imagination to get results in the outside world.

On a lower level in the moral hierarchy is Gertie Twomey, another Blarney Lane neighbor in Cork, whose imaginative nature conjured up visions of prosperity for herself, even if it meant the death at sea of her husband. When the wind was high and the sea around Cork harbor was treacherous, Gertie Twomey came to the O'Donovan cottage with the hysterical fear that her husband was dying at sea at that moment; gradually, to the bafflement of O'Connor's father and the disgust of O'Connor's mother, she would overcome her hysteria with the comforting thought that if her husband were drowned she could receive a sizeable insurance portion with which she might open a boarding house in London.

On the bottom of the moral hierarchy is Ellen Farrell who imposed her power of imagination on reality with the full knowledge that she was harming others. She was an old, canny widow who enjoyed taking in lodgers, then hauling them into court for mistreating her, a helpless old woman.

She repeatedly received judgments against the tenants, and gathered a hoard of money with her conquests. When a clever tenant exposed her formula, she died soon afterwards from disappointment and frustration.

His elaborate and entertaining analyses of different sorts of imaginative natures culminate in the description of his hierarchy, with each member receiving her proper moral judgment.

Minnie Connolly is probably astonished if she knows that the solemn little boy who read prayer books in her attic bedroom while she ironed remembered her as a myth, a point in history at which the whole significance of human life seems to be concentrated . . . She would be still more astonished at the company she keeps, but what she had in common with Gertie Twomey and Ellen Farrell was that each of them knew exactly where she was going. Ellen was going to Hell, or wherever it is people go who think only of themselves. Minnie was going to Heaven, if that is the right name for the place where people go who think only of poisoned cats and starving dogs and dying people. Gertie, of course, was merely going to London. (An Only Child, pp. 110-11)

From top to bottom the women in the hierarchy represent aspects of the feminine imagination, with the lower and more dangerous examples like those characters who might be at home in the literature of Northanger Abbey, characters divorced from objective reality, thus dangerous to themselves and to the well-being of society. It is by such moral hierarchies as this that O'Connor judges his own characters in relation to moral truth on the one hand and the "refrigerator of the imagination"

on the other. The moral hierarchy is used in the stories to distinguish the degrees of health and sickness in regard to his theory of imagination and judgment.

Until O'Connor was in his teens he continued to live in his own imaginative world with his mother and her friends as his major companions. After leaving school for good at the age of fourteen he tried to hold several jobs from clerk to messenger, but each time he was unsuccessful because he was too much of a "dreamer." The chores to which he was assigned had no relation to his inner world of the imagination. What did appeal to him, besides his mother and her friends, was words. He began to learn Gaelic when the Gaelic League offered lessons in an effort to make it the living language of all the Irish people. The words he learned were more real than the world around him because

All I could believe in was words, and I clung to them frantically. I would read some word like "unsophisticated" and at once I would want to know what the Irish equivalent was. In those days I didn't even ask to be a writer; a much simpler form of transmutation would have satisfied me. All I wanted was to translate, to feel the unfamiliar become familiar, the familiar take on all the mystery of some dark foreign face I had just glimpsed on the quays. (An Only Child, p. 170)

But his adventure with the Gaelic League was short-lived. Out of work, without an education, abused by his father, and often feeling desperate, he was confronted with a flight of the imagination so divorced from reality that he had to

mobilize his undeveloped faculty of judgment or else be destroyed; the same was true of all of Ireland about to confront the imaginative improvisation of the struggle for independence from England, and then the civil war.

When the fighting broke out in Ireland O'Connor joined the Irish Republican Army, as much because his Gaelic League activities were interrupted as because he had a vague idea that it could offer "material" for a writer. At first he gladly went out with the columns with the increasing idea that he should write the Irish equivalent of Tolstoy's The Cossacks. His brief period as correspondent and newspaper censor he describes as a "triumph of mind over matter," as far as any understanding he had of what his assignment meant; at the time he had no inkling of what the relation of literature to life should be. Literature was an aspect of his imagination used to protect himself from reality. In his gentlest analysis of the war spirit he judges the war mongers as being like himself, unwittingly exempting themselves from reality. But

sooner or later the imaginative improvisation imposes itself upon reality. But it is only then that its real troubles begin, when it must learn to restrain itself from imposing too far, and acquire a smattering of the practical sense it has rejected. That, I think is where the Irish Revolution broke down. The imagination is a refrigerator, not an incubator; it preserves the personality intact through disaster after disaster, but even when it has changed the whole world it has still changed nothing in itself and emerges as a sort of Rip Van Winkle, older in years but not in experience. (An Only Child, p. 200)

As the war escalated so did the frenzy of instigators of the fighting who "were acting on the unimpeachable logic of the imagination, that only what exists in the mind is real" (An Only Child, p. 210).

As this was happening O'Connor was wandering about the Irish countryside with a printing press assigned to write propaganda for the Irish Republican Army. He accepted the peculiar Irish idea of holding the "front line," which meant it dissolved each Sunday morning as both sides passed one another on the way to Mass and to visit their mothers. On many afternoons O'Connor found himself in an Irish-speaking neighborhood where he would at once forget about the war and listen to people speaking Gaelic as their native tongue as "the phonetics went clean to my head." He felt relief, however, when he was captured by the Free State side. During his short period as a soldier he had wandered into a house where a boy was killed by a random bullet, he had seen another bayoneted, and another sent before a firing squad, and he had realized the idealists were being replaced by men with no standards except the love of violence.

The romantic improvisation was tearing right down the middle and on both sides the real killers were emerging . . . it was clear to me that we were all going mad, and yet I could see no way out. The imagination seems to paralyse not only the critical faculty but the ability to act upon the most ordinary instinct of self-preservation. (An Only Child, p. 240)

His capture actually turned out to be the beginning of one of the happiest years of his life up until that time. He was assigned to Gormanstown Internment Camp where the prisoners had set up classes, and O'Connor was recruited to teach Gaelic. He was delighted with his teaching and with the opportunity to study French in another class. Also, the camp was an old American installation from World War I with indoor plumbing. O'Connor felt it was the most healthy place he had ever lived, mentally and physically. While at the camp, he studied grammar books in several languages and decided that his most important lesson of the war was his introduction to the objective case.

To show how, psychologically, the war came to an end, O'Connor recalls a minor incident in the camp.

Two audacious girls, realizing that fighting was over and that no one was likely to kill them in cold blood, walked coolly across the fields one evening from the main road and stood outside the wire by the Limerick hut, asking for some relative. In their high tower the sentries fumed, waiting for a military policeman to escort the girls away. In no time a crowd gathered, and two or three men who knew the girls stood on the grass bank overlooking the wire and talked to them. The rest of us stood or sat around in complete silence. It was years since some of the group had heard a woman's voice. Nobody cracked a dirty jok; if anyone had, I think he might have been torn asunder. This was sex in its purest form, sex as God may perhaps have intended it to be--the completion of human experience. Unearthly in its beauty and staggering in its triviality. "Mother said to ask did you get the cake. Jerry Deignan's sister asked to be remembered to you." (An Only Child, p. 272)

The simplest courtship ritual was enough to turn the minds of the romantic improvisators back toward

normality; O'Connor's phrase for it, "the completion of human experience," is the same one he uses in Towards an Appreciation of Literature to define the purpose of literature. When O'Connor began writing stories he devoted most of his first volume to the war experiences, but even that book shows a gradual return of its characters' interests to courtship and marriage, the feminine principle and the masculine principle seeking "the completion of human experience." At the conclusion of An Only Child O'Connor notes that the end of the war also decided him on turning from "poetry to story-telling, to the celebration of those who for me represented all I should ever know of God" (An Only Child, p. 274).

The first volume of the autobiography is only half of the story of how O'Connor became a writer. A recognition of the need for the objective case was the most important achievement of these years, but the long struggle of finding a balance between his imagination and judgment was to take him through his years at the Abbey Theatre and his search for the suitable father to complete his metaphor. That is the subject of My Father's Son, at the conclusion of which he announces his understanding of literature's relation to life, involving the realist and the moralist.

My Father's Son

Although My Father's Son consists of a more complex series of reminiscences than An Only Child, its design is simpler. O'Connor recounts his acquaintances with several men who become candidates for his model of the masculine judgment. Each new candidate he meets is introduced according to whatever aspects of his character attract O'Connor; these aspects are minutely analyzed, their weaknesses exposed, and as the candidate is discarded he is also assigned to his place in another one of O'Connor's moral hierarchies, this one more elaborate than the one he builds for the feminine imagination in An Only Child. Minnie O'Donovan made it relatively simple to find a satisfactory definition of the feminine imagination, but it took O'Connor several years of struggling to settle on a definition for the masculine judgment sufficient for his needs as a writer of the realistic prose he valued above other forms of literature.

The time frame of My Father's Son recounts a more complicated period of his life as a developing writer than the early years at home or even in the Irish Republican Army. This volume begins with O'Connor's attempt to apply his newly learned concept of the objective case to his problem of earning money. The narrative takes him through his training as a librarian in a new Carnegie library program in Ireland, to his eventual work in Dublin where

he was determined to meet the famous writers of the Irish Literary Renaissance who still had some ties with the Abbey Theatre. A sizeable portion of My Father's Son deals with O'Connor's experiences as a member of the Board of Directors at the Abbey, and then his brief period as managing director of the theatre. The narrative becomes involved in describing a complicated feud over the direction the theatre should take in the kind of plays produced, in the way they were to be directed, in the sort of actors who should be chosen--the feud seems to have penetrated all departments of the theatre. It was a feud that clearly left a deep impression on O'Connor, and he makes no attempt to delete his own feelings of resentment or his accusations from the account. The entire tangle is minutely analyzed in a recent study by Maurice Wohlgernter,¹ but the subject does not have significant bearing on his development as a writer of story cycles, except, perhaps, as it discouraged him from further experiments with the drama. By the end of the period O'Connor describes in My Father's Son he realized that both drama and poetry were unsuitable to his needs, and that his future experiments should be in prose.

The main design is not lost sight of during the theatre experience. Although he presents his series of

¹ See Maurice Wohlgernter, Frank O'Connor. An Introduction (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

candidates in the order in which he meets them, they are assigned their places in the hierarchy according to their moral development. His real father, Mick O'Donovan, has his place at the bottom of the structure. As O'Connor explains in An Only Child his father could never achieve any kind of communication between his imagination and judgment, as manifested in his gloominess and the inexplicable sieges of alcoholism. O'Connor found his father "a born hob-lawyer, always laying down the law" (An Only Child, p. 26), but judgment without sympathy is as dangerous to an individual and those around him, as is imagination without judgment. The most damning thing O'Connor felt he could say of his father was that the man had no interest in the lives of most human beings.

One incident in particular epitomizes O'Donovan's inadequacy as a "father figure" and model for the principle of masculine judgment. On one of the rare occasions O'Connor and his father attempted to reconcile the gulf between them, they were taking a walk together in the Irish countryside near the library where O'Connor was working. The elder O'Donovan was each moment impatient to return to the familiar world of Cork. His impatience surfaced when their walk was interrupted by a farmer standing in the path, mesmerized by a ship passing far off-shore. O'Connor's curiosity was aroused, and he stopped in an attempt to learn what there was of significance in that

particular ship. The farmer, it turned out, stopped to look at every ship that passed, because it always called into his mind a question he had never been able to answer.

The farmer told the story of how once a boat like the one off-shore had taken his only son to America. In New York his son met a girl from Donegal and married her; the girl appeared mysteriously at the farmer's home one summer for a visit, but alone. She stayed the entire summer, entertaining the farmer and his wife with tales of their son's success in America, and learning what her husband's childhood had been like. Only after the girl finished her visit did she write that her husband had died in New York, even before she had paid her visit. Why she had spent the entire summer with her father- and mother-in-law without a word of their son's death was the question the farmer stopped and asked himself every time a passing ship, or any other detail, reminded him of it.

As a young writer O'Connor was delighted with the farmer's story, but when he glanced over at his father he noticed that Mick O'Donovan was not paying attention.

I knew that some time I should have to write that story but Father only listened with the polite, perfunctory smile that he gave to the scenery. Both, no doubt, were suitable for people living in backward places, but did not call for close inspection, and next morning he was up at six to make sure of catching the noon bus for Cork.²

² Frank O'Connor, My Father's Son (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 48. All further references to this work are in the text.

O'Connor turns the experience into the story "Michael's Wife," but he also uses it as a way of making concrete his reasons for rejecting his father.

There is one other "father figure" who belongs in the lower orders of the hierarchy, Daniel Corkery, a Cork school teacher who instructed O'Connor. Corkery was the first writer O'Connor had ever met, and the pupil was very impressed to find A Munster Twilight with his teacher's name on it in a bookshop, although in his excitement he reports that he did not understand a word of it. Corkery was O'Connor's first "authority" on matters of utmost interest to him. When O'Connor left school he visited Corkery to listen to his gramophone where he first heard the works of Mozart and Beethoven. Corkery had the habit of making judgments that O'Connor thrived on. From Corkery he learned that Oscar Wilde's style would be a bad influence on him, that Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam was too "sugary" for the aspiring writer and that the proper reading for a young man in an internment camp was the poetry of Heine. O'Connor admired Corkery's courage to remain in Cork as a boys' teacher, to support his mother and sister, and still to write novels and paint water colors. He managed all of this while suffering from a physical disability that left him partially crippled. What made Corkery the first hero to fall from favor in O'Connor's collection of father figures

was his acceptance, and then celebration of the spirit governing the Irish Civil War. Corkery became in O'Connor's opinion one of the mad revolutionaries who locked himself in the refrigerator of his own imagination. But O'Connor realized, at least, that with Corkery he was on the right track in the search for a father figure. Corkery did have "iron discipline," a virtue O'Connor deeply admired.

But his next acquaintance to whom O'Connor was temporarily attracted was Geoffrey Phibbs, a youth of about his own age who also wanted to become a poet. He had the virtue of being an aspiring writer, and for a time O'Connor looked up to him. He admired Phibbs's "artistic" nature, particularly in the way it involved him in intense love affairs that eventually led to his marriage to a young painter. When O'Connor visited the couple he was prepared to witness an example of how dedicated artists live their lives, but on the first evening he was shocked. The young woman at her easel did not interrupt her painting to shop for dinner, and there were no potatoes in the artist's studio. Nor did it occur to her to go buy potatoes; instead, she sent Phibbs and O'Connor on the errand. (O'Connor recalls "I had never met a girl who forgot things like potatoes, and if I had I should have expected her to repair her omission in silence" (My Father's Son, p. 71). It took O'Connor years to sort out his theory of the feminine imagination and the masculine judgment, particularly when the males and females became

mixed up with the wrong principle. Phibbs turned out to be another case of a man who locked himself in his imagination, but a case O'Connor had not observed before.

I began to see then what became clear to me years later, that he was a man trapped by his own nature. We are all trapped, of course, sooner or later, but he was more inescapably trapped because in him the gap between instinct and judgment was wider than it is in most of us, and he simply could not jump it. With the two thirds of him that was air and fire he adopted new attitudes and new ideas, without ever realizing how they contradicted the conventions that were fundamental to himself. (My Father's Son, p. 74)

The first candidate O'Connor seriously considered as his spiritual father was George Russell, the poet AE, who according to O'Connor, was as interested in finding a gifted son as O'Connor was in finding a gifted father. Russell had sons of his own but seemed as concerned about them as O'Connor was about his father. For a while the relationship was ideal, with O'Connor borrowing books from Russell, taking lessons in literary taste, and receiving criticism on his own work. O'Connor particularly liked Russell's comments on the heroine in his first novel, The Saint and Mary Kate, who is based on O'Connor's idea of the "Mozartean temperament." Russell, too, was attracted to women of gaiety, and attempted, on an occasion or two, to find interesting, artistic companions for O'Connor. With the description of Russell, however, another pattern emerges in O'Connor's search for a father. The members of

O'Connor's moral hierarchy also tend to serve the purpose of stepping stones. Russell introduced O'Connor to several of the famous writers he hungered to meet; and soon Russell's "fatherly" manner began to pall on O'Connor. O'Connor reports how he discovered that Russell was actually an old man who may once have been talented, but was now a dull companion. He describes Russell as becoming for him like a comfortable old coat, but suffocating. Russell was a man of judgment, but without an active imagination; he was not overbearing as was Mick O'Donovan, just dull. The example that for O'Connor best reveals Russell's weakness occurred during a conversation about one of Russell's paintings.

I chose a painting of a tree by a lake--chose it because it was the only picture in the room that did not contain those dreadful children who appeared in almost every picture he painted and whom he had seen originally in some landscape of Corot's.

"By the way," I asked, "what IS that tree?" I did not mean to be impertinent, but at once I knew I had been.

"No particular tree," he replied with a hurt expression, "just a tree."

Everything with him was "just a tree," not an oak or an elm or an ash; above all, not one with a character or a pattern of its own. Habit had obliterated all distinctions. (My Father's Son, p. 94)

Judgment and generalization without the fire of imagination cause Russell to merit a low place in the hierarchy. His qualities are of little use to the writer who needs the observation of an artist like Austen or Chekhov.

Several other candidates make brief appearances in O'Connor's narrative, like Lennox Robinson, who got O'Connor the job as librarian, and whom O'Connor later rewarded by firing him as a member of the Abbey Theatre board. Robinson's relation to O'Connor is mixed up in the unfortunate feud for power and recognition at the theatre, and so is not pertinent to the general design of My Father's Son. But the relationship with William Butler Yeats becomes of utmost importance to O'Connor's search for a model of the masculine principle of judgment, because Yeats is his final choice. All his conversations with Yeats become of primary importance to O'Connor who records them with relish. He admits that Yeats may not have been aware of the father-son relationship that was just beginning to develop when it was cut off in 1939 by the poet's death. But the narrative does give a convincing idea of Yeats's enjoyment of O'Connor's impudence, every response to which O'Connor quotes in detail. The narrative does not analyze how much O'Connor's worship of the aging poet had to do with their relationship. It began when Yeats decided that the failing Abbey Theatre needed some changes. To keep it in existence at all was a serious problem during the 1930s when it was threatened with bankruptcy. Yeats said the theatre needed some of those "gunmen" who were active during the Irish Civil War to keep it alive. The theatre

needed realism of the quality Sean O'Casey could give it, and O'Connor was avid to meet Yeats's requirements.

The real test of O'Connor's ingenuity in the manufacture of his design for his spiritual parentage--his mother's imagination and Yeats's judgment--comes in showing how the two balance to produce the kind of writer he admires the most, the realistic novelist, moralist, and story writer. He acknowledges Yeats as a great poet in the Romantic tradition, who has even fallen into the trap of symbolism O'Connor disdains in modern literature: the poet is a writer of the inner world of the imagination and therefore, according to O'Connor's definition, not a moralist. But O'Connor approaches his task with a list of the similarities between O'Connor and Yeats, and he finds there are more similarities than differences. Both of them began their writing in an Irish mist of romanticism; both were temporarily taken in by Irish political idealism, Yeats by the Easter Rising and O'Connor by the Irish Civil War; both outgrew their youthful idealism to become realists. Not everyone might perceive the bonds between them, because not many who knew Yeats saw beneath his characteristics as a poet to his characteristics as a novelist. But O'Connor finds the deeper aspect of Yeats's nature to discover how his development continued so long.

. . . listening to him when he suddenly decided to talk freely one recognized that the foolish, fond old man was only half the personality, the personality that

made the poetry, but that beneath it was another sort of personality altogether, sensitive, compassionate, but watchful, cool and without illusion, the mind of a novelist, rather than that of a poet. This, of course was what gave him his extraordinary capacity for development, and even in the few years I had known him I had seen his poetry getting nearer to my own ideal of poetry. (My Father's Son, p. 222)

With the identification of Yeats as O'Connor's spiritual father, the model for the masculine principle of judgment, the design of O'Connor's parentage is complete. With this understanding comes the struggle with the romantic imagination to become somehow bounded, guided by the masculine judgment. It is the struggle O'Connor finds in Austen and Turgenev, the struggle he finds in himself, and it is the struggle he takes two volumes of an autobiography to document. The manufacture of the design of O'Connor's autobiography vies with his design of the criticism for sheer determination to carve and chip and bend all elements to the conclusion he determines. Both criticism and autobiography reveal the intensity of his belief in his theory of imagination and judgment, on the level of the cultural pendulum, and on the level of the individual struggle with the two elements of human nature.

The autobiography ends with O'Connor's report of the events of 1939, the year of Yeats's death. Having recognized the proper relationship between the feminine imagination and the masculine judgment, he decided to leave his job as librarian, leave his position at the

Abbey Theatre, and write the kind of literature whose relation to life he finally understood. The extraordinary thing about the design he outlines in his works of criticism and autobiography is that it is borne out to some extent in his short stories. In the development of O'Connor's short story cycles, there is recorded, from one volume to the next, the genuine struggle of an artist to find a form suitable to express his theme, the quest for order and for identity in a disorderly world. While the final design of the story cycle is too small for O'Connor openly to acknowledge as he does his kinship with William Butler Yeats, it is his genuine contribution to modern literature. It is not manufactured out of O'Connor's curious treatment of cultural and personal history; it grows with the experience of an artist.

PART II

THE GROWTH OF A DESIGN: DEVELOPMENT
OF THE STORY CYCLE

CHAPTER IV
PIECES OF A MOSAIC, GUESTS OF THE NATION
AND BONES OF CONTENTION

Guests of the Nation is O'Connor's first volume of short stories, and his first attempt at the story cycle. He wrote five more volumes with the cycle as his aim, these experiments spanning more than twenty-five years, during which some of the early methods were discarded or improved, and new ones added, until he eventually settled upon his own form adequate for the expression of his themes. There were many other volumes of stories published during his lifetime, but he made sure that they would be distinguishable from the cycles by their titles. The story collections that are admittedly his breadwinners are clearly labeled collections. After 1939, the year he decided to begin earning his living as a writer, he published numerous volumes with titles like Selected Stories (1946), The Stories of Frank O'Connor (1952, 1953), More Stories by Frank O'Connor (1954, 1967), Stories by Frank O'Connor (1956), Collection Two (1964), Collection Three (1969). There was usually an edition published in New York one year and one in London the next, and there were always more reprinted and revised in each collection than there

were stories published for the first time. He clearly disliked the job of gathering stories into collections, and complained about it in The Lonely Voice in his introduction to Joyce's writing.

James Joyce is fortunate in having escaped from the necessity of publishing either his collected or selected stories. A good book of stories like a good book of poems is a thing in itself, the summing up of a writer's experience at a given time, and it suffers from being broken up or crowded in with other books. The Untilled Field, Winesburg, Ohio, England, My England, Fishmonger's Fiddle and In Our Time should be read by themselves as unities, and preferably in editions that resemble the originals. That is how we have to read Dubliners, and its uniqueness is one reason for its continuing reputation. (The Lonely Voice, p. 113)

Guests of the Nation is also a thing in itself, and should be read as a unity that sums up O'Connor's experience of the war against England and of the Irish Civil War. All of the cycles should be read in the same way, as unities. Guests of the Nation and Bones of Contention are his two volumes of stories written during the decade of experimentation from 1930 to 1940 at a time when he had not decided whether to become a poet, a dramatist, a novelist, or a story writer. These two volumes have titles taken from the central story of each volume, but all of his later cycles are given separate titles, generally suggesting the thematic unity of the whole. The four other experiments in the form of the story cycle are: Crab Apple Jelly, The Common Chord, Traveller's Samples, and Domestic Relations. The cycles

also stand out from the collections by the predominance of stories printed for the first time. The first volume of stories was suggested by Harold Macmillan, who had read "Guests of the Nation," a story highly praised by William Butler Yeats as one of the fine products of the Irish "gunmen." Macmillan suggested that O'Connor put together a volume of stories on the order of Sean O'Faolain's A Purse of Coppers, a cycle of stories on O'Faolain's war experiences. Although O'Connor produced a very experimental volume that does not achieve the coherence of a cycle, the methods later perfected for the story cycle are recognizable in retrospect. Bones of Contention, his second volume of stories, published in 1936, does not achieve the unity of a cycle, either.

The two books were only a small portion of works produced by O'Connor during this extraordinary decade of experiment during which he also published two novels, one biography, four plays, four volumes of translations from the Gaelic, and numerous essays; he also participated in several broadcasts over Radio Eireann and the B.B.C. on literary topics, all the while holding his position as librarian, and for half of the decade, holding a position at the Abbey Theatre, first as a member of the Board of Directors and then as managing director.

Guests of the Nation is the more fully realized of his two experiments in the story cycle, primarily because

it relates experiences of the war and draws many of the same conclusions he later expressed in An Only Child: that the war in Ireland was entirely a "romantic improvisation," continuing until it tore down the middle, and "the real killers" emerged. In the book's arrangement there is the sense of a rising current of hysteria, though at the same time there is another strong counter current of disillusionment, expressed by the desire for the re-establishment of order involving friendship, courtship, marriage--the values of everyday life that became the subject of his second volume, and that he celebrates for the rest of his career.

Bones of Contention is a volume about domestic relations, and it focuses on the development of moral awareness according to O'Connor's favorite theory of the imagination and judgment; the theory is related to a period of history in his first volume, and it is related to personal behavior in the second.

Guests of the Nation (1931)

The keystone of the design of Guests of the Nation is its title story, appearing first in order of the fifteen stories included in the volume. It is among the finest dozen stories of the nearly two hundred he wrote, and by far the best in a first volume containing some stories that are not understandable if considered separately from their place in the entire book's arrangement. This highly

experimental volume also reveals a weakness in O'Connor's ability to control the narrative point of view. In the later cycles both difficulties are corrected. Each story can be understood independently from the cycle; yet assigned to its place in the larger design it contributes to the "ideal ambiance" Harriet O'Donovan alludes to in her introduction to Collection Three. In the mature cycles the resolution of the question of point of view is based on the achievement of a clear moral tone.

"Guests of the Nation" is thematically relevant to the development of all the war stories in the volume, but it is also the first story in a group of stories united by a somber tone. There are three groups in O'Connor's presentation of his war experiences, but they all belong to a loosely chronological treatment of the Irish rebellion from the days during World War I to the closing weeks of the Irish Civil War nearly a decade later. "Guests of the Nation" is based on an incident from the time of the "Troubles" in the 1920s, but O'Connor places it in the period prior to the Easter Rising of 1916. The last of this group, "September Dawn," relates the disillusionment of one of the most idealistic of revolutionaries, who finally cannot remember what his first belief in the "cause" had meant.

The second group of stories represents a dramatic shift in tone, but continues the loose chronological structure from the opening group. This second group shows

where the "romantic improvisation" of the war begins to impose itself upon reality, resulting in an escalation of violence to the point where "the real killers" began to emerge. The four stories relate the experience of a group of young revolutionaries who grew up in Cork, and who idolize their most daring fighter, Alec Gorman. In each story the exuberant spirit of these young men who aim to prove their manhood, is outstripped by the spirits of Gorman, until he is revealed as devoted to violence unrelated to any "Cause." The last story of the group, "Alec," shows him expressing pride in the killing of a member of the boyhood fraternity who decided that the Free State government could help Ireland more effectively than the Irish Republican Army. By the end of the story Alec also succeeds in getting revenge on an elderly caretaker who insulted him; Alec beats him to death, and burns down the house where he lives.

There are two more stories about war in the volume relevant to the outline of a cycle of stories, but only when compared with O'Connor's later work does the design of the first volume become evident. "Soiree Chez Une Belle Jeune Fille" tells of a young girl's experience as a messenger in the Irish rebellion, comparing her experience to the romantic poetry she studied in school. She is able to overcome her natural horror at the sight of a murdered boy by relating the incident to a poem which she quotes at the end of the story. The last story presents the war

experience as reviewed by a member of the Cork group who has sorted out the romantic improvisation that began the conflict, and is able to judge where the improvisation broke down. For him the break came when a boyhood friend was murdered by one of his own people. The narrator traces his involvement with the rebellion from his first sympathy for the victims of the Easter Rising, through his experiences with the Gaelic League, his part in the war against England, and then in the Civil War. This reliable narrator, whose experiences are akin to O'Connor's, gives his judgments on the war which are also akin to O'Connor's in the autobiography written thirty years later. This last story, "The Patriarch," takes the narrator's reactions one step further, by forgiving the old man called the Patriarch whose childlike belief in Holy Ireland involved him and his friends in the "romantic improvisation." Not only does the narrator forgive the old man, but the story celebrates their personal friendship that transcends the war.

The last four stories in the volume have nothing to do with the structure of a cycle, except that they celebrate values the war suppressed--courtship, marriage, and the struggle for maturity by development of the faculty of judgment.

"Guests of the Nation" opens the volume with the central theme of brotherhood; the theme is established through assigning characters to their places in a moral

hierarchy by which the central incident, the murder of two men, is judged. The story tells of two Irish youths on their first assignment as soldiers in the Irish Republican Army. They are assigned to guard two English prisoners at an isolated peasant cottage because the search for them has intensified. The narrator, Bonaparte, is one of the guards who reports "They were handed on to us by the Second Battalion to keep when the search for them became too hot, and Noble and myself, being young, took charge with a natural feeling of responsibility."¹

Both of the Irish boys respond to their orders with zeal and obedience because the orders are an extension into the real world of the fight for "Holy Ireland" that men like Emmet and Parnell fought for. There is no conflict between their youthful idealism and their assignment to guard the two English prisoners. Nor do they notice any disruption between their past experience and the experience of a growing friendship with the prisoners. In the domestic routine of the isolated cottage the Irish guards find that the Englishmen are likeable, and they soon give up any pretense of being watchdogs. The quietest of the group is the Englishman, Belcher, who spends his days helping the old woman of the cottage by chopping wood, carrying water,

¹ Frank O'Connor, Guests of the Nation (London: Macmillan, 1931), p. 2. All further references to this work are in the text.

or any other domestic chore he can think of. Belcher is also responsible for the practice of lighting the lamp each evening and inviting prisoners and guards to play cards. He provides money for the betting, and quietly enjoys the spirited conversation while his Irish and English comrades form their own brand of friendship. His devotion to the quiet pleasures of domestic life and friendship make him happier as a prisoner than as a soldier, and he is respectfully placed at the top of the moral hierarchy near the old woman who keeps the cottage. The narrator explains she has no sense of what war is about, either the English war against the Germans or the Irish war against the English, but she does know that "nothing but sorrow and want follows them that disturb the hidden powers" (Guests of the Nation, p. 5). The events of Belcher's death before a firing squad prove her right in the eyes of the narrator, and the moral hierarchy is unchanged. Bonaparte comes to understand that his deepest sense of right and wrong has been violated, but at the same time that he was carrying out orders in the war for "Holy Ireland." The story ends only in his recognition of the violation, and the pain it causes him.

The narrator, Bonaparte, is just below Belcher in his place in the moral hierarchy. He is reliable in his evaluation of Belcher, of the old woman, and of his friend Noble, who is a "decent lad." Noble also believes in the cause of freedom for Ireland at the same time that he

naturally responds to friendship, whether the friend is Irish or English. Each night as the guards and prisoners gather around the lamp, two of them begin a loud and animated argument. Noble is Catholic and he accepts his religion as he does the Irish "Cause." His antagonist is the English prisoner, 'Awkins, who baits Noble each night

with a string of questions that would puzzle a cardinal. And to make it worse, even in treating of these holy subjects, 'Awkins had a deplorable tongue; I never in all my career struck across a man who could mix such a variety of cursing and bad language with the simplest topic. (Guest of the Nation, p. 4)

"Awkins also argues that he is a communist, or perhaps he is an anarchist, but he is certainly no capitalist, like the ones starting the German war in the first place. He delights in leading Noble into confusion. But he also delights in dancing the Irish rebel dances of "The Walls of Limerick" and "The Siege of Ennis" and "The Waves of Tory" which the girlfriends of the Second Battalion taught him while he was their prisoner. He is as much at home in the Irish countryside with his new friends as he was in England, and as unaware of his approaching death as his friends Bonaparte and Noble, who are participants in the double murder.

The low man in the moral hierarchy is Jeremiah Donovan, the Irishman in charge of the prisoner detail. His passion is for recognition of his own importance, a recognition he never achieved in civilian life. Bonaparte

does not take him particularly seriously and thinks

he was looked up to at all because he was a fair hand at documents, though slow enough at these, I vow. He wore a small cloth hat and big gaiters over his long pants, and seldom did I perceive his hands outside the pockets of that pants. He reddened when you talked to him, tilting from toe to heel and back and looking down all the while at his big farmer's feet. His common broad accent was a great source of jest to me, I being from the town as you may recognize. (Guests of the Nation, p. 2)

Donovan holds himself aloof from the card players except when he looks over their shoulders and loses his assumed military manner by shouting directions in his excitement. He is not able to make friends with anyone in the house, and gradually develops a dislike for the Englishmen who do not notice his position of being "in charge." It is to Donovan that the order is sent from headquarters, calling for execution of the Englishmen as reprisal for the shooting of Irish prisoners before a firing squad in England. Belcher accepts the order immediately, and only regrets leaving the domestic pattern he has set up doing chores by day and playing cards by the lamplight. 'Awkins does not believe the order, continuing the same tirade about communism, anarchy and religion all the way to his execution. Only when he is standing near an open grave on the dark bog does he understand. The resolution is simple for him: he will argue from a new set of principles and become an Irish rebel like his friend

Noble, the exchange of terms making no difference in his unthinking, exuberant attitude toward life.

Bonaparte and Noble stand before their friends paralyzed by the idea of the event that seems to be taking place, an execution at their hands of their friends. Bonaparte keeps hoping they will run away, the only solution. The night before he had lain awake trying to figure out how he could save them.

So I lay there half the night and thought and thought, and picturing myself and young Noble trying to prevent the Brigade from shooting 'Awkins and Belcher sent a cold sweat out through me. Because there were men on the Brigade you daren't let nor hinder without a gun in your hand, and at any rate, in those days disunion between brothers seemed to me an awful crime. I knew better after. (Guests of the Nation, p. 9)

While his orders as a soldier should be carried out for the Irish cause, he cannot accept the violation of his own moral sense; but he and Noble are too inexperienced to comprehend the dilemma. All they know is that they are on an unreal journey to a bog where they are to shoot Belcher and 'Awkins. When Donovan tries to assert his authority with the order to shoot, neither Bonaparte nor Noble can lift his weapon. Donovan is too cowardly to manage it, so he begins a sermon on his "duty." Only when 'Awkins shouts back, "Ah, shut up, you, Donovan . . ." does he commit the first killing himself. As Bonaparte "opened my eyes at the bang, I saw him stagger at the knees and lie out flat at

Noble's feet, slowly and as quiet as a child . . ." (Guests of the Nation, p. 16)

After the death of 'Awkins, a genuine child in his comprehension of the "romantic improvisation" of the Irish rebellion, Belcher, the top man on the moral ladder, becomes loquacious for the first time. He explains how he cannot understand what "duty" means, but the important thing is that someone look in Noble's pocket and get his mother's address. They need not announce his own death to anyone because

my missus left me eight years ago. Went away with another fellow and took the kid with her. I likes the feelin' of a 'ome (as you may 'ave noticed) but I couldn't start again after that. (Guests of the Nation, p. 17)

Donovan does his "duty" again, and the burial scene is carried out in the dark, in contrast to all the other scenes taking place around the lamplight. Bonaparte makes no moral judgment, but expresses a need to remember how he felt, to exorcise the incident that he cannot forget, and to understand it. But he concludes "And anything that ever happened me after that I never felt the same about again" (Guests of the Nation, p. 19).

In The Lonely Voice O'Connor expands his definition of the short story by referring to a similar sentence in Gogol's "The Overcoat":

If one could find an alternative description of what the short story means, one could hardly find better than that single half-sentence, "and from that day forth, everything was as it were changed and appeared in a different light to him." If one wanted an alternative title for this work, one might choose "I am your brother." (The Lonely Voice, p. 16)

The description fits his own dramatic success in "Guests of the Nation," but the rest of the definition of the short story does not apply. There is no character in O'Connor's story like the one he finds Akakey Akakeivitch to be:

What Gogol has done so boldly and brilliantly is to take the mock-heroic character, the absurd little copying clerk, and impose the image over that of the crucified Jesus, so that even while we laugh we are filled with horror at the resemblance. (The Lonely Voice, p. 16)

Instead, the narrator in "Guests of the Nation" is assigned his place in a moral hierarchy among "decent" full-bodied characters, and the reader is encouraged to make value judgments according to their behavior to one another. The resulting hierarchy shows the normality of the characters who develop friendships as natural to them as killing is unnatural.

Nor is the theme the one of loneliness expressed in the sentence "Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie"; the story conveys a sense of moral outrage at the disorder imposed by the war. Bonaparte is "normal" although unaware of the "romantic improvisation"; Belcher is

"good"; Donovan is a moral coward; and war is "bad." The impact of the story is partially created by the reader's sympathy for the narrator who is a witness--and technically--an executioner of his friends. It does not have to be a lonely universe, but the culprit, the romantic improvisation of the war, produces chaos. Bonaparte's recognition of the violation of a moral order is encouraged in the reader; reader, writer, and character all are capable of defining morality as it pertains to the first commandment of Bonaparte's world.

The other four stories in the first group all present war situations that "children" find disruptive to their normal lives, though in accordance with the ideals of the Irish struggle for independence. In the second story, "Attack," there are two kinds of children, ones like the narrator sharing Bonaparte's desire to prove his manhood, and the dangerous "children" like an old peasant who delights in the destruction of the English police barracks because he seeks revenge for their warrant for his only son. The old man, obsessed by hatred, has hidden his son in an attic for several years, reducing him to sickness and madness; the raging old peasant swears fidelity to the Irish cause when his romantic improvisation and the war's coincide.

In the third story, "Jumbo's Wife," the "child" is a giant of a man of very little intellect, who closely

resembles Gypo Nolan of Liam O'Flaherty's The Informer. Jumbo is faithful to the British government which has faithfully paid him a pension after the Boer War, and without compunction he informs on an Irish youth in the neighborhood. His wife unwittingly informs on him, and the family of the dead boy hunt Jumbo down for their revenge. But not before Jumbo loses faith in his hero, the British government, who would not protect an informer, even for their side.

The fourth story returns to children like Bonaparte; the conflict has advanced into open civil war, and in "Nightpiece with Figures" a dashing, handsome youth expresses bitterness over the death of his friend by an informer, who was also once a part of their brotherhood. The cry "I am your brother" reverberates with increasing force as the war against England breaks down to a struggle among Irishmen. The final story of the somber group is "September Dawn," the title symbolic of the hero's disillusionment with fighting for a cause he no longer believes in. Once among the most disciplined and idealistic of the Republican side, he wakes one morning finding that he yearns for a romantic attachment to a young peasant girl. The heroes of the feminine imagination are often characters who have not undergone sexual initiation. He recognizes his romantic attachment to a false ideal that existed only in his imagination; the girl is real, and he turns away from war.

This analysis of O'Connor's war stories is not generally accepted by critics who find that O'Connor is primarily an "intuitive" writer celebrating man's romantic nature above his faculty of judgment. The judgments O'Connor later expresses about the war in his autobiography represent, therefore, a change of heart by a mature writer who looks back on the exuberant excesses of his youth. This is the basis of Guerry Brenner's argument in his study of the short stories.

To O'Connor the "feminine" qualities of instinct, impulsiveness, and emotion are the individual's most important assets because they permit him the irrational freedom to display his individuality. His "villains" comprise men and women who efface their individuality by letting their "masculine" qualities of judgment, prudence, and intellect rationally and continuously guide their conduct. Such an alignment of values declares his conservatism that would cock an eye at any notion that progress could be achieved through rational processes.²

In Guests of the Nation Brenner focuses on the four stories of a "comic" spirit that comprise the second group in the book: "Machine-Gun Corps in Action," "Laughter," "Jo," and "Alec." These four present the irrational and youthful acts of characters who enjoy the disorder of the war, especially the disorder they help create in a holiday spirit. Brenner arrives at his conclusion by reading each

² Gerry Brenner, "A Study of Frank O'Connor's Fiction," Diss. Univ. of Washington 1965, p. 15.

story as a separate unit. If the four stories are considered as part of a larger unity, continuing the chronological movement from the first group, then the four stories of a "comic" spirit reveal the point at which the "dramatic improvisation" breaks down when "the real killers" emerge.

The four stories united by a "comic" tone are also connected by the progress of a group of youths in their late teens when the Irish Republican Army separates from the Free State government to declare civil war. The I.R.A., O'Connor's own choice between the two, was by far the more extreme side, refusing the English peace treaty that offered autonomy for Catholic Ireland in all but name, though refusing to extend this autonomy to the primarily Protestant northern six counties, who did not want economic independence that went with political independence. The rebel forces had their hero, Michael Redmond, who was cool, trench-coated, and charismatic. Rebels from the Free State government had the added romance of the last outpost for uncompromising idealism, and a desperate all-or-nothing attitude for "Holy Ireland." The characters in the four "comic" stories--old women, tramps, idealistic youths--are all like children in the innocence of their actions. There is one extreme character, extreme even to these idealists, who becomes the most prominent and dashing of the Cork rebels. His name is Alec Gorman, and he is mentioned several times before the final story, "Alec," is entirely

given over to his exploits. Alec is O'Connor's portrait of the "real killer" who takes advantage of the chaos of war to release his own love of violence. He is idolized by the Cork youths, but in the last story he takes a personal pride in murdering a friend who "went over to the Free Staters" and then Alec attends the wake to be praised by the dead boy's father who does not know who killed his son. Alec's last daring exploit is to beat an elderly man to death because the man once insulted him.

The "comic" tone of these stories is heightened by the narrative voice, which is very different from Bonaparte's in "Guests of the Nation." The narrators participate in the fun of wearing trench coats and riding breeches and soft hats, and they only gradually become aware of the consequences of their holiday spirit. The violence escalates from one story to the next as Alec becomes the central figure, mentioned only by reputation in the second story, and shown briefly with a grenade in his hand in the third.

The first comic tale is genuinely intended to be funny; it is based on an incident O'Connor recalls in An Only Child as an example of the many situations of sheer foolishness occurring during the war. As driver of a seldom-working armored car, O'Connor was sent to pick up a "Big Gun" and the nine precious shells that fit it; the target was a parsonage where the enemy was entrenched.

When I reached the barrack, the armourer, who had brought his beloved gun all the way from Dublin with him, was still working on the tenth shell and didn't want the gun fired till the shell was finished. But my orders were peremptory, and we loaded the little weapon and its shells on the back seat of my car. A mile or two from the parsonage we were intercepted by the officer in charge of the attack, and I was sent back to Buttevant with fresh instructions, so that I never really saw the weapon in action. Next day, however, I heard that after the first shell had been fired the enemy rushed out of the parsonage with their hands in the air, but, as in Kilmallock, this gesture had gone unnoticed. When the second shell sailed over their heads they came to the conclusion that they were to be massacred whether they surrendered or not, and took to their heels across the country. But this too went unobserved, and the whole nine shells were fired at the parsonage, without hitting it once.

I am not reporting what I saw, merely what I heard, but I do know that stranger things happened. (An Only Child, p. 226)

The incidents of "Machine-Gun Corps in Action" present some of the "stranger things." O'Connor fuses this tale with his own travels across country with his friend, Sean Hendrix (Sean Nelson of the story). The narrator and Sean Nelson are sent out to catch the gunner, a comic character resembling a clown in dress and manner, who spends rounds of ammunition shooting up an empty town so he can see the plate glass break; he also sets his gun on a hill-top to decimate every moving leaf. When the narrator catches up with him he has taken up the cause of a young country widow.

He had heard how her husband's people had been annoying her, had heard something about herself as well and come fired with a sort of quixotic enthusiasm to protect her. On the very night of his arrival he had begun his career as knight-errant by gunning the house of one of

the responsible parties, and only her persuasion had discouraged him from doing them further mischief. Three times a day he paraded the boundaries of her farm to make sure all was well. (Guests of the Nation, p. 116)

The narrator finally gets the gun, but the tramp's enormous wife comes to fetch him home to Dublin by the ear; the narrator leaves Sean Nelson to begin a romance with the widow.

So I took the hint and musing upon the contrariness of men and the inhuman persuadableness of motors, I took my machine-gun and drove through the hills as night was coming on. (Guests of the Nation, p. 121)

There is no judgment on the part of the narrator; he has enjoyed the comedy and the romance, and only one man was shot accidentally by the wild gunner. In the next story, "Laughter," the narrator also wants to be a part of the activity, but he is aware of the more serious action he wants to achieve. Admiring Alec Gorman's ease in launching "Mills bombs" at transports of enemy soldiers, Stephen decides he would like to do the same and prove his own mettle. The central action of the story is Stephen's initiation into violence by repeating Alec's bombing accomplishment. The revolutionary helpers in this story are no longer feuding country families, but the old "laney" women of Cork, childlike in their belief in the "Cause." Stephen is also helped on his mission by Eric Nolan, a

type of the intellectual revolutionary recognizable in other stories of the volume.

He came in, tall, long, and cynical, a little too carefully dressed for the poor student he was, a little too nonchalant for a revolutionary. He smoked a pipe, carried a silver-mounted walking-stick and wore yellow gloves. There was a calculated but attractive insolence about his way of entry and greeting the occupants. (Guests of the Nation, p. 124)

Stephen, "admiring even his mannerisms," is attracted to Eric's coolness as he is to Alec's daring. The other participants in the bombing mission include "a gloomy, little auctioneer who, as he said in his pompous way did these things 'purely as a gesture--as a matter of principle,' and a butcher who throws bombs "for the sake of enjoyment." The butcher is like Alec Gorman in his delight in violence and Stephen "had seen him when his ugly, puckish face suggested that his imagination was almost to the breaking point" (Guests of the Nation, p. 129). As the violence increases from one story to the next, the word "imagination" is used often to describe the men who enjoy it. The outcome of this story is the narrator's wild sense of relief when he has launched the bomb, and proven he is a man of daring like Alec Gorman. He and the butcher begin to laugh as they run arm in arm from the scene and as the transport truck careens wildly toward the barracks. "There was something strange in the laughter, something out of

another world, inhuman and sprightly, as though some gay spirit were beating through them both" (Guests of the Nation, p. 132).

In "Laughter" the narrative voice is difficult to determine because it appears to be an unnamed member of the group who judges Eric Nolan's posture as a dandified revolutionary. But the end of the story is entirely limited to Stephen's reactions to throwing the bomb, and there is no judgment of the act. A reader accustomed to the clear narrative comment of O'Connor's later stories does not find the "wise comment" O'Connor admires in Chekhov's stories, and which is standard in his own mature cycles.

There is no doubt, however, of the narrator's judgments in the third story, "Jo." The first person narrator is nearly as wild as Alec Gorman, and for a time the narrator, Jo, and Alec go out on "jobs" such as tearing up railway ties "on principle." The narrator tells his story in a bar years after the war, and recounts his exploits with Jo. He would not talk about Jo until Jo was safely in America. It could have proven dangerous. Jo was

what you'd call a nice, good-natured fellow, though that free-and-easy smile of his had been spoiled by him having two front teeth knocked out in a tap-room row. There was a wild streak in Jo. (Guests of the Nation, p. 136)

The wild streak comes out not only in his violent schemes and their execution, but in everything he thought; "but to be fair to all, I must say that you could never be certain of what you heard from Jo, for he had a strong imagination" (Guests of the Nation, p. 138).

The narrator tells how Jo made friends with a youth called The Marshal, a Corkman who chose the Free State side at the beginning of the civil war. Jo never forgives any of his old comrades who chose against him, and in the case of The Marshal he makes an effort to seek him out. One morning when he and Alec Gorman are tearing up railway ties he notices that The Marshal is guarding the station. Waiting for a clear shot, he manages to hit the youth "two out of three, brother." In so "imaginary a man" friendship can easily turn to the opposite extreme, and the narrator himself becomes uneasy when Jo accuses him of stealing his girlfriend. "He thought I was in love with her and would give him away to the other side just to get rid of him. He was real mad about that. This will show you what an imaginary man Jo was when roused" (Guests of the Nation, p. 141).

Refusing to criticize the wild streak in Jo, the narrator at least recognizes the danger it poses. After The Marshal is shot

I could never bring myself to be pally with Jo again. Though as I said before he was an imaginary man, and didn't always mean what he said, there was a terrible wild streak in him

And after that, I never spoke a word to Jo's girl again. (Guests of the Nation, p. 146)

The final story of the "comic" series belongs to Alec Gorman, who by now is legendary to the young revolutionaries of Cork. The narrator is Larry Delaney, a native of Blarney Lane, Cork, who is in later cycles O'Connor's major autobiographical character and reliable narrator. Larry is one of the Corkmen who fights with Alec Gorman. The story takes place near the end of the civil war and includes many of the details of O'Connor's own experiences in jail before transfer to Gormanstown Internment Camp. The "Laney" women too, are recognizable from O'Connor's acquaintances described in An Only Child.

Alec is nearly the only fighter left as the tide turns against the Republican side, "a solitary Cuchulain at the ford." The narrator is careful to point out Alec's difference from the original fervent group of revolutionary youths in Cork.

Alec had never belonged to us, he was too much of an idler. Idler, lounge at bars, tippler, scrounge, football fan, spy, maker of quarrels. That was Alec.

Every town has its own Irishtown and every Irish-town its Alec. He was known to everybody. He was welcome at every pub for miles around. (Guests of the Nation, p. 147)

The narrator spends nearly half of his story describing the way Alec behaves in domestic situations. It is much the same way he reacts in war, only the war

gives him more scope for his love of violence. He is the same "imaginary" character whether a "Laney" woman angers him, or an enemy "from the other side." Larry describes in detail a quarrel Alec joins between two old women. Taking sides between them

Alec crossed the road to Najax's house, and stamped in on her, blustering and swearing. Najax retorted by giving him sauce. Then he lifted up a bath of sudsy water that was on the table before her and threw it at her head, leaving her with her own nightdress hung about her neck, dripping with water. The rest of the clothes that she had been washing he kicked all around the floor in a perfect fury.

This was Alec when he was quite himself. (Guests of the Nation, p. 151)

Although the narrator does not condemn Alec he listens to the washerwoman's complaint and is sympathetic with her distress and poverty. As he hears her tearful account he notices her home.

The tiny window was covered by an old red petticoat, and in the light of an oil lamp bracketed to the wall the white room, with its deal table and bath, its handful of plain chairs, looked hateful and bleak and sordid. And as I became conscious of it I became conscious of an intolerable feeling of pity in myself, that pity which is the curse of our garrulous and emotional race. She was looking up at me, haggard, and fierce, and I was aware of the fine modelling of her nose and cheeks, of the hawklike intensity in her, and in a moment I was sitting beside her trying to soothe the wild look out of her eyes.

She was very like a child (Guests of the Nation, p. 156)

When the narrator, Peter Keary, another revolutionary, and Alec's mother all try to criticize him for the incident

they are not heard.

Alec had almost forgotten about the incident and it was only when Peter called it a low-down trick that he began to defend himself by crying out "shut up for Christ sake," and Peter realised the futility of saying any more. (Guests of the Nation, p. 158)

Alec is described in one more domestic scene before the parallels are drawn between them and his war exploits. Alec is the lord of his household, taking money from his mother, a washerwoman, sending his sister to buy cigarettes, and screaming at his father "Ah shut up you . . . I'm sorry it isn't a ton of dynamite I have until I'd blow you ou' that bed . . . Go on now, go on now If you're good, I'll take you for a nice ride in your pram" (Guests of the Nation, p. 161).

The second half of the story tells of the group's part in blowing up a bridge, their capture, and Alec's escape from their prison. They are captured in a house Alec forced open after the raid to demand beds for the night. The caretaker informs on them. With Alec's first insolent response to their questions he is beaten, and the narrator fears he is dangerously injured.

Alec began to groan and the groan rose to a squeal as the officer kicked him again. The officer shouted at him to be quiet, but Alec only screamed louder, like a man who was in mortal pain . . . we were chucked back

into the cell . . . Alec whining and holding his stomach. When we got inside I put my hand on his shoulder and said something; he continued whining, and I was astonished at his softness. (Guests of the Nation, p. 169)

Larry is amazed that the next morning Alec is in exuberant spirits. He tries to organize a mass rush on the guards in a daring escape for every prisoner. When someone laughs at his idea he holds his stomach again and doubles up in pain. But once more he cheers up, becoming friendly with a guard, and is taken from the cell. He does not return, and "it was only when the ex-soldier, looking up from his ring-making, came out with the ugly word that was in all our minds that Peter lost his temper" (Guests of the Nation, p. 175).

But no one blames Alec, especially when they find he has staged a daring escape and thrown his guards off one side of a roof and jumped to freedom off the other. Alec goes back to Cork to brag of his exploits, and also returns to the house where they were captured and where he had hidden some guns. The narrator learns that Alec has saved him from the danger of being accused of carrying a gun, but he also reads in a newspaper that "the caretaker, Michael Horgan, an old man, is in hospital, suffering from exposure and injuries said to be the result of a beating. He is not expected to recover!" (Guests of the Nation, p. 178).

Even though some of O'Connor's experiments with the narrative voice lack the clarity of later stories, the cumulative effect of the related stories is to reflect the progress of the war's violence as it triumphs over the fragile idealism that the narrator of "Guests of the Nation" expresses in the first story. Unaware of any concept of brotherhood Alec, the hero of the last fighting, uses the Irish Civil War as an opportunity to express his irresponsible, violent nature. Before that he was confined to the abuse of his helpless family and neighbors.

Unless O'Connor's outline for a cycle is followed, showing the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts, then the following critical account of Guests of the Nation might appear applicable:

The first collection, Guests of the Nation (1931), adulates reckless individuals of nearly legendary stature: the quixotic old Robin Hood whose machine-gun makes him so omnipotent that he participates in any vendetta or civil war that happens his way, even firing innocuously on his own cohorts when he runs out of enemies ("Machine-Gun Corps in Action"); the old man who has been concealing in his attic for five years a son who accidentally killed a man ("Attack"); the derring-do antics of a Civil War guerilla with the proportions of a Cuchulain-Michael Collins combination, leading his enemies to some guns on a roof, leaping off, burning down the house, and escaping ("Alec")
 3

Agreeing with Brenner's interpretation, Gary Davenport comments that O'Connor approaches his subject of

³ Brenner, p. 138.

the civil war with a "highly romanticized view" because his personality is based upon an identification with his mother's imaginative family, manifested in a passion for gaiety.

Even though he thought of himself basically as a dour person who admired gaiety from afar, O'Connor consistently approached life--even its pain and violent aspects--from the viewpoint of his mother and uncle Laurence. The comic impulse is deeply rooted in his background.⁴

Except for the opening story, "Guests of the Nation," he says the comic spirit pervades the work, and O'Connor believes in the spirit of freedom the war fosters:

Thus the revolution was sufficiently important to him to serve as an imaginative focus for much of his early energy as a short-story writer; and he in turn was important to the revolution, because in Guests of the Nation it is treated in a good-natured and often comic manner that one seeks elsewhere in vain.⁵

The two final stories on the subject of the civil war are irrelevant to either Brenner's or Davenport's argument. "Soiree Chez Une Belle Jeune Fille" which returns to the serious tone of the first group of stories is about Helen Joyce's first experience as a revolutionary; she is assigned to her mission by way of a note passed to

⁴ Gary Davenport, "Four Irish Writers in Time of Civil War . . ." Diss. Univ. of South Carolina 1971, p. 114.

⁵ Davenport, p. 139.

her during a literature class. Realizing that the note could have easily been delivered orally, she is nevertheless thrilled by the last instruction on the note:

"Destroy this." She must take a bicycle trip to a country house in weather that is "slobbery and greasy" where she will meet heroic Republican officers to receive her dispatches. But the cold, wet trip does not begin as she had expected.

She handed her dispatch to Michael Redmond, who merely glanced at the contents and put them into his coat pocket. "There was no answer," she asked in consternation. "Not at all," he replied with a shrug of his shoulders and offered her instead several letters to post. She looked incredulously at him, perilously close to tears. (Guests of the Nation, p. 185)

She is further disappointed that the house is owned by a college acquaintance nicknamed "the Darling because she resembled the heroine of some Russian story." Helen has disdained the Darling because she is shallow and interested in attracting men. Helen is appalled to learn the Darling has plans to continue her romance with Michael Redmond that evening.

The Darling looked at her out of indifferent, half-shut eyes. "Michael is a sweet man! . . . It's the way they hold you, isn't it, dear? I mean, don't you know immediately a man puts his arm around you what his character is like?" (Guests of the Nation, p. 197)

The only real excitement of the trip is a visit from a doctor who is uneasy about driving into town with the

corpse of a boy who just died in his car. The boy turns out to be the one Michael Redmond and his companion shot earlier in the day, and the companion hears the news with satisfaction. Helen is horrified at the sight of the boy, and refuses a ride into town, but the killer accepts the lift without qualm. And yet cycling back in the rain as the car with corpse, doctor, and killer passes her, she recalls some lines of a poem to restore her romantic perspective on revolutionary activities. The story ends with the comment

from the depths of her memory rose a bit of a poem that she had heard old Turner quote in college. Had he said it was one of the finest in the English language? It would be like old Turner to say that. Fat lot he knew about it anyway! But it haunted her mind.
 "So the two brothers with their murdered man
 Rode past fair Florence . . ." (Guests of the Nation, p. 200)

The feminine imagination is capable of blotting out the facts of the war experience; Helen Joyce is immersed in the "imaginative improvisation" permeating the Irish response to the war. In the last of the war stories, "The Patriarch," the reliable narrator sums up his own experiences, and judges the entire effort as a romantic venture that ended in the death of his friend, and in his own complete disillusionment with idealism that matches itself up with violence. While the narrator's name is not Larry Delaney, he is an autobiographical character, growing up in

Blarney Lane, buying pictures of the heroes of the Easter Rising in 1916, joining the Gaelic League, then the Irish Republican Army during his teen-age years. The conclusion of "The Patriarch" involves his rejection of the ideals of the man bearing that title who is a childlike, innocent proprietor of a sweet shop. As a boy the narrator, Dermot, earned sweets by quoting Gaelic to the Patriarch, who did not know the language himself but revered anyone who did. Dermot learned Gaelic from his grandmother who remembered phrases like "Give me a kiss," but nothing about the "Cause." But that does not stop Michael Callanan, the Patriarch. Dermot translates his latest Gaelic lesson for him:

O my wife and my children and my little spinning wheel. My couple pounds of flax each day not spun--two days she's in bed for one she's about the house, and Oh, may the dear God help me get rid of her!
(Guests of the Nation, p. 205)

The Patriarch epitomizes O'Connor's judgment of most participants in the Irish rebellion, at least in its early stages.

"I have it," he exclaimed solemnly. "'Tis England he means. The bad wife in the house. That's it--I have it all straightened out now. You have to have them songs interpreted for you. The pounds of flax she didn't spin are all the industries she ruined on us. England, the bad wife--ah, how true it is? Dark songs for a people in chains." (Guests of the Nation, p. 206)

Dermod heard this interpretation when he was fourteen years old and recalls

I went away, dedicated to the revolution, a youthful carrier of sedition that was never even guessed at by the poor country singer who had made my song . . . But by that time, thanks to Michael Callanan, I already knew some Irish, and had imbibed a little of the old man's boundless hatred of what he called the "hereidhithary enemy." (Guests of the Nation, p. 207)

Enjoying his attention from the old man Dermod is appalled when "the bombshell of the rebellion" brings about the old man's arrest for supporting "gun-running."

Dermod recalls the activity in Cork in the early 1920s, and the sweet shop becomes a gathering place for revolutionaries.

By this time the whole country was on the edge of a volcano, and the Patriarch was happier than he had ever been in his life before. He loved the sight of young men and now he had young men in plenty to listen to him. He would shake me by the shoulder--I was then a gawky lad of sixteen--and shout, "Hurry up, hurry up Dermod, will you! Hurry up and grow up before we free old Ireland without you!" (Guests of the Nation, p. 215)

The war came along when Dermod had nothing better to do than brood upon boys' games or a first love affair. He found his assignments to "shadow" suspicious people around the town enormously exciting.

We were innocent in those days, and yet strangely, when the armistice came and there was no longer anything for us to do, we woke and found ourselves hardened, almost grown up, a little sly, a little

given to bragging, a little contemptuous of people like the Patriarch who indulged in what we thought false sentiment. (Guests of the Nation, p. 216)

For the Patriarch the fun went out of the war when it turned into a civil conflict. His "boys" were levelling guns at one another, and he had probably financed weapons for both sides. The Patriarch stopped Dermot in tears pleading with him to patch things up with his "brothers." But they were finding a different war experience from anything they had imagined.

We--that is to say, the little group that had grown up under Michael Callanan's nostrils--managed to keep fairly well together. We never saw him now, in fact we rarely dared to go into the city at all. After the first flush of enthusiasm has died away, fighting of this sort is a filthy game in which obstinacy and the desire for revenge soon predominate. (Guests of the Nation, p. 221)

These reactions sound much like O'Connor's own sentiments in the autobiography. What destroys the idea of war entirely for Dermot is the death of the youngest member of the group. The group hero, Alec Gorman defies the spotters to get a last look at the boy and talk to his family. Dermot's job is to try to console the Patriarch, now an entirely broken old man who blames himself for the boy's death.

The story ends in the Patriarch's death, when he has lost all understanding of the war, and his childlike mind has entered its last imaginative battles over which

saint his housekeeper lights candles to in opposition to his own favorites. Dermot realizes that the Patriarch never understood what the war was about, and he realizes that what endures beyond his own experience is the sense of brotherhood he feels for the Patriarch, akin to the sense of brotherhood the narrator of "Guests of the Nation" felt for his English prisoners. Dermot, through his war experience, comes to reject the unrealistic source; his judgment gives him the power of moral vision, and with it the sense of brotherhood.

The pattern of a story cycle in Guests of the Nation is present, along with the moral structure it is based on, but the one is not more readily apparent than the other. The methods O'Connor experiments with for the first time are rough sketches for his mature cycles. Only one story, "Guests of the Nation," is masterful, uniting the construction of a moral hierarchy with a clear narrative voice. The moral hierarchy remains a favorite device through his career; in Bones of Contention it is achieved through powerful dramatic incident, the moral and the weak characters falling into their proper places as the result of the action. More often the moral hierarchy is achieved with the aid of a reliable narrator, or with the authoritative intrusion of the writer's confident judgment. It is the narrative voice that proves to be the weakest element of O'Connor's first attempt at a cycle,

particularly the stories of the "lyrical," "poetic," "static," nature he describes in the stories of A Sportsman's Sketches, the form of the conte that eventually gives way to the nouvelle in his later cycles.

The weakest of the stories in Guests of the Nation are the lyrical stories. "Nightpiece with Figures," "Soiree Chez Une Belle Jeune Fille," and the conclusion to "The Patriarch" all become blurred in their purpose with melodrama or sentimentality as the result. O'Connor gradually turns away from this sort of writing, perhaps finding in himself the weakness he assigned to Austen and Turgenev--they "loved poetry too well." Whatever the reason, the decision was sound. These stories suffer as does the "comic" story "Laughter" from a narrative voice that becomes accidentally confused with O'Connor's. "Laughter" begins

While he was waiting for Eric Nolan to appear he told mother and daughters the story of the last ambush. It was Alec Gorman's story, really, and it needed Alec's secretive excited way of telling it and his hearty peal of laughter as he brought it to a close. (Guests of the Nation, p. 122)

The "he" of the first sentence is Stephen, in whose mind the reader learns impressions of his initiation into violence. But the second sentence suggests that there is a different narrative voice commenting on the scene outside of Stephen's perceptions. The confusion is never actually

resolved, and it is not difficult to understand how critics, commenting on the stories only as separate entities from the rest of the cycle, would misapprehend O'Connor's purpose. That purpose is blurred by an unclear point of view. Until O'Connor settles on a point of view that can "comment wisely" as Chekhov is free to do, then his experiments with the narrative voice continue to cause difficulty.

Complementing the lyrical tendencies of the stories is a tendency toward "local color" as O'Connor describes descriptive writing in his criticism, the kind that can lead to poetic imagery and the dangerous symbolism of some modern writers. That problem is settled at about the same time that the narrative voice is controlled to suit his purpose. In an interview held after his last cycle is complete O'Connor remarks that in his writing description is kept to a minimum:

It is one of the things I know I do, and sometimes when I'm reading Coppard I feel that it's entirely wrong. I'd love to be able to describe people as he describes them, and landscapes as he describes them, but I begin the story in the man's head and it never gets out of the man's head.⁶

The man's head usually belongs to a character lacking in lyrical flights, or an interest in observing details of the

⁶ Frank O'Connor, in "Frank O'Connor" interview, ed. Anthony Whittier, Paris Review XVII (Autumn-Winter 1957), 49.

physical world. The man's head is involved in moral concerns, in the relation that should exist between the feminine imagination and the masculine judgment. It is no accident that the experiments with point of view dominate the writing in his second volume, Bones of Contention.

But the methods he finds successful for his purposes in Guests of the Nation are retained and developed in later writing. The mature cycles usually show a chronological ordering of stories, by incident in time, or by age of the narrator; they have characters who appear in more than one story, and they are often unified by a general sense of place, usually a provincial city like Cork; they have arrangement of stories into groups unified by tone. Most important, they increasingly clarify the concept of the two poles of human nature, the feminine imagination and the masculine judgment. The mature cycles show a movement from innocence to experience with the help of these various methods; the main problem facing O'Connor after Guests of the Nation is how to integrate personal experiences, especially the ones centering on the struggle for maturity, into his story cycles. The attempt in Guests of the Nation is clouded by lack of technical control. The year after its publication he turns his attention to the problem in his first novel, The Saint and Mary Kate (1932), and again in his second novel, Dutch Interior (1940). But that story of personal maturation is finally told successfully in the

form of the story cycle, when the narrator achieves the proper balance between judgment and imagination.

The last story of Guests of the Nation, "The Procession of Life," gives a glimpse of how that integration of autobiography and fiction is achieved. The narrator passes a milestone in his struggle for maturity, which, finally, is what O'Connor intended in his volume on the war. Larry Delaney, the resident of Blarney Lane, Cork, is the narrator, and his mother is dead. Without her protection Larry's father imposes curfews upon him that he fears to disobey. But one night he comes in late and he cannot get into the house. He determines to show his father he does not need the protection of the house, and he begins to wander about the quays. There he meets a prostitute as goodhearted as any Maupassant invented who offers to take the boy home with her. But a bully of a policeman claims her for himself. Larry, however, feels his growing sense of triumph over his father and, at least, takes his first drink of straight whiskey, and smokes a cigarette without becoming ill. As the sun rises over Cork he heads for home, on the way to maturity.

The second volume of stories ends with just such a story of a boy's struggle for maturity in terms of sexual initiation. The war experience is intimately related to the growth toward maturity, and the idealist of "September Dawn" replaces his idealism with a real woman; the old man

called the Patriarch remains sexually innocent all of his life. But Guests of the Nation only gives a hint of how that process of maturation is related to the balance of a masculine judgment and feminine imagination. Bones of Contention (1936) makes the two poles of human nature in O'Connor's theory the central thematic concern. The moral dilemmas of all the stories are based on an imbalance along one pole or the other. At the same time the search continues for the best form to express his vision of reality.

Bones of Contention

At a glance Bones of Contention (1936) seems to be a new departure for O'Connor after the war stories of Guests of the Nation since only two among the eleven stories even peripherally touch on the subject. They are "Lofty," in which the conceited hero pretends to be a rebel commander, and "The English Soldier," in which a lonely Canadian boy makes friends with an Irish family before going off to die in Germany. A second glance shows that each story is thematically related to O'Connor's developing theory of imagination and judgment. In Guests of the Nation it is applied primarily to an historical period, with generally normal individuals thrown into the "refrigerator of the imagination." In Bones of Contention O'Connor applies the theory in several ways, experimenting with its application to individuals, to

marriages, and to whole "peasant" and "townie" populations that can be temporarily caught up in a "romantic improvisation" of one kind or another. Unless there is a balance of imagination and judgment within an individual or in any human relationship, there can be no clear moral understanding and sympathy. So simple and seemingly narrow a theory applied to every story in a volume could produce the unity of a story cycle, or it could produce boredom.

Bones of Contention does neither. It is not a story cycle because the wide range of experimental writing, particularly with point of view, creates so uneven a group of stories that the thematic continuity is hard to find. For example, "Orpheus and His Lute" tells how drinking excesses bring about the downfall of the Irish-town Band who were reputed to be the most talented musicians Ireland produced in fifty years. But it takes a while to begin the story. After the epigraph, "Du holde Kunst," it opens with a dialogue of sorts.

"The changes in this city--! said the old man, and then paused as though overcome.

"What changes?" I enquired.

"Ah, well," he concluded in a shocking anticlimax, "'tis God's holy will."

"But what are the changes," I persisted.

"What are the changes? Isn't it change enough for anyone that the two things the people were fondest of under the sun, the two things they'd give body and soul for are after falling into disrespect?"

"And what are they?"

"What else but porter and music?--Sometimes it was the music got the upper hand and sometimes the

porter, but the one and the other were in every bit of sport and mischief there was. Did I ever tell you the story of the Irishtown band?"

"You did not."

"Well, now 'tis a little story worth telling, . . .⁷

By the time the narrator does begin to tell the tale, he makes it nearly as rambling as the introduction; the point of the story is lost, even if the point is to tell an entertaining anecdote. The method O'Connor experiments with several times throughout the volume is one he imitates from the Irish "shanachie" or public storyteller. Such people were still practicing their art in the 1930s in remote areas of Ireland, and O'Connor made numerous pilgrimages to hear them speak. He even wrote an introduction to The Tailor and Ansty by Eric Cross, another devotee of shanachie storytelling, who recorded and transcribed the repertoire of "The Tailor of Gougane Barra."

In his essay "The Irish Short Story and Oral Tradition," Vivian Mercier advises that

writers--and especially short-story writers and dramatists--in languages whose oral tradition has atrophied should turn for refreshment to languages which possess a living oral tradition. Irish writers of English can do this without leaving their own country. . . The two Irish writers who have been

⁷ Frank O'Connor, Bones of Contention (New York: Macmillan, 1938), pp. 28-29. All further references to this work are in the text.

most openly and articulately concerned with the question of how to restore the oral quality of fiction and especially the short story are Frank O'Connor and George Moore.⁸

Moore's reason for writing The Untilled Field as he explains in his introduction, is so that it can be a model for future Irish writers to return to their own idiom, richer than any literary imitation of Englishman's writing could be.

O'Connor's own reason for getting the "tone of a man's voice speaking" into literature is one he never explains except by naming the writers who have let it disappear from their own work: Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, those autobiographical writers who reside at Northanger Abbey. The "public" voice of the shanachie assumes a unified, receptive audience, sharing in the same traditions and value system as the speaker. This narrative experiment is most apparent in Bones of Contention, and the shanachie's "public" voice does not survive without transformation in his later stories.

In The Lonely Voice he explains why a "public" voice is impossible to the lonely, alienated modern

⁸ Vivian Mercier, "The Irish Short Story and Oral Tradition," in The Celtic Cross, ed. Ray B. Browne, William John Roscelli, and Richard Loftus. Purdue University Studies (Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Research Foundation, 1964), p. 107.

storyteller; the modern story is a "private" art, and the writer can claim to address only the solitary reader, as lonely as himself. He attacks the stories of Rudyard Kipling because the writer assumes the voice of a spokesman for an entire society. "The Town that Voted the Earth Was Flat" fails because of the narrative voice, and because of the attempt to involve levels of society that a storyteller cannot hope to reach. The criticism of Kipling's work might be the same criticism he applied at one time to his own work. "The Man that Stopped" is a tale involving half of Ireland before the "stopping" epidemic is over. Its opening is even more involved than that of "Orpheus and His Lute."

"The queerest thing I ever saw," began the old man in his meditative way.

"Yes?" I said eagerly.

"The queerest thing anyone ever saw," he continued correcting himself with great firmness, "occurred in this town when I was a boy."

"And that was?"

"The man that stopped."

"Stopped?"

"Stopped."

"What do you mean by stopped?"

"I mean stopped and nothing else. Now you're a clever young man; you write stories; and still you never thought of writing a story about a man that stopped. I'm not blaming you. Far from it. How could you, and you never seen the like? But it just shows you. (Bones of Contention, p. 154)

Rather than contributing to his desire to "get down to the people" (which he was proclaiming in radio

broadcasts shortly after the publication of this volume), the use of the shanachie only creates more distance between the reader and the narrator. The authoritative voice O'Connor wants for his moral purpose does not resemble the voice of the shanachie. And yet in the best group of stories, the "peasant" stories, O'Connor uses a narrator who observes the conflict facing an entire community; the narrator is a part of the community, is unidentified, and achieves "the tone of a man's voice speaking." This narrative approach, as well as that of an omniscient narrator of a highly dramatic scene are both highly effective.

The peasant stories compose nearly the first half of the book. In each story there is a moral conflict that a community or an individual tries to resolve, most often to no one's satisfaction. O'Connor's triumph is that the essential right and wrong of the basic issue is accepted. There are two stories of murder, one of theft and one of assault. No one questions the act itself, only what is to be done about the culprit. The characters are finally judged in their moral hierarchies according to the fusion of judgment and imagination. The extremists find no way out of the conflict created by imposing their vision of reality upon the objective world.

The opening story is not part of the peasant group, but presents the two extremes of temperament in terms of

a marriage. In "Michael's Wife" the husband, Tom, is warm-hearted, emotional, and incapable of dealing alone with any situation. His wife, Maire, on the other hand "was born heavy with the weight of sense," and relies entirely on her judgment to sustain her. Neither one alone can understand what is troubling their daughter-in-law on a visit from America. They do not know that their son is dead, and she does not tell them. Tom's sister, Kate, knows how to deal with the girl because Kate has a balanced, sympathetic mind, and rather than learning the girl's secret, shows her how to accept her husband's death.

In the first peasant story the dilemma is a moral one. Michael John Cronin has stolen the funds from the Carricknabreena Hurling, Football and Temperance Association. The club members condemn the action, but if they prosecute the boy, the rest of the world will think there is a thief in Carricknabreena. And that would hurt everyone's pride. To hush the matter up they go to the priest, who insists on using Michael John as an example, and the town is shamed. First, the town tried to take up a collection to send Michael John to America, but after he has actually served his three-month sentence, the town tries to make up for the blot on its character by collecting money for setting him up in business. He prospers,

marries a wealthy girl, buys a public house, and becomes the Shylock of the community, requiring usurious interest rates on debts.

The town cannot see its mistake in imposing a lie on the reality of the situation. The priest, equally intolerant, loses his position when everyone tithes in a different parish. The narrator, a member of the community, obviously burnt by Michael John's rates, concludes with a string of oaths against the priest which the town first hurled at Michael John. The comic result is that the one man everyone recognizes as the low man on the moral hierarchy is the only one who is happy about the entire situation.

In the next story the question of moral balance is given a more difficult test, when the community of Farrenchreesht unites to save a murderess from the hangman. This highly dramatic story was popular on the Abbey Theatre stage, adapted by Hugh Hunt. The omniscient narrator lets everyone speak for himself, and it is not difficult to imagine the scene in three dimensions. As in the case of Michael John, everyone knows the guilt of Helena Maguire who murdered her husband so she could "have Cady Driscoll." The moral hierarchy is a complex one, and even Helena herself rises along it when she begins to understand what she has done. In court she had no idea of what was happening, and she was more interested

in taking her money from the State to buy a bright blue blouse. But when a vindictive neighbor tells her she is now free to marry Cady Driscoll she answers that her lover is no more to her than the salt sea. Sitting in the train going back to Farranchreesht with those who lied to save her, she finally reacts.

The flame of life had narrowed in her to a pin-point, and she could only wonder at the force that had caught her up, mastered her and thrown her aside.

"No more to me," she repeated dully to her own image in the window, "no more to me than the salt sea." (Bones of Contention, p. 82)

Not all the characters lied for Helena to save their village from disgrace. The sergeant who could not trace the poison she used, is glad that Helena will not be hanged. He is shown to be a tolerant man--his is a shrew--and he wants nothing to do with the suggestion that the community "give her the hunt" when Helena gets back to Farranchreesht. Moll Mor, the best liar of the group to save Helena, does not lie to save Farranchreesht. She, too, is shown to be tolerant, to have sinned herself, and to have learned to communicate with the two sides of her personality, her judgment and imagination, until she has found a moral center. The sergeant's wife shares the lower reaches of the moral hierarchy because she screams when Helena accidentally tries to enter her railway carriage, and her elevated image of herself inspires the gentle policemen with disdain. There is an old peasant wife

on the train who marvels that the world is becoming so bad; in the good old days the people would never have committed murder. But in each story there is the same comment, and the suggestion that in those good days there was the same struggle between thought and feeling for the achievement of a mature vision.

Perhaps the best story of the volume is "The Majesty of the Law." The violator is Old Dan Bride, who like the other offenders is childlike. Like the intolerant priest in "Peasants" he is also celibate.

Dan had looked after his mother while the spark of life was in her, and after her death no other woman had crossed the threshold. Signs on it, his house had that look. Almost everything in it he had made with his own hands, in his own way. (Bones of Contention, p. 83)

His conflict arises when a neighbor does not understand Dan's "own way" and argues loudly with him. The entire story is taken up with a description of the elaborate ritual the policeman observes in serving Dan with his warrant. Dan refuses to pay a fine for justifiably "opening the head" of his neighbor, and prefers to go to jail in order to shame the neighbor before the community. At the end of the tea- and whisky-drinking and pipe-smoking ritual, Dan vents his grievance to the policeman.

Together the two men strolled down the laneway, while Dan explained how it was that he, a respectable old man, had had the grave misfortune to open the

head of another old man in such a way as to necessitate his being removed to hospital, and why it was that he could not give the old man in question the satisfaction of paying in cash for an injury brought about through the victim's own unmannerly method of argument. (Bones of Contention, p. 96)

Old Dan, like the elder of "In the Train" believes that the old days were the good days, when people made whisky from heather, were close to the fairies, could cure rheumatism, and were always mannerly. Old Dan belongs among the characters whose personal visions brook no contradiction. When enough people are willing to impose the ideal upon the real in Guests of the Nation, the result is violence. The same is true when an individual, out of touch with objective reality, imposes his own improvisation on the outside world.

The last story of the group is "Tears--Idle Tears," in which a man is accidentally killed in a tap-room fight, which he probably started, and where he died hitting his head in his last fall. The community cannot allow anyone to think they have a brawling town, so they do not admit to an accident, or even a death. No officials can crack their story, but afterwards there is no peace in the town. Brawling with one another, they gain a reputation for bad temper in the town where "the fairies took the man." The first person narrator figures out what happened, and understands that the town is paying more for its deceit than it would have paid for the accident.

The conflicts in each story are resolved around the method of the moral hierarchy, the characters' places determined by their ability to find a balance between judgment and imagination for a clear, sympathetic, moral vision. In the second half of the book O'Connor demonstrates the universality of the theory by taking it to Ireland's "townie" population. People in town are just the same, and while capable of finding the moral balance, many of them do not. These stories are generally less satisfactory than the peasant stories because the narrative voice intrudes with comment and judgment, sharply separating the judgment from the dramatic incident that should demonstrate it. In "Lofty" there is an individual who creates an image of himself as dashing, noble, dignified, and then tries to impose it on reality. It works while his plumbing business is successful and he can dress up his employees as rebels and pretend to join the Republican troops during the civil war. But when his fanciful world engrosses him entirely, his plumbing business fails, his wife and children leave home, and he is left with only his mirror and his memories of the great days serving Ireland's "Cause." The tone of voice that describes Lofty is familiar to later cycles, authoritative, accurate, but here it performs in front of the curtain between acts.

He had a certain whining, soft, insinuating manner, and a certain look, broadly and angelically innocent,

which he could summon up at will and which made his whole face shine with super-celestial light, even when he told the most infernal lies. As a companion he was unreliable, because sometimes when lies failed and punishment seemed imminent he split. He was a great braggart, who could never be brought to admit that he was wrong, and was forever setting up to know things he knew nothing of. Naturally, he remained, till the end of his days, unteachable. (Bones of Contention, p. 118)

Gerry Brenner, accepting the idea that O'Connor is a modern champion of the individual, the instinctive, and the irrational, says that O'Connor takes sides with his "imprudent heroes," praising their rash acts as manifestations of individuality in an impersonal modern world. He uses Old Dan Bride as his primary example of "moral fecklessness" that wins O'Connor's approval. This is in accordance with O'Connor's theory of the "Little Man" he describes in The Lonely Voice.

Dan's victory lies in what O'Connor sees as his ability to absorb completely the impersonality of public law and thereby keep the issue a personal one. His accuser, not the legal machinery, is the one who punishes, and gets punished by, Dan. The upshot of the conflict between legal systems is that O'Connor celebrates the supremacy of Dan's individuality which ignores responsibilities, metamorphosing them into private ones . . . By compelling the reader to applaud the majesty of Dan's personalized law, O'Connor also inveigles him into approving the impulsiveness of Dan's initial act of violence since to accept only one act of individuality and not the other would be inconsistent: this is O'Connor's victory.⁸

⁸ Brenner, pp. 131-32.

If the inconsistency is instead found to be in O'Connor's definition, then Old Dan Bride need not be a member of a submerged population group whom O'Connor celebrates in opposition to the impersonality of the modern world. On the other hand, if Bones of Contention is regarded as an experiment in the story cycle, then the improvidence of Dan Bride also extends to the "townies" and even back to the heroes of the civil war whose imbalance of imagination and judgment has disturbed their moral eyesight.

While Bones of Contention does not give the immediate effect of a unified group of stories whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts, the book is closer to the achievement of a story cycle than is Guests of the Nation. The gain is from an increasing mastery of the story writer's art, particularly in what he calls in The Lonely Voice the dramatized conte. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that O'Connor soon drops this form after his success with it in "Peasants," "In the Train," and "Majesty of the Law." But at this period of his life his concern is to find an adequate form for the expression of his own personal experiences as they relate to his theory of the imagination. On that relationship he might be able to establish authority of the moralist who has an understanding of the proper balance between judgment and imagination.

As in Guests of the Nation O'Connor reserves the last story of the volume for autobiographical experiences dealing with the process of maturation. This time the boy from Blarney Lane, Cork, is not Larry Delaney; his name is Noel, but he cannot keep a job as a messenger or as clerk in a draper's shop because he is a "dreamer." His pretensions are greater than Lofty's but his saving grace is that he knows when he is telling lies; he simply cannot help it because his life of the imagination is much more interesting than his career in the draper's shop. Each time he meets a girl who is attractive to him he becomes "melancholy"; he sighs, and he creates a romantic dream around the real girl until there can be no matching the real and the ideal. His problem is that the girls take him seriously, and before the end of the story he is engaged to three girls at the same time, each of them impossible to leave. Finally, his improvisations go too far, and he wakes one morning to find one of the girls in bed beside him; she is no longer "magical." Now

the world would be magical again, but not for him . . . He had fallen, and wasn't a ha-porth the wiser for his fall, and the woman of the night before had become a liability . . . (Bones of Contention, p. 271)

Before O'Connor is able to turn to the short story form in the cycle he devises for it, he makes two attempts to handle the mass of autobiographical material

based on his idea of his mother's feminine imagination, his overdependence on her, and his quest for independence and maturity. In 1932, a year after Guests of the Nation, he published The Saint and Mary Kate, a novel about a young boy in a Cork tenement house who is devoted to his mother. In 1940 he published Dutch Interior, a novel about a potentially great Irish artist who decides to sacrifice himself for his family, and who buys a house for his mother to grow old in. While the two novels are both failures as novels, they teach him what he needs to know about a story cycle. The Saint and Mary Kate has an omniscient narrator whose longwinded explanations are relieved by short, sometimes good, dramatic scenes. All characters are based on his theory of the feminine imagination and masculine judgment, and all are clearly labeled so the reader cannot mistake the danger when they attempt to live at either extreme. The form of the novel is imitative of Fielding's sequences in the country, along the road, and in the town, except that in O'Connor's novel the country is provincial Cork, and the town is Dublin. Dutch Interior is more like a series of short stories than it is a novel, and it resembles the structure of Winesburg, Ohio. The two together constitute the next stage in the development of O'Connor's story cycle.

CHAPTER V
THE NOVELS, THE SAINT AND MARY KATE
AND DUTCH INTERIOR

When O'Connor's first novel was published in 1932 his theory of imagination and judgment was already worked out on three levels. It applies to the individual who struggles to unite the opposite poles of his nature; it applies to men and women who are naturally dominated by one or the other of their faculties, and who seek "the completion of human experience" through courtship and marriage; and it applies to periods of history such as the time of Ireland's "Troubles" when an entire society experiences the tyrannical imposition of a "romantic improvisation" upon external reality. The theory initially developed out of O'Connor's personal struggle toward maturity in the face of great obstacles. First, he regarded the imaginative faculty of his own nature as exercising too much influence during his early years because of his reliance on his mother's protective spirit. Second, his model for the masculine faculty of judgment, Mick O'Donovan, was himself suffering from an internal dissociation of the two faculties of human personality, and O'Connor's spirit revolted against his father. O'Connor's own immense struggle for personal balance is a story he attempted to tell many times. The

story is based on long years of hard experience from earliest childhood to maturity finally achieved later than O'Connor felt was normal. After experimenting with a few autobiographical stories he decided that for so comprehensive a story the novel could be suitable. But his two attempts to tell his personal story in a novel ended in artistic failures. Considered as steps in a process of experimentation, The Saint and Mary Kate (1932) and Dutch Interior (1940) were successful in teaching O'Connor valuable lessons which he applied to the development of a cycle, in which, ultimately, he could tell his own story.

In the first novel the story of imagination and judgment is presented in terms of a courtship between a girl embodying O'Connor's ideal of the imaginative faculty and a boy who cannot respond to her because of his undeveloped faculty of masculine judgment. (His initial trouble is overdependence on his mother and absence of a father.) But this story constitutes about one third of the work. The rest is padded with "local color," a hubbub of peripheral characters to represent a panoramic view of society, and melodramatic incident. O'Connor had little interest in these aspects of the novel, because he had little interest in these aspects of life. The writing that fills in around the central relationship is often perfunctory, and two thirds of the novel is fairy tale. In his constant quest for a voice of moral authority O'Connor

includes an omniscient narrator whose judgment over the world of the novel is no more convincing than the world itself. The entire experiment may well have been the basis for his comments in Towards an Appreciation of Literature that the novel form is not viable in twentieth century literature.

The second experiment, Dutch Interior, is built upon an entirely different approach that comes near to that of a story cycle. The autobiographical experiences that form the plot belong to the same year in which the novel was written, with the consequence that the narrative voice is completely identified with the characters undergoing extreme emotional upheaval. The point of view creates an opposite problem from that of the first novel; it demands emotional responses that are not justified by the interaction of plot and character. The result, instead of fairy tale, is melodrama. In The Saint and Mary Kate O'Connor meant for the authority of the narrator to be validated by the consistency between his comments and the world reflected by character and action. In Dutch Interior he attempted to show the validity of his theory of imagination and judgment by applying it to more than one set of characters suffering from the same dissociation of the two aspects of human nature. The two story lines alternated from one chapter to the next, and are complicated by a friendship that forms between one character from each set. No chapter tells a story complete in itself as does a story in a cycle; in

consequence the complex web of relationships forms a plot that is extremely difficult to follow.

The experiments in the novel were sufficient to show O'Connor that his own needs did not demand a single long narrative, but a series of short, but independent units that could be arranged into a thematic whole. The autobiographical material is successfully told in his final story cycles. The novels served to eliminate the imitation of nineteenth century conventions, and drew him toward the final development of the story cycle.

The Saint and Mary Kate

The Saint and Mary Kate is built around another of O'Connor's warnings against the dangers of "romantic improvisation," although this time the ideal imposed upon reality is not political as in Guests of the Nation, but religious. O'Connor finds Ireland's religion to be as introverted as its politics, and the effects of it more deeply embedded in Irish society than even the scars of the "Troubles." The love story of the imaginative Mary Kate McCormick and the deeply confused Phil Dinan, the Saint, is a simple one. They grow up together in the Doll's House, a reeking tenement house in Cork. Mary Kate has many built-in troubles including her mother's prostitution and her father's permanent absence. She is occasionally gullible, but each experience brings her closer to maturity;

she is determined to recognize the good from the bad people, and seek out those who can help her to a better life. She knows, first of all, that she needs a father, so at an early age she sets out in search of one, choosing a neighbor who is stable, pipe-smoking, and gentle. But when he is overwhelmed by a drinking bout closely resembling Mick O'Donovan's described in An Only Child, Mary Kate learns a lesson. With each collision with objective reality Mary Kate grows more sensitive to other characters, and is more able to judge them wisely. Within her, her faculties of judgment and imagination gravitate toward one another.

The Saint, on the other hand, does not confront reality, and with each of his conflicts he takes one more step inward, seeking the protection of an "imaginative improvisation" that grows into "religious mania" of the kind O'Connor describes in An Only Child, and which Mary Kate calls "fidgets." Phil should be a model for the masculine judgment; his powers of abstraction attract Mary Kate, but she learns that much of his apparent judgment is only diverted emotional energy. He spends his time attempting to deny the imaginative side of his nature. Like Mary Kate he has the problem of growing up without a father, so when his mother dies he turns all his energy to the preparation of meeting his Father in heaven. His mother, until her death, is a housemaid six days a week while he studies to prepare for their future. Their world is built

around their dreams of security, money, and property, that his successful career will provide. This all sounds familiar to a reader of O'Connor's autobiography. Only Phil Dinan does fulfill O'Connor's ambition to live alone with his mother, and to become an excellent student. When Mrs. Dinan falls fatally ill, her son is ill-prepared for a confrontation with the outside world. The agony of her illness and Phil's hysterical reaction draw Mary Kate into their lives. Improvising as she goes along, she learns how to comfort, cook, clean, find money, food, and medicine. At Mrs. Dinan's funeral she is Phil's spiritual support.

As Mary Kate becomes attached to Phil she realizes her primary need is for a romantic relationship with a man, rather than for a child's relationship with her father. Simultaneously, Phil's inability to cope with reality causes him to make a systematic withdrawal from it. On the day of his mother's funeral he buys a watch, and his "fidgets" begin. Mary Kate looks on with increasing uneasiness as Phil turns his life into a series of mechanical devotions executed with mathematical precision. He also takes a job as a carpenter because it was Joseph's profession. Though he is attracted to Mary Kate he comes to think of her as a temptation, and he redoubles his efforts to prepare himself for the next world by denying all the pleasures of this one.

Mary Kate is near despair after she invites Phil to kiss her which he declines to do because it would mean a betrothal recorded in heaven, and he is intended for a life of asceticism. Her own sense of reality tells her it is time to be kissed, and she writes the promise in blood drawn from her finger. She succeeds in being kissed, but desires a physical relationship that is part of a spiritual one. When Phil denies her, her desire for a father reasserts itself. Coincidentally her father in Dublin invites her to become his housekeeper, so leaving Phil to his dream world she sets out hopefully to Dublin. When Phil finds out that the father is not her real father, he has his chance to enter the real world, rescue Mary Kate from a dangerous situation, and profess the love he has been trying to deny. His emotional employer, Gregory Mahon, sends him off to Dublin with exclamations of the need for haste. Phil complies, but almost immediately the loss of mathematical precision in his actions leaves an opening for his repressed emotions. It is the beginning of the end for his "romantic improvisation."

"I'm getting as big an idiot as himself," thought Phil. The moment he put his foot outside the shop. This escapade would mean that his savings would be gone forever. But worse, he who was in all things anxious to submit himself to authority was now flung on his own two legs to fend for himself, and it daunted him. But there was what Gregory called a 'black strake' in him that made him indifferent to opinion, even his own,

which may mean only that his logic was but another form of emotional energy.¹

His "romantic improvisation" begins breaking down immediately as he makes desperate attempts to reassert it. He jumps from the Dublin train to make a tour of churches between him and Mary Kate's house, saying a decade of the rosary in each church, visiting ten churches. Getting lost he finds he must go back to the first church to begin his rosary all over again, but he cannot find it. Many hours later he arrives at Mary Kate's door, his hysteria near the surface. In a scene with Mary Kate's supposed father Phil demonstrates the inevitable conclusion of imagination strained to the breaking point. He strikes the man with a poker, at the moment trying his best to kill him. But Mary Kate separates them by promising her father to get Phil out of the house, and promising Phil that she will go with him.

From here until the end of the novel Phil's inner chaos takes him through a series of bizarre situations until he lets his hair grow the length of Jesus' and takes to the roads in search of his salvation. Mary Kate remains at the Doll's House waiting for him, knowing that his salvation lies with her.

¹ Frank O'Connor, The Saint and Mary Kate (London: Macmillan, 1932), p. 168. All further references to this work are in the text.

Their story holds O'Connor's attention for about one third of the entire novel. In 1932 O'Connor was convinced that a novel should be defined in terms of nineteenth century fiction, and should create a panorama of society. It should also be weighted on the side of the intellect, and thus be written in a tone that admits humour. Following these criteria O'Connor begins to fill the Doll's House, until it is "teeming" with life. He begins with Babe McCormick, Mary Kate's mother, a part-time prostitute who is content with her life except for the occasional illegitimate children she bears. All of her clients seem to fall in love with her, and she is "still as young and pretty as she was seventeen years ago" (The Saint and Mary Kate, p. 157). She is as easy-going a prostitute as any in Maupassant's "Tellier House," though less credible. Next is Mary Kate's Auntie Dinah who shares their attic in the Doll's House, and who is also a comic character. She is an "eternal child" who spends most of her energy creating caricatures of Babe's lovers and acting them out for the entertainment of her neighbors. As O'Connor adds characters he assigns them places between the two poles of imagination and judgment. Dinah fits on the side of imagination. She

portrayed on a lower plane all the anguish of the artistic nature, which continually images a life more abounding than its own and always dreads to approach it. (The Saint and Mary Kate, p. 37)

The character whose nature finds the greatest balance

between imagination and judgment is Dona Nobis, based on O'Connor's childhood friend, Minnie Connolly, whom he describes in An Only Child. She acts as adviser to Mary Kate and Phil, pulling him out of numerous attacks of "religious mania," and urging Mary Kate not to give up on her romantic attachment.

At the same time that he approaches his characters in a comic vein, O'Connor's omniscient narrator emphasizes the suffering they endure in the squalid tenement life surrounded by prostitution, poverty, alcoholism, illegitimacy, dirt and ignorance. It stands near the quays of Cork Harbour "bulging with its content of human suffering" (The Saint and Mary Kate, p. 264). The suffering is not apparent in the comic characterization, and the tenement remains a doll's house, a fantastic background for the writer's central concern in this novel, the story of the Saint and Mary Kate as they seek a mature balance between imagination and judgment.

O'Connor also has difficulty in his attempt to present different levels of society. His major effort is through a woman who takes pity on Mary Kate, offering to lift her out of the squalor of the Doll's House by finding her a job. Mary Verschoyle is the wife of one of Babe's lovers who visits the tenement when she learns that Babe has borne her husband's child. She is designed to represent a middle class point of view, but all of the

characters are finally directed by O'Connor's own moral sense. Another level of society is represented by Mary Kate's supposed father, and his working friends in Dublin. They, too, are only superficially different from the rest of the characters in the book. A level of society economically even lower than that of the Doll's House is suggested by slightly drawn characters with names like Seldom Sober and Always Drunk. But they are more dolls for O'Connor's fanciful panorama.

The least convincing portraits are those filling the space of Phil and Mary Kate's walking trip home from Dublin to Cork. Along the way they spend the night in an abandoned cottage where they are disturbed by five visitors, two carrying a corpse, another revealing she is a murderess. They also meet a tramp who is actually a noble character who never recovered from his disappointment over the Irish Civil War. He becomes Phil's friend, and it is his suicide that triggers Phil's flight from a Doll's House in an attempt to regain mathematical control over his life.

Yet it is probably the narrative point of view that most contributes to the fairy tale atmosphere of the book. The omniscient narrator is rarely silent, pointing to the theme of imagination and judgment, generalizing about the moral status of characters, and commenting on the role of the novelist. The voice signals each step toward maturity

that Mary Kate takes, and notes each mistake that Phil makes as he avoids reality. When Mary Kate begins to care for Phil's dying mother, for example, the narrator comments

If she could have seen herself as she said this she would have been astonished. There were two sculptors at work in that little room, death and life, and life with a touch had flicked into her lovely girlish face the terrible responsibility of womanhood. It was no more than a touch but it altered her appearance completely. A moment and it had disappeared again under his thumb, but Life the sculptor knew just how that look must be. (The Saint and Mary Kate, p. 65)

As Mary Kate continues her pursuit of Phil, the narrator notes the growing distance between their levels of maturity.

Mary Kate, who had outgrown her years both mentally and physically, was already a model of eternal woman wondering at eternal boy. She smiled when she saw the mirror with its face to the wall, turned so that Phil should not be distracted by the image of his own features when he wished to concentrate on something. At forty Phil's behavior would provide her with as much amusement, for no man ever outgrows abstract interests and no woman ever grows into them. (The Saint and Mary Kate, pp. 116-17)

It is difficult to find a reason for some of the narrator's intrusions except as exercises in the convention of narrator's intrusions. In this case he comments on Mary Kate's first kiss.

But her chronicler, as a disciple of the realist school, feels bound to add that to her Mr. Moran was never more than a toy. He feels reluctant to probe this trait in Mary Kate's character, a trait which undoubtedly temporarily broke the heart of Mr. Robert Moran, as it was later to break other hearts than his. He is aware

that a more faithful pen might bluntly describe Mary Kate as selfish. But his plane of reference is different, and to use such a word as selfish would be to introduce an anomaly into his narrative. If the poet in Mary Kate had left behind a printed record of her dreams his task would be an easier one, for artists need no defence however numerous their cold attachments. All that they take from life they give back a hundred-fold in colour and melody and rhythm. (The Saint and Mary Kate, p. 141)

O'Connor's use of the omniscient narrator moves from the extreme of inconsequential ruminations, to the important job of giving structure to a large section of the novel. The long narration of the bizarre walk from Dublin to Cork is bound by cryptic allusions to "chariots and roads for chariots." Prefacing the journey is the narrator's remark: "For two reasons these chapters may be called Chariots and Roads for Chariots" (The Saint and Mary Kate, p. 181). The two reasons are not given, and the terms are not explained. Yet four chapters later the phrase turns up again. After Phil tells Mary Kate that he likes the mysterious tramp they have joined along the way home, the chapter ends suddenly with this comment by the narrator. "'Chariots and roads for chariots,' said the Indian sage" (The Saint and Mary Kate, p. 231).

At the journey's end more than one hundred pages after the promise to give two reasons for naming the section chariots and roads for chariots, the narrator gives an explanation of sorts, pointing out that Phil has

begun to shift away from his "romantic improvisation" without realizing it.

Phil did not know the wise saying of the Indian sage that in the heaven world there are no chariots or roads for chariots, for the soul creates them in itself, nor did he know that when men fall from sanctity they think of goodness to their neighbor. Perhaps it is as well. (The Saint and Mary Kate, p. 283)

While the wisdom of the narrator's commentary may be lost on the reader who does not expect the intervention of one hundred pages between a cryptic remark and its explanation, the allusions physically tie up the section of the novel into a package. It is not weighty enough a binding to give the section coherence and suggests O'Connor's tenuous hold over the plot he was determined to expand into a panorama of society. Despite O'Connor's efforts for two-thirds of the novel, he does not enlarge it into a comprehensive panorama of society, nor even a convincing miniature of life in Cork. The novel does contain an excellent portrait of the character O'Connor liked best, the imaginative character of the feminine imagination, Mary Kate. The subverted character of masculine judgment is not so successful as Phil struggles with love for his mother. The Saint and Mary Kate was most useful to O'Connor as an example of what he could not do with his autobiographical material.

Dutch Interior

The autobiographical material in Dutch Interior is based on events that came to a crisis in O'Connor's life during 1939, the year the novel was written. He names this year in his autobiography as the one when he finally decided to make writing his career. At the beginning of the year he was a librarian by profession, he was managing director of the Abbey Theatre, and he was following his own advice in a B.B.C. broadcast of 1938. In the broadcast he said Irishmen could not become successful writers unless they actually remained on Irish soil; otherwise they could not feel the contention their work generated among the "raw, new middle class" they intended to influence. By the end of the crisis months O'Connor was living in England, committed to support his new and growing family by his pen. He was no longer a librarian, no longer involved in the Abbey Theatre, but had a job with the B.B.C. In his personal life O'Connor had not survived an angry row at the Abbey Theatre over who should govern it after Yeats's death (1939), but he had weathered an ecclesiastical court row that was to free his future wife from her first marriage with custody of her child.

Dutch Interior is O'Connor's gloomiest book, reflecting his unhappiness during these difficult times. It suffers from the lack of perspective that the passing of time could have placed between O'Connor and the events.

The book tells two parallel stories, each autobiographical, and each ending in defeat. In the first one a potentially fine Irish artist decides to sacrifice himself and his art for his family; he decides to live in Ireland, earn a steady wage, and provide a home for his aging mother. In the second story, a man who is in love with a married woman accepts her decision not to flee with him to England, but to make her husband believe that her unborn child is legitimate. Fortunately for O'Connor the defeats are ultimately suffered only by his autobiographical characters, and fortunately for his art, there is never again so complete an identification between writer and characters in complete emotional upheaval.

The novel is an unnecessarily confusing one because the two parallel stories are developed in alternating chapters with no indication of a connection between the two story lines. It is further complicated when the two stories do merge through a friendship formed between characters from each group. The most important relationship between the two stories is thematic. In each group is a character of imagination and a character of judgment, and one of the pair is destroyed, with the other left to live out his unfulfilled existence in resignation. In the last chapter the two remaining characters visit one another, aware that they are living among "Ghosts," the final chapter's title. The organizing principle in each set of characters

is akin to the one O'Connor analyzes in James Joyce's Ulysses. Stephen Daedalus and Leopold Bloom are parts of a metaphor.

When we grasp the analogical relationships, we realize that they are the same person and may either be regarded as a man young and old or as two aspects of the same man. (The Mirror in the Roadway, p. 310)

Two characters in each story are brothers, the first set consisting of Peter and Gus Devane. The novel opens with Peter's trip through the rain to a house where his mother is a maid. The boy's fantasies as he wanders through the large, comfortable house, so unlike his own impoverished cottage, are the same fantasies O'Connor records from his childhood in An Only Child. Peter becomes a man of judgment, but stripped of his original powers of imagination. His brother, Gus, is the man of imagination, and O'Connor describes him in terms of Turgenev's man of action in On the Eve, a Quixote. O'Connor is critical of what he finds to be an improper division in Turgenev's thinking between men of action, Quixotes, and men of thought, Hamlets. In The Mirror in the Roadway O'Connor explains that Turgenev was avoiding the poet in himself so he created a man of action without poetic inclinations. O'Connor attempts to correct this error in his own story, because the Quixote in Dutch Interior is a man of imagination. (In O'Connor's theory a writer is a moralist whose

faculty of judgment guides imagination.) Gus Devane has energy, spontaneity, and a desire to see dreams become reality. But acting without communication with the judgmental side of his nature, he is doomed to create endless trouble for himself. As part of the metaphor of imagination and judgment he shares with his brother, the brother, too, is doomed by Gus's actions. Stringing the chapters on the Devanes together, the reader learns that Gus makes it impossible to remain in Ireland because he is arrested for visiting a prostitute. In order to save his brother, Peter Devane gives Gus all of his own savings so Gus can go to America. It was money Peter was saving to complete a music education, since he has already shown signs of greatness as a composer. Settling into the care of his aging mother, Peter hears that Gus has fallen in love with a Russian revolutionary and that they are deeply happy together. Peter writes "Grania's Lullaby" to commemorate their union. To the characters who hear it, it documents Peter's great, though undeveloped talent. Later Peter finds out that the great romance is only another of Gus's adventures, and long ago he dropped his Russian lover. Gus returns to Ireland determined to reform the country, by showing the Irish how to live in a progressive spirit. He plans to build a chain of hotels, but he is swindled out of all his money and returns to America. The only damage he does is to himself and to Peter, whose mother turns

on him with the accusation that all these years he has been jealous of Gus. Mrs. Devane has been under the impression that Gus has been supporting her from his American earnings, just as Gus has been under the impression that the money he received to go to America was hers. Each time it was Peter who made the sacrifice.

The other set of brothers consists of Ned and Stevie Dalton. They have a terrible domestic life because their father is a slow-witted, potentially cruel individual who becomes vicious when he drinks. He is easily recognizable by readers of An Only Child as Mick O'Donovan. Mr. Dalton despises any trace of artistic ability in his sons, because art is beside the point of living, of earning one's wage. Mr. Dalton is culpable in the death of Ned, a gentle, "well-liked" character who is imaginative and responsible for the little gaiety in his brother's life. But Ned suffers from tuberculosis, and Mr. Dalton insists that he go to work regularly, anyway. When Ned dies his brother Stevie has no protective cushion between him and his father's cruelty. He seeks the imaginative faculty by falling in love with the beautiful, imaginative, and very unhappy girl across the road from him.

The story of the young girl causes greater complication in the arrangement of the novel. Her past life and present miseries are told in separate chapters interspersed among the chapters on the Devanes and the Daltons. The

young girl is Eileen O'Donoghue. She grew up in the house of "The Beautiful Miss Maddens" who are sisters and widows. They live together on pensions from their husbands' military service. Annie is the most attractive of the sisters to the young Stevie Dalton. She is gay, spirited, spontaneous, but she prevents her sister from marrying a man she eventually marries herself. That is the downfall of the happy group, because when she marries she loses her pension. Her new husband leaves her to come for the sister he wanted in the first place. When they run away together Annie is taken away to the insane asylum, and never is heard from again. Eileen, the only child of the sisters, must grow up in misery and neglect. To escape her unhappiness she marries a dull accountant who provides her with a nice house and financial security. Although she despises him she bears a child and then tries to live apart though within the same financial arrangement. Along the way she gathers a small group of admirers who recognize her superiority over her husband, and the waste of her imaginative, vital nature in the oppressive atmosphere of her domestic life. One of her admirers is her first boyfriend who still comes to her house, babysits, and gives her courage to endure her life. A second admirer is a priest who is attracted to her imaginative nature, too, and sympathizes with her marital situation. The husband who cannot endure his situation any better than Eileen tries

drinking, then he moves into a brothel, not for sexual relations but for a place to read the evening paper in peace. His actions only give Eileen and her entourage more reason to vilify him. The third admirer is Stevie Dalton, separated from his imaginative self with the death of his brother, who seeks the fulfillment of his nature with Eileen.

At the end of Part I of Dutch Interior, all the characters are aware that their lives are not turning out as they might have wished, although they have not yet despaired. The chapter is called "Wild Geese," in which Peter Devane and Stevie Dalton talk quietly together. As Stevie leaves Devane's house he is caught in a shower and takes refuge on the church porch near Devane's home. He watches Devane's mother leave the church after her night prayers and the first half of the novel ends with this symbolic description:

There was a light in the doorway, a very feeble one, and moved by boyish recollection, he pushed it slowly in. It yielded on leather-bound hinges. Within he heard the clock throbbing--"tock, tock, tock." The church was almost in darkness but for the sanctuary lamp and the shrine of the Blessed Virgin. Stevie knelt in the back seat. The sacristan, a bald little man, cleaned candlestick after candlestick, tossing the smoking butts into a box. As each socket was removed the church grew dimmer, the white figure with clasped hands and blue floating sash sank farther back into the shadows of the grotto. At the altar rail a head was raised for a moment, Mrs. Devane's. Then she shuffled out past him with bowed head, the last worshipper. The clock at the top of the church stopped its ticking for a moment, wheezed and chimed. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten."

The sacristan tossed the last candle-butt into his box and pattered towards the door on rubber-soled shoes, swinging an electric torch. The wind tore, and rain spattered the clerestory windows above. There was nothing to be seen but the red sanctuary lamp and its festoon of chains at the heart of the darkness.²

Part II of Dutch Interior ends in much the same way with Stevie Dalton recognizing after a conversation with Peter Devane that they who remain on in Ireland live with their past, and do not expect much of their future. The first chapter of Part II is called "A Spring Day" and it marks the beginning of the end for both sets of characters. Eileen and Stevie spend their last happy hours together, and Gus Devane, the "eternal boy" concludes the financial arrangements that end in his ruin. Gus also brings out of the closet some of his brother's musical compositions with the scheme of publishing them and starting an opera company in Cork. He mortifies his brother, but nevertheless all of Peter's friends learn what a great talent has been lost by the end of Peter's musical education.

O'Connor's narrative alternates between the mind of Stevie and the mind of Peter, with occasional generalizations that belong to neither of them. As a consequence of his close identification with the suffering of each one, the tone of the novel is consistently dour, while the writer's

² Frank O'Connor, Dutch Interior (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 170. All further references to this work are in the text.

emotional intensity is conveyed by descriptions of characters' feelings without much substantiation in the plot. They are both victims of circumstance, and look no farther than those circumstances. Since Stevie and Peter are bound by their metaphorical relations to their brothers, they have no autonomy after the brothers are gone. The questions about why Peter does not find another way to study music, or why Stevie does not find a way to rescue Eileen cannot be asked. The two must remain victims. The only expression of feeling for eternal victims must be pity, and the novel is pervaded by O'Connor's intense pity for both of his autobiographical characters. When they have nothing left to look forward to in the last chapter, "Ghosts," he concludes

How well Stevie understood! The past that will not be quiet; the dead who will not rest; images of desire and loss that rise for ever in our paths; lost fatherlands. He could understand why Devane sought refuge in history books. The dead there are quiet enough, they do not clutch at the heart.

He glanced at Eileen's house as they went by. There was a light in the hall, but no other sign of life, and he thought how all these houses keep their secrets to themselves. (Dutch Interior, p. 266)

O'Connor's next prose work after Dutch Interior is a story cycle, a group of independent short stories whose sum is greater than the addition of its parts. It differs from Dutch Interior in that each story is complete in itself, and there is no confusion of characters as there

is in his last novel. The narrative voice of the story cycles avoids the tyranny of emotion imposed by the narrator in Dutch Interior. Instead the stories are usually told by a detached narrator or they are told by an unidentified narrator who is somehow a part of the community, and who comments wisely on the story. The mature cycles are told by a master of comic tone, a realist, and a moralist. All of these are criteria for O'Connor's definition in The Mirror in the Roadway of a writer who has achieved the proper balance between imagination and judgment. For the next two cycles after 1940 he avoids autobiographical material. It is only in the last cycles that O'Connor returns to his own story to show how the proper balance between imagination and judgment can be achieved in the mature writer.

CHAPTER VI
THE STORY CYCLE, CRAB APPLE JELLY AND
THE COMMON CHORD

After his intense concentration on autobiographical material in Dutch Interior, O'Connor chose to turn away from Blarney Lane and his unhappy childhood experiences for subjects of his stories. He also took a step back from his new material. The distance produced a narrative perspective capable of answering his needs for commentary and moral judgment, and it also produced a comic tone. The two together contribute to the unity in Crab Apple Jelly (1944) and The Common Chord (1948), his first story cycles.

The themes, however, are unchanged from his earlier work, and the relation between imagination and judgment necessary for moral balance is the central concern of both cycles. The feminine and masculine principles do not vary from earlier work, and characters are easily linked to their prototypes. O'Connor aims to show how a proper balance of imagination and judgment leads to "the completion of human experience" as he refers to it in Towards an Appreciation of Literature and An Only Child. In both cycles the search for fulfillment is presented in terms of friendship, family relations, courtship and marriage. While few characters achieve the proper balance, and many experience loneliness

as a result, loneliness is not the theme of his cycles. Some characters are only vaguely aware of their discontent, and others experience guilt, anger, and frustration; at the same time, O'Connor the moralist is determined to point out the major culprit in bringing about these unhappy relationships. Both cycles have for their target the "introverted religion" of Irish Catholicism, particularly its repressive attitudes toward sexual relations. Between Crab Apple Jelly and The Common Chord O'Connor shifts from the expression of a gentle sympathy for the victims to moral outrage against the villains.

Half of the stories in Crab Apple Jelly directly involve priests or monks; the other half involve characters experiencing the oppression of the Church's tyrannical control over their behavior. In all of the stories there is a lack of communication between the feminine and masculine faculties, with the result that no character achieves his desires. In The Common Chord O'Connor focuses specifically on sexual relations. Some few heroes do achieve fulfillment of their natures in happy marriages, but they have to become sinners in the Church's eyes to manage it. The numerous villains, on the other hand, are socially acceptable, while they willingly practice deceit and hypocrisy. The Irish Catholic Church did not interpret O'Connor's voice as that of a moralist and reformer in The Common Chord, and the book was promptly banned in Ireland.

Crab Apple Jelly

Most of the characters in Crab Apple Jelly live in the same town. They cross the same bridges, listen to the hours chime from Shandon's Tower, know how to get from Blarney Lane to Sunday's Well, and complain about Father Ring behind his back. Sometimes the town is called Cork, sometimes not. But the physical place is not meant to be a central unifying device of the cycle. As O'Connor demonstrates in Bones of Contention, his characters suffer from the division of thought and feeling whether they live in town or in the country. There are three country stories in Crab Apple Jelly, at the beginning, middle, and next to last (the last story summarizing the cycle) to extend his theory of imagination and judgment beyond geographical bounds. The device of physically tying-up his cycle into a neat package is a carry-over from the rudimentary attempts at the method in The Saint and Mary Kate when "chariots and roads for chariots" is repeated at the beginning, middle, and end of a section. The device in Crab Apple Jelly does not enhance the unity of the cycle, but it does not harm it. Two other organizing principles effectively create the sense of a story uniting the volume's individual parts. First, O'Connor composes the first half of the cycle of contes, stories centering on a single central incident. Together they comprise about one third of the book's length. The other aspects of O'Connor's definition

of the conte in The Lonely Voice do not apply, and in later volumes the only distinction is one of length. But in each of these six stories characters of imagination are denied the fulfillment of their desires. From one story to the next they become increasingly aware of their difficulties, and in the last of the six, the imaginative character knows exactly what she wants, and better than that, she knows how to go about fulfilling her desires. She is almost successful.

The last six stories in the volume comprise about two thirds of the book's length. These are nouvelles, stories of greater length than the contes, which give O'Connor time to present a series of chronological incidents that together give an idea of the characters' daily lives. Nearly all of the stories in the entire volume are comic in tone; although the three country stories are more serious in tone, they all have comic elements. But no matter what the tone of individual stories, their cumulative effect is serious--the dissociation of thought and feeling is dangerous to individuals and society. There is a pervasive sense of a shared system of values based on the teachings of Irish Catholicism, but O'Connor points out that the system has become so rigid and narrow that individuals are prohibited from the natural development of their thoughts and feelings. No one in Crab Apple Jelly finally gets what he desires.

There remains in their lives a dissociation of their imaginative nature from their judgmental faculties.

The conte that opens the volume presents a character who lives his life entirely separated from the faculty of judgment, and he exists by his imaginative faculty alone. The boy is gentle, but tongue-tied, and he lives in a cottage by the sea with his mother. While he is "well-liked" by the few neighbors in their village, he does not talk to anyone, but lives in his own quiet dream world, that is, until a pretty schoolteacher arrives from the town. The teacher has decided to work in the wild countryside because she wishes to have scope for her romantic imagination, and she revels in long lonely walks with stops in isolated coves to study her Gaelic poetry. The boy immediately gravitates toward her, not understanding why he does so, and not able to speak to her when he does find her. Each time he seeks her out he lies down at her feet, staring at her and pulling up blades of grass, but not speaking. The girl is not alarmed by his visits, but she realizes that there is something the matter with him, and that his attachment to her could eventually hurt his feelings; so she avoids him. But no matter how far she wanders he seeks her out until finally she does not go to the coves. One night the boy leaves his cottage to wander the cliffs in search of her. His weary mother follows him knowing there is no reason to search at night, and begins to realize that her son is mad.

When she does catch up with him at daybreak he turns back to the cottage with her saying "Mother, we'll go home now. It was the bad day for you ever you brought me into the world."¹

When they are back in the cottage he begins "roaring" and she sends for neighbors to bind him, and to the asylum for attendants to fetch him. He stops his "roaring" to ask that he spend his last night at home unbound. Discussing what should be done the woman and her neighbors wonder if the schoolteacher might calm him. She not only consents to come but she complies with the boy's request that she lie next to him. When she is near him he immediately falls into a contented sleep, and the next day he goes quietly to the asylum expecting that she will come to him again.

The straightforward story is marred only at the beginning by a narrator who announces the great loneliness and pain of the old woman left behind. The narrator is a stranger to the wild countryside, drawn to it apparently as was the schoolteacher. He meets the old woman on the road and she tells him the story of her son who was taken to the asylum twelve years ago. He prefaces her story with the observation "I had no fear of trespassing on her

¹ Frank O'Connor, Crab Apple Jelly (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), p. 8. All future references to this work are in the text.

emotions. These lonesome people in wild places, it is their nature to speak" (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 4). He compares her cry of loneliness to the cry of the wild birds, and there is no indication that he is not to be taken seriously except as his tone contradicts hers. The old woman herself does not talk of loneliness, but of the gratitude she still feels for the schoolteacher who some people say had three hundred pounds to her bank account. And the boy himself is only aware of his loneliness once.

The next two very short contes are slight, but in each an imaginative character experiences pain. First, a young boy is left outside a pub waiting for his father until late at night. Terrified, he makes the trip home alone, buying a toy dog to hold before him to bark into the alleys he passes. At home he feels safe. The envelope story is actually told by the boy after he has grown up, and keeps his own son outside the pub as his own father kept him. The third story tells of a father who is not successful in his career, who learns his daughter is ashamed of him. Although she asks his forgiveness the harm is already done.

The fourth story in the volume is of better quality than the preceding two, and presents two characters who understand what could alleviate their loneliness, but they feel that their pleasures are sinful. They are two Trappist monks, one a character of judgment, the other a character of imagination. The humorous story opens with

Brother Michael, a dour, melancholy ex-jockey from the Curraugh reading a week-old racing form. The jolly Brother Arnold inadvertently comes across him, and Brother Michael behaves as if he has been apprehended in a shameful crime. He eventually goes to Brother Arnold and explains what he has been doing. He takes pleasure in reading the forms and picking the winners. It gives him satisfaction when the results come in to match his predictions. Rather than seeing anything sinful in the recreation, Brother Arnold shares Brother Michael's interest, feeling great admiration for a man who can pick the winners from miles away. Together they enjoy picking winners, developing a system of betting with the loser saying prayers for the other's intention. Finally Brother Arnold lets Brother Michael into his own little secret; every week a farmer leaves a glass of ale for him in the monastery stable. The two monks share this as they bet on the horses, and all goes happily until Brother Arnold produces a deck of cards. As they sit down to play Brother Michael knows what he must do, but he waits out the hand until the devil fills it for him. He spreads out the full house for Brother Arnold to see and solemnly points at the floor. (All of their relations are handled in sign language since they have taken a vow of silence.) Biting his lip to keep from crying Brother Arnold helps Brother Michael gather up the evidence of their crimes, and together they carry them under their habits to reveal to the Prior.

Recognition of loss is repeated in the next story of two priests but in "The Star that Bids the Shepherd Fold" Father Devine realizes why he is lonely. The situation bringing Father Whalen and Father Devine together involves two of Father Whalen's parishioners, young unhappy girls who seek companionship on board a docked French ship. Father Whalen, a self-satisfied childlike individual, plans to go on board the ship and demand in the name of Christian decency that the girls be put off. Father Devine realizes he should go along and mediate between Father Whalen and the French captain. The captain nearly throws both of them overboard, convinced that one of the girls is Father Whalen's daughter. When Father Whalen hears this he is amazed at the depravity of the French; he is speechless when the captain confesses he called the girl his daughter out of politeness; he is sure she is really his mistress. Father Devine likes the captain and feels sorry for the two young girls who appear on deck in their feathers and baubles. Longing for company he asks the captain to dine with him, realizing that when the ship leaves there will be no one to be his friend.

Ending the group of contes is "The Long Road to Ummera" the second country story. This protagonist is an ancient hag-like woman who is nearly blind and hardly capable of airing her shroud on the line every week. When she feels it is time for her to die she tells her son that

she must be taken back to her village of Ummera to be buried with her husband. Her son, a narrow-minded "townie" wants to save the expense and tells her he will bury her in the town cemetery which is good enough for him and ought to be good enough for her. She gathers up her shroud and hires a wagon to take her to Ummera while she is still alive, since it is the only way to foil her son. She only makes it part of the way, but from her bed in the work-house where she will die she sees a vision of her husband.

Ah, Michael Driscoll, my friend, my kind comrade, you didn't forget me after all the long years. I'm a long time away from you but I'm coming at last. They tried to keep me away from you, to make me stop among foreigners in the town, but where would I be at all without you and all the old friends? Stay for me my treasure, stop and show me the way . . . (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 81)

The six stories of the second group begin at the opposite pole of human nature with characters devoid of imagination. From one story to the next the characters become increasingly aware of their desires, and in the last story of the book the characters, like the woman of Ummera, know what would make them happy. A girl of imagination falls in love with a boy of judgment, only too late, because she marries the wrong man.

The group of nouvelles begins with "The Miser" introducing Father Ring who with Father Whelan and Father Devine becomes a frequent visitor among the characters in O'Connor's stories. Father Ring is a good-natured crook

who spends most of his time milking his parishioners of money for the Church. In "The Miser" Father Ring for once meets his match in the old miser Devereux who is reputed to be wealthy, and also reputed to be dying. Father Ring visits him with the promise of sending two nuns out to nurse him through his final illness. Father Ring offers to help him resign himself to death, and to settle his estate. The will he helps Devereux make begins with one hundred pounds to the Church for prayers for his soul--it is the only investment you can make in this world and collect interest on in the next, one hundred pounds for the convent, another hundred for the monks so they will not be jealous of the nuns, and a few pounds for Devereux's daughter who has left town. If Father Ring did not remember the daughter then the will could be upset (which happens to him in a later story in the cycle). The old man has an "edifying" funeral with the two nuns kneeling beside his bed, but the ceremonies are cut short so that Father Ring can get to the money. He never finds money, only trunks of pipe stems and clock pieces. After getting in a wrecking crew to examine the walls and chimneys he admits defeat, but leaves with a real admiration for one of the few people who ever outwitted him.

The next story is "The House that Johnny Built" and Johnny, another lover of money, begins at the end of his life to sense that something may be missing. For years

he has lived a shopkeeper, fat, complacent, and stashing away a fortune. When a vivacious young doctor comes to town and laughs with him, Johnny loses his heart and decides to marry her. In a proposal that begins with a statement of his bank account he asks for her hand never guessing that she can turn down such a fortune. She only laughs at him, and he angrily determines to find a better wife. He builds a big house, furnishes it at great expense, and then builds a chemist's shop. His plan is to hire a pretty young chemist, then marry her. The pretty young chemist spends one evening in the house with Johnny and begins to look around for his wife. Learning there is no wife the girl asks to run out to the chapel for prayers, and once out of the house she makes a run for the safety of the doctor's house. Johnny is a laughingstock, and after his second failure to get a wife he gives up, still unaware of why his plan failed. He slowly wanes away feeling that

there was a curse on him; that his luck was broken, and all his beautiful house and furniture was all for nothing.

He died less than a year later and the story goes in town that the chagrin of it went to his heart.
(Crab Apple Jelly, p. 126)

The last stories all continue with the same general one; courtships and friendship are thought of, or actually initiated, but the characters suffer from too great a separation of their imaginative and judgmental faculties.

"The New Teacher" tells the story of Sam Higgins who is methodical, patient, and cautious. He wants to marry the laughing, gay widow teaching in the girl's school but feels it is too soon after her husband's death to begin a courtship. A new teacher, one of Father Ring's kinsmen, has no scruples about courting her right away, not that he cares for her but she is the only eligible woman nearby. Sam Higgins watches the new teacher's courtship, but cannot make a bid for the widow's hand. Instead he finally comes to the same end as so many of O'Connor's characters who try to repress one side of their natures. Just as the childlike Dan Bride comes to blows in "The Majesty of the Law" Sam Higgins starts a fight with the new teacher. When it is over and the other teachers are huddled around the new teacher, Sam Higgins dusts his trousers, leaves the school key in the presbytery, and is never heard from again.

The next character whose methodical life blows up is Peter Lucey of "The Luceys." He is a carefully brought up boy whose father, Tom, wants his son to have all the advantages he lacked himself. Peter must study harder than other children, attend the opera and the theatre, finish his education, and become a lawyer. Peter does all of this only to leave the country in a hurry after embezzling a fortune from his firm. His father's principles are too firm to help his son, but he cannot forgive his brother Ben, for not trying to help either. Ben is Tom's opposite;

he is easygoing where Tom is reserved, laughing where Tom is dour, and if either brother would concede something to the opposite pole of his own nature then the bitterness between them might end. But Ben dies waiting for Tom to cross the street and share a last glass of whisky and a handshake.

The next to the last story is the last of three country stories at the beginning, the middle, and next to the last. In country and town the difficulty between imagination and judgment is the same. "Uprooted" tells of two brothers, one a priest, one a teacher, one emotional, one reserved, who become intensely aware of their need for fulfillment. On a trip into the country to visit their parents the two brothers realize they are doomed to live their lives with their desires unfulfilled. What makes their realization so sudden is a trip to an island near their childhood home where their mother's relatives live. On the island is their cousin, Cait, to whom both brothers are attracted.

It was only later that Ned was able to realize how beautiful she was. She had the same narrow pointed face as her sister, the same slight features sharpened by a sort of animal instinct, the same blue eyes with their startled brightness; but all seemed to have been differently composed and her complexion had a transparency as though her whole nature were shining through it. (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 190)

Sheltering under Cait's shawl with his arm around her "Ned felt as if he had dropped out of Time's pocket,"

and the experience "filled him with passion and loneliness" (Crab Apple Jelly, pp. 192-93).

The brothers return to their childhood home from the island to spend one night before going back to their respective responsibilities in the town. The priest wakes up with a sick feeling that he is doomed to be unhappy, and his vows of celibacy will always prevent him from fulfilling his yearning; but he cannot understand why his brother does not go back to the island and marry Cait. Ned tells him "we made our choice a long time ago. We can't go back on it now." What Ned realizes that his brother cannot, is that a return to a world of imagination they felt in boyhood would destroy him as surely as his present life of reserve and judgment will destroy him if he cannot find some meeting ground for the two aspects of his nature. Walking out in the morning air after his talk with his brother he finds

There was a magical light on everything. A boy on a horse rose suddenly against the sky, a startling picture. Though the apple-green light over Carriganassa ran long streaks of crimson, so still they might have been enameled. Magic, magic magic! He saw it as in a picture-book with all its colours intolerably bright; something he had outgrown and could never return to, while the world he aspired to was as remote and intangible as it had seemed even in the despair of youth. It seemed as if only now for the first time was he leaving home; for the first time and for ever saying good-bye to it all. (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 199)

Ned's ambitions to go to the city and be a teacher have been fulfilled, but they turned out differently from what he had hoped. Extinguishing the imaginative side of

his nature, he is now in an opposite but equally dangerous position from that of his childhood. But it is likely that Ned will

continue to be submissive and draw his salary and wonder how much he could save and when he'd be able to buy a little house to bring his girl into; a nice thing to think about on a spring morning; a house of his own and a wife in bed beside him. And his nature would contract about him; every ideal, every generous impulse another mesh to draw his head down tighter to his knees till in ten years' time it would tie him hand and foot. (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 173)

The final story in Crab Apple Jelly is "The Mad Lomasneys," one of O'Connor's finest stories. In it there is a young girl of spontaneity and imagination who falls in love with a young man of precise habits and good judgment. She, too, has good sense, and he can be enthusiastic when he is in her company. They have the best chance of any of the characters in the volume to achieve a balance between judgment and imagination and to have a happy marriage. But it does not happen that way.

Rita Lomasney is very like Mary Kate McCormick in her imaginative nature, but unlike Mary Kate who is not deeply religious, Rita is a devout Catholic. Her first conflict when she was growing up was to perceive in her sisters a false piety that revealed itself in deceit. Rita takes her religion more seriously and each time the rigid codes are in conflict with her natural inclinations, she experiences head-on collisions with her family, unable to

cushion the repeated shocks. Her sisters defend themselves with habitual criticism while her father keeps himself too remote from the battle scene to offer support. Usually Rita tries to maintain a moody silence.

She had always been the queerest of the family. There seemed to be no softness in her. She had never had a favorite nun; she said it was soppy. For the same reason she never had flirtations. There was something in her that wasn't in her sisters, something tongue-tied and twisted and unhappy. She had a curious, raw, almost timid smile as if she felt people desired no better sport than to hurt her. (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 208)

When Rita turns eighteen her sisters contrive to get her out of the house. She is sent to a convent school as a teacher, a job she does not want in a place she does not want to go. But while she is there a boy is sent home from his last year of college and refuses to finish school. Rita and he temporarily bolster up one another, since he is being forced to become a priest which does not suit his nature, and she is forced to be a teacher which does not suit hers. She is never in love with the boy, but when he asks her to marry him she accepts. The head of the convent school sees to it that Rita is fired and sent home. Back in Cork she describes her experience to her childhood friend Ned Lowry. He is a natural man of judgment who is genuinely in love with her. She makes a good story of her attempt to steal a man from the priesthood, and at the same time she reveals her full understanding of the motives behind the whole escapade. The boy is forced to go back to school,

because of a weakness in his own nature.

"Anyway," she went on, "he told me he wanted to chuck the Church and marry me. There was ructions, of course. The people in the shop at the other side of the street had a son a priest. His old one thought they'd never live down the scandal. So away with her to the Rev. and the Rev. sends for me. Did I want to destroy the young man's life and he on the threshold of a great calling? I said 'twas they wanted to destroy him. "What sort of a priest would he make?" said I. Oh, 'twas a marvellous sacrifice to be called to make, and after it he'd be twice the man . . . So begor, then she dropped the Holy Willie stuff and told me his ma was after getting into debt to put him in for the priesthood. Three hundred quid! Wouldn't they kill you for style? (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 213)

Rita is relieved that the episode is over but she enjoys the idea of a first love affair, and she is glad to give her sisters some trouble. But the sisters are so outraged they look for ways to send her away again, and a relative in England finds her another teaching job. But Ned is delighted she is back in town, and her even more than usual animation prompts him to propose to her. She is taken back by it, and asks to be proposed to later. First she wants to find the appropriate moment to use it against her sisters who suggest Rita cannot find a husband. When Ned proposes to her he speaks "matter-of-factly, drawing himself together like an old clock preparing to strike" (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 218). By profession he is a clockmaker and he runs the family jewelry store. Part of his natural reserve is enforced by his careful training

and his family's sense of "good breeding." When he arrives at the Lomasney home he smiles a greeting

with his mouth primly shut and his eyes wide open. With a sort of automatic movement he took off his coat and hat and hung them on the rack. Then he began to empty the pockets with the same thoroughness. He hadn't changed much. He was thin and pale, spectacled and clever, with the same precise and tranquil manner, "like an old persian cat," as Nellie said. He read too many books. In the past year or two something seemed to have happened to him. He didn't go to Mass any longer. Not going to Mass struck all the Lomasneys as being too damn clever. (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 209)

Their complementary natures would have insured the "completion of human experience" in marriage, except for the timing. Ned had been too reserved to propose to her before her departure, and Rita should have accepted his proposal when he did make it, but her judgment is clouded by a desire to savor her first romance and by a childish desire to be revenged on her sisters. Thoughts of her new job in England throw her into a chaotic state of mind, and she does not want to be forced to leave again. On the evening of her going away party she resolves to propose to the first eligible man who comes to the house. She hopes it will be Ned, but instead it is a dogmatic lawyer who once proposed to her sister. He accepts Rita. Rita is carried away by the fury she causes in her sisters, and she does not immediately recognize the consequences of her actions. If the would-be priest had firmly stood against his family's pushing, she would have found herself married to him.

Ned accepts her marriage without question. Had he protested to Rita she would have thrown over the lawyer immediately, but according to his nature he remains silent. A few months after Rita's marriage he begins to go out with "a gentle, humourous girl" while Rita observes jealously, calling the rival "Señorita." In the last scene of the story the full impact of the situation strikes Rita and Ned. She is pregnant and bad-tempered at the time, and during a chance meeting at the Lomasney home Rita tells Ned how she married someone else.

"You mean," he said quietly, "if I'd come earlier you'd have married me?"

"If you'd have come earlier," said Rita, "I'd probably be asking Justin to stand godfather to your brat. And how do you know, Ned, but Justin would be walking out the Señorita!"

"Then maybe you wouldn't be quite so interested whether he was or not," said Nellie knowingly.

Ned turned and lashed his cigarette savagely into the fire. Rita looked up at him mockingly.

"Go on," she taunted him, "say it, blast you!"

"I couldn't," he said bitterly.

A month later he married the Señorita. (Crab Apple Jelly, p. 235)

This is the conclusion to all of the aroused desires of Crab Apple Jelly. No one achieves what he wants, and the characters are abandoned to their unfulfilled lives in which they cannot match their feminine imagination with masculine judgment. For Rita Lomasney the trouble began when her naturally developing faculties ran up against her memorized catechism. For Ned Lowry the problem lay in

the prim manner he was brought up, going to confession each Saturday, Mass on Sunday and studying his lessons at designated times the rest of the week. But each of them was beginning to respond to the quiescent aspect of his own nature, awakened by its dominance in a complementary individual. The nearness of their finding the proper balance of imagination and judgment thus brings into relief all the would-be happy relationships in Crab Apple Jelly. But O'Connor does not find the happy endings in his subject matter; the work of a realist and a moralist should be to reflect the world as would a mirror in the roadway.

The Common Chord

In The Common Chord O'Connor turns his mature powers as a storyteller on the meddlers who make the struggle for the union of the feminine imagination and masculine judgment even harder than it naturally is. As in Crab Apple Jelly he singles out Ireland's "introverted religion" as the biggest meddler of all. But unlike Crab Apple Jelly the tone of the moralist in this volume is angry, and the consequences of religious strictures are ultimately destructive of healthy relations between the sexes. In this cycle the attraction of the masculine and feminine principles in human nature are entirely worked out in terms of courtship; although the stories involve sexual encounters, the common chord does not refer to sexual instincts, but to the same common chord in human relations he exalts in his other

volumes: brotherhood. A character in the final story of the cycle explains what it is that all the characters seek:

. . . you mightn't think it, but as a kid I used to be very lonely. I sometimes think young people are the loneliest creatures on God's earth. You wake up from a nice, well-ordered explainable world and you find eternity stretching all round you, and no one, priest or scientist or anyone else can tell you a damn thing about it. And there's this queer thing going on inside you that gives you a longing for companionship and love, and you don't know how to satisfy it. I used to go out at night, looking up at the stars, and thinking if only I could meet a nice understanding sort of girl it would all explain itself naturally.²

The subject of all the stories is meddling. The difficult struggle for maturity, for finding the proper balance between the masculine and feminine principles, is made even more difficult by strictures of the Catholic Church. The priests who are the designated moral guides of the community are themselves incapable of fulfilling their own natures, and yet they must advise others who seek to achieve "the completion of human experience."

In the first story, "News for the Church," O'Connor squarely places a portion of the blame in the lap of the clergy. Father Cassidy is the same sort of priest as Father Whelan in Crab Apple Jelly. He is self-satisfied, and has no awareness of the conflict within the young girl who comes

² Frank O'Connor, The Common Chord (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 276. All further references to this work are in the text.

to him for confession. She is like all the Mary Kate McCormicks in O'Connor's fiction, a girl of honesty, spontaneity, and sympathy. At first the priest likes her too. When she confesses that she was drunk, he assumes that the nuns in the convent school where she works drove her to it. He does not like nuns, himself. As he questions her further he learns that she is only nineteen, and that her mother died when she was nine. "Having worshipped his own mother he was sorry for people like that" (The Common Chord, p. 6). As long as the girl's responses match his own likes and dislikes he enjoys counseling her. But the omniscient narrator warns at the beginning of the story that there are many things Father Cassidy dislikes, even though he has a reputation as a "notoriously easy-going confessor." Father Cassidy's mind

was full of obscure, abstract hatreds. He hated England. He hated the Irish government, and he particularly hated the middle classes, though so far as anyone knew, none of them had ever done him the least bit of harm. He was a heavy-built man, slow-moving and slow-thinking, with no neck and a punchinello chin; a wine-coloured, sour-looking face, pouting crimson lips, and small, blue, hot-tempered eyes. (The Common Chord, p. 4)

His temper flashes as soon as the girl confesses a sin for which there is no excuse, and all his sympathy turns to outrage, not only because of the nature of the sin--"I had carnal intercourse with a man, father"--but because the girl does not recognize the gravity of her sin. She tells him that it was a lovely, "magic" experience, but not something

she intends to do again. She was simply curious about sex because "People make such a mystery of it," particularly her married sister who will tell her nothing. She will only talk to other married women who

get in a huddle in a corner and whisper, whisper, whisper, and the moment you come into the room they begin to talk about the weather--exactly as if you were a blooming kid! I mean you can't help feeling it's something extraordinary. (The Common Chord, p. 10)

Unable to make her sorry enough for her sin the priest begins to think that the girl has only come to confession to have someone to tell about her wicked delight.

This little trollop, wandering about town in a daze of bliss, had to tell someone her secret, and he, a good-natured old fool of sixty, had allowed her to use him as a confidant. A philosopher of sixty letting Eve, aged nineteen, tell him all about the apple! He could never live it down . . . He had never tasted the apple himself, but he knew a few things about apples in general and that apple in particular which little Miss Eve wouldn't learn in a whole lifetime of apple-eating. Theory might have its drawbacks, but there were times that it was better than practice. (The Common Chord, p. 13)

If Father Cassidy can have an effect on the girl, his effect according to O'Connor's theory can only be for the worse. The girl, when she first comes into the confessional, has the qualities O'Connor most admires in the feminine imaginative nature. She is "candid and bold," she has "no false modesty," and her features are "full of animation and charm." She naturally seeks the "completion of human experience" through a union of the masculine and feminine

principles, but she can tell the difference between sexual curiosity and love. Father Cassidy has no idea of these distinctions and he is angry when she shows no interest in trying to get the man to marry her. She does not love him because he is "irresponsible." The priest does his best to divert her from the natural path to maturity she has embarked upon, and sets out to make her feel that her sexual experience was not "magic" but "sordid." His strategy is to force her into a detailed description with the repeated question "and what did he do next?"

She didn't see his purpose; she only saw that he was stripping off veil after veil of romance, leaving her with nothing but a cold, sordid, cynical adventure like a bit of greasy meat on a plate. (The Common Chord, p. 14)

The story concludes with the young girl in despair and Father Cassidy in a state of delight as he leaves the confessional "with a fat good-natured chuckle."

If there is a weakness in the story it is the same one that recurs as a result of O'Connor's moral comment. Once he has found his moral voice he uses it with increasing confidence and conviction even if on occasion it is to the artistic detriment of the story. There is no reason to suspect that the girl feels her sexual experience was really like "a bit of greasy meat on a plate," except that the narrator says so. O'Connor's own sense of propriety prevents an account of the conversation that creates

this feeling in her. Nevertheless, the story is an effective beginning to those that follow, and when the "fat good-natured chuckle" is heard again, its significance increases from the repetition. There are three stories that tell the same story as "News for the Church," though with variations. O'Connor places them at the beginning, middle, and end of the volume. This time the habit of tying up his cycle into a neat package redoubles the volume's strength. The three stories are even more powerful when the priest in the confessional becomes an opportunistic Don Juan who tells his sexual experiences to "the poor caubogues of the town" who hang on his every word. These Don Juans who impose their desires on the Mary Kate McCormicks of the world are no less destructive than the priest in diverting the naturally developing characters of imagination from their aim of union with characters of judgment.

The second of the three stories is "Don Juan (Retired)." This Don Juan sits complacently in a bar, cadging drinks while telling entertaining stories of his sexual adventures. One of his listeners is Joe French, who is an example of the naturally developing masculine principle. Even though he has had one bad experience with a girlfriend who left him to run off with a commercial traveller, he still believes that some day he will fall in love and marry the "right" girl. Don Juan is finally able to change his mind by proving that all women are just alike. The Don Juan, Spike

Ward, becomes in danger of losing his place as town talker when Joe French and the barman disbelieve one of his stories; they challenge him on a ten-shilling bet to "prove" his prowess with women. Spike leaves the bar deeply upset that his reputation may be harmed and his free drink ticket revoked. As Spike and Joe French walk down the road together Spike sees a young girl coming toward them. He says he knows the girl, and starts mumbling to himself. Remembering the bet Joe French walks ahead in embarrassment. As he looks back Spike and the young girl are lost in conversation. Suddenly they take a swift look around them, and both climb over a wall near the road. French waits for about an hour until they both climb back over the wall, separating without a look or a word. As Spike saunters up to Joe French his expression is "as grave and smug as a parish priest's."

The story is reminiscent of Joyce's "Two Gallants," a story O'Connor criticizes in The Lonely Voice as being immoral. Joyce refrains from any moral comment about a wager on whether a certain girl can be seduced. O'Connor makes certain that there is no doubt about his moral position. As Joe French waits for the victorious Don Juan to return

He had plenty to think about. Of course, if what Spike said was true and all women were alike, he could understand why it was that Celia had run off with the commercial traveller. His bitterness against her, he realized, would now be transferred to the whole sex.

They were all a terrible lot, the best of them unworthy of a member of his confraternity. (The Common Chord, p. 156)

In the last story of the volume Father Cassidy's "fat good-natured chuckle" is echoed by another man who turns a young girl from her natural, healthy development. Rather than being a priest, he is another Don Juan like Spike Ward. He repeats the story of "News for the Church" with another imaginative girl. In "Don Juan's Temptation" the aging lover, Gussie, as effectively turns a young girl from optimism about finding a happy marriage as does Father Cassidy. Gussie tells his story in a bar about a girl who argued with his theory that romantic ideas of love are fairy tales, and that sexual pleasure has nothing to do with emotional attachments. His "temptation" is that when the girl describes her own parents' married life he nearly believes in married love. But his fat chuckle becomes a "greasy laugh" as he recalls that the temptation did not last long and the girl became another of his conquests.

This arrangement of stories at the beginning, middle and end enforces an important thematic element of the cycle. Father Cassidy, and the two Don Juans are low on the moral hierarchy formed in the volume. The stories are grouped according to the kinds of meddlers there are, and their effectiveness in detouring the normal development of imagination and judgment. In three stories after "News for

the Church" the meddlers are mothers, their reasons for interfering in their children's courtships are religious, social, financial, and in one case the interference is from an over-protective love that resembles jealousy. Fortunately the victims of these stories survive their antagonists' attacks, and two of the three even manage happy marriages.

In the next group the consequences are more serious, and O'Connor focuses on the victims rather than the meddlers. "Babes in the Woods" is about two illegitimate children who comfort one another when no one else will. A young woman wants to take her illegitimate son to live with an Englishman who proposes marriage. But the girl's mother refuses to allow the marriage because the man is a Protestant. The girl stays in Ireland and marries a Catholic who does not adopt the illegitimate child. The woman does not try to see her young son again. In "The Frying Pan" the victim is a priest, one of the sensitive, imaginative clerics of whom there are many in O'Connor's stories. This one finds out too late that his happiness lies in marriage. He is attracted to a particular woman, the wife of a friend. In the next story the victim is a foolish man who thinks he is on the point of death when he allows a priest to force him to marry his housekeeper.

After these stories the victims and meddlers alike seem to contract in their humanity. They are like Rita Lomasney's sisters who find the way to avoid the conflict

between their religious duties and their natural desires in deceit. In "A Thing of Nothing" a woman pretends to have a baby so she can be sure of an heir for her husband's business, thus of a roof over her own head in her old age. In another story a man is made to believe that the child of his wife's infidelity is his own child. Friends of the couple meddle in their lives and help the wife choose to abandon the man she loves, and remain the wife of a selfish, narrow man she does not care for.

In all of the stories the characters are easily recognizable as dominated by imagination or by judgment. There are the honest ones who try to find fulfillment through marriage, and there are the self-centered ones who impose their own will on others for their selfish ends. These latter include parents, priests, Don Juans, and "friends." The arrangement of the stories moves from situations in which union between judgment and imagination is possible to situations in which the ambition is not to join in a balanced relationship but to grab what one can for his own selfish ends. The total effect of the cycle is that few individuals ever do achieve happy marriages. As one innocent victim concludes "And damn little love there is knocking round when you start looking for it" (The Common Chord, p. 35).

One departure in this volume from the other cycles is the lack of distinction between the short stories O'Connor

defines in The Lonely Voice as contes, and the longer stories he designates nouvelles. Length is the only difference between stories in this volume. All the stories share a uniform tone and the narrators, omniscient or unnamed members of the community, have an authoritative moral commentary. The long stories, one of nearly one hundred pages long, fulfill the purpose of a nouvelle as something greater than a story though less comprehensive than a novel. It is O'Connor's most characteristic form in the mature cycle.

"The Holy Door" is an example of a story that has the scope of a man's entire life. Charlie Cashman was a commandant during the time of the Irish "Troubles," and afterwards settled down to run an efficient hardware store business. He is attracted to his complement, Nora Lalor who "was exceedingly shy, and a bit of a dreamer, as well as being crazily inquisitive." The only problem with the courtship is that Nora is avid to learn the sexual facts of life at the same time that she is terrified of them. Charlie is more than she can contemplate in a husband because he has too much hair and "a cleft in his chin, which always betokened a sensual nature . . . it made him look so animal" (The Common Chord, p. 59). Because no one in Ireland will explain the facts of life to her she lives in an imaginative state of terror. Charlie's masculinity frightens her to the point that she cannot abide

the thought of a courtship. When Charlie turns his attention to Polly Donegan a reader of O'Connor's stories may recognize immediately that their marriage will be disastrous; their natures are not complementary. Polly is a girl with "an air of great calm and determination." She has never wondered about the facts of life and has no interest in marriage at all. But to please her family she marries Charlie. The honeymoon is a horror to her and she prevents herself from running away on her wedding night by repeating aspirations under her breath to Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Charlie had hoped that marriage would settle him down and he wanted a love relationship of shared intensity. But he accepts the situation, continuing with the hardware store as his central interest, until he begins to worry about an heir. If he has no children then the store will go to his nephews. Polly makes a pilgrimage to "The Holy Door" in Rome, opened every seven years to help families without children. When the pilgrimage does not work Polly begins to believe that Charlie's mother has bewitched her, because the mother-in-law wants the property to go to the family of her favorite son, not Charlie. But Charlie's greatest worry is that he may be the cause of the childless family. He proves himself wrong with the maid who bears him a son. When Polly finds out about the illegitimate child Father Ring has his hands full keeping their marriage together. But the marriage is doomed from the beginning, anyway.

Charlie cannot keep himself from thinking he will have another chance at a happy marriage when Polly conveniently dies from a wasting disease. After her death he goes to Nora, and asks her to have the honeymoon before the wedding to make sure he can have an heir. Nora's maiden soul is shocked, but she concedes something to Charlie's nature by deciding that she will commit a sin for him. Charlie is so grateful to find a real Juliet that he marries her immediately.

The story covers several years from Charlie's first inclination to marry, to his marriage, fatherhood, his wife's death, his remarriage and fatherhood a second time. During this span the daily lives of the characters are explained, and their places in a moral hierarchy made clear. This is the story O'Connor has moved toward for some time, a story that lacks "local color," lyrical details, or patterns of imagery and symbols, and one that has a comic tone, a realistic style and a moral voice guiding the reader to a recognition of the proper balance between imagination and judgment. With the formula for a successful story cycle worked out, O'Connor is prepared to return to the one task that has eluded him for years, the telling of his personal story of the struggle for maturity and for a writer's moral voice carrying more authority than the sound of one man's lonely speaking voice.

CHAPTER VII
THE MATURE DESIGN, TRAVELLER'S SAMPLES AND
DOMESTIC RELATIONS

The story of O'Connor's personal struggle for maturity was one that proved difficult to tell. From the beginning of his career as a storyteller he was preoccupied by a desire to show how his personal experiences taught him to recognize the two poles of human nature and to develop the proper relation between them. The first volume of stories, Guests of the Nation, focuses on the personal and political crisis resulting from a lack of understanding of the proper relation between imagination and judgment; occasional short stories written during the experimental years of the 1930s are based on autobiographical material; and the two novels, The Saint and Mary Kate and Dutch Interior, are attempts to tell his personal story. But until the development of his mature cycles O'Connor was unable to explain how his own process of maturation contributed to the development of his theory of imagination and judgment and to his authority as a moralist.

It was necessary to "prove" his authority when his first extravagant claims for the writer as moral guide never came to fruition. Success of the magnitude O'Connor prophesied in 1938 radio broadcasts would have required the

acceptance by a large reading public of his authority as a moralist, and even more than that, of an actual change in the moral behavior of his following. Within two years of making his initial claims for the writer as reformer, O'Connor completed his gloomy portrait in Dutch Interior of an unsuccessful artist who not only lacks a following but is himself defeated by the inability to unite his own thoughts and feelings in the achievement of moral certainty. O'Connor's own frustration is reflected in Dutch Interior by the argument that the artist fails because society lacks moral awareness as a result of the widespread dissociation of imagination and judgment. This argument forms a full circle with the 1938 claims that the writer must teach moral truth to his audience.

And yet O'Connor never abandoned his belief in the writer as reformer; he was, however, forced to reexamine the question of how a work of art can affect the reader's behavior, a question presented most concisely by Robert Frost: "How Soon?" O'Connor's answer finally appeared in The Lonely Voice where he bequeathed the justification of his claims to a new generation of realists beyond the shadow of Northanger Abbey. In the meantime he applied his theory of imagination and judgment to his personal experience as a way to "prove" his own stature as a moralist and his authority for explaining the lives of his characters. He attempted it in Dutch Interior but after that psychological

and artistic failure O'Connor avoided the problem of telling his personal story for ten years. When he had achieved the unity of the story cycle in Crab Apple Jelly and The Common Chord he was ready once more to attempt the alchemy of transforming autobiography into art. Traveller's Samples (1951) is his first experiment with autobiographical material in the form of a story cycle. It is successful as a cycle, but falls short of O'Connor's desire to describe his own maturation as a man of judgment and an artist. O'Connor does achieve his portrait of the artist as moralist in his final story cycle, Domestic Relations (1957).

Traveller's Samples

In all of the work before Traveller's Samples, a reader has no difficulty recognizing the characters representing the feminine principle in O'Connor's theory of imagination and judgment. As early as 1932 O'Connor explained to George Russell that Mary Kate McCormick in The Saint and Mary Kate is based on an abstraction; she represents the positive elements of a healthy imaginative nature caught up in her vital quest for fulfillment through marriage with an individual embodying the masculine principle of judgment. As O'Connor explains in An Only Child, he never had to look far for a definition of the feminine principle, being highly satisfied with the example of his own mother. But a definition of the masculine principle was more difficult to find in his personal history, and there is

no early prototype of the masculine nature in his fiction. The young men in Guests of the Nation are committed to the "romantic improvisation" of the civil war, and the Saint, Phil Dinan, of his first novel is diverted from natural development by the "romantic improvisation" of Irish Catholicism. Traveller's Samples is devoted to a definition of the masculine principle of judgment, most fully represented in the person of the narrator who achieves his authority for moral comment through his mature union of imaginative and judgmental faculties.

The book is divided into three groups of stories according to differences in the narrative voice. In the first group a young boy tells of his struggle for maturity; in the second group the first-person storyteller is older, near manhood himself, and beginning to observe other characters as they do or do not reconcile their faculties of imagination and judgment; in the third group the narrator is an unnamed member of the community, or else there is an omniscient moral commentator to point out the way in which a man can achieve maturity--one of the final stories is actually called "The Masculine Principle."

There are five stories in the first group of childhood reminiscences, all of them recognizable in O'Connor's account of his own early memories in An Only Child. The narrator is an adult, but he remembers the experiences as if they happened only yesterday. The character is older from

one story to the next, and he is able to understand more about himself with each experience. Not until the last story in the group, however, does he step beyond the comfortable world of childhood to recognize the severity of his family's poverty, the unhappiness caused by his father's drinking, and his mother's reliance on him to help the family out of their misery. In each story the narrator has a different name; sometimes he has a brother or sister, but his voice is always recognizable as that of Frank O'Connor who has learned to approach autobiographical material from a comic distance.

The opening story is "First Confession," one of O'Connor's most anthologized stories, and one of his most successful for sheer comic effect. But within the framework of the cycle the story of a boy's terror of damnation over a bad confession has significance beyond the specific incident. It is also his first conflict between his own judgment and his religion. As a child of seven, Jackie's main problem is a grandmother who dislikes him, and who gives pennies to his sister but none to him. Worse than that, Jackie's father sides with the grandmother, and Jackie's mother sides with him, causing family rows that usually end in a "leathering" for Jackie. When his teacher explains confession Jackie finds that he has broken nearly all of the commandments because of his grandmother. He lacks the courage to tell his confessor how he decided to

murder his grandmother and carry her away piecemeal in his wheelbarrow. He is terrified by his teacher's tales about people who made bad confessions and then appeared before priests at night to leave burning handprints on the furniture. His sister torments him all the way to the confessional where he becomes so confused that he supposes the arm rest is designed for him to kneel upon. When the priest opens the confessional slide he sees no one before him and asks who is there.

'Tis me, father,' said I, for fear he mightn't see me and go away again. I couldn't see him at all. The place his voice came from was under the moulding, about level with my knees, so I took a good grip of the moulding and swung myself down till I saw the face of a young priest look up at me. He had to put his head on one side to see me, and I had to put mine on one side to see him, so we were more or less talking to one another upside down. It struck me as a very queer way to hear confessions, but I didn't feel it was my place to criticise.¹

The priest's surprised shout adds to "the strain the politeness was putting on my hold of the moulding" and Jackie rockets to the floor of the confessional, rolls out the door, and lands broadside across the church aisle in time to receive a "smack across the ear" from his infuriated sister. But instead of condemning Jackie to hell the priest

¹ Frank O'Connor, Traveller's Samples (London: Macmillan, 1951), p. 6. All further references to this work are in the text.

turns on the sister, and then listens attentively while Jackie tells how he planned to kill his grandmother. Jackie is delighted with "the most entertaining man I'd ever met in the religious line" who admits that there are quite a few he has been tempted to murder but was stopped by fear of the hangman.

The perfect ease of the narrative voice in recalling an experience as a seven-year-old mind perceived it is enough to secure the story's reputation among O'Connor's best. But "First Confession" also contributes to the theme of the cycle. In the last paragraph Jackie's sister laments her brother's rewards--candy, a long conversation, and a walk out of the church with the priest at his side.

'Lord God!' she wailed bitterly. 'Some people have all the luck! 'Tis no advantage to anybody trying to be good. I might as well be a sinner like you.'
(Traveller's Samples, p. 10)

Jackie's sister is an example of a type common in O'Connor's stories, an individual who develops a complacency about the forms of religion yet remains free to practice unkindness and deceit. In later stories the conflict between Jackie's natural sense of justice and the laws of the Church do not find so easy a resolution. The comic story introduces an obstacle in the path of the natural development of judgmental faculties that must be dealt with more seriously later in the cycle.

In the next story a youth, somewhat older than Jackie, prides himself on becoming "The Man of the House" when his mother falls ill. His determination to take control in the frightening situation ultimately leads him to defeat. After crossing town alone to have a prescription filled, he allows a small girl to talk him into drinking the treacly syrup, and into buying candy with the pennies he had promised to the Blessed Virgin. After his failure he stops in the cathedral to beg the Blessed Virgin to save his mother anyway,

and having told her about my fall, I promised her a candle with the very next penny I got if she'd make my mother better by the time I got back. I looked at her face carefully in the candlelight and I thought she didn't look too cross. Then I crawled miserably back over the hill. All the light had gone out of the day, and the echoing hillside had become a vast, alien, cruel world. As well as that I felt terribly sick after the cough bottle. It even crossed my mind that I might die myself. In one way it would be a great ease to me. (Traveller's Samples, p. 19)

He is better able to judge his situation than Jackie in "First Confession," but at the same time his child's world of order remains inviolable; when he gets home the Blessed Virgin has granted the miracle.

In "The Idealist" the narrator imposes an English "school code" on his peers in a poor Cork neighborhood. Dissatisfied with his option to avoid trouble by lying to an unreasonable teacher, he causes himself increasing trouble by telling the truth. The English system gets to

be more trouble than it is worth when the teacher interprets his nonconformity as impudence, and singles him out for the most severe punishments. But the boy does not reason through his situation. He abandons the "school code" for another "romantic improvisation," and exchanges the English stories for gangster tales because "The only good teacher is a dead teacher."

"The Drunkard," like "The Idealist," presents a potentially dangerous situation to a child's world, in which a child is sent with his father to act as a "brake" on his drinking. Only briefly does the narrator describe what one of his father's drinking bouts can be like.

By the time he had taken the first one he realised already that he had made a fool of himself and had to take a second to forget it, and a third to forget that he couldn't forget, and at last came home, reeling drunk. Next day he stayed in from work with a sick head, and inside a fortnight was poor and savage and despairing again. Once he began he drank steadily through everything down to the kitchen clock.
(Traveller's Samples, p. 35)

The horror of these memories is confined to Dutch Interior and An Only Child. In "The Drunkard" there is still the possibility of a miracle. Tired of waiting for his father the boy reaches for the pint of lager at the bar and quaffs all of it. When his father turns around to savor his long-awaited drink he finds an empty glass and a starry-eyed son. Before he can get the drunken boy home the child has philosophized on his father's favorite subjects, mournfully

sung his favorite songs, and shaken his fists at the neighbors to mind their own business. At home they are met with the angry cries of the boy's mother, but when his father quietly gets up and goes to work the next day she is ecstatic. "'My brave little man,' she said with her eyes shining. "'Twas God did it you were there. You were his guardian angel'" (Traveller's Samples, p. 45).

In this story the father's name is Mick Delaney although the boy is not named Larry. The Delaneys compose his central autobiographical characters in the final story cycle, and all of the childhood reminiscences are told by Larry Delaney. But only the last in the group of childhood stories of Traveller's Samples is told by Larry, and in "The Thief" he has a little brother. The story summarizes the real difficulties that must eventually confront O'Connor's autobiographical narrators. In "The Thief" the child's belief in the natural does not involve the Blessed Virgin but Santa Claus. Larry Delaney switches his stocking for his little brother's on Christmas day thinking that the only one who can catch him is half-way back to the North Pole. But when he watches his mother's reaction he learns the truth. She has bought the few presents with pennies his father begrudged the night before,

I understood it all and it was nearly more than I could bear; that there was no Santa Claus, as the Dohertys said, only my mother trying to scrape together a few coppers from the housekeeping; that my father was

mean and common and a drunkard, and that she had been relying on me to get on in the world and save her from the misery of the life she was leading. And I knew that the despair in her eyes was the fear that like my father I should turn out to be a liar, a thief and a drunkard. (Traveller's Samples, p. 55)

Until this bitter self-denunciation the narrator of the childhood stories is protected by his belief in the supernatural and his own fantasies. His realization marks a giant step in the development of his faculty of judgment and moral awareness. In the second group of stories the first-person narrators begin to make comments about characters of imagination and of judgment. The narrator of each story is only peripherally involved in the story's situation.

The first story of this group is "My First Protestant" which tells how two people decide not to marry because their families disapprove of a Catholic-Protestant union. The narrator is a reserved, observant friend of the couple who realizes they have upset their chances for happiness. He storms at the girl "If you were my girl, I would not let God, man or devil come between us." He then explains to the reader that "I knew she'd be a very good wife for Joe, and I couldn't help feeling that there was something wrong about letting religion get between them" (Traveller's Samples, p. 60). The narrator explains how his own attitudes toward religion began to change and he becomes agnostic, a healthy sign among all of O'Connor's characters of judgment. The slow philosophic pace of the story absorbs the

passage of time, and the narrator meets again the Protestant girl, now a widow with two children. Since her parents' death she had decided to become a Catholic. He chats with her and then explains it all to the reader.

I understood for the first time how her life had gone astray. A woman always tries to give her children whatever it is she feels she has missed in life. Sometimes you don't even know what it is until you see what she is trying to give them. Perhaps she doesn't know herself. With some it's money, with others education, with others still it's love. But the kids never value it, of course. They have never really felt the loss of it.

And there, as we were sitting over our drinks in the front room of her little house, two old cronies, I thought how strange it was that the same thing should have blown us in opposite directions. A man and a woman in search of something are always blown apart, but it's the same wind that blows them. (Traveller's Samples, p. 65)

The narrator tries out his newly discovered power of explanation on another couple who decide not to marry for religious reasons. The narrator meets the would-be bridegroom during church hours when they both prefer to take walks by the river. He is an atheist who tries to talk sensibly to his fiancée, a devout Catholic. But she starts a novena for enlightenment and learning that God is against the match she breaks off the engagement. The atheist decides he has nothing to live for and convinces everyone that he will commit suicide. Instead he sees "the light" and becomes religious; the narrator learns that the ex-atheist prefers not to associate with him any longer because he has no proper faith.

The last story in the group is "Old Age Pensioners" which is given this place in the cycle because it identifies the narrator as a writer. It also identifies the best subject for writing, the daily lives of seemingly ordinary people who are in fact extremely important because they have the gift of brotherhood. But in this case the introduction of the narrator as writer is awkward. After this story, the narrator is the model for the mature principle of judgment that communicates with the imaginative faculty. The narrator is vaguely identified as a member of the community, or the narrative voice is omniscient and the authorial intrusions belong to O'Connor. The tone of the two is identical. Of the remaining stories three deal with characters who are in search of the masculine principle. They are "The Masculine Principle," "Jerome," and "Darcy in the Land of Youth."

"The Masculine Principle" resembles "The Mad Lomasneys" in Crab Apple Jelly. The difference is one of degree. Jim Piper is like Ned Lowry in his quiet manner and reflective nature.

Jim Piper came on the scene in such an unobtrusive way that no one knew he was on at all till himself and Evelyn were engaged. He was that sort of a fellow, a motor mechanic and more seen than heard . . . But when you scratched the surface of Jim's gentle self-effacing air, you found he had a hard streak in him, too. (Traveller's Samples, p. 100)

Evelyn has the same problem as Rita Lomasney--two sisters who are self-satisfied, deceitful, and dislike their "emotional, brooding" sister. When Jim begins giving Evelyn ten shillings each week to bank toward a house of their own, the sisters sneer at Evelyn's dull fiancé. When they have ninety pounds saved Evelyn breaks loose and takes the money to Dublin where she has a love affair with a medical student. Weeks later she comes home without a cent to learn that Jim forgives her everything, and he begins to save money for the house. Frustrated and unhappy the couple cause further scandal when Evelyn becomes pregnant. Jim allows her to have the child without marrying her because he still does not have enough for their house. Finally he comes to visit Evelyn one evening and laughs at her father for shunning him; he laughs at Evelyn for her embarrassment, tells her that the money is saved and they can pick up the child and be married immediately. He admits that he has suffered from "waiting too long" because he adhered too rigidly to his masculine principle of judgment.

In "Jerome" the protagonist has the same problem as Jim Piper, but he is even more extreme. As the narrator comments

There are some people so cautious I wonder they ever let themselves get born. Cork people in particular; if caution were transmitted instead of acquired that place would be depopulated long ago. (Traveller's Samples, p. 131)

Jerome goes to London during World War II for a factory job; he meets an English girl who is neat, serious and efficient, but Jerome is afraid there might be something he has not noticed that would prevent her from becoming a tidy wife. First he looks up her factory production chart to make sure she is hard-working; then he looks at her through the eyes of his neighbors in Cork. On her part she begins to worry about his caution and invites him on a holiday out of town. He fears that the situation might be compromising, so he invites another Irishman with an English girlfriend to come along. On their trip Jerome meets a phrenologist who warns him about his close, untrusting nature, pointing out that Jerome is unpopular at the factory.

"I don't care whether I am or not," said Jerome with a flash of real pique.

"Oh, yes you do," said the phrenologist joyously. "You care a lot as a matter of fact. You'd like people to like you more, but the trouble is you're so cautious and secretive you won't give them the chance. It's not that you're not clever, mind! . . . But your intellect is completely undeveloped . . . Every time it makes a move independently, up comes this side of your head and knocks it flat. Result is, you feel yourself inferior to other people, which you're not really, not by any manner of means, and hence you put on an air of bumptiousness, and pretend to understand things you don't understand at all." (Traveller's Samples, p. 137)

The phrenologist, like the narrator, knows O'Connor's theory of the two poles of human nature, and Jerome is explained as a man of judgment who cannot communicate with his imaginative faculty. The phrenologist loses his temper

with Jerome when instead of following his advice about becoming more trusting and tolerant, Jerome brings his girlfriend by to see if he can learn more about the sort of wife she would make him. After the phrenologist's second lecture Jerome takes his chance and a happy marriage is the result. In the final story of the volume the man of judgment learns to unite thought and feeling only after a sexual initiation, what O'Connor calls "the completion of human experience."

"Darcy in the Land of Youth" is the same story as Jerome, only Darcy has a more developed judgmental faculty. Darcy falls in love with Janet, an English girl at the factory. But his Cork values are jolted when she freely admits to having "fooled with love" by taking men on holidays to country hotels. Darcy concludes that she is not responsible enough for a wife, and he leaves for Cork determined not to renew their courtship. But while he is away he realizes that he is foolish not to take her away on a holiday, even though his training tells him that sexual relations before marriage are sinful. Janet, on the other hand, admits to herself that weekends at hotels never pleased her, and she believes in the love relationship Darcy offered at first. He rushes back to England determined to sleep with Janet, and she meets him fearfully, thinking that his willingness excludes marriage. They find each other out on their excursion; Darcy "laughed out loud and heartily.

'Holy God! and we could have been married the whole time!'" (Traveller's Samples, p. 168).

The ending is one that the narrator, and O'Connor the moralist, heartily approve. Marriage as the union of imagination and judgment is the essential formula for happiness. If men of judgment and women of imagination are united then Northanger Abbey will be shut down as a popular modern residence. A healthy, middle class society can emerge to revel in the marriage ritual at Mansfield Park. The narrator, a mature man of judgment, approves of his characters' weddings, commenting "Marriage seems to come more natural to us" (Traveller's Samples, p. 168).

Domestic Relations

Domestic Relations is O'Connor's most carefully designed story cycle. It generally follows the arrangement of Traveller's Samples although it adds the identification of the autobiographical narrator as the mature writer of the cycle; Larry Delaney of Blarney Lane, Cork, is O'Connor's portrait of the fully matured principle of judgment in communication with the faculty of imagination, and thus he is O'Connor's portrait of the best kind of writer, the realist and moralist.

The first group of stories is narrated by Larry, and the incidents are recorded in An Only Child as experiences of the young Frank O'Connor. The difference in the two autobiographical accounts is that Mick and Mary Delaney

are portraits of Mick and Minnie O'Donovan without the harsh details of marital unhappiness. O'Connor describes his childhood from a comic distance, and the group of stories illustrates the natural development of an artist. The three groups of stories, separated according to differences in the narrative voice, are maintained in Domestic Relations with the exception that Larry Delaney also narrates the final story, explaining the principle of imagination and judgment to his reader.

The group beginning the volume with "The Genius" is so closely integrated that preoccupations of the first-person narrator are continued from one story to the next. In "The Genius" Larry says "Now, one of the things I wanted badly to know was where babies came from but this was something that no one seemed to be able to explain to me."² The second story begins "The discovery of where babies came from filled my life with excitement and interest" (Domestic Relations, p. 20). The group, while composed of independent short stories, forms one long account of the writer's childhood. The details of the stories are the same ones that cause pain to Peter Devane in Dutch Interior and to O'Connor in An Only Child, but to Larry Delaney they are the subject of a comic narrative. In "The Genius" Mick Delaney's distrust of his son is a normal reaction to

² Frank O'Connor, Domestic Relations (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 8. All further references to this work are in the text.

the boy's preference for opera singers instead of street gangs.

I can see now, of course, that he really didn't like me. It was not the poor man's fault. He never expected to be the father of a genius and it filled him with foreboding. He looked around him at all his contemporaries who had normal, bloodthirsty, illiterate children, and shuddered at the thought that I would never be good for anything but being a genius. To give him his due, it wasn't himself he worried about, but there had never been anything like it in the family before and he dreaded the shame of it. (Domestic Relations, pp. 5-6)

Larry's mother always sided with Larry, but it is not the protective gesture of Minnie O'Donovan against the red-eyed drunkard who attacked her and her son with an open razor, as O'Connor recalls in An Only Child. Mick Delaney complains with some justification that his wife is turning Larry into a mother's boy, and he insists that she allow the boy to grow up "a bit natural." Following his mother's encouragement to separate himself from the rough boys in the neighborhood, Larry decides to become a genius, but as he does so he pursues a normal quest for the development of the masculine principle of judgment. Larry wants to know, first of all, where babies come from. Irish reticence in discussing matters of sex provides Larry with a wealth of fanciful answers to his questions, answers he accepts as logical explanations until he begins to air them, evoking laughter instead of admiration for his genius.

Assuming that he is a genius and need not associate with "babies" his own age, Larry begins his first year at

school by making the acquaintance of a girl twice his age. He does not know at the time that she likes him because he reminds her of a younger brother who was killed by a car the year before. Larry believes she admires his superiority over other children. He is angry when she laughs at his explanation of where babies come from, and he is horrified when she begins to prefer the company of a boy her own age. When she tells him she will not have time to play with him any more he feels

there was no comfort for me. My great work meant nothing to me and I knew it was all I would ever have. For all the difference it made, I might as well become a priest. I felt it was a poor, sad, lonesome thing being nothing but a genius. (Domestic Relations, p. 19)

The great work Larry refers to is the book of adventures he is writing. His preference for his girlfriend is the right one for the natural development of a character of judgment. At the beginning of the next story, "The Study of History" Larry has recovered from his jilting, but he has still not learned the facts of life.

In "The Study of History" Larry wants to know who he might have been if his mother had not married his father, another way of approaching the question of where babies come from. He ponders the descriptions of his mother's suitors before Mick Delaney, and each one in turn creates "a vivid figure in my imagination." But he prefers real people, and Mick Delaney's old girlfriend is still

alive, and residing in walking distance of Blarney Lane. So one afternoon Larry pretends that he has just wandered by her house, and he gathers courage to speak to her. When he gets home with his story he causes a sensation. That night he delights in using his new information to pretend he is the oldest child of the old girlfriend, a woman now married with several children of her own. When the game is over he suddenly finds he cannot return to his identity as Larry Delaney, and the experience frightens him.

I had ceased to be Gussie all right, but somehow I had not become myself again, not any self that I knew. It was as though my own identity was a sort of sack I had lived in, and I had deliberately worked my way out of it, and now I couldn't get back again because I had grown too big for it. (Domestic Relations, p. 37)

His only way to recover his security is to seek his mother's soothing caresses, but he has irrevocably taken one step toward maturity.

In "The Man of the World" Larry continues his search for the facts of life, this time turning to an older boy for his information. Larry feels that this experience, too, takes him farther than he wants to venture, but he is better equipped to analyze it. The older boy is reserved, supercilious, and wears "a knowing smile." The treat he has for Larry is an evening in the attic where they can look into the bedroom next door of a newly married couple. Larry's reason for joining the friend

all goes back to my curiosity about fellows and girls. As I say, I only imagined things about them, but Jimmy knew. I was excluded from knowledge by the world of appearances that blinded and deafened me with emotion. (Domestic Relations, p. 37)

The evening treat consists of watching the couple arrive home late, change into their nightclothes, and go to bed. Larry watches guiltily as the young woman throws her clothes here and there; she then stuns Larry by kneeling for her night prayers. She makes sudden, emotional gestures, and her husband moves carefully about the room to keep from disturbing her. He methodically undresses and as methodically kneels next to his wife for his prayers, though "with none of the abandonment suggested by her pose, and with an expression that combined reverence, and self respect." They are but another of O'Connor's men of judgment and women of imagination, and Larry is deeply relieved when they go straight to bed after turning out the light. The experience gives him cause to stop and analyze his reaction, the first of many reflections by the maturing narrator. Larry explains:

beyond us watching the young married couple from ambush, I had felt someone else watching us, so that at once we ceased to be the observers and became the observed. And the observed in such a humiliating position that nothing I could imagine our victims doing could have been so degrading . . . I think that even then I knew that I should never be sophisticated like Jimmy, never be able to put on a knowing smile, because beyond the world of appearances I would see only eternity watching. (Domestic Relations, p. 45)

In the next story Larry continues to mature, studying himself as well as those around him. This time he confines his questions about who he is to daydreams, pretending that he is one of "The Duke's Children." Fortunately for the developing principle of judgment Larry cannot keep his imaginative improvisations from spilling over into the objective world. When he decides he is a changeling, and someday he will meet an American heiress on his evening walk, a real girl speaks to him. He immediately begins to work her into his daydreams, and when he meets her father he treats him like one of the imaginary fathers of his American heiresses who wants to help him into a job worthy of his genius. But the conversation backfires when the girl's father recognizes he is being told outrageous lies. Larry is so mortified by the memory of the conversation he can no longer make up stories about the real girl. Only later does he realize that the girl also was one of "the duke's children," and unable to form real friendships.

In "Daydreams" his make-believe world again causes anguish when it collides with reality. Late one night Larry walks along the quays to become the innocent witness to a scuffle between a man and woman. At first thinking the woman is ill he stops to see if he can help. As he approaches, the man flees, and the girl breaks into sobs. Unable to assess the situation Larry hears that the man has taken five pounds from the girl, and to ease her mind Larry

pursues the man to ask him about it. When the man says he only received two pounds Larry becomes angry that he is being lied to and demands all of the money. It only slowly dawns on him that the girl is a prostitute and that he is actually experiencing one of his daydreams to save a young woman in distress. But it also dawns on him that he has ruined his heroic image of himself by allowing the girl to reward him with two of the five pounds. "After that I could find no pleasure in my solitary walks; the imaginary girls were all gone" (Domestic Relations, p. 73).

Larry's final experience brings him to a confrontation with a "romantic improvisation" greater than any he has conjured himself, the Irish Civil War. It marks a giant step in his maturation, just as it was for O'Connor. In the last story of the childhood group Larry recognizes that the ideals of the revolutionary movement quickly dissolve into private fights and like his daydreams, the revolutionary ideals have little to do with the real world. Like the other stories of the group "Private Property" is a comic story, and Larry learns to reject the revolution with less difficulty than O'Connor. Larry is quartermaster in charge of gathering weapons against the day that the word comes from Dublin to rise against the enemy. Two of his helpers get into an argument and the munitions dump is mysteriously found out by the enemy. Larry observes them closely, discovers their motives, and recognizes that

when private vendettas enter the war effort "there was no chance at all for idealism" (Domestic Relations, p. 88).

After these stories Larry becomes conscious of himself as a student of human nature. In "A Bachelor's Story," the first one in the group narrated by a character only peripherally involved in the action, Larry stands aside to take a close look at one of his acquaintances. He is also aware of himself as a storyteller. Introducing his narrative he explains that

Every old bachelor has a love story in him if only you can get at it. This is usually not very easy because a bachelor is a man who does not trust his neighbor, and by the time you can identify him as what he is, the cause of it all has been elevated into a morality, almost a divinity, something the old bachelor himself is afraid to look at for fear it might turn out to be stuffed. (Domestic Relations, p. 91)

This generalization could as easily be used as an introduction to "This Mortal Coil" in Traveller's Samples. The stories serve the same purpose in the cycles, to illustrate the imbalance in human nature that occurs when a man refuses to seek the completion of his nature in marriage. Domestic Relations, like Traveller's Samples, is a paean to married love. The difference between the two stories about intolerant bachelors is primarily in the narrator's understanding. Larry is a far more conscious guide than the speaker in "This Mortal Coil." Larry perceives the importance of recognizing what went wrong in the bachelor's

life, because he has broken the essential law for happiness. Like the bachelor in "This Mortal Coil" the new bachelor decides that his fiancée has absurd ideas about fidelity. He simply breaks off the engagement, concluding that all women are untrustworthy. The narrator makes the mistake of telling the bachelor what he has done wrong, and remarking that he has lost a fine chance for happiness.

And from that evening on, Archie dropped me. He even told his friends that I had no moral sense and would be bound to end up bad. Perhaps he was right, perhaps I shall end up as badly as he believed; but, on the other hand, perhaps I was only saying to him all the things he had been saying to himself for years in the bad hours coming on to morning, and he only wanted reassurance from me, not his own sentence on himself pronounced by another man's lips. (Domestic Relations, p. 108)

After this observation Larry Delaney ceases to be the recognized narrator until his reappearance in the last story, the story of a successful marriage in which Larry carefully defines the masculine principle of judgment attained by the central character. The intervening stories in this group are similar to the ones in the last section of his other cycles, stories of courtships which are commented upon by a narrative voice explaining the theory of imagination and judgment. "The Expectation of Life" tells of a woman who does not recognize that she possesses all the ingredients of a happy married life until she is on her deathbed. "The Ugly Duckling" is another variation on a familiar O'Connor story; the ugly duckling is an imaginative,

unhappy girl who does not recognize her need for the man of judgment who proposes to her. Instead she retreats into a cocoon of religious idealism and becomes a nun. The narrator, commenting throughout the story on the imaginative and judgmental natures of his characters, concludes with an explanation of that imbalance.

Because of some inadequacy in themselves--poverty or physical weakness in men, poverty or ugliness in women--those with the gift of creation built for themselves a rich interior world; and when the inadequacy disappeared and the real world spread before them with all its wealth and beauty, they could not give their whole heart to it. Uncertain of their choice, they veered between goals--were lonely in crowds, dissatisfied amid noise and laughter, unhappy even with those they loved best. The interior world called them back, and for some it was a case of having to return there or die. (Domestic Relations, p. 168)

The stories in this group do have a slightly different emphasis from similar groups in other cycles because of the narrative voice. Whatever the cause for a character's imbalance, the narrator points out what would have made the character happy. Domestic Relations also adds a sense of the recurring mistakes from one generation to the next. "Pity" is a story like his earlier "Babes in the Woods" focusing on the unhappy children of marriages that end in actual separation, or perhaps worse, in economic arrangements no longer involving love. "Pity" follows a story about a bored, selfish man who is tired of being the responsible head of his family; sent to bring the doctor for the birth of his third child, he forgets his errand, drinks with

his old civil war comrades, and then tries to remember what his errand was. He decides that he was sent to buy "Fish for Friday" because marriage has become equated in his mind with the regimen of Friday's menu. As he drives up to his front door and reaches back to get the fish, he hears the sound of a newborn baby. In "Pity" the central character is a young boy who feels the loss of love after his parents separate. His mother is so intent on vilifying his father that she does not notice her son's needs, and unconsciously deprives him of affection. In stories like this O'Connor's compassion for unloved children often results in his angriest denunciations of society's blindness to the theory of imagination and judgment. The story gives a sense of finality to the group. O'Connor's need to tell and retell the stories of characters who throw away their happiness becomes marked in the last cycle by the pervasive voice of the narrator who spells out the moral significance of each story.

Explanation is the central interest of the narrator in the final story, "The Paragon." It tells of a boy who is like the young Frank O'Connor, "a real mother's darling," but who remains a mother's darling long after his friend Larry Delaney has grown up and become the writer of the story. The paragon, Jimmy Garvin, does all the things in childhood that O'Connor wanted to do; he lives alone with his mother, he plays the piano and violin, he succeeds at school,

and he makes the highest mark on his examinations in Ireland. The narrative voice is identical with the one in the stories in the book's final group, with the exception that this narrator is named. Larry explains how Jimmy Garvin must fail in his ambitions because he has ignored the masculine principle; he has lived too long in the childhood world of "The Genius." The difference between the genius of the first story and the paragon of the last story is that the genius has grown into the mature writer, and the paragon has remained a child too long. Without the masculine principle of judgment Jimmy cannot understand himself in relation to objective reality. His only salvation is to find his father, recognize the two poles of human nature, and then try to draw his thoughts and feelings together. Also in the formula is the inevitable appearance of the feminine principle in the form of a spontaneous, imaginative girlfriend.

Jimmy does struggle to find his balance as Larry explains each step to the reader. Without O'Connor's power to tell a comic tale and to create a dramatic scene, the story would fall into an essay on the theory of imagination and judgment. But the story is a good one. Larry presents scenes he cannot possibly observe, and the inconsistency saves rather than mars the narrative. The entire story with its sharp contrast between Jimmy and Larry is a review of O'Connor's own development, his conflicts, and his maturation into a moralist.

Jimmy's mother is like Minnie O'Donovan in some ways; she is a charwoman who counts on her son's future success to draw them out of their poverty. Mother and son spend hours planning what their new life will be like. Jimmy visits his mother in the large house where she is a maid, and he imagines himself already the owner. They plan together how he will complete his schooling, find a lucrative job, and

then they would have a big house on the river, exactly like the one they were in, with a maid to wait on them who would be paid more than any maid in the neighborhood, and they would spend their holidays in France and Italy. If his mother was friendly with the maid she was working with, he even offered the position to her. There was nothing like having the whole thing arranged. (Domestic Relations, p. 237)

The details of Jimmy's dreams are identical with the ones Phil Dinan has in The Saint and Mary Kate, the ones Peter Devane has in Dutch Interior, and the ones Frank O'Connor recalls in An Only Child.

In "The Paragon" Larry analyzes the dream to show how it must fail if Jimmy is to succeed in his quest for maturity. An amusing detail of the autobiographical material in Jimmy's character involves a description of his photograph when he achieves "the highest mark in Ireland in the Intermediate exams; and his picture had appeared in the Examiner, with his right arm resting on a pedestal and his left hand supporting it to keep it from shaking" (Domestic Relations, p. 238). That photograph of the young

Frank O'Connor did not appear in the Cork Examiner but it is printed in My Father's Son, the self-conscious young O'Connor posing next to the pedestal, one eyebrow raised to create the impression of intellectual superiority and the upper lip lifted in the same direction as the eyebrow; the wide-eyed terror in his eyes contributes to a total impression of panic.

Larry Delaney wears the same expression in "Daydreams" and "The Duke's Children"; but he matures to write a cycle that records his own successful struggle for maturity. Watching Jimmy and his mother together Larry tells what is wrong with their "romantic improvisation." "Late in the evening his mother and he would go home together, holding hands, while he chattered on in his grave, ancient, innocent way, the way of a child on whom Life has already laid too heavy a burden" (Domestic Relations, p. 237). Larry also points out that "the trouble really began" for Jimmy when an aunt suggested that he visit his father in England. His mother is frightened by such a meeting, afraid her ex-husband might have a bad influence on the paragon, but she is swayed by the temptation to display the perfect son she has brought up without his father's help.

In the next section of this long story Larry describes the meeting between Jimmy and his father, carefully describing the diamond panes of the renovated Elizabethan house and the expressions on the characters' faces, especially on

Jimmy's face when he meets his father's second wife and their child. At this point O'Connor's identification with Larry is so complete that the first-person narrative temporarily lapses into an omniscient point of view. The entertaining dramatic scene makes the accompanying explanations and detailed commentary acceptable to the reader.

Jimmy's father has "a fundamental restlessness about him." Jimmy is not accustomed to so unresponsive an audience and attempts to win his favor by his habitual performance as a paragon.

He had trained himself to present a good impression without wasting time; he knew that he was polite, that he was intelligent, and that he had a fine voice; and it was a new experience for him to find his friendliness coming back to him like a voice in an empty house. It made him raise his voice and enlarge his gestures until he felt that he was even creating a disturbance.
(Domestic Relations, p. 244)

Since Jimmy is accustomed to his mother's total admiration he is confused every time his father upstages him. On the first night of his visit Jimmy lies awake planning his great scene, in which he will ask his father whether or not he is married to the woman he lives with, and whether or not it is binding in the eyes of the Church. If his father's answers are not satisfactory Jimmy imagines himself leaving the house quietly, but firmly letting his father know that right is on Jimmy's side.

No doubt his father would make a scene, and it would all be very unpleasant, but later on he would realize that Jimmy was right. Jimmy would explain this to him, and make it clear that anything he had done was done as much in his father's interests as his own; that nothing was to be gained by defying the laws of morality and the church. Jimmy knew he had this power of dominating people; he had seen old women's eyes filled with tears when he had sung "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen." (Domestic Relations, p. 246)

The great scene quickly gets out of Jimmy's control, and it ends in a pub with his father capturing the attention of everyone present, directing a discussion of a local hurling team. Jimmy returns to Ireland completely mystified, concluding that his father is very strange, but likeable just the same. In his mother's eyes this is the worst possible reaction that Jimmy can have, and she blames his father for the cracks that begin to show in her paragon. First, he makes his initial visit to an Irish pub, and next, he begins to court an imaginative, volatile girl. While he is engaged in these interests he loses his scholarship to college. He writes a bantering letter to his father for financial help, but receives a reply from the English wife that his father can give no one any help because he has been jailed for embezzlement. Larry Delaney documents each change occurring in Jimmy as the paragon becomes broken forever. When Jimmy begins his rounds of local pubs Larry notes that "for the first time in his life Jimmy was enjoying himself, and like all those who have not enjoyed themselves in childhood, he

was enjoying himself rather too much." When he forms a circle of drinking partners Larry comments "Up to now, Jimmy had been a young fellow with no particular friends, partly because he had no time for them, partly because, like most kids who have no time for friends, he was scared of them when they made advances to him" (Domestic Relations, pp. 150-51).

When Larry last sees Jimmy he bears no resemblance to a paragon. He is a husband and a father and is celebrating his hard-earned college degree. Larry explains that "He wanted a degree because it was the only pattern of achievement he understood, and the only one that could re-establish him in his own esteem" (Domestic Relations, p. 259).

Larry has one more generalization to make about Jimmy, one that summarizes the struggles of all the characters in Domestic Relations, including Larry.

. . . what interested me was what his father had done for him. All that evening, while they chattered and laughed in a sort of frenzy of relief, I was thinking of the troubles that Jimmy's discovery of his father had brought into his life, but I was thinking, too, of the strength it had given him to handle them. Now whatever he had inherited from his parents he had combined into something that belonged to neither of them, that was his alone, and that would keep him master of his destiny till the day he died. (Domestic Relations, p. 260)

The volume ends with the inevitable marriage between a character of judgment and a character of imagination who

have found the balance between the poles of their own natures, and found "the completion of human experience." But this volume also ends in the achievement of the same mature balance on the part of O'Connor's autobiographical narrator. Through the arrangement of the story cycle, the grouping of stories by the narrative voice and chronological age of the characters, the unity of tone, the repetition of a central character, the unity of theme, and the explanations of a character who is also a mature realist and moralist, O'Connor manages to present his autobiographical story in his most fully realized cycle.

After Domestic Relations the need for explanation dominates O'Connor's work. After 1957 he published no more story cycles, but wrote several new stories on his same theory of imagination and judgment, the narrative voice explaining characters' natures even more fully than in the final cycle. Many of these stories are merely vehicles for a moral lesson. After 1957 he rewrote many of his older stories for inclusion in collections, some of them as many as twenty years old, some of them rewritten as many as fifty times. While many of the revisions created a smoother story, as many more weighed down the original story with an excess of authorial intrusion and explanation of what was obvious to begin with. After 1957 he became more preoccupied than before with other forms of explanation, and completed the elaborate apologia for his own theory of art criticism

that near ~~modern~~ literary history: The Mirror in the Roadway (1956) and The Lonely Voice (1961). The year 1957 marks the summit of O'Connor's artistic powers when he completed his best story cycle in which he also defended his theory of the artist as realist and moralist, and teacher of the theory of imagination and judgment in all of its ramifications concerning marriage and society. Although O'Connor repeated his theories in many different forms, in collections of stories, in the novel, in literary criticism and autobiography, his only expression of the theme in a work of art was achieved in the story cycle, his greatest contribution to modern literature.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

After the publication of Domestic Relations O'Connor wrote dozens of new stories, several of them published in periodicals that had accepted his work since the 1940s, such as Harper's Bazaar, The New Yorker, The Saturday Evening Post, and Mademoiselle. They appear in Collection Three (1969), a posthumous volume selected and arranged by his widow, Harriet O'Donovan. There is no new thematic material in the stories; character types and narrative techniques are familiar to a reader of his cycles, and several stories like "The Impossible Marriage," "Masculine Principle," and "The Martyr" could be exchanged for stories on the same subject in earlier volumes.

One character does receive special attention during the last years of O'Connor's life, and his stories are grouped in a climactic arrangement at the end of the book by Mrs. O'Donovan who comments on the "mosaic" pattern of O'Connor's volumes in her preface. The character is a priest, Father Jerry Fogarty, who is a character of the imaginative principle, and represents O'Connor's return to this pole of his theory after focusing on the masculine principle in his last two cycles. The character is seen in

earlier stories as Father Foley in "The Frying Pan" (The Common Chord), and as Father Keating in "Uprooted" (Crab Apple Jelly). He is boyish, emotional, spontaneous, moody, and the victim of a recurring thought that there is something essentially the matter with his life. In "The Frying Pan" he falls in love with the wife of a friend; in "Uprooted" he urges his brother to marry an island girl they are both attracted to. When Father Fogarty appears in Collection Three he is also attracted to a spontaneous young girl.

Of course, as a celibate priest Father Fogarty is condemned to a life of frustration by the laws of O'Connor's theory of imagination and judgment. He cannot reach maturity as does O'Connor's autobiographical narrator, and the narrator points out the reasons for the failure, all according to the theory. In each story the priest does find some consolation in his vocation, until in the final story, "Mass Island," the more practical characters are reminded of the power and importance of the imaginative faculty. After years of focusing on the masculine principle of judgment O'Connor's final preoccupation in these stories is to remind the reader not to forget the necessity for the special qualities that the feminine imagination offers. Father Fogarty's group of stories do not represent an alteration in the theory because in the stories leading up to "Mass Island" he is repeatedly frustrated in the

natural development of the masculine principle, and pays dearly for it during his lifetime as a priest.

In the first story about him, "A Mother's Warning," Father Fogarty is young and inexperienced; he is attracted to a pretty girl before he knows what has happened to him. The story ends in the same lament expressed by Father Keating and Father Foley in earlier volumes. This pretty girl works in a jewelry store in the town where Father Fogarty is curate. When she comes to him for help the narrator immediately observes

She was tall and thin with a slight pale face, and her good manners barely contained a natural excitability of manner. Though he was normally shy of women he was attracted to her . . .¹

Her name is Sheila Moriarty, but it could be Rita Lomasney or Mary Kate McCormick. She represents the principle of the feminine imagination in search of the masculine principle. Sheila is duped by an opportunist at the store who convinces her to steal a piece of jewelry. She is then ushered to his home for dinner where she meets the wife she has been led to believe is a shrew. Instead she finds a frightened woman who has been subjected to meeting Don Juan's conquests on other occasions.

¹ Frank O'Connor, Collection Three (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 121. All further references to this work are in the text.

Having seen through this Don Juan, Sheila goes to Father Fogarty for advice.

Fogarty, partly because of his character, partly because of his circumstance, was a man who lived a great deal in his own imagination, and something about the girl had set his imagination on fire. . . . And he had no difficulty in imagining the sinister figure of Joyce, trying to lure the girl from one small misdemeanor to another, until eventually he would exercise moral blackmail on her. He had seen a few men like that as well . . . But in spite of his own determination to frustrate Joyce, he wasn't at all sure what he should do. (Collection Three, p. 124)

Fogarty goes to another priest for advice who tells him to "go by the book" and not try any "unorthodox" solutions in this difficult matter, since Fogarty is prone to listen to his heart rather than his head. The other priest knows Fogarty well, but cannot prevent the stormy confrontation with Don Juan during which the priest loses his temper three times and scarcely refrains from a fist fight. "He had an aching regret that he hadn't hit the man when he had the opportunity. It was clearly a public duty on someone's part to hit him" (Collection Three, p. 127). He does recognize that no matter how poorly he handled the situation, the villain recognizes the danger of pursuing Sheila any longer. Father Fogarty jubilantly recounts the confrontation for the girl who shares his glee until he repeats Joyce's request. He asked that Sheila tell Father Fogarty her mother's last advice before she left home. Instead of telling him, Sheila suddenly "withers up" and

hurriedly leaves the presbytery. After she is gone and Father Fogarty puzzles over her behavior for a few moments,

Then he understood and he withered up too. Sheila's mother said something about not throwing temptation in the way of priests because they were more vulnerable than other men. And quite innocently she had thrown temptation in his way and quite innocently he had been tempted, and Joyce in his coarse, worldly way had seen it all. (Collection Three, p. 129)

In the group of stories at the end of the book Father Fogarty suffers again because of his inability to fulfill his nature, but as the narrator explains, the priest's "profound humanity" finds some consolation in helping others when he cannot help himself. In the final story other characters pay their respects to this quality.

"Teacher's Mass" tells of a wrangle between Father Fogarty and a character of judgment. The opposite principle is represented by an ancient schoolmaster who insists on serving at the curate's Mass. The old man has the childish nature of a person "of dissociated scholarship," whose greatest pleasure aside from assisting at Mass is acting as a rigid censor for the travelling library. Father Fogarty tries to get rid of him by noting his failing health. But the old man's horror at the idea of leaving his morning post shows the priest it would be better to let him die in church than in bed. Each man learns a little about the other, the schoolmaster recognizing the deeply

sympathetic nature of the priest that prevents him from following the letter of the law, and Father Fogarty learning to wait patiently for the old man to hobble through the altar duties that are so important to him. When at last the old man does not respond during the ceremony Father Fogarty looks behind him to see the prone body. After administering the last rites he continues the Mass murmuring the responses to himself, stepping over the body to complete the ceremony. He does so with the satisfaction that the old man died as he wanted to.

In "An Act of Charity" Father Fogarty's problem is greater; he must cover up the fact of another young priest's suicide. He does it because suicide undermines all the promises the priesthood makes to its people. He gleans some satisfaction from the idea that he has protected his parishioners and those of the dead priest from religious doubt, but his sense of satisfaction slowly evaporates as he begins to feel the loneliness of his situation. There is no one he can confide his own doubts to.

"Requiem" is a brief anecdote about an old woman who asks to have a Mass said for Timmy, her departed French poodle. Father Fogarty is tempted to do it because he recognizes the satisfaction that it would give her. But he has to admit that his vows do not permit it; he also asks that the woman not forget him in her prayers, though

he does not tell her it is because her faith is greater than his.

"I will not, indeed, father," she said quietly.
"I know you're a good man and I'll remember you with the others that were good to me, and one of these days, with God's help, we'll all be together again."
(Collection Three, p. 209)

The stories about Father Fogarty are designed to demonstrate his "profound humanity" at the same time they show his frustration imposed by the nature of his vocation. In "Mass Island" those who criticized his volatile nature get the chance to see the good it has done others. True to his impractical nature Father Fogarty has told all of his friends that he wants to be buried on Mass Island, a tiny place in the wild mountain country where Mass was said secretly in the days of Cromwell, but he left no will. The place was also where he went on his vacations to follow an "instinctive life," his greatest temptation as a priest. He fished and roamed the wild country during the day and kept the hotel bar at night. After his death from a second heart attack he did not try to prevent, his more practical friends see that his wishes for burial are carried out. His brother, a cold businessman, says the priest must be buried in town unless there is written evidence of the last wishes.

It takes Father Jackson, a clever priest with a "Jesuitical air" to think of a ruse that will put Father

Fogarty on Mass Island. In private Father Jackson feels that Father Fogarty was childishly romantic. The brother sulks during the long drive to Mass Island as the priests accept the inconvenience for an impractical friend. But as they near the island on a wet, winter night, cars begin to join the procession. As they drive onto the island lanterns and flashlights appear along the face of the mountain as hundreds of mourners make their way to Father Fogarty's grave. In place of the small unlighted ceremony Father Jackson anticipated, the cemetery becomes brightly illuminated by headlights and lanterns. Father Jackson is deeply moved by the devotion shown for Father Fogarty.

As the lights strengthened and steadied, the whole island became like a vast piece of theatre scenery cut out against the gloomy wall of the mountain with the tiny whitewashed cottages at its base. Far above, caught in a stray flash of moonlight, Jackson saw the snow on its summit. "I'll be after you," he said to Father Hamilton, and watched him a little perturbed and looking behind him, join the parish priest by the gate. Jackson resented being seen by them because he was weeping, and he was a man who despised tears--his own and others'. It was like a miracle, and Father Jackson didn't really believe in miracles. Standing back by the fence to let the last of the mourners pass, he saw the coffin, like gold in the brilliant light, and heard the steadying voices of the four huge mountainy men who carried it. He saw it sway above the heads, shawled and bare, glittering between the little stunted holly bushes and hazels. (Collection Three, p. 259)

This conclusion to the volume, and to O'Connor's career, reminds the reader of the importance of the imaginative faculty that might have been neglected by a narrator preoccupied with the necessity of explanation and moral

commentary. But the few stories do not balance the majority of stories dedicated to explaining the masculine principle, even by O'Connor's scales. Rather than escaping what he felt to be Austen's fate, that of repressing the imaginative faculty through exaltation of the principle of judgment, O'Connor's final judgment of Austen boomerangs into his own lap. In The Mirror in the Roadway her novel, Persuasion, is described as the revenge of Austen's imagination on her judgment. The central character gives up a lover from an overriding sense of duty, and Austen is unsuccessful in defending the defeated character. The book is a "natural sequel" to Austen's "restraint she imposed upon herself in youth" (The Mirror in the Roadway, p. 41).

In his late work O'Connor's narrator effects a tyranny over his own characters in the rigid application of his theory. Father Fogarty notwithstanding, the characters rarely stand up under the yoke of their definition by type. The repetition of character according to types of imaginative and judgmental principles, coupled with the narrator's explanations, create stories of less power than the work of the earlier cycles.

The great purpose O'Connor envisioned for the writer as teacher is never achieved in his lifetime, and it is not likely that a new generation of writers emerging from the shadows of Northanger Abbey can vindicate his claims. O'Connor's elaborate theory of imagination and judgment is

never "proven" in his criticism, autobiography, or art. But in his story cycles it is embodied in one man's vision of reality, a vision closely resembling the Christian ethic of his early religious training whose "proof" by religious faith was unacceptable to him. The cycles are O'Connor's few herbs and apples harvested from his grand design for art, their narrow range excluding him from the title of "major writer," but they remain a substantial contribution to modern literature.

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