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The Wise Blood of Enoch Emery

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Some readers regard Enoch Emery of *Wise Blood* as a shallow, comic, even demonic character because of his seemingly meaningless rituals, his grotesque actions, and his secular state of living. In a lecture to the NEH Summer Institute "Reconsidering Flannery O'Connor" at GCSU in July 2007, Michael Kreyling described Enoch as "obviously deranged" and "only a molecule away from becoming Dick Hickock in *In Cold Blood*." Enoch actually shares qualities with many common eighteen-year-old boys and is not the disturbing character many critics claim he is. Readers too easily have overlooked Enoch's important role in the novel, because they have not considered the potential of this character who has "wise blood" (44). Enoch possesses the qualities of self-knowledge, resilience, and initiative, traits that come from his wise blood. Enoch's wise blood serves as a spiritual compass in his life and enables him to connect with and try to help others, prepare for his future as a productive adult, and overcome his difficult childhood.

Unlike the self-absorbed Hazel Motes, Enoch consistently reaches out to other human beings. This quality separates Enoch from Hazel Motes, who is on a self-destructive journey toward blind faith and redemption, takes advantage of other people throughout his journey, and obsesses over creating his Church Without Christ and meeting the shallow, blind preacher Hawks. While Hazel attempts to be a preacher in a new Church Without Christ, he fails to notice the lonely young boy named Enoch who follows him and describes his loneliness. Because he is unable to express his feelings and connect with others, Hazel is inferior to Enoch and his persistent efforts to associate with people. Susan Srigley suggests that Hazel embodies the opposite of O'Connor's "ethical vision" that "human beings are created in the image of God and that this spiritual image is what connects human beings to each other through love" (63). According to Srigley, Hazel represents man absolved from his responsibility to God and his desire for redemption. Therefore, Hazel also represents man who is spiritually separated from his fellow human beings (63). Srigley focuses on Hazel in her study of the novel and excludes Enoch, who does not separate himself from others. Although he frequently experiences rejection, Enoch perseveres in his desire to make friends and find his place in the world, as I will demonstrate later.

Enoch's fidelity to his wise blood, which helps him survive each day, is an example of an honorable form of blind faith, although not in a traditional Christian form. Like Christians who believe they possess blind faith, Enoch never doubts his wise blood and relies upon it to give him guidance and the courage to face the world he has been forced into as a lonely eighteen-year-old boy. Many people believe that O'Connor's depiction of Hazel Motes's spiritual journey in *Wise Blood* reflects the author's affirmation of blind faith, which is also a central concept of her Catholicism. Because these critics do not view Enoch as a man with any form of a spiritual awareness, they believe that Enoch's belief in his wise blood merely reflects the shallowness and the irrelevance of modern man. To some critics, Enoch's assuming the identity of a gorilla is the final sign of a man who is uniting with the secular world and reverting to a primitive state of existence. Sarah Gordon describes Enoch as the character "who follows his instincts backward to the bestial" (90). Although Ralph C. Wood undertakes a thorough study of *Wise Blood* in his work *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*, he basically ignores Enoch Emery. O'Connor provides a careful study of this young man from a broken home who is sensitive, has a colorful personality, and overcomes obstacles that would hinder most people. This understanding should cause critics to reconsider Enoch's worth, instead of dismissing him as a pawn in this story.

Enoch is a young man who searches for meaning in his life and for his place in the world, and he is not unique in his quest. In 1952, the same year that *Wise Blood* was published, Paul Tillich, a prominent Protestant theologian, explored the state of modern man's existence in his work *The Courage to Be*. Tillich discusses many issues that Enoch faces in the novel: anxiety, self-affirmation, neurosis, a life without meaning and, ultimately, the courage to face these issues and act. The title of Tillich's work is from his definition of "the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation" (3). Despite a difficult childhood filled with betrayal and disappointment, Enoch daily affirms his existence by participating in the real world with all of its daily mishaps and misunderstandings. Tillich also identifies what he terms the "anxiety of meaninglessness": This condition stems from "the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings. This anxiety is aroused by the loss of a spiritual center, of an answer, however symbolic and indirect, to the question of the meaning of existence" (47). Through his efforts to connect with others and assist them with their personal quests, Enoch searches for meaning in his life.

Tillich's "anxiety of meaninglessness" can easily apply to the majority of the characters in *Wise Blood*; among them, significantly, Enoch seeks to resolve the anxiety by heeding his intuition and acting on his instincts. Enoch's

actions throughout the novel are those of a young man who reaches out to society and looks for meaning in a world where modern religion has failed him. Enoch is actively involved in the real world, even when he receives little reward for his actions. While critics have focused on Enoch's compulsions, a term associated with anxiety and neurosis, Tillich sees the value in such traits and views these as a means to overcome the threat of nonbeing (67). He writes, "The neurotic is more sensitive than the average man to the threat of nonbeing. And since nonbeing opens up the mystery of being . . . he can be more creative than the average" (67). Enoch's seemingly hollow rituals, grotesque actions, and wise blood may be closer to religious mystery and spirituality than most critics will admit. As a well-rounded reader of contemporary theology, O'Connor was not only aware of Tillich, but she expressed admiration for this progressive Protestant theologian, who was also a friend of Maryat Lee. In an unpublished letter to Maryat Lee on 1 Mar. 1958, which is located in O'Connor's correspondence files in Special Collections at Georgia College & State University, O'Connor explains that she learned about Tillich's theology through reading essays by such Catholic theologians as M. C. D'Arcy and George H. Tavard. In a letter to Betty Hester on 22 Nov. 1958, O'Connor refers to Tillich and laments the state of contemporary Catholic theologians:

I am surprised you don't know anything about the crisis theologians; in any case don't make a virtue of this ignorance for it is not. They are the greatest of the Protestant theologians writing today and it is to our misfortune that they are much more alert and creative than their Catholic counterparts. We have very few thinkers to equal Barth and Tillich, perhaps none. This is not an age of great Catholic theology. (HB 305-06)

Perhaps, through Enoch's character, O'Connor is incorporating Tillich's philosophy as she describes this young man who possesses so many of the qualities that Tillich explores in *The Courage to Be*.

Enoch Emery is a young man who, at the age of eighteen, possesses a remarkable gift of self-knowledge and confidence in his wise blood. He is aware of how his past has shaped his life, and he is capable of articulating what he believes and does not believe. From the numerous traumatic experiences in his eighteen years, Enoch has enough maturity to recognize what he believes, what he does not believe, and where danger lurks. Upon meeting Hazel Motes and learning that he is pursuing the blind preacher Asa Hawks, Enoch immediately recognizes what Hawks represents and distances himself from him, accurately referring to him and his daughter as "hicks" who are into the "Jesus business" (23). He attributes his views to his four weeks at the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy where he was sent by the welfare woman: "Jesus, four weeks and

I thought I was going to be sanctified crazy” (23). The reader can infer that the welfare woman who “traded” (23) him was responding to Enoch’s truancy from school. In those four weeks at the academy, Enoch learned just enough to realize that being forced to memorize scripture and recite platitudes is an almost meaningless exercise. The welfare woman may have found more positive results if she had sent her ward of the state to a public school where Enoch could learn functional academic skills, obtain an education, and prepare for the future.

Enoch is attentive to his surroundings and tries to help others who lack focus on important, although sometimes mundane, matters. Hazel is so focused on his pursuit of Hawks that he is oblivious to such life and death matters as traffic. Enoch yells to warn him about obeying traffic laws when crossing the street (24). As Enoch continues to follow Hazel and notices that they are catching up with the Hawkses, he can predict what will happen next based upon experience: “I bet we’ll be at some meeting singing hymns with her and her daddy if we don’t watch out” (26). At the young, impressionable age of eighteen, Enoch is perceptive enough to recognize a shallow preacher and to know that he does not want to be near such a person and his ideas. Enoch also recognizes that Asa Hawks’s daughter, Sabbath, is a “kid” (32) and does not categorize her as a female he would like to meet. Hazel, on the other hand, engages in sex with this young teenager.

Despite being raised in a broken home, Enoch is a resilient young man who has begun to overcome his past, hoping to become a productive member of society. He never knew his mother and lived an itinerant life with his father who was a construction worker (25). Enoch cries to an unsympathetic Hazel as he describes his journey to Taulkinham and his father’s role in his move: “I ain’t but eighteen year old an’ he made me come and I don’t know nobody, nobody here’ll have nothing to do with nobody else. They ain’t friendly” (32). Despite being thrust into the city after being neglected throughout his life, Enoch immediately sought and found employment at the city zoo (32). Enoch does not wait on other people to provide for him. Although he is a lonely boy who has not had the benefit of a good childhood with supportive parents, he displays resiliency by going to work, where he is punctual (44), and attempting to make friends with people and assisting them. Although he is only eighteen, Enoch has enough maturity to recognize and admit that he is lonely. Many lonely young people and adults are not even aware that they lead lives of desperation. Instead, they wander around confused, unemployed, and vengeful. Enoch repeats his speech to Hazel about how unfriendly the people are in the town of Taulkinham and how lonely he is. Enoch describes his single room in the boarding house: “I got me a room and there ain’t never nobody in it but me” (31). Enoch responds to his loneliness in the most positive way possible: he

develops a daily routine, is actively involved in the real world, and reaches out to others in friendship.

Enoch's instincts benefit him not only by advising him of potential dangers and helping him to be resilient, but by causing him to turn the other cheek when others harm him. While he is still in tears after confessing his loneliness to the uninterested Hazel, Hazel responds to Enoch by hurling a stack of tracts at him. Hazel hits Enoch in the chest and the force of the tracts knocks his mouth open. Instead of getting himself into a fight with Hazel as many people would instinctively do, Enoch runs away from Hazel (33). Later, when Hazel demands that Enoch give him the home address of Asa and Sabbath Hawks, Hazel shakes Enoch until the young boy falls down. Hazel finishes his assault by hurling a rock at Enoch, which wounds him on his forehead (57). Enoch never seeks revenge on Hazel after these violent events. Enoch also does not harbor resentment toward his father, despite his many shortcomings. In his room at the boarding house, Enoch's favorite picture is of a small boy kneeling at his bed while saying, "And bless daddy" (75). Perhaps this picture comforts Enoch, because this image of an ideal father is his compensation for the lack of one in his childhood. This picture may also remind him of his own father and of the unconditional love Enoch has for his father, despite his shortcomings. This unconditional love that Enoch appears to have for his father suggests that he is mature enough to forgive his father.

As the novel progresses, Enoch begins to display signs of maturity in his personal life. He takes concrete initiatives: he begins to save money and spends his salary only on rent and food. This is a positive change for Enoch who had never saved money before and had even indulged in stealing in the past (73). He also begins a practice of thoroughly cleaning his room at the boarding house. He polishes his bed and chair so diligently that the gold layer disappears on the old furniture. In his effort to brighten his home, Enoch spends his money on drapes, gilt, and paint. The gold tint adds luster to Enoch's home, including the cabinet which he prepared to temporarily house the mummy (76). As a child growing up in Savannah, Georgia, O'Connor lived in a home adorned in gilt. According to Rena Patton, President of the Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home Foundation, the first and second floors contain furniture and other items, including a picture mold, which are painted with gilt; even O'Connor's baby carriage has gilt monogrammed on the carriage. While O'Connor readily admits her identification with Enoch in several of her personal letters, she and Enoch share yet another similarity: they lived in homes that were decorated with gilt.

In addition to his efforts to brighten the appearance of his humble home, Enoch looked to advertisements for inspiration, since he did not have role models in his life. He was particularly drawn to an insurance ad featuring a

“young man of the future” whom people waited in line to meet (108). Some people find inspiration in advertisements and it would seem logical that a positive image as the friendly insurance man shaking the hands of people would interest Enoch. Due to his age, the gaps in his education, and his earnest nature, Enoch may not understand the negative connotations that critics associate with the positive ad of the insurance man.

Some critics of Enoch point to his daily rituals as evidence that he is shallow and sacrilegious. After completing his shift at his job as a gatekeeper at the zoo, Enoch regularly heads to the city park where he secretly watches women in the swimming pool. Some people view Enoch’s ritual of spying on women in bathing suits as a sign of Enoch’s paganism and his denial of the existence of God (Martin 68). Most males tend to observe females when given the opportunity, particularly in a public place such as a park where so-called people watching takes place. Enoch’s ritual is due to the fact that he is a curious teenage boy and not a pagan in denial of God. After meeting Hazel for the first time, Enoch informs Hazel that he knows of a place where they could find women. He states, “I heard about where there’s a house where we could have us some fun. I could pay you back next week” (32). The narrator also notes that Enoch has visited a brothel in the past (44). Hazel has relations not only with the prostitute Mrs. Watts (18) but also with the underage Sabbath (96). The only similarity these two characters have is that they have both visited with a prostitute.

Enoch’s daily routine also includes a visit to the Frosty Bottle, where he indulges in his daily chocolate milkshake and makes suggestive comments to the waitress on duty, whom he believes is secretly in love with him (46). Carter Martin views Enoch’s milkshake as the “grotesque pagan equivalent of the sacrificial wine in Holy Communion” (68). He continues by linking the milkshake and Enoch’s lewd comments to the waitress as further evidence of Enoch’s pagan indulgences (68). Enoch’s ritual of patronizing the local soda shop is certainly the same ritual that many teenagers of the 1950s shared. Enoch could use some lessons in etiquette and respect for females, and if he had been raised in a stable home with parents who taught him such manners, he might be capable of making appropriate comments to females. It is not unusual for a teenage boy to harbor a crush on a girl he mistakenly believes is in love with him. Enoch certainly has plenty of time left in his life to work on improving his social skills.

Many critics claim that Enoch is a secular individual who is devoid of any spiritual foundation and that his daily rituals are a substitute for religion. Timothy P. Caron suggests that Enoch should have been able to apply the knowledge from his four weeks at the academy to the growth of his spiritual life. Caron states that Enoch “is unable to convert the factual knowledge

of Jesus he acquired” in the school “into a practicing Christian faith” (37). Assuming that a typical teenage boy could be expected to absorb enough facts within a period of four weeks at a stern, fundamentalist school to give him a genuine faith is simply unrealistic. Martin contends that Enoch “professes to know everything about Jesus because he has been to Rodemill Boys’ Bible Academy” (194–95). Enoch’s unfortunate time at the academy gave him the only religious experiences he has known. Enoch’s statements about Jesus reflect his views about the religious dogma that was enforced upon him there. He never claims that the academy enriched his spiritual or his academic life. Kreyling states that Enoch’s escape from the academy is a sign that he “prefers to remain incorrigible and unrehabilitated,” although Kreyling does not explore the circumstances surrounding Enoch’s placement in the academy. Enoch does not display any signs in the novel of being either incorrigible or unrehabilitated. Richard E. Hughes describes Enoch as a person who “gets entangled in easy rituals, false formulas, God-searches that do not involve his real self” (189). According to Hughes, unlike Haze, who is traveling toward the sacred, Enoch is traveling in the “opposite direction” and “afflicted with the allure of the easy and the partial” (189). I think Enoch is a working citizen who has devised a daily ritual for his free time, while Haze is an opportunist who uses people on his journey that ends with his brutal death. Enoch does not use people or harm others.

Enoch’s daily ritual also includes a visit to the animals at the zoo, whom he professes to despise, but he appears to identify with their unnatural state of captivity. The creatures are housed in cages that are heated in the winter and cooled during the summer. Enoch resents and is envious of the care the animals receive in the climate-controlled environment. He spits on a wolf in a cage and expresses his contempt for the animals there (53). Some people view this particular ritual as evidence that Enoch is evil. I think Enoch’s behavior, while cruel, is not so atypical for a boy who has not been nurtured or raised by people who have taught him to respect all forms of life. Perhaps as Enoch matures into a responsible adult, he will learn to respect and love animals. The captive animals may also symbolize something more to Enoch. The two bears at the zoo who spend their days in a cage facing each other are in an unnatural state. For Enoch, the captive animals are another sign of the unnatural state of life he sees in Taulkinham, along with the unfriendly, strange people he encounters.

Most readers are disgusted as they read about Enoch’s stealing the mummy from the museum, housing it in his self-made tabernacle, and ultimately delivering it to Hazel to serve as the “new jesus” (80) that Hazel seeks. Critics focus on this act as more evidence that Enoch is a pagan who has found a god in his own mummified and unresurrected image (Martin 70).

They also see this act as a hollow gesture. As Currie explains, Enoch steals the mummy “because he needs a god, and any god will do” (141). However, Enoch does not display any signs of an evil intention when he performs this deed. He appears earnest in his desire to assist Hazel in his quest to find a new Jesus. Unlike Hazel, whose experiences leave him callous and jaded, Enoch still has the quality of innocence in him and truly believes that Hazel is seeking a “new Jesus” (80). Furthermore, Enoch is uneducated, has not been exposed to critical thinking skills, and takes Hazel’s rhetoric literally.

Enoch’s seemingly grotesque act of stealing the mummy from the museum is not a shallow act of irreverence or stupidity. While Hazel spends his days talking about the need for a “new Jesus,” (80) Enoch is an activist who visualizes Hazel’s object of desire and seeks to find it. After he steals the mummy, he brings the bundle to his home where he places the bundle in the tabernacle he had constructed. He treats this object with reverence as though it is a holy object (98). As he walks to Hazel’s home while dressed in disguise, he carries the bundle in his arms and delivers it to Sabbath Hawks who answers the door while Hazel is asleep. Enoch does not want any credit for this action as he hands the bundle to Sabbath who treats the mummy with care as though it is her child (103-04). After Hazel awakes and discovers Sabbath treating the mummy so caringly, he immediately destroys and throws away the new Jesus (106). Although Enoch is unaware of the significance of his deed, Enoch’s action of stealing the mummy to serve as the new Jesus exposes the fallacy of the message of Hazel’s Church Without Christ and is a criticism of Hazel’s vacuous message. Enoch assists Hazel in his journey toward repentance by believing the message and by trying to help him find the object of his search. In a letter to Carl Hartman in 1954, O’Connor reflects on the importance of Enoch’s wise blood in completing the important task of identifying the truth behind Hazel’s message: “Enoch, with his wise blood, unerringly lights on what man looks like without God and obligingly brings it for Hazel to have a look at” (920). Once Enoch completes this task, he does not look back or dwell on it. He moves on with his life.

Critics of Enoch also dismiss him as a “Horatio Alger figure” who is shallow and pursues a popular vision of the American success story (Dyer 6). Because Enoch represents such a stereotype to them, these critics believe he is not worthy of serious consideration. Kreyling attacks not only Enoch’s character, but also his job: “Enoch is no messiah and not even much of a John the Baptist. He still ends up working for the city” (Kreyling). Because Kreyling does not elaborate after making this statement, one can infer that he is speaking condescendingly about people who work for the city and suggesting that working for the city represents the secular world. Martin describes Enoch as a “thoroughly ridiculous country bumpkin” whose personality traits are not to

be taken seriously (194). Martin's attack on Enoch is not only unfair, but it is an attack on anyone who has not been fortunate enough to be raised in a loving, middle-to-upper-class home where children can be educated and taught social graces. People who are poor do not have the resources to lead sophisticated lives. In contrast to these critics, O'Connor describes in such rich detail the life of a poor young man who struggles to survive on his own. Perhaps, through Enoch, O'Connor is revealing her sympathy with the plight of the poor.

Another critic, Ronald Emerick, contends that Enoch signifies "modern man separated from religious faith and reduced to an animalistic state" and, by becoming Gongga, "he loses his essential humanity and becomes an animal, an 'it' . . ." (36). However, if Enoch's critics would look beyond the physical act of wearing the gorilla suit and consider his motivations, they would view the final scene as another example of Enoch's altruistic qualities. Enoch admires and remembers positive role models he sees and tries to emulate them. When he attends the picture show and watches a series of movies, he observes the baboon, Lonnie, who is the star of a movie called *Lonnie Comes Home Again*. This baboon is a hero who saves orphans from their burning home. Lonnie takes many risks as he saves the children and, at the conclusion of the movie, is awarded a medal by a pretty girl. Enoch is so overcome after watching this film that he races out of the theater and collapses outside (79). After reading the advertisement for the "Giant Jungle Monarch and a Great Star," Enoch is eager to meet what he expects will be another nice animal in *Gongga the Gorilla* (100). With his heart racing in anticipation of meeting Gongga, Enoch finally builds up the courage to step forward when it is his turn. Enoch repeats the familiar speech of his life story that he recites whenever he introduces himself: "My name is Enoch Emery. I attended the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy. I work at the City zoo." And he adds, "I seen two of your pictures. I'm only eighteen year old but I already work for the city. My daddy made me com . . ." (102). Enoch's voice cracks on the same place it always does when he introduces himself. The gorilla shocks Enoch by responding with an insult: "You go to hell" (102). Embarrassed, Enoch immediately runs away. Although Enoch is shaken by the surprisingly hateful response from Gongga, he decides to take action. In keeping with his youthful, though naïve, optimism, Enoch plans to right a wrong and become the new Gongga—the compassionate gorilla who wants to impress and befriend people, just as Lonnie the baboon did in *Lonnie Comes Home Again*. He manages to overpower Gongga and steal the gorilla suit, bury his own clothes, and assume his new identity (110-11) as a "Great Star!" (100).

Some critics view this final scene of Enoch in the gorilla suit as a pseudo-awakening experience for him. By wearing the gorilla suit, Enoch assumes a new identity as an ape and becomes a "dehumanized and depersonalized" human being (Gregory 63). Although Enoch is a teenager, and teenagers often

do silly, daring things, some people say that his act indicates that Enoch's wise blood "is without wisdom and has played him false" and that his life is without meaning (Gregory 64). Caron even goes so far as to say that Enoch's transformation from man to gorilla endorses pernicious Southern stereotypes about race:

But the translation of Enoch Emery from man to gorilla reveals Wise Blood's deferral to prevailing Southern opinions on race. The South's racist images of blacks as sub-human beasts lurk just beneath the surface of this scene. By the end of the transformation, Enoch is a black, shaggy brute completely ruled by base or 'animal' desires. In attempting to demonstrate that all humans urgently need a regenerative encounter with Christ, O'Connor creates a portrait precariously close to the white South's stereotypical menacing black male. (39)

Alan Henry Rose defines Enoch's final scene in the novel as the "final objectification of Emery's evil instincts" and describes Enoch as being "transformed into a black bestial form" (123). Emerick claims that Enoch has "destroyed his old identity and adopted a new one," and, in the process, represents "modern man separated from religious faith and reduced to an animalistic state" (36).

I think Enoch's critics place excessive emphasis on what could be a typical teenage prank rooted in curiosity or, in Enoch's case, a sincere desire to turn a bad situation into a good one. When he approaches a couple and attempts to greet them while wearing his new gorilla suit, Enoch is surprised by rejection as the frightened couple flees (112). While Enoch did frighten the young couple on the hill as he approached them in the costume, he did not harm anyone during his journey, except for the people in charge of Gonga who lost their gorilla suit. Significantly, we do not have any more information about Enoch after he puts on the gorilla costume.

Enoch is a sensitive boy who lives a structured life, and it is quite possible that he returned home that evening after being rejected as a gorilla, and resumed his daily routine the next morning with his job at the zoo. Enoch, like most people, seeks friends and a comfort zone. Since his brief stint as a gorilla brought him only rejection, his past behaviors in the novel indicate that he will return to his familiar, secure life. Enoch learned many lessons from his difficult childhood and, after his four weeks at the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy, he learned that it was prudent to distance himself from the "Jesus business" (23). His experience with stealing the mummy and trying to be the new, friendly Gonga can provide Enoch with the opportunity for more lessons to help shape his future. Perhaps his life will even take a turn for the better as a result of these experiences, and his spiritual life will grow from the wise blood he relies

upon as an eighteen-year-old boy trying to survive.

Enoch's critics also assert that he is an individual who relies completely on his instinct, his wise blood, which causes him not to think and instead live a life in which he blindly follows his compulsions. Emerick states that Enoch is "the victim of his compulsions which he cannot resist. He is a slave to his wise blood, a special intuitive knowledge which he has inherited from his daddy and which determines most of Enoch's actions in the novel" (34). He also claims that Enoch is aware that his wise blood sometimes causes him to "perform mysterious and irrational acts" (34). Kathleen Feeley identifies the source of Enoch's wise blood as "diabolical" and a "negative counterpart of the blood of Redemption" (66). John V. McDermott continues the attack on Enoch's self-reliance. He describes Enoch as "the man of unwise blood" (163) who avoids the act of thinking and only uses his eyes to see life on the surface (163-64). I think if Enoch were a slave to his compulsions and never thought deeply about anything, he would be incapable of keeping his job, paying his bills, and following the laws of society. Some of his peers in the novel have difficulty with such important matters.

Enoch is an easy target for most critics who quickly point to his daily rituals, his theft of the mummy, and his stint as a gorilla as proof that he is stupid and evil. However, two critics, Melody Graulich and Marshall Bruce Gentry, give Enoch the benefit of the doubt and see him as a young man on a journey that is not so different from Hazel's. Although Graulich and Gentry do not dismiss Enoch as most critics do, they do not explore Enoch's childhood in depth or connect his past experiences with his approach to life as an eighteen-year-old. Graulich states that, although Enoch is a comic character, O'Connor uses him in important and solemn ways in the novel (74). Although Enoch's faith is a "perverse" one, Graulich says, he possesses the ability to "recognize and accept mystery" (75). Graulich continues by stating that Enoch's wise blood is an obscure method O'Connor uses to reveal the power Christ has over every man (76). Because Enoch accepts the instructions from his wise blood without question, he is an example of faith and serves in the novel as a "double act of revelation" (76). However, she also states that Enoch's type of religion is "instinctive and self-concerned" (74). While Enoch certainly relies upon his instinct and his intuition to help him survive, he is far from "self-concerned" in his way of life. Although his wise blood helps him survive each day and make decisions, Enoch is an altruistic character who reaches out to and tries to help others throughout the novel. Enoch, of course, has been poorly served by organized religion and has been betrayed by his caregivers. Remarkably, he is a resilient individual who is not hardened by the many betrayals in his life. Although Enoch may not appear to be a person with a Christ-centered spiritual life, his altruistic actions are not merely secular ones.

Gentry argues that Enoch and Hazel are both on complementary paths toward redemption. While Hazel uses the grotesque as a tool for his redemption, Enoch in the gorilla suit also employs this tool in his journey (125). Both characters reduce their versions of religion to a physical level, due to their life experiences, and Enoch serves as Hazel's disciple throughout the novel (136-37). Gentry also states that Enoch uses the grotesque in a positive manner because of the separation of his unconscious from his conscious mind (138). The abrupt ending of Enoch's story can be a positive sign for the young man's future (140). At the end of the novel, Enoch is alive and conceivably could lead a productive life. While Graulich and Gentry both approach the concept of redemption, a traditional religious concept, they do not consider the possibility that Enoch reflects existential courage.

Readers and critics who dismiss Enoch as a secular, pagan character on the periphery of the novel fail to notice the value of his wise blood. While other characters in *Wise Blood* lead lives of deception and harm others, Enoch is the character who is a contributing citizen and takes action when he determines it is necessary, even if he does not always understand the purpose of his actions. Enoch is a much more complicated person than many critics will admit. In one of her letters, O'Connor expresses her confidence in Enoch's actions and his wise blood. In a 1954 letter to Carl Hartman, O'Connor describes her process in writing *Wise Blood*: "I wrote the book just like Enoch would have, not knowing too well why I did what but knowing it was right" (919; O'Connor to Hartman 2 Mar. 1954). O'Connor defines wise blood as a positive trait that enables an individual to pursue and achieve a goal. She describes this trait to Hartman: "Hazel and Enoch both have wise blood, which is something that enables you to go in the right direction after what you want" (920). O'Connor makes clear that Enoch's wise blood is not a comical trait, but a trait that helps him to do the right thing. Furthermore, O'Connor even reveals to Hartman that she identifies with Enoch and possesses the same disposition as he. While she was living in Connecticut with the Fitzgeralds in 1949, O'Connor indicated her identification with Enoch. In a letter to Robie Macauley, she describes Enoch's disdain for the city life of New York:

Enoch didn't care so much for New York. He said there wasn't no privetcy (sic) there. Every time he went to sit in the bushes there was already somebody sitting there ahead of him. He was very nervous before we left and somebody at the Partisan Review told him to go to an analyst. He went and the analyst said what was wrong with him was his daddy's fault and Enoch was so mad that anybody should defame his daddy that he pushed the analyst out the window. (886)

Perhaps Enoch, whom O'Connor so carefully and vividly depicts, is created from O'Connor's own personality traits and insights.

In what sense does Enoch Emery possess wise blood? Many critics do not pause to consider the significance of Enoch's reliance upon his wise blood and the possibility that his wise blood is beneficial to him and to others. Enoch identifies Hazel's quest for a new Jesus and, in his macabre actions, illustrates the vacuity of Hazel's message. He also was quick to see through the phony blind preacher Asa Hawks, and to recognize the immaturity of his daughter, Sabbath. Enoch is perceptive enough to realize that faith in God and the "Jesus business" (23) are two mutually exclusive concepts. He never denounces his faith in God and even refers to his calling upon Jesus in prayer to help him escape the welfare woman without killing her. He prayed and, he believes, God answered his prayer by giving him the courage to escape from her (26). Enoch craves the friendship of others and is in touch with his emotions. He senses the anonymity of the fast-paced world he has been forced into at the vulnerable age of eighteen.

Enoch takes risks to confess his loneliness and to reach out continually to others in friendship, even when he is ignored or treated negatively by others. Enoch searches for ways to connect with people. In Gongga, he sees a positive symbol of the popular mind and seeks to become a better version of that being when the real Gongga proved to have feet of clay. Although Enoch is very young and has an understandably naïve approach to religion and a naïve version of Jesus, his wise blood has led him on a positive journey. By contrast, Hazel's journey ends with his descent into self-mortification and his needless death.

As an artist, O'Connor was aware of the religious aspects of popular culture. The writer depicted in Enoch Emery and Hazel Motes the human need to find meaning in a society that had been poorly served by organized religion. O'Connor may have viewed my interpretation as the opposite of her religious views. She also may be surprised that I would link Enoch with the philosophy of an existentialist Protestant theologian who is familiar to her and whom she admires. However, without realizing the logic of her art, O'Connor may be anticipating a changing religious consciousness that Tillich explores in *The Courage to Be*. While Tillich revealed these concerns in the early 1950s, other theologians would continue this discussion a few years later in the mid-1960s, when the "Death of God" proponents addressed profound questions about God's role in the modern world. *Wise Blood* is set in a landscape that reveals the collapse of modern religion. Just as Hazel attempts to deal with the void intellectually, Enoch deals with the issues pragmatically. Enoch is an example of someone who, in the face of betrayal and darkness, affirms God, although he may not be mature enough to realize God's presence in his life. As the activist and altruist in *Wise Blood*, Enoch represents the modern man who seeks to

cope with his disappointments by surviving each day through his God-given gifts of self-knowledge, resilience, and initiative.

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