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Lucidity and Vulgarity in the World of Flannery O'Connor¹

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This paper deals with a contrast in the work of Flannery O'Connor, which she has drawn between ordinary, average people who lack personal identity and take the infernal chaos of modern life for granted, and the demonic personages in her fiction who have become destructive nihilists as a result of their experiences of *Grenzsituationen* of life as these are named and described by Karl Jaspers. This contrast is illustrated first by an analysis of the language and behaviour of the two kinds of characters in Flannery O'Connor's fiction with the purpose of defining clearly and distinctly the border-line between irresponsible, impersonal, proverbial, and platitudinarian collective wisdom of ordinary people and the lucid nihilism of her solitary, demonic individuals. In order to define this contrast with utmost precision Flannery O'Connor makes a sharp distinction between her lucid, solitary, nihilistic individuals and various types of contemporary intellectuals who are, as a species, treated by Flannery O'Connor with merciless irony. The mind of the modern intellectual being sceptical is amoeboid and omnivorous in Flannery O'Connor's opinion, and for this very reason it lacks a firm criterion of values. A description of the weaknesses of the modern intellectual as seen by Flannery O'Connor leads to the conclusion of this paper, which is an attempt to point out the importance that permanent and painful lucidity has for the writer herself and to suggest, with the help of Jung's definition of modern man, that Flannery O'Connor identified herself with her demonic characters.

1. This article is a revised and slightly modified version of a paper read at Flannery O'Connor's Commemorative Symposium held from August 2—5, 1984 in Sandbjerg, Denmark, under the sponsorship of the English Departments of the Aarhus and Odense Universities.

One would be hard put to find a sharper contrast in the work of Flannery O'Connor than the one she has drawn between ordinary, average people and the demonic, violent, destructive or self-destructive freaks of her fiction. It is observable first in their use of language. The ordinary person in her stories and novels will in any situation in life most predictably resort to the collective, conventional wisdom of proverbial commonplaces in his fumbling attempts to explain it to himself. The demonic restless character will express his quintessential truth from the depths of his experience of extreme situations in life, those called *Grenzsituationen* by the German existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers. In fact, this thinker's "concern with himself", his attempts at "radical sincerity", and his interest in "the human condition and its inescapable extremities of death, suffering, chance, guilt, and struggle"² appear to me to fairly accurately describe Flannery O'Connor's demonic doubters.

Let me illustrate this assertion with a few examples. On guessing wrongly, after superficial observation, that Hazel Motes was going home, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, at the beginning of *Wise Blood*, is quick with the ready-made comment, "there's no place like home".³ It is a polite remark anyone could have made in a train to an unknown fellow passenger, but the depth of inattention to the mental state of another person and of unthinking self-satisfaction expressed by this platitude become clearer only when Hazel Motes, out of the ultimate depths of his own experience of the extremities of life, gives his verdict, "You might as well go one place as another, [...] That's all I know".⁴

Despite appearances, this is not simply a matter-of-fact realization of Hazel's own situation. It is true, he himself has nowhere to go, he has come back home from his four years service in the army to find out not only that all the members of his family are dead but that his native home is an empty ruin and his birthplace Eastrod practically abandoned. Yet, this is certainly not the essence of his remark, and one can barely detect a personal note of self-pity in it. His generalization transcends his own personal circumstances and it quite certainly transcends the trite platitudinarianism of Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock's assertion that there is no place like home. What he is trying to communicate by these words is an insight into the essence not only of his own but of everybody's condition — in fact, of the whole of mankind.

This is made quite clear in Chapter 10 of *Wise Blood* where Hazel, already a self-appointed preacher, preaches his existentialist nihilism to two women and a boy in front of the Odeon Theater in Taulkinham, trying to

2. Cf.: Karl Jaspers, "Philosophical Memoir", in *Philosophy and the World*, A Gateway Edition, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1963, p. 221.

3. F. O'Connor, *Wise Blood*, in *Three by Flannery O'Connor*, A Signet Book, The New American Library Inc., New York, p. 10.

4. O. c., p. 11.

answer the age-old questions of philosophy: where do we come from, where are we going to, and what is man?

Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it. Where is there a place for you to be? No place.⁵

Haze is responding to what is for him the tormenting metaphysical question of man's place in the universe; Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, on the other hand, is in no sense responding to any vital, basic need of her own while mouthing, "there's no place like home". She has spoken not from her own experience but from an urge to engulf Hazel in a feeling of fellowship and community by offering to share with him one of the almost universally accepted social banalities of our everyday contact — there is no place like home. This is not her opinion, this is no opinion at all. Instead, it is a statement concocted by an irresponsible, collective social entity.⁶ When one subscribes to it by repeating it every so often, one is presenting one's credentials and so is accepted by the society.

The contrast which we are talking about then, is between two totally different ways of experiencing and observing life. The ordinary human being remains shut inside this world, is perfectly well adjusted to it and has no sense of transcendence as of the realm that gives form and moral criteria to his life. Flannery's ordinary character is, without being aware of it, very much like Leora Watts who "was so well-adjusted that she didn't have to think any more".⁷ Similarly, he is like that girl Sabbath, though in a different sense, who asked for advice from a psychologist employed by a newspaper to answer questions from the sexually perplexed.

"Dear Mary, I am a bastard and a bastard shalt not enter the kingdom of heaven as we all know, but I have this personality that makes boys fol-

5. *O. c.*, p. 90.

6. Since no one seems to have expressed better than José Ortega y Gasset, not even Heidegger, the impersonality and irresponsibility of the social conventionalities, I think it is proper to quote him at some length on the subject.

My opinions consist in repeating what I hear others say. But who is that "other", those "others", to whom I entrust the task of being me? Oh — no specific person! Who is it that says what "they say"? Who is the responsible subject of that social saying, the impersonal subject of "they say"? Ah — people! And "people" is not this person or that person — "people" is always someone else, not exactly this one or that one — it is the pure "other", the one who is nobody. "People" is an irresponsible "I", the "I" of society, the social "I". When I live on what "they say" and fill my life with it, I have replaced the I which I myself am in solitude with the mass "I" — have made myself "people". Instead of living my own life, I am *deliving* it by changing it to otherness. J. Ortega y Gasset, *Man and Crisis*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1959, pp. 92—93.

7. F. O'Connor, *Wise Blood*, *o.c.*, p. 37.

low me. Do you think I should neck or not? I shall not enter the kingdom of heaven anyway so I don't see what difference it makes".⁸

A grotesquely confused answer appeared in the paper.

"Dear Sabbath, Light necking is acceptable, but I think your real problem is one of adjustment to the modern world. Perhaps you ought to re-examine your religious values to see if they meet your needs in Life. A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper perspective and do not let it warf you. Read some books on Ethical Culture".⁹

Sabbath answered that confused advice with disquieting and shocking ease.

"Dear Mary, What I really want to know is should I go the whole hog or not? That's my real problem. I'm adjusted okay to the modern world".¹⁰

Sabbath is aware of her nihilism, takes pleasure in it, and because of this does not belong to that vast category of ordinary mindless people to which I have provisionally and imprudently assigned her. Her assertion that she is adjusted okay to the modern world is cited here for the sole purpose of pointing out that what she says is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the modern age, its nihilism and its mindlessness. Of course, there is no lack of examples of collective, conventional commonplaces in Flannery O'Connor's work, and of the characters that voice them. They sound a note so different from Sabbath's radical sincerity that there is surely no need for sophisticated discrimination. To Red Sammy's complaint in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find", that "These days you don't know who to trust",¹¹ the grandmother gives a politely compassionate answer, "People are certainly not nice like they used to be",¹² which triggers Red Sam to say, "A good man is hard to find, [. . .]. Everything is getting terrible. I remember the day you could go off and leave your screen door unlatched. Not, no more".¹³ This prompts the old lady, in discussing better times, to air her opinion that "Europe was entirely to blame for the way things are now".¹⁴

The first conversation between Mr. Shiftlet and Lucynell Crater in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" is almost identical.

"Nothing is like it used to be, lady", he said. "The world is almost rotten".

"That's right", the old woman said.¹⁵

8. *O. c.*, p. 67.

9. *Ib.*

10. *Ib.*

11. F. O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find", in *Three by Flannery O'Connor*, *o. c.*, p. 133.

12. *Ib.*

13. *O. c.*, p. 134.

14. *Ib.*

15. F. O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own", in *Three by Flannery O'Connor*, *o. c.*, p. 161.

Or, for that matter, what is said by Mrs. Hopewell in "Good Country People" and is objected to so strongly by her intellectualist daughter Joy-Hulga, does not fall short of the same mental accomplishment.

Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs. Hopewell's favorite sayings. Another was: that is life! And still another, the most important, was: well, other people have their opinions too. She would make these statements, usually at the table, in a tone of gentle insistence as if no one held them but her, and the large hulking Joy, whose constant outrage had obliterated every expression from her face, would stare just a little to the side of her, her eyes icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it.

When Mrs. Hopewell said to Mrs. Freeman that life was like that, Mrs. Freeman would say, "I always said so myself".¹⁶

This repetitive babble, false conversation or *ersatz* communication, ubiquitous in Flannery O'Connor's fiction, stands in enormous contrast to the experiences and the language of her demonic, questioning characters. Although they move and act in the same physical universe as the mentally inert ordinary people, theirs is another world, the world of last things, of sin and death and the horror of existence. Some of Flannery's most innocent though devilishly subtle ironies lie in her descriptions of situations in which an ordinary person totally misunderstands a demonic character on account of the discrepancy of their two worlds.

A good example of this kind of subtle irony is, I believe, the description by Mrs. Hopewell, who brimful with commonplaces such as, "good country People". He introduces himself to her with the words, "Lady, I've come to speak of serious things".¹⁷ This, of course, can superficially be understood as a self-advertisement of a travelling salesman accomplished at selling Bibles and is, most likely, taken to mean just that and nothing else by Mrs. Hopewell, who is brimful with commonplaces such as, "good country people are the salt of the earth!"¹⁸ or, "it takes all kinds to make the world go 'round. That's life!"¹⁹ Such commonplace, proverbial wisdom prevents clear observation of fact simply because it does not allow a person to detach himself or herself from the limited utilitarian world of daily pragmatism. Mrs. Hopewell's vision and thought are dulled by it so that she mistakes Manley Pointer for a young, honest, simple country boy, a cardinal mistake reinforced in her mind by his admission that he is "real simple"²⁰ and that he does not "know how to say a thing but to say it",²¹ or

16. F. O'Connor, "Good Country People", in *Three by Flannery O'Connor*, o. c., pp. 244—245.

17. O. c., p. 249.

18. O. c., p. 250.

19. *Ib.*

20. *Ib.*

21. *Ib.*

that he is "from out in the country around Willohobie, not even from a place, just from near a place".²² This, most certainly, has a double meaning; one for Mrs. Hopewell — that he is a poor, good, simple country boy to be invited for dinner and fed properly — and the other, intended by Flannery O'Connor — that he is a specimen of what C. G. Jung has called the modern man, the man who is "aware of the immediate present",²³ is ahistorical and solitary, that is to say separated both from unity with other men and unity with God, and therefore sinful. I am tempted to think that Flannery O'Connor relished this situation almost as a private joke, describing it tongue in cheek, because it is hard for me to believe that she was capable of the illusion that her ordinary reader was radically different from the common character of her stories, her disappointment with her readers and reviewers being notorious.

What Manley Pointer was quite openly and simply saying or — to use a learned critical term — prefiguring by his words, was that he was one of Flannery's demonic preachers whose preaching is often done by means of shock, and whose words are not meaningless babble but plain truth. What he says about himself is evocative of Hazel Motes, the Misfit, Mr. Shiftlet. His last words to Hulga, a Ph. D. in philosophy who embraced nihilism, "you ain't so smart, I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!"²⁴ could have been but were not predicted by this lame girl when she was asked, earlier in the story, that unusual question, "You ever ate a chicken that was two days old?"²⁵ Eating such a "mighty small"²⁶ chicken would obviously be a sign of nihilistic blasphemy and a sin against utilitarianism since such a morsel of food would not satisfy hunger at all. Moreover, the eating and wasting of it would raise the question of what other need it would satisfy. Probably the need to show that one did not have illusions and that one belonged to the people who "see through to nothing",²⁷ to whom Hulga believed that she belonged and was forced to find out that she did not. She thought that her bookish nihilism was giving her freedom, whereas she was like everybody else, enclosed in and exposed to the small grotesque world of her mother and Mrs. Freeman, whose name ironically suggests what she is not capable of being — being free. And this was true despite Mrs. Hopewell's fear that her daughter "every year grew less like other people and more like herself — bloated, rude and squint-eyed".²⁸

It is hard at this point to resist the temptation of quoting George Santayana on the subject of the philosophy of the common man, not because Santa-

22. *Ib.*

23. C. G. Jung, "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man", in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, First published 1933, p. 196.

24. F. O'Connor, "Good Country People", *o. c.*, p. 261.

25. *O. c.*, p. 254.

26. *Ib.*

27. *O. c.*, p. 258.

28. *O. c.*, p. 247.

yana was one of the authors whom Flannery did read²⁹ but simply because what he says is so pertinent here.

Criticism surprises the soul in the arms of convention. Children insensibly accept all the suggestions of sense and language, the only initiative they show being a certain wilfulness in the extension of these notions, a certain impulse towards private superstition. This is soon corrected by education or broken off rudely, like the nails of a tender hand, by hard contact with custom, fact, or derision. Belief then settles down in sullenness and apathy to a narrow circle of vague assumptions, to none of which the mind need have any deep affinity, none of which it need really understand, but which nevertheless it clings to for lack of other footing. The philosophy of the common man is an old wife that gives him no pleasure, yet he cannot live without her, and resents any aspersions that strangers may cast on her character.³⁰

The common man, that is to say, does not want to leave the prison of his customary assumptions and collective superstitions. However narrow, dull and vague they may be, yet he, not even fully understanding them, clings to them jealously for fear perhaps of what he might encounter beyond them.

Hulga in "Good Country People", and Calhoun in "The Partridge Festival" who would like to imagine himself as "the rebel-artist-mystic"³¹ and not as what he unmistakably is by talent and heredity, a master salesman of "air-conditioners, boats and refrigerators"³² best represent those characters in Flannery O'Connor's fiction who want with all their might to be different from the others but cannot manage. Faced with Flannery's devilish characters they collapse back into the safety of the dailiest of their ordinary routines. Flannery O'Connor can almost justly be accused of innocently malevolent pleasure in the failure of such characters to live up to their own expectations since she seems to be apt, on occasion, to overdo the naiveté of such persons by making them either attempt to seduce the devil, like Hulga, or by making them proffer "a box of candy, a carton of cigarettes and three books — a Modern Library *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a paperback *Revolt of the Masses*, and a thin decorated volume of Housman",³³ as an offering, in sign of kinship, to the devil incarnate, as is done by Mary Elizabeth in "The Partridge Festival". Whatsoever the devil does to them, it seems to be Flannery's judgement, serves them right; and one is inclined to

29. Cf.: Sally Fitzgerald (Editor), *The Habit of Being, Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 1979, p. 26.

30. George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1955, first published in 1923, p. 11.

31. F. O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1976, p. 424.

32. *Ib.*

33. *O. c.*, p. 441.

express one's most heartfelt agreement with her here. They have to pay for their inattentiveness and for their obsession with their own selves. Sympathy and compassion would be of no use here as an authorial stylistic attitude; only the cold light of the author's intellect seeing through them is appropriate.

The order of lucidity now begins to loom before our eyes as one of the most important things in Flannery O'Connor's fiction. First in order of appearance are the creatures that have no lucidity whatsoever, the vulgar ones, *profanum vulgus*. They are characterized by unthinking acceptance and ritualistic repetition in conversation of what has been called here the collective, conventional wisdom of proverbial commonplaces. Not, of course, only by that. They are given an appearance made to match their words. Since their words result from lack of thought and are a confusion of everything, a gallimaufry of sorts, so the descriptions of them are veritable little studies in grotesque art. The description of Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, given at the beginning of *Wise Blood*, may suffice here by way of an example. "She was a fat woman with pink collars and cuffs and pear-shaped legs that slanted off the train seat and didn't reach the floor".³⁴ Not only is it possible to distinguish between a child in her (pink collars and cuffs and legs so short that they could not reach the floor of a railway carriage) and an adult woman advanced in age (a fat woman), but there is even a further confusion between a rational human individual and a plant, suggested by the pear-shaped legs. All this suggests a medley of insensitive plantlike life with the mindlessness of early babyhood which has encroached upon the adult life of a person that should show intelligence and discrimination and is, according to Wolfgang Kayser, a hallmark of the grotesque style in both art and literature.

So what is ordinary, the common man, is a grotesque medley both in the mind and in the body, lacking even elementary lucidity. Flannery has expressed her distaste for this type of human being many times and on very different occasions. One which seems to me to be very telling is this, "I believe and the Church teaches that God is as present in the idiot boy as in the genius".³⁵ This is one of her very emotional utterances, and, characteristically enough, God is though by her to reside in two extremes, those of idiocy and genius. It would be only logical not to expect her to have believed that it resided in the statistical average too. Then, there is another characteristic slighting of the ordinary man that I would like to mention here. In giving an account, in a letter to "A", of her reading of Simone Weil's books, Flannery skips from the works of that author to her life in order to say:

The life of this remarkable woman still intrigues me while much of what she writes, naturally, is ridiculous to me. Her life is almost a perfect

34. F. O'Connor, *Wise Blood*, o. c., p. 9.

35. *The Habit of Being*, o. c., p. 99.

blending of the Comic and the Terrible, which two things may be opposite sides of the same coin. In my own experience, everything funny I have written is more terrible than it is funny, or only funny because it is terrible, or only terrible because it is funny. Well Simone Weil's life is the most comical life I have ever read about and the most truly tragic and terrible.³⁶

This was said in a letter written on 24 September 1955. Six days later, in a letter to the same person, we learn that this account of Simone Weil's life was meant to be a praise.

By saying Simone Weil's life was both comic and terrible, I am not trying to reduce it, but mean to be paying her the highest tribute I can, short of calling her a saint, which I don't believe she was. Possibly I have a higher opinion of the comic and terrible than you do. To my way of thinking it includes her great courage and to call her anything less would be to see her as merely ordinary. She was certainly not ordinary.³⁷

A perfect blending of the comic and the terrible seem to me to be an appropriate definition of Flannery's demonic characters. Such a blending involves knowledge and awareness of the grotesqueness of the world and excludes an ordinary, irresponsible confusion of ideas, a kind of muddledness which results in compassion, pity, and sentimentality and is best expressed by a kind of smug tolerance of everything. "It takes all kinds to make the world go 'round'" is not, in essence, different from, *homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*. It is an admission of weakness which, no matter whether made by a half literate or an educated person, Flannery had no taste for and which she best disowned by expressing her admiration for St. Thomas's intolerance of sin.

In any case, I feel I can personally guarantee that St. Thomas loved God because for the life of me I cannot help loving St. Thomas. His brothers didn't want him to waste himself being a Dominican and so locked him up in a tower and introduced a prostitute into his apartment; her he ran out with a red-hot poker. It would be fashionable today to be in sympathy with the woman, but I am in sympathy with St. Thomas.³⁸

In other words, tolerance of sin is nothing else but irresponsibility of man without God. You are either in sympathy with St. Thomas or with that woman and there is nothing else to it in Flannery O'Connor's way of thinking which seeks after simplicity, not subtlety of thought, as is wonderfully expressed in a piece of advice given by Flannery to a close friend, "Subtlety is the curse of man. It is not found in the deity".³⁹ In another let-

36. O. c., p. 105.

37. O. c., p. 106.

38. O. c., p. 94.

39. O. c., p. 452.

ter to the same correspondent Flannery has clarified her view of St. Thomas's act and of the principle that guided her in her art of writing.

Both St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross, dissimilar as they were, were entirely united by the same belief. The more I read St. Thomas the more flexible he appears to me. Incidentally, St. John would have been able to sit down with the prostitute and said, "Daughter, let us consider this," but St. Thomas doubtless knew his own nature and knew that he had to get rid of her with a poker or she would overcome him. I am not only for St. Thomas here but am in accord with his use of the poker. I call this being tolerantly realistic, not being a fascist.⁴⁰

An explanation concerning Flannery O'Connor's dislike of the intellectuals is apposite here. Unlike St. Thomas, a social worker like Sheppard in "The Lame Shall Enter First" would be in sympathy with the prostitute and would try to "save" her, and so would, most likely, try any other type of modern intellectual, social scientist, culture monger, psychoanalyst and psychologist with their interest in personality development. But it is not only the members of these intellectual professions that have taken over from the church the task of illuminating people's minds, consoling and directing them, doing so in an altogether confused fashion, pretending to be in possession of the right knowledge about what is good and what bad, what true and false although they are demonstrably in possession of no truth at all; it is not only these pseudo-intellectuals whose profession makes fakes of them that Flannery O'Connor's disowns; it is the whole category, and this, of course, begs an additional explanation.

In a sense it can be said that intellectuals come into being with the modern age. It is the mind of the modern twentieth century man that can most easily be fitted into the mould of a sceptical intellectual. Scepticism is both his virtue and his vice. Although her surface meaning is different and very limited, Mrs. Hopewell, in "Good Country People", hits the mark well by making her mental remark, "You could not say, 'My daughter is a philosopher.' That was something that had ended with Greeks and Romans."⁴¹ A present-day intellectual with a doctorate degree in philosophy is quite a different breed of man from, let us say, Heraclitus or Plato. What characterizes an intellectual nowadays is what Aldous Huxley in *Point Counter Point* has so aptly called his amoeboid quality.

But this question of identity was precisely one of Philip's chronic problems. It was so easy for him to be almost anybody, theoretically and with his intelligence. He had such a power of assimilation, that he was often in danger of being unable to distinguish the assimilator from the assimilated, of not knowing among the multiplicity of his rôles who was the actor. The

40. *O. c.*, p. 97.

41. F. O'Connor, "Good Country People", *o. c.*, p. 248.

amoeba, when it finds a prey, flows round it, incorporates it and oozes on. There was something amoeboid about Philip Quarles's mind. It was like a sea of spiritual protoplasm, capable of flowing in all directions, of engulfing every object in its path, of trickling into every crevice, of filling every mould and, having engulfed, having filled, of flowing on towards other obstacles, other receptacles, leaving the first empty and dry. At different times in his life and even at the same moment he had filled the most various moulds. He had been a cynic and also a mystic, a humanitarian and also a contemptuous misanthrope; he had tried to live the life of detached and stoical reason and another time he had aspired to the unreasonableness of natural and uncivilized existence. The choice of moulds depended at any given moment on the books he was reading, the people he was associating with. [...] Where was there a self to which he could be loyal?⁴²

The mind of the modern intellectual is digestive and when his ego is "learned and omnivorous",⁴³ as is suggested by George Santayana, then he is adrift with no firm criterion by which to judge things, an empty shell that can be filled by any content.

If we take the order of lucidity as our criterion here — which I would like to argue Flannery O'Connor was always taking as hers — then the intellectuals would form an intermediary step between the ordinary mass of uncritical people who take everything for granted, and those who are "a different breed of dog",⁴⁴ like the Misfit, from everybody else. The grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" in fact immediately recognized the Misfit as not belonging to the category of common man. "You're not a bit common!"⁴⁵ she said to him in despair and horror of death. To quote Santayana once again, "People are not naturally sceptics, wondering if a single one of their intellectual habits can be reasonably preserved"⁴⁶, and the ultimate scepticism of the modern intellectual therefore has some merits, but quite certainly not the merit of a firm criterion of values, particularly because ultimate scepticism cannot be sustained for long and this or that narrow-mindedness is quickly and unconsciously, or at best with a guiltily conscience, embraced by the former sceptic.

What Flannery O'Connor has to say about the preference of the catholic novelist in the protestant South, "I think he will feel a good deal more kinship with backwoods prophets and shouting fundamentalists than he will with those politer elements for whom the supernatural is an embarrassment and for whom religion has become a department of sociology or

42. A. Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1955, pp. 197—198.

43. G. Santayana, *o. c.*, p. 254.

44. F. O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find", *o. c.* p. 139.

45. *Ib.*

46. G. Santayana, *o. c.*, p. 11.

culture or personality development",⁴⁷ may well be true of her own preferences. About her Christian orthodoxy she had said.

Let me make no bones about it: I write from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. Nothing is more repulsive to me than the idea of myself setting up a little universe of my own choosing and propounding a little immoralistic message. I write with a solid belief in *all* the Christian dogmas. I find that this in no way limits my freedom as a writer and that it increases rather than decreases my vision. It is popular to believe that in order to see clearly one must believe nothing. This may work well enough if you are observing cells under a microscope. It will not work if you are writing fiction. For the fiction writer, to believe nothing is to see nothing. I don't write to bring anybody a message, as you know yourself that this is not the purpose of the novelist; but the message I find in the life I see is a moral message.⁴⁸

Parenthetically one might add that Erich Fromm would have taught Flannery O'Connor that "rational faith", not the "irrational faith" like the most drastic contemporary phenomenon of faith in dictatorial leaders, is indispensable for scientific discovery too.⁴⁹

Now one must be cautious not to make a mistake. Flannery O'Connor is a writer painfully aware of the disintegration of the world and of the ensuing dissolution or anarchy of values. A firm standard of judgement is a desirable thing in such hard times, yet I feel certain that she is not a person who would, in a time of crisis, rush, as many have done, to find, say, shelter from an earthquake into "the house which, in Europe, had long resisted the ravages of time and which had demonstrated the greatest immunity to the movements of the ground. Everyone rushes and runs in that direction, not in order to cultivate his soul, not to seek *the* culture which corresponds to his own individual nature and destiny and to an objective, serious knowledge of contemporary culture, but in order to look for something quite different — a master who will direct how we are to think, act and live".⁵⁰

Lucidity and the smugness of the Catholic church do not, as Flannery O'Connor knew, go hand in hand. Her simple assertion is that in order to see clearly one has to believe something. When she claims Christian orthodoxy by saying, "I take the Dogmas of the Church literally",⁵¹ I take her to mean that she is concerned with the ultimate questions, those asked in the extreme situations of life, those which Jaspers has named *Grenzsitua-*

47. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (Editors), *Mystery and Manners*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1969, p. 207.

48. *The Habit of Being*, o. c., p. 147.

49. Cf.: Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*, A Fawcett Premier Book, Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Conn., 1947, pp. 206—207.

50. Max Scheler, *Philosophical Perspectives*, Beacon Press, Beacon Hill, Boston, 1958, pp. 15—16.

51. *The Habit of Being*, o. c., 221.

tionen. I feel confirmed in this view by what Flannery says about herself being a catholic writer in an earlier letter. "However, I am a Catholic peculiarly possessed of the modern consciousness, that thing Jung describes as unhistorical, solitary and guilty".⁵² This reference to Jung explains for me the central position of Flannery's demonic characters in her fiction. First, for Jung, "the man we call modern, the man who is aware of the immediate present, is by no means an average man".⁵³ Then, he is a solitary individual and there are not many of them around. "There are few who live up to the name, for they must be conscious to the superlative degree".⁵⁴ The fact that intellectuals seek each other's company makes them unfit for the title of modern man. At best, they may be classified as Jung's pseudo-moderns.

This requirement — that they have to be conscious to the superlative degree — seems to me to be realized by the Misfit, by Hazel Motes, by Flannery O'Connor herself, and this is why I have the weakness to see her in the company of her demonic figures rather than in any other company. Unceasing awareness and lucidity are a curse from the point of view of the common man, an abnormality in fact, and it is hence from his point of view that Flannery's misfits appear as demonic figures. Clear vision and firm belief may for all I know not be in contradiction; what Flannery used to say to her mother seems to me to be true of her own position or the position of any martyr of lucidity. When asked by her mother late at night to stop reading, and turn off the light her answer, modified by a preliminary humorous remark, was invariably, "I with lifted finger and broad bland beatific expression, would reply, 'On the contrary, I answer that the light, being eternal and limitless, cannot be turned off. Shut your eyes'".⁵⁵

LUCIDNOST I VULGARNOST U SVIJETU FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Ovaj članak obrađuje kontrast, toliko karakterističan za djelo spisateljice Flannery O'Connor, između običnih, prosječnih, duhovno lijenih ljudi bez identiteta, koji pakleni kaos modernog života drže za normalno stanje stvari, i demonskih likova njenih djela koji su do svog nihilizma dospjeli kroz doživljaje graničnih situacija, kako je ove nazvao Karl Jaspers.

Taj kontrast se ovdje analizira prvo na razini govora i ponašanja likova sa svrhom da se jasno ocrtta granica između bezličnog, tzv. životnom mudrošću sputanog pseudo-mišljenja običnog svijeta i lucidnog nihilizma usamljenih demonskih pojedinaca.

Da bi se usamljenost i odvojenost od svakodnevice ovih lucidnih pojedinaca posebno naglasila, Flannery O'Connor ih oštro razlikuje od tipa suvremenog inte-

52. O. c., p. 90.

53. C. G. Jung, o. c., p. 196.

54. O. c., p. 197.

55. *The Habit of Being*, o. c., p. 94.

lektualca koji je kod ove spisateljice izložen nesmiljenoj ironiji upravo zbog paradoksalnosti položaja u koji je stavljen svojim skepticizmom, gubitkom određenog kriterija vrijednosti.

S ovog polutanskog tipa egzistencije na granici vulgarnog ne-mišljenja i pri-sebne lucidnosti, koji prema Flannery O'Connor predstavlja suvremeni intelektualac, članak prelazi na pokušaj definiranja značaja lucidnosti za pisca. U zaključku, lucidnost se definira kao svojstvo bez kojega se u svijetu suvremene groteskne svakodnevice ne može svjesno bivstvovati, te tako ona postaje nužan atribut pisca samoga. Jungova definicija modernog čovjeka bila je u ovom zaključku dragocjena jer je omogućila da se ustanovi stupanj identičnosti između Flannery O'Connor i njenih demonskih likova.