

THE VERTICAL SENSE OF PLACE IN THE
FICTION OF BARRY HANNAH AND
FLANNERY O'CONNOR

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In Barry Hannah's novel *Ray*, the protagonist by the same name is simultaneously a Vietnam and a Civil War veteran and his memory is cluttered with events from both wars. Ray, who narrates his own story, says in the two-sentence chapter V, "I live in so many centuries. Everybody is still alive" (41). In another chapter Ray, as ex-pilot, simply relates the coordinates for an air attack. The chapter looks like this:

XXIX

ERD. #92. #Doe4. Utap. At 40-50. Range. In Clear. Solid.
Ventre.

How Hannah has managed to portray Ray without sacrificing the verisimilitude of the character may have something to do with his sense of place and time, and I propose that this sense is vertical. By vertical I refer to Mikhail Bakhtin's vertical chronotope, one of the many time-place schemes he outlines in his monograph entitled "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." The vertical chronotope enables a literary use of time and space which spreads the world out along a vertical axis, blotting out linear time and twisting horizontal space into a right angle with the earth. "The temporal logic" of this chronotope, Bakhtin says, "consists in the sheer simultaneity of all that occurs" (157). Hannah's *Ray* is usually read as an incoherent story told by a fragmented character. Michael P. Spikes, for example, points out that "almost every critic and reviewer of *Ray* has commented, either directly or indirectly, on the fragmentation of its principle character" (70). Spikes argues that "Ray also seeks stability and order" through his narration of the text (71). I would like to argue that this quest for order has its own vertical logic characterized by simultaneous time combined

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with perpendicular movement suggested by the motif of flight. This vertical sense of place characterizes several of Hannah's works and is a feature which he shares with other Southern writers, one of them is Flannery O'Connor. O'Connor has said that "the writer operates at a peculiar crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet. His problem is to find that location" (1969, 59). These are the three ingredients of vertical space as I understand it: place, time and the extra-temporal other-worldly, and it is this kind of space I think O'Connor and Hannah construct in their fiction.

Vertical time and space are grounded in a Dantesque vision of the world. Hence the temporal in the vertical chronotope has a significance which goes beyond Ray's simple simultaneous "I live in so many centuries." "Only under conditions of pure simultaneity," Bakhtin says, "can there be revealed the true meaning of 'that which was and which is and which shall be'" (157). There is a line from O'Connor's novel *The Violent Bear it Away* which is even more illustrative of vertical time than Ray's line. It has to do with the 14-year-old boy Tarwater who has been abducted by his great-uncle, a fundamentalist old man who isolates his nephew in a cabin in the woods in order to give the boy a proper education. It reads:

His uncle had taught him Figures, Reading, Writing, and History beginning with Adam expelled from the Garden and going on down through the presidents to Herbert Hoover and on in speculation toward the Second Coming and the Day of Judgment. (4)

Owen W. Gilman, Jr. has singled out a difficulty one inevitably meets in a comparative reading of Hannah and O'Connor in the remark that "O'Connor's fiction, with all of its grotesque characters and scenes, always had an overreaching purpose—illuminating certain principles of faith—and there is no such motive behind anything produced by Barry Hannah. The closest thing to faith in Hannah's world is the process of storytelling" (216). While it is true that O'Connor was a professed Catholic and Hannah has expressed no particular religious conviction, Hannah's work, in my analysis, is no secular counterpart of O'Connor's, as some suggest. In her illuminating article "'The Whole Lying Opera of it': Dreams,

Lies and Confessions in the Fiction of Barry Hannah" Ruth D. Weston says Hannah's characters "inhabit a moral void which is a secular version of what O'Connor depicts" (415). Although Ray, for example, has intentionally killed, maimed and abused in his careers as soldier, pilot, doctor and husband, had he lived in a moral void he would not have the sense of guilt and purpose expressed in such passages as, "rising sins from my past are coming up and haunting my insides [...] Look here, I'm an important doctor on a mission" (61).

On the other hand, most of Hannah's characters do not live in a Dantesque world consisting of spheres of hell beneath the earth and spheres of purgatory and paradise above, which is the original form-generating image behind the vertical chronotope. Bakhtin notes that "in the subsequent history of literature, the Dantesque vertical chronotope never again appears with such rigor and internal consistency. But there are frequent attempts to resolve, so to speak, 'along the vertical.'" (158). In what follows I will examine such attempts in O'Connor's and Hannah's fiction. I see in both of these writers a striking tendency to portray characters ascending and descending, literally and metaphorically, through vertical spheres as well as recurring images of verticality such as flight, bridges and ladders. O'Connor is certainly the more rigorous of the two in her allusions to the traditional categories of heaven and hell in her works, while Hannah constructs some very concrete spheres of underworld, earth and overworld which are not necessarily poles of unequivocally negative and ideal worlds. Again, this is not to say that Hannah is presenting a secular version of O'Connor's world, both writers, I think, are dealing with spiritual movement in their employment of the vertical chronotope.

The use of the vertical chronotope, Bakhtin claims, is a device which enabled Dante to portray all of the "manifold contradictions" and "representatives of all social classes" of his epoch by means of a single feature. In "Revelation" O'Connor attempts such a feat by twisting the social stratification of her time and place into a vertical line. The protagonist of the story, Mrs. Turpin, spends her mental energy constructing a social hierarchy which she imagines in vertical terms: "On the bottom of the heap were most colored

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people [and] the white trash; then above them were the homeowners, then above them the home-and-land-owners, to which she and Claud belonged. Above she and Claud were people with a lot of money" (491). Mrs. Turpin considers herself a clean, virtuous, middle-class land owner, as opposed to blacks and poor whites whom she finds dirty and disgusting. But at the end of the story a vision appears before her in the sky in which her vertical scheme is ironically reversed:

She saw [...] a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those [...] like herself [...] Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away (508).

"In Dante the real time of the vision" Bakhtin says, "as well as the point at which it intersects with two other types of time, the specific biographical moment [...] and historical time—has a purely symbolic character" (156). In "Revelation" O'Connor has woven together the biographical time of Mrs. Turpin, the historical reality of the mid-twentieth century South (which she depicts with concise detail), and eternity which all meet in the scene of her symbolic vision of the day of judgment. Mrs. Turpin literally sees herself at the bottom of a vertical bridge to heaven in the climactic scene of the story. The material security and physical cleanliness which Mrs. Turpin prizes belong to the horizontal realm of the earth and have no value, or rather, have a negative value, when they are twisted into the vertical realm.

O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger" is likely her most Dantesque story, and the allusions to Dante have been studied at length by a number of scholars. I have therefore chosen to concentrate on the vertical journey in O'Connor's "The Lambe Shall Enter First," a story characterized by a clash between evolutionary

theory with its linear temporal-historical chronotope on the one hand and Christian fundamentalism with its vertical chronotope on the other hand. The confrontation between the horizontal and vertical is realized through the use of two antagonistic characters. The atheist and humanist Sheppard says that "man's going to the moon [...] is very much like the first fish crawling out of the water onto land billions and billions of years ago. He didn't have an earth suit. He had to grow his adjustments inside. He developed lungs." (462) The satanic-prophetic delinquent Rufus Johnson, on the other hand, claims that "I ain't going to the moon and get there alive [...] and when I die I'm going to hell" (462). Much of the plot is concerned with Sheppard's determination to convert Rufus Johnson to his scientific world-view; he is convinced that intellectual stimulation will enable Rufus to cast off both his criminal behavior and his Christian bias. Rufus, however, will not give in to the pull of the horizontal and in the course of the story will begin his movement upward along the vertical ladder, ultimately to exclaim, "when I get ready to be saved Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist" (480).

A third character, the child Norton, is involuntarily pulled into this battle of wills, and will become its victim. The conflict between Sheppard and Rufus crystallizes through the use of the moon-voyage theme which is an age-old device for portraying utopian travel along the vertical line between the earth and the moon. One of the central characteristics of the moon-voyage genre is the emphasis on scientific plausibility to fabricate a journey to the moon, but this journey virtually always becomes, to quote one commentator on the genre, an "incidental item in the effort to achieve a perspective from which the metaphysical, cosmic, or social phenomena of human existence can be evaluated" (Bennett 142). The deeper meaning of the vertical voyage theme in "The Lamé Shall Enter First" lies in the fate of Sheppard's ten-year-old son Norton.

At the outset of the story we learn that Sheppard and Norton live alone after having lost wife and mother. Sheppard does not tolerate his son's grief, his attitude is that "she had been dead for over a year and a child's grief should not last that long" (447).

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Sheppard, consistent with his role as representative of the objective material world, reproaches his son for not appreciating material security and completely neglects the boy's emotional needs. Sheppard invites Rufus Johnson, who lives on the street, into their home and a central passage in the story is when the three characters are gathered around a telescope which Sheppard has purchased as part of his ploy to stimulate the children:

"It's at least possible to get to the moon," Sheppard said dryly [...] "We can see it. We know its there. Nobody has given any reliable evidence there's a hell."

"The Bible has given the evidence," Johnson said darkly, "and if you die and go there you burn forever" [...]

Norton lurched up and took a hobbled step toward Sheppard.

"Is she there?" he said in a loud voice. "Is she there burning up?" [...]

"She's saved," Johnson said.

The child still looked puzzled. "Where?" he said. "Where is she at?"

"On high," Johnson said... "it's in the sky somewhere." (461, 462)

The telescope in the story becomes a metaphor for Sheppard's material tunnel vision and the distance between father and son. At one point Norton "appeared so far away that Sheppard might have been looking at him through the wrong end of the telescope" (460). At the same time the telescope will become, literally, a means for Norton to see his mother. Norton cannot accept Sheppard's explanation that "your mother isn't anywhere. She's not unhappy. She just isn't" (461). Sheppard realizes with "revulsion" that "the boy would rather she be in hell than nowhere" (462) and when Rufus Johnson tells Norton that his mother is "on high" the stage is set for the dramatic turn the story will take.

The disturbed child Norton embarks on a quest to find his mother, and believes that he has found her in the telescope. In the final climactic scene of the story Sheppard rushes to the attic to find that Norton has committed suicide to be with his mother:

The tripod had fallen and the telescope lay on the floor. A few feet over it, the child hung in the jungle of shadows, just below

the beam from which he had launched his flight into space.
(482)

The vertical chronotope, Bakhtin says, is accompanied by a tension which arises from a conflict between fictional characters who strive to "set out along the historically productive horizontal" (157), and their creator, who pushes them upward rather than forward. When the artist employs the vertical chronotope with any rigor, Bakhtin says, there is an "antagonism between the form-generating principle of the whole and the historical and temporal form of its separate parts. The form of the whole wins out" (158). In the early 1960s, when O'Connor wrote "The Lamé Shall Enter First," the historical reality was that man was preparing the first scientific voyage to the moon. But Norton is pulled out of his father's horizontal scientific world by his search for a place in the story, and it will be found only when he embarks on a vertical journey to join his mother in space/heaven. Hence, the need for a sense of place in this story is intimately tied to the characters' deepest existential crisis, the lost of a loved one, and the 'nowhere' of Sheppard's humanism is utterly incapable of helping Norton to weather this crisis.

In an interview from 1983 Barry Hannah has said, "some of the weakest writing I read is where some guy is trying to grab you and hold you up to a telescope: this is nature my way, look at that" (Vanarsdall 340). This is exactly what Sheppard does to Rufus in "The Lamé Shall Enter First" and he will pay dearly in the story for his words and deeds as the artist uses the vertical chronotope to abduct his son. In Hannah's work, however, there is seldom any moral or narrative judgment telling us who is looking through the wrong end of the telescope, and the characters are given more freedom of movement in the here and now of the contemporary world. But even though their creator starts them moving along a horizontal line it seems almost as if it is the characters who inevitably strive to move upward. In Hannah's semi-biographical novel *Boomerang*, for example, the characters try "to practice secular humanism as good as we can" but this only leads to them

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"staring out of windows trying to see even the rough face of God in the clouds" (55).

I would like pause here on an important distinction between a chronotopic motif and a chronotope. Bakhtin makes bold claims for the significance of the chronotope in literature. One of them is that "a literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope" (243). Such is the case only when chronotopes are employed with rigorous internal consistency, something which is seldom the case outside of the epoch in which they originate. Literary works, in Bakhtin's analysis, are complex conglomerates of chronotopic motifs which have been passed down, altered, and given new meaning from generation to generation. In O'Connor's work, I did not choose to make the distinction between chronotope and motif because, although the Dantesque vertical chronotope may not be the controlling time-place construction of her work, in the standard analysis, it is a Christian world-view which is very similar.

In two of Hannah's stories, which I will save for last, I see the vertical chronotope as being specifically connected to the artistic unity of the work. But the vertical as chronotopic motif is strikingly recurrent throughout his fiction. It is especially present in his use of the themes of flight and music as well as movement along a perpendicular line. Pilots and musicians are stock characters in Hannah's work, and most of them experience a spiritual high from these activities. The first paragraph of chapter LX of *Ray* is only one of many examples where flight, music and vertical movement are combined:

Over Hanoi. Hendrix coming in clear. Coming down from high nowhere to blue somewhere to spy the water and the *Bonhomme Richard* in the luminous China Sea. There was a certain spirit that had the controls and guided me in to make the deck [...] At the last moment it is all spirit, because five things could go wrong before the hooks catch you and you are climbing out of the cockpit. (107)

The motif of music is inherently compatible with the vertical chronotope. Michael Holquist, in his glossary to Bakhtin's *The*

Dialogic Imagination, says under the entry *orchestration* that "within the novel perceived as a musical score, a single 'horizontal' message (melody) can be harmonized vertically in a number of ways" adding that the literary chronotope's "sensitivity to time finds a natural kinship with the overwhelmingly temporal art of music" (431). In Hannah's works the sheer horizontal limits of the here and now are often transcended through flight or music, or a combination of the two.

In the story "Testimony of Pilot," from the collection entitled *Airships*, the three main characters all start out as promising musicians; two of them, however, will end up in aviation, and the third, who will live to narrate the story, becomes a writer. The character Quadberry flies an F-6 jet in the Vietnam war which, it is stated, can turn "perpendicular in the air." But the F-6 is also capable of descent into a dangerous underworld. On one occasion, taking off from an aircraft carrier, Quadberry takes part in the following scene:

Then he went off the front of the ship. Just like that, his F-6 plopped in the ocean and sank like a rock. Quadberry saw the ship go over him. He knew he shouldn't eject just yet. If he ejected now he'd knock his head on the bottom and get chewed up in the motor blades [...] Down what later proved to be sixty feet, he pushed the ejection button. It fired him away, bless it, and he woke up ten feet under the surface swimming against an almost overwhelming body of underwater parachute. But two of his mates were in a helicopter, one of them on the ladder to lift him out. (41)

Quadberry's girlfriend in the story, a stewardess named Lilian, is given no chance to climb a vertical ladder out of the aquatic underworld. She is killed in a plane crash in which "the poor stewardesses were all splattered like flesh sparklers over the water just out of Cuba. A fisherman found one seat of the airplane. Castro expressed regrets" (*ibid.*).

The two stories in which the vertical chronotope is most intact are from Hannah's 1993 collection *Bats out of Hell*. Here Hannah develops flight as a motif into a consistent patterning of imagery

which spreads movement out along a perpendicular line from an underworld, through the earth and on into the sky. In the story "High-Water Railers" there are three vertical spheres: an aquatic underworld, an earthly middle sphere and the sky. There is hardly any plot at all, the story is simply a short episode in the lives of a group of old men who have a pier, Farte Cove, as their habitual hang-out where they lie to pass the time. The character Ulrich is interested in birds and aircraft; Lewis, his antithesis, is fascinated with the underworld of the sea. Each pursue their chosen hobby with religious fervor. We learn at the opening of the story that "Lewis, ninety-one, had watched some four-foot square of water for three years" (3). A few lines down we are told how this spatial aspect of what Lewis considers a scientific pastime is inextricably linked to the temporal: he "considered himself an ichthyologist of minor parts and kept a notebook with responses to fishlife in it. There were no entries or dates when he did not catch or witness interesting water life" (3).

Ulrich, on the other hand, is a self-appointed representative of the upper sphere of the vertical world. Here is how he is portrayed in the story:

This man featured himself a scientist or at least an aerocrat, [he] was in the process of 'studying' blue herons, loons, and accipiters in flight and for some nagging reason he was interested in the precise *weight* of everybody he met. He thought it happily significant that the old had lighter, hollower, more aerodynamic bones, such as birds have. (3)

Ulrich's conception of time is consistent with his role as self-appointed spiritual mentor of the old men on the pier. Ulrich had once been blown a distance by a hurricane, and he never loses the opportunity of pointing out to his peers that he is "wiser in actual 'hurricane minutes.'" These minutes are supposed to support his theory that "the body was preparing the elderly for 'the flight of the soul.'" Ulrich "expected to weigh about thirty-five pounds when he died, just a bit of mortal coil dragged away protesting like a hare under an eagle" (4).

In order to illustrate my point that the story's controlling image is that of vertical spheres, I have worked out a graphic presentation of all of the creatures who are mentioned in the text:

Winged Creatures (Ulrich)

birds, eagle, accipiters, saint, (Wooten, Wren)
chicken
wading birds, loons, blue herons, geese, duck

Earth Creatures

human being, pet, glass animals
dog, horses, fox, mink, nutria, hare, mice, rat
cricket, nits, mites, worms

Water Creatures (Lewis)

three unrecovered human bodies, mocassins, turtles, alligators
fish, sunfish, perch, bluegill, gar, buffalo, carp, trout, bass, bream,
gaspergou
shad, sturgeon, shark, shrimp

The meticulous zoologists Lewis and Ulrich would balk at such an arbitrary classification, but it is only meant as a concrete version of my discussion, not a treatise on natural history. The emphasis in the story is on transition, movement from one sphere to the other, and hence the verticality of this chain of creation is in sharp contrast to Sheppard's linear evolutionary scheme in "The Lame Shall Enter First" in which progress is horizontal and irreversible. For example, shrimp and crickets are both used as fresh-water bait in the story and both are thus moved from their rung on the ladder. The lake which is the setting of the story is full of all kinds of oddities from all rungs; salt-water creatures washed into it from hurricanes, three human bodies, the transitory shoreline which is the haunt of reptiles and webbed birds, and the pier from which the humans fish. In addition to the three spheres of sky, earth and water, each level is inhabited by its own vertical layers of creatures.

The central metaphor of this scenery seems to be that our place on the vertical ladder is by no means static or secure, we may ascend and descend, both bodily and spiritually, as well as consume and be consumed by other creatures. The movement in this story is

reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau's loon in *Walden*. "Loons have been caught," Thoreau says, in "lakes eighty feet below the surface, with hooks set for trout [...] how surprised must the fishes be to see this ungainly visitor from another sphere speeding his way amid their schools" (235). In Hannah's story it is the character with a bird's name, Wren, who catches the gaspergou which surprises all the fishermen. This freakish creature elicits a speech from Ulrich about our vulnerable and transient existence. The gaspergou, Ulrich says, is "an anomaly of the food chain, hardly ever witnessed. We've got the aquatic equivalent of a fox and a chicken here, on your food chain. Reminds you of man himself. All our funereal devices are a denial of the food chain [...] pitifully declaring ourselves exempt from the food chain. Our arrogance. But we aren't. we're right in it. Nits, mites and worms will have us" (10).

"High Water Railers" is a story full of humor and irony. In one scene, Sidney Farte, exasperated by one of Ulrich's flight lectures, points out, "I knew a rat once could fly. Throw that sumbitch cheese in the air. Shit in the air too" (7). Yet the comic aspects and the ironic distance do not exclude an underlying sense of the seriousness of death, the impermanence of flesh and, implicitly, the permanence of spirit. At the end of the story Lewis, the ichthyologist, has a sudden need for a dog. The last sentence of reads, "All in [the car], they set out to Vicksburg to find Lewis a dog" (11). One wonders if Lewis is not on the ladder upward, if his fascination with the underworld of piscatorial life is being renounced here in his impulsive need for an earth creature, a dog. As dog is backwards for god, the whole lying bunch may be setting out on a spiritual quest ultimately to lead them to the birdwatching of Ulrich. Yet birdwatching is not necessarily morally better than fishing, and the sea of lies and tall tales in this story and its precedent "Water Liars," although it may be a mysterious underworld, is not unequivocally evil. In fact it seems closer to being a metaphor for the art of telling tales; if the closest thing to faith in Hannah's work is the process of storytelling, it is this hobby that is the spiritual bond between all of the men on the pier. All the

characters are dedicated to their daily lying sessions more than they are to fishing or birdwatching.

In the title story of the 1993 collection, "Bats out of Hell Division," Hannah takes the metaphorical play of matching the characters's weight with their spirituality one step further. A whole division of Confederate troops, or rather, what is left of them, is so gaunt from hunger and mutilation that the men are hardly fit targets for the enemy. The division's scribe, who narrates the story, has lost all limbs except his writing arm, and is pushed around in a wheel-barrow. At the outset of the story he tells us, "They have shot hell out of us. More properly we are merely the Bats by now" (43). These bats, fresh from hell at the start of the story, will ultimately climb the vertical ladder through earth and on into paradise. The enemy Union soldiers are wholesome and gluttonous earth creatures, "The smoke from the enemy's prime ribs, T-bones and basted turkeys floats over here at nights sometimes, cruelly, damn the wind" says the scribe, while *his* men, he says, "were hardly anything but eyes, shoulders and trigger fingers" and are nourished on dry bread and water (47).

There are two soldiers in the story who provide the type of thesis and antithesis of underworld and overworld represented by Lewis and Ulrich in "High Water Railers." Beverly Crouch has burrowed himself permanently into a hole in the ground, literally *crouching* to dodge the fire of the enemy. Like Lewis and the lake of tall tales, Crouch is associated with lies, his boasts, since he never leaves his hole except to attack the enemy, are related to the division second hand, and it is said that he spends his time practicing telling the tale of the war because "it will set the tone for the century and be in all the books. Great-grandchildren will be shaking their heads, overpowered" (46). At the other end of the vertical ladder in the story is the Division's observer, Jones Pierce-Hatton (see the pun on the fate of his hate below), who has made a "crow's nest" in a tree from which he reports on the movements of the enemy. The scribe comments that "it must be rather godly up there, calling the wrath and precision down on individuals of the indigo persuasion [...] his ladder's been all shot away for a long time" (46). Jones Pierce-Hatton, having literally climbed to a higher

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sphere, will remain a permanent fixture there. In his new habitat, he appropriately refuses to consume the food sent up to him in a basket from the lower sphere, a gesture of abstinence worthy of his godly status in the division. Here is how the scribe retells the fate of the superior Union Army's observation balloon:

The same ill wind that brought us those belly-churning odors of roasting prime meat increased and blew the [balloon] off its anchor, so it wobbled over here right up alongside Jones Pierce-Hatton in his nest.

You could hear the cries of dismay from the disheartened passenger as he came alongside the lone enormous tree at bright high noon. Pierce-Hatton shot into the thing with his French double quailing piece, and such a blast of burning air covered the top of this single stick of the forest we reckoned on a momentary view of hell itself [...]

Somebody called up to Pierce-Hatton to ask whether he was injured. A head wearing nothing but the scorched crown of a hat arose from the hatch.

"Why shit, yes! Haven't you got eyes man?" came the reply. (47)

It is by sheer perseverance against impossible odds that this ragged shadow of a division who "advance by inches and retreat by yards" will vanquish the enemy. For all their ghostliness, they have what the Union lacks: spirit. Due to a scientific diet of the kind Ulrich advocated in "High Water Railers," they have been severely reduced in matter but proportionately increased in soul, and they have music, which will prove to be the final onslaught to the gluttonous blue-coats: "By God we surrender" shouts the Union General, adding,

"This can't go on. The music. The Tchaikovsky! You wretched specters coming on! It's too much. Too much."

Our general, stunned, went over to take his sword [...]
Nothing in history led us to believe we had not simply crossed over to paradise itself and were dead just minutes ago. (49)

Gluttony is also a central concern of O'Connor's "The Lame Shall Enter First," although in her story she is not making use, as Hannah is, of the mythical dualism between the materialistic North and spiritual South, but rather pitting Sheppard's literally nauseating humanism against the spiritual needs of the boys. Tony Magistrale has suggested that in this story "various acts of eating are employed as metaphors to mirror the spiritual conditions of the characters" (58). In his hunger, Rufus Johnson is driven to eating out of garbage cans and Norton is emotionally starved, yet it is these two who carry the spiritual weight of the story; just as the starving Confederate soldiers, especially the fasting Pierce-Hatton, carry the spiritual weight of their story. The implication of both of these stories is that it is paucity rather than bounty that leads to a purgatorial process necessary for a positive spiritual condition. At the end of "The Lame Shall Enter First," Sheppard realizes that he has neglected his son; he thinks in horror that "he had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton" (481). Likewise, I realize that, like a glutton, I have stuffed some empty pages with good words about fiction which probably speaks for itself. It may be time to go on a scientific diet.

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