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## Pulverizing the Idols: Flannery O'Connor's Battle with Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung

Curtis: "My wife and I are going to counseling."

Briscoe: "Yeah, sometimes a shrink can help."

Curtis (somewhat irritated): "We're seeing a priest."

Briscoe (in his usual blasé manner): "Whatever works."

—*Law and Order*

IF TWO PEOPLE HAUNT FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S LETTERS AND LECTURES IN a negative way, they are Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. References to Freud and Jung and psychoanalysis and psychotherapy continually punctuate her letters, from an undated one in 1950 which jokingly has one of her characters, Enoch Emery, push his analyst out a window because he "was so mad that anyone should defame his daddy," to one ten years later scolding William Sessions for the "ridiculous results" of his "Freudian technique" (*Habit* 21, 407). In her library at the time of her death, O'Connor had copies of *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (1937), Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933) and *The Undiscovered Self* (1957), and three different books with introductions by Jung. Tellingly, she underlined extensively in Jung's *Modern Man*, much more than she did in Freud's *Basic Writings* (see Kinney). Her thoughts on Freud remain relatively consistent throughout her letters. In 1955, O'Connor wrote to Betty Hester, "As to Sigmund, I am against him tooth and toenail" (*Habit* 110), and she did not stray far from that opinion. Her thoughts on Jung, however, prove more ambivalent, especially as they relate to Freud. In April 1956, she wrote again to Hester, "I think Jung is probably just as dangerous as Freud" (*Habit* 152). Three years later, in December 1959, she claimed, "Jung has something to offer religion but is at the same time very dangerous for it," and three years after that, in a September 1962 letter, her thoughts on Jung reached their trajectory: "To religion I think he [Freud] is much less dangerous than Jung" (*Habit* 362, 491). In between these last two letters, on 16 March 1960, after O'Connor had finished *The Undiscovered Self*,

she wrote Ted Spivey, “I admire him [Jung]” (*Habit* 382). O’Connor saw Freud as dangerous for religion for many reasons: one, Freud stood as a great critic of religion, O’Connor a great champion; two, Freud embodied what O’Connor saw as the secular mindset of her times; and, three, O’Connor worried that Americans took up psychoanalysis as a substitute for religion. O’Connor saw Jung as more dangerous than Freud because, whereas Freud at least tried to demarcate a clear line between science and religion, Jung enthusiastically erased such a line, believing that psychoanalysis could complement a religion that no longer addressed modernity’s psychic needs. We can then take O’Connor’s concerns with Freud and Jung and use them to illuminate one of her most-studied stories, “Good Country People” (1955). The story’s main characters, Hulga Hopewell and Manley Pointer, mimic the theological positions promoted by Freud and Jung, positions O’Connor rejected while acknowledging their seductive power. This short story reads as O’Connor’s calling, like the biblical prophets she continually invokes, her people back from worshiping false idols, calling her culture back from thinkers like Freud and Jung.<sup>1</sup>

Part of O’Connor’s reaction to Freud and Jung corresponds to her reaction to what she saw as the secularism of her times. Her lectures and letters make clear that she envisioned herself as writing in a secular culture. In an August 1955 letter, O’Connor declared, “My audience are the people who think God is dead” (*Habit* 92) and eight years later in an interview, she alleged, “the man of our times is certainly not a believer” (*Conversations* 104). In her biography of O’Connor, Jean Cash describes the writer’s secondary education as restrictive and parochial, her college education as progressive and secular (76). This progressive, secular bent continued when she went to the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and, in 1948, to Yaddo, the artists’ community in Saratoga Springs, New York. At Yaddo, the restrictive and parochial crashed into the progressive and secular. Cash tells us that the secularism O’Connor found at Yaddo disgusted her (69), while Brad Gooch avers that many of her fellow artists’ disbelief in God shocked her (176). We get an idea of the extent to which the writer saw her times as secular from a recurring metaphor

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<sup>1</sup>In his engaging *Flannery O’Connor and Cold War Culture*, Jon Lance Bacon writes, “theological issues continue to dominate O’Connor studies” and “It is time to recover her historical circumstances” (5, 6). This study historicizes O’Connor’s theological issues by delineating her concerns with Freud and Jung.

in her letters. In August 1955, O'Connor wrote to Betty Hester, "if you live today you breathe in nihilism," and in September 1959 to John Hawkes, "for me this is always the conflict between an attraction for the Holy and the disbelief in it that we breathe in with the air of the times" (*Habit* 97, 349). For O'Connor, one could not simply navigate around the secularism of the 1950s; rather it enveloped one in the very air one breathed.

For a brief period in the early sixteenth century, Pope Leo X dubbed Henry VIII "Defender of the Faith." If one had to select a defender of the faith in twentieth-century American literature, Flannery O'Connor would be a prime candidate. We could discount her contention that she wrote in secular times as being colored by her religious beliefs. If, however, we look at the secularization thesis dominant among the intelligentsia during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, O'Connor's views do not appear to be too far off of the mark. J. Hillis Miller begins *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (1963) with this sentence: "Post-medieval literature records, among other things, the gradual withdrawal of God from the world" (1). Two years later in *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (1965), theologian Harvey Cox tries to give a positive spin to secularization when he writes, "Secularization is the liberation of man from religious and metaphysical tutelage, the turning of his attention away from other worlds and toward this one" (15). These writers neatly formulate the dominant secularization thesis that represented the conventional wisdom of academia for much of the twentieth century, a thesis which originated in the claims of such nineteenth-century thinkers as Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud, who contended that religion would eventually fade in importance in industrial society. In the 1950s and '60s, a second wave—C. Wright Mills, Peter Berger, J. Hillis Miller, Harvey Cox—continued to espouse this thesis, Berger pithily summing up the secularization theory of this period as "more modernity, less religion" (Berger).<sup>2</sup> Had O'Connor lived

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<sup>2</sup>Into this second wave, I would place Michel Foucault. The academy positions Foucault as a post-structuralist thinker and uses a specific vocabulary to talk about him—power, discipline, discourse. However, in the works he published as a historian in the first ten years of his writing career (roughly 1965-75), he focuses on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this period—what he sees as the last epistemic shift—a new discourse around the nascent sciences of biology, penology, sexology, economics, and philology emerged. The Christian pastoral became the modern

into the 1990s, she might have taken wry satisfaction when Berger and Cox both renounced the secularization thesis that they put forward in the 1960s. As Berger stated in a 2006 interview, “The belief is still quite prevalent among intellectuals—secular intellectuals—that religion is a kind of backwoods phenomenon that with rising education will increasingly disappear. That’s not happening. It’s not going to happen” (Mathewes 157). Indeed, sociologists today divide into two camps: those who want to discard secularization theory and those who want to keep parts for limited use. Certainly O’Connor knew the resilience of “backwoods phenomena,” but as a self-styled “hillbilly Thomist,” she also knew that she was defending one tradition and skeptically critiquing the hegemony of secularist sociological theory from a place at the far margins of mid-century modernism (*Habit* 81).

Why did O’Connor see Freud as dangerous for religion? On one level the answer is simple: for O’Connor, Freud embodied the secular *Zeitgeist* of 1950s America. Certainly Freud stood as a great critic of religion. Peter Gay describes him as “a militant atheist” (37), while in a 1918 letter to Oskar Pfister, Freud described himself simply as “a completely godless Jew” (*Briefe* 63). In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), the psychoanalyst explains away religion as arising out of the Oedipus complex and asserts that religion has been given its chance and failed. The time has come to discard religion and take up a new god, “Our God *Logos*” or reason (69). Freud saw psychoanalysis as a science, himself as a scientist, and science as locked in a battle with religion. Religion stood as the enemy, with Roman Catholicism as the worst: “Roman Catholicism occupied a particularly conspicuous place in the catalogue of villains to be overthrown” (Gay 59). The psychoanalyst’s anti-Catholicism perhaps grew out of his living in Austria; Nathan G. Hale, Jr., describes Freud “as a Jew in an anti-Semitic Roman Catholic Empire” (*Freud* 333). In 1920, the Christian Socialist Party came into power in Austria with a priest, Ignaz Seipel, as president. The party had close ties to the Roman Catholic Church, and Freud worried that the Catholic hierarchy would have

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pastoral—the care of the self passed from the Church to the modern sciences. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), Foucault claims, “in the alleviation of physical misery . . . it [the clinic] would be a sort of lay carbon copy [of the Church],” for “Are not doctors the priests of the body?” (32). Foucault viewed the transfer of power from the Church to the sciences dispassionately; O’Connor did not. Her letters demonstrate that she recognized this transfer in the Enlightenment, but unlike Foucault, she saw it as a loss.

psychoanalysis banned in Austria (Gay 44). Freud's godlessness, not his Judaism, troubled O'Connor, as she saw godlessness as the spirit, if you will, of her age.

Freud, however, did not simply represent a certain ethos of 1950s America: he, in a sense, made up part of that ethos. Hale depicts 1945-1965—the very years in which O'Connor published all of her work—as the “golden age” of the popularization of psychoanalysis in America (*Rise* 276). With Hitler's rise to power, many European Jewish analysts fled Nazism; Freud left Austria for London after the *Anschluss* in 1938. By 1942, psychoanalysis's center of gravity had shifted to the United States. This golden age peaked in America with the one-hundred-year anniversary in 1956 of Freud's birth; university lectures, public addresses, and even congratulations from President Eisenhower greeted this anniversary. The celebration corresponded with Ernest Jones's three-volume biography of Freud (1953-1957), which consecrated the analyst as the equal of Copernicus and Galileo (Hale, *Rise* 286-87). American culture's attention paid to Freud walked side-by-side with psychiatry's and psychotherapy's growth in this period. In 1946, Congress passed the Mental Health Act, which led to the establishment of the National Institute of Mental Health three years later. In 1949, seventy percent of the Institute's budget went to psychiatric training, and perhaps because of this backing, from 1948 to 1976 the number of psychiatrists in America grew from 4,700 to 27,000 (Hale, *Rise* 246). In 1962, William Menninger became the first prominent psychiatrist to meet with the president, and the following year John F. Kennedy became the first president to make a national speech on mental health. According to Eva Moskowitz, “In the 1950s popular culture became saturated with therapeutic messages” (217). Freud's star began to dim after the mid-1960s, but from 1945 to 1965, his star in America shone at its brightest.

O'Connor's concern with Freud, however, went beyond his being a great critic of religion, her a great champion. Part of the reason Freud haunts O'Connor's letters lies with the ambiguous status of psychoanalysis. Freud insisted that psychoanalysis stood as a science and that he qualified as a scientist employing the scientific method, but it seems that he and his early followers were the only ones convinced that psychoanalysis was a science. Freud's theories began to lose their luster after 1965, in part because the scientific community started to have its

doubts about the scientific validity of psychoanalysis (Hale, *Rise* 300). What, then, is psychoanalysis? In *A History of God*, Karen Armstrong likens it to a modern-day mysticism (211), while in *The Battle for God*, she calls it a “secularist spiritualit[y]”(199). Dietrich Bonhoeffer envisions psychoanalysis as “the secularized offshoots of Christian theology” (326), while Anna Freud sees it as a corpus of philosophical wisdom from which people want “answers to all the riddles of existence” (Coles, *Secular* 112). In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan claims that after World War II, psychoanalysis in America became “a new religion. It filled the vacuum of thought and purpose that existed for many for whom God, or flag, or bank account were no longer sufficient” (123).<sup>3</sup> These writers saw in psychoanalysis the very issue that concerned O’Connor: the slippage of this science into something approaching religion.

Freud declared that psychoanalysis stood as a science and religion as the enemy, yet psychoanalysis and religion constantly intertwined—the crux of the issue for O’Connor. One first sees this intertwining in how the early practitioners of psychoanalysis talked about their experience. An early analyst, Morton Prince, complained that “the followers of Freud care more for the acceptance of their method—for being baptized in the faith, than for the determination of the truth” (338). One hears this language not only inside the culture of early psychoanalysis but also in the wider culture. A 1917 article in *Current Opinion* describes the analyst as a “priest in a confessional of science” (“Establishment” 260). In his two-volume history of Freud in America, Hale tells us that the stereotype of the analyst had been established before World War I as “the uncanny analyst, who combined the qualities of secular priest, uncondemning listener, and scientific soul surgeon” (*Rise* 95). But O’Connor worried less about how psychoanalysts talked about themselves or how culture talked about psychoanalysis than about how

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<sup>3</sup>As to Freud’s insistence that psychoanalysis exists as a science, Freudian scholar Klaus Theweleit ended his keynote address at a conference celebrating the one-hundred-year anniversary of the publication of *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) by saying that Freud well knew he had not created a science but rather a craft. Still, the analyst persisted in calling it a science because he also knew that if he did not, he would, to use Theweleit’s words, “be chased out of the temple.” Here, Theweleit depicts psychoanalysis as a craft in the guise of a science phrased in the language of religion. (This quotation came from the question-and-answer period after Theweleit’s address. For the address proper, see Theweleit.)

people practiced psychoanalysis and how they practiced religion. In a June 1962 letter, O'Connor asserted, "One of the effects of modern liberal Protestantism has been gradually to turn religion into poetry and therapy" (*Habit* 479). This assertion demonstrates O'Connor's concern about religion's turning into therapy; her focus on Freud demonstrates her concern with the opposite, therapy's turning into religion.<sup>4</sup> Robert Coles alleges that with psychoanalytic theory, "secularism gained a new hold on what once had been the prerogative of the sacred. In the Old Testament it is God who knows man" (*Secular* 51). Ironically, had Freud been correct in his assertion that psychoanalysis was a science, had he been an atheistic scientist who dismissed religion as superstition, he would have concerned O'Connor less than he did when people took up psychoanalysis as something other than a science and the lines between psychoanalysis and religion began to blur.

Jung, unlike Freud, did not position himself as an atheistic scientist who dismissed religion, so *prima facie* one might think O'Connor and Jung would be compatriots rather than adversaries. Whereas Freud loudly proclaimed his atheism, Jung calls atheism a "stupid error" (*Psychology* 100). Whereas Freud critiques religion in *The Future of An Illusion*, in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Jung takes *The Future of an Illusion* to task for its "inability to understand religious experience" (117). If O'Connor described the person of her times as a non-believer, Jung echoes this sentiment: "to believe has become today such a difficult art, that people, and particularly the educated part of humanity, can hardly find their way there" (*Modern Man* 111). In fact, Jung believed that the church and psychotherapy needed to join forces to meet "this great spiritual task" (*Modern* 229). Finally, late in her life, O'Connor became quite taken with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit priest who took part in the discovery of Peking Man. From her letters, we can determine that O'Connor first read Teilhard around December 1959. The following spring, in a March 1960 letter, she told Ted Spivey, "There are parallels between Jung and Teilhard that are striking" and "Those two would have had much to say to each other" (*Habit* 383). Still, from this date to the end of her life in 1964, O'Connor became more enamored with Teilhard and more concerned about Jung.

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<sup>4</sup>What O'Connor saw at mid-century, Moskowitz sees as a trend growing throughout the century. In her introduction to *In Therapy We Trust* (2001), she states, "Today Americans turn to psychological cures as reflexively as they once turned to God" (1).

After O'Connor read *The Undiscovered Self*, she clearly articulated her criticism of Jung in a letter dated 18 December 1959: she worried that Jung read Christ's resurrection symbolically and that he equated communist ideas with certain elements in Catholicism.<sup>5</sup> O'Connor, however, had larger, more generalized concerns that eclipsed these specific concerns. For her, Jung represented a greater danger than Freud because whereas Freud at least tried to demarcate a clear line between psychoanalysis and religion, Jung, in theory and in practice, readily embraced a liminal space between the two. We see this liminal space most clearly in the prestigious Terry lectures that Jung gave at Yale University in 1937. The series of talks begins with Jung's claim that we live "in an age where the gods have become extinct," but the lectures that follow show he does not exactly believe this: rather, Jung believes that we live in an age when the gods have drawn inward to the unconscious (*Psychology* 18). In the course of the talks, in order to map out how the gods end up residing there, Jung outlines an evolution of these entities:

The gods first lived in superhuman power and beauty on the top of snow-clad mountains or in the darkness of caves, woods and seas. Later on they drew together into one god, and then that god became man. But the gods in our time assemble in the lap of the ordinary individual and are as powerful and as awe-inspiring as ever, in spite of their new disguise—the so-called psychical functions. (102)

Jung calls this "the historical process of the de-spiritualization of the world" (102). The deities, originally external projections, have withdrawn "to the inside of the unknown man" (103). Consequently, when Jung describes the unconscious, it takes on the qualities of a deity. He writes that he feels "not at all certain whether the unconscious mind is merely *my* mind" (46). One's individual conscious mind sits within an "indefinitely extended" unconscious mind (99). When one does psychotherapy, when one delves into the unconscious mind, Jung proposes, one comes into contact with this ever-extending mind.

Jung's lectures propose that psychotherapy, in part, fills the void left by the extinction of the gods: the "idea of God, utterly absent from the conscious mind of modern man, returns in a form known consciously

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<sup>5</sup>O'Connor's concerns regarding Jung sound redolent of the incident when Mary McCarthy told O'Connor that she had come to think of the Host as a symbol, to which O'Connor famously replied, "Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it" (*Habit* 125).

three hundred or four hundred years ago" (*Psychology* 69). Stepping back four hundred years before the Terry lectures would place one in the middle of the Protestant Reformation. Jung looks at the Reformation as a time of loss rather than as a time to be celebrated, as historians so often present it in standard Western histories. For Jung, Protestants lost the sacred images and the ritual "which, since time immemorial, has been a safe way of dealing with the unaccountable forces of the unconscious mind" (58). Psychotherapy, then, stands as a modern method for managing, even taming, these "unaccountable forces." Jung implies that around the time of the Reformation, God began to slip from the conscious into the unconscious. Despite her disagreements with Jung, O'Connor, in a talk given at Wesleyan in 1960, gives a similar configuration, stating that God has "gone underneath and come out in distorted forms" (*Conversations* 72). For Jung and O'Connor, God, in the last three or four hundred years, has "gone underneath," and both writers attempt to bring Him back to the surface. O'Connor believes one does this by embracing the images, ritual, and mystery of the Church; Jung, by embracing the mystery of the unconscious.

Whereas Freud places psychoanalysis and science in one camp and religion in an opposing one, Jung overlaps these entities and places psychotherapy on the cusp between science and religion. In an echo of Freud, Jung begins the Yale lectures by presenting himself as "an empiricist" who adheres to "the phenomenological standpoint" and "the principles of scientific empiricism" (*Psychology* 1). Like Freud, Jung wants to be seen as a scientist. Soon into the lectures, however, he sounds defensive when he says that medicine does not care for psychology: medicine believes "either the body is ill or there is nothing the matter" (9). Here, Jung differentiates himself and psychology from the strictly empirical stance. Jung also distances psychology and himself from science in terms of religion. He describes one of his clients, whom I will discuss shortly, as "a scientist of today" (41) who panics when seized by thoughts of spiritual rebirth: "He belongs to those intellectuals or scientists who would be simply amazed if anybody should saddle them with religious views of any kind" (27). Clearly, Jung sees himself as an intellectual apart from this group: thoughts of spiritual rebirth do not panic him, and religious views do not saddle him.

Neither do these lectures, on the other hand, completely endorse religion. Jung begins his talks with a detached stance on religion—as a

psychologist, he will examine religion the way a zoologist examines an elephant—and he ends the lectures not by dismissing religion, as does Freud, but by taking a more neutral stance, with a shrug of his shoulders: “if such experience helps to make your life healthier, more beautiful, more complete and more satisfactory to your self and to those you love, you may safely say: ‘This was the grace of God’” (*Psychology* 114). The psychotherapist takes this somewhat paternalistic stance towards organized religion but not towards religious experience. Given his evolutionary concept of God, Jung believed the psychotherapist provides what the rituals and imagery of the church once did: a method for managing and encountering “the unaccountable forces” of the collective unconscious. In this way, psychotherapy resides in an in-between space: it concerns itself with phenomena empirical science does not recognize, and it takes up the issues religion no longer effectively addresses.

Jung’s Terry lectures revolve around a case study in which the analysand’s cure comes after he encounters, in the course of his therapy, “an archetypal image of the Deity” (*Psychology* 73). Jung describes the patient, a lapsed Catholic, as “highly rationalistic and intellectual,” “a scientist of today” (36, 41). The analysand’s intellectualism causes him to reject religion as absurd but also to reject the notion of the unconscious because it undermines his “enlightened common sense” (51). The patient comes into counseling with Jung, however, sure he has cancer, though tests show he does not, and no amount of evidence will convince him otherwise. The turning point in his therapy comes in the form of a dream in which the patient sees a quaternity or mandala—what Jung calls an archetype of the Deity—and this vision fills the patient with “the most sublime harmony” (80). Jung ends his discussion of the case tersely: “It was what one would call—in the language of religion—a conversion” (80). Jung differentiates between religious experience and religion, religious experience being when one has contact with what Rudolf Otto names the “numinous,” religion being when the powers-that-be set this experience down in code, dogma, and creed (7). Jung’s lectures imply that his client, in his therapy sessions, has a religious experience that brings about his cure.

O’Connor saw Jung as more dangerous than Freud because Jung believed in this common space, and she worried that American culture in her time followed Jung’s lead. Jung’s view of psychotherapy encroached upon O’Connor’s view of religion, an encroachment visible

in an odd detail. During the course of his therapy, in addition to the dream of the mandala, the analysand has a dream in which an angel explains the mystery of the Trinity in terms of a peacock's tail. This dream sounds odd, especially if one knows about O'Connor's lifelong fascination with peacocks: she kept a steady flock of the birds at Andalusia, and they show up in both her non-fiction and fiction. In her essay "The King of the Birds" (1961), O'Connor describes the moment the peacock spreads its tail, which silences the viewer and causes others to respectfully remove their hats; in "The Displaced Person" (1954), a peacock's tail comes to signify the transfiguration of Christ. Jung would look at this coincidence as further evidence for his theory of the collective unconscious: a peacock's tail representing the Trinity or Christ shows up in his patient's dream in the 1930s and in a writer's story in the 1950s because the unconscious minds of both the patient and the artist reach down into the same collective unconscious which holds this archetypal image of divinity. O'Connor would have had no trouble with the analysand's dreaming about the Trinity in a peacock's tail, but she would have bristled at the idea that one now accesses the divine while lying on a therapist's couch. On 19 October 1958, O'Connor wrote to Ted Spivey, "the religious sense seems to be bred out of them [modern people] in the kind of society we've lived in since the 18th century. And it's bred out of them double quick now by the religious substitutes for religion" (*Habit* 299-300).

O'Connor's concerns with Freud and Jung run throughout her fiction, but "Good Country People" distills these quarrels into one story and two characters, Hulga Hopewell and Manley Pointer. Whereas the Terry lectures describe a secular conversion experience that Jung believes represents modern religious experience, "Good Country People" climaxes with a secular conversion experience that O'Connor believes represents the failure of modern religious substitutes. If Freud represented an outspoken, aggressive atheism, so too does Hulga Hopewell. When Manley Pointer first comes to the Hopewell household, Mrs. Hopewell cannot tell him the truth: "My daughter is an atheist and won't let me keep the Bible in the parlor" (*Collected* 270). Later, Hulga bluntly tells Manley, "I don't even believe in God" and soon reiterates the point: "In my economy," she tells him, "I'm saved and you are damned but I told you I didn't believe in God" (277, 278). In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud, after denouncing Christianity, identifies his new god, reason.

Hulga follows in his footsteps in that no sooner does she announce her atheism than she makes it clear that she worships Freud's god of reason. Richard Giannone writes of Hulga's "idolatrous substitution" (76) of her mind for God, and indeed Hulga makes clear that she places absolute faith in her intellect and her reason. She believes that her mind gives her complete control of her environment, so that when she and Manley first kiss,

the power went at once to the brain. Even before he released her, her mind, clear and detached and ironic anyway, was regarding him from a great distance, with amusement but with pity. She had never been kissed before and she was pleased to discover that it was an unexceptional experience and all a matter of the mind's control. (278)

When Hulga and Manley reach the barn loft and their kissing becomes more frequent, the narrator tells us, "Her mind, throughout this, never stopped or lost itself for a second to her feelings" (279). Her intellect, Hulga believes, allows her to understand her surroundings flawlessly: "I don't have illusions," she tells Manley, "I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing" (280). Hulga has an unwavering belief that her intelligence will keep her in control of her life and allow her to see clearly and perfectly. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud avers that science will eventually explain the mysteries of life that remain, and Hulga makes clear that her intellect allows her to pierce any and all of life's mysteries.

O'Connor, however, worried less about Freud's atheism than about the slippage between the sacred and the secular in the language around and practice of psychoanalysis. We see this same slippage in the language of "Good Country People." "We are all damned," Hulga tells Manley, "but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation" (280). Here Hulga describes her nihilism in the language of religion. Even when she emphasizes her atheism, she uses religious diction: "I'm saved and you are damned but I told you I didn't believe in God." The sacred and the secular continually bleed into one another throughout O'Connor's fiction, so at the beginning of "The Displaced Person" (1954), Mrs. McIntyre, still enamored with Mr. Guizac, exclaims, "That man is my salvation!" (*Collected* 294). In "The Enduring Chill" (1958), as Asbury lies on his deathbed, or so he thinks, he realizes, "He had failed his god, Art, but he had been a faithful servant

and Art was sending him Death. He had seen this from the first with a kind of mystical clarity" (*Collected* 563-64). That night, he has a dream: "The moon came up and Asbury was aware of a presence bending over him and a gentle warmth on his cold face. He knew that this was Art come to wake him and he sat up and opened his eyes" (564). And, finally, in "The Lame Shall Enter First" (1962), twice Sheppard tells Rufus Johnson, "I'm going to save you" (*Collected* 624). At the story's end, however, when the police come to take Rufus away for the final time, Sheppard's focus shifts: "He came down one step and fixed his eyes on Johnson's eyes in a last desperate effort to save himself" (631). And then in the penultimate paragraph, Sheppard's focus shifts yet again when he thinks of his son, Norton: "The little boy's face appeared to him transformed; the image of his salvation; all light" (632). If mid-twentieth-century America talked about the psychoanalyst as a "priest in a confessional of science," a "secular priest," a "scientific soul surgeon," so too do O'Connor's stories and characters continually conflate secular concerns with the language of religion—salvation, faith, servant, and mystery—and O'Connor meant to draw attention to the ramifications of this conflation.

We know, however, that Jung represented a greater danger for O'Connor because, unlike Freud, he readily embraced what she saw as "religious substitutes for religion." We find Hulga chasing these religious substitutes throughout the story. She does not just talk about the secular in the language of the religious; she pursues the secular as a form of religion. So Hulga tells us her intellect stands as her "salvation," but her body undercuts this claim and identifies her true object of worship, her wooden leg. Normally, Hulga maintains a detached, expressionless exterior, but at points in the story she blushes—her body responds to events in a way that belies her much-touted and much-loved intellectual control—and these points have to do with Manley and her leg. When Manley asks Hulga softly, "Where does your wooden leg join on?," the narrator tells us, "She turned an ugly red" (277). Later he whispers to her, "Show me where your wooden leg joins on," and "her face instantly drained of color" (280). Still later, at the story's end, when Manley will not give back her leg, she yells, "Give me my leg!" and "Her face was almost purple" (283). When it comes to her leg, Hulga cannot keep up her cool reason, her face betraying her true feelings by turning red, draining of color, and flushing "almost purple." She "was as sensitive

about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail. No one ever touched it but her. She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private and almost with her own eyes turned away" (281). To liken Hulga's feelings about her leg to a peacock's sensitivity regarding his tail, I suggest, extends O'Connor's frequent association of the peacock's tail with the mystery of Christ. Hulga loudly touts her atheism and her intellect, but she has her own form of worship that centers on her wooden leg—her body reacts to any encroachment on the sacred space of this leg, and, like a pilgrim before an idol, she must turn her eyes away when in its presence.

The pathetic nature of these religious surrogates reveals itself when Hulga, in an instant, discards them when she believes she has found her true salvation, Manley Pointer. The story climaxes in the barn loft when Manley asks Hulga to remove her leg, and she agrees:

She decided that for the first time in her life she was face to face with real innocence. This boy, with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom, had touched the truth about her. When after a minute, she said in a hoarse high voice, "All right," it was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his. (281)

Both Coles and Louise Westling read this scene as a parody of a Christian conversion, but we can read it as a parody of a secular conversion, the very sort of conversion we see in Jung's Terry lectures (Coles, *Flannery* 140; Westling 152). Late in her life, O'Connor stated, "Those who have no absolute values cannot let the relative remain merely relative; they are always raising it to the level of the absolute" (*Mystery* 178). The scene in the barn's loft, depending on how one reads it, could depict the absolute or the relative with equal ease: it sounds redolent of Augustine's moment in the garden when he converts to Christianity, and it echoes the moment in a cheap Harlequin romance when the protagonist decides she will have sex for the first time. We see this concern with the fusion of the relative and absolute in a seemingly quirky detail from O'Connor's postscript to a March 1963 letter: "Have you read about the lady in Texas who is having a chapel built in the shape of John Glenn's capsule?" (*Habit* 511). Hulga and this lady in Texas raise the relative (Manley Pointer, John Glenn) to the absolute; they surrender to them completely and build them chapels. For Hulga, at least, her confusion between the

relative and absolute proves disastrous and dooms her secular conversion experience to failure.

The story implies that what Manley does with Hulga in the barn loft goes beyond simple sadistic pleasure; for him it approaches a religious ritual. When he opens his Bible, we discover that he has hollowed it out to make room for a flask of whiskey, a pack of playing cards with obscene pictures, and a box of condoms. He literally has hollowed out one religion to make room for another: "He laid these out in front of her one at a time in an evenly-spaced row, like one presenting offerings at the shrine of a goddess" (282). That Manley presents this array like offerings before a goddess places him in a pre-Christian pagan religion. If at times Hulga looks like a displaced Calvinist who sees herself as saved, as one of the Elect, and others as the damned, here Manley resembles a displaced pagan, carefully laying out "gifts" before his goddess.

The fact that Manley has his own religious replacements does not keep him from destroying Hulga's. Throughout the story, he consciously or unconsciously strips away each of the items in which Hulga places her faith. John Gatta sees Manley as "the devil doing God's work" (7). Whether or not he does God's work, he certainly does O'Connor's work of skewering the positions of Freud and Jung. If Hulga loudly declares her atheism, Manley outdoes her. At the story's end he tells her, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born" (283). If Hulga shows that she puts all of her faith in her intellect, Manley out-smarts her. Hulga believes her intellect allows her to "see through" everything around her, but Manley shows her she cannot even see through his flimsy act of a country bumpkin. If Hulga worships her leg, he takes her leg. Finally, she places her faith in this innocent boy "with an instinct from beyond wisdom," and Manley takes away that surrogate also when he reveals his true nature: "Without the leg she felt entirely dependent on him" (282). Manley leaves Hulga completely dependent, shorn of each of the entities in which she deposits her belief.

As to what happens after this moment in the loft, critics divide evenly. Brian Abel Ragen suggests that this moment represents an offer of grace, "a call to conversion" (xviii). Scholars divide, however, on whether Hulga accepts that call. Some believe that Manley's violation of Hulga represents a new beginning for our protagonist; others, like Frederick Asals, chastise those very critics for their need to impose a

“cheerful” ending on the story (85). What the story’s ending does make clear is that Hulga’s atheism and her knowing and unknowing recourse to religious stand-ins—the very qualities O’Connor feared in Freud and Jung—must be stripped away before there exists a possibility of her changing. In a December 1959 letter, O’Connor told John Hawkes:

More than in the Devil I am interested in the indication of Grace, the moment when you know that Grace has been offered and accepted—such as the moment when the Grandmother realizes the Misfit is one of her own children. These moments are prepared for (by me anyway) by the intensity of the evil circumstances. (*Habit* 367-68)

Two years later, in January 1961, O’Connor started a letter to Betty Hester, “I don’t know if anybody can be converted without seeing themselves in a kind of blasting annihilating light, a blast that will last a lifetime” (*Habit* 427). Certainly what takes place in the barn loft represents “evil circumstances”—the hollowed-out Bible, the condoms, the whiskey, a man preying on vulnerable women and stealing their body parts for his own pleasure—and these circumstances prepare Hulga for a possible conversion. *Conversion* comes from the Latin *convertere*, “to turn around.” The grace offered Hulga is a chance to turn around from the spirit of 1950s America, as embodied in Freud and Jung, and turn toward the truth O’Connor found in the Church.

“Good Country People”’s critique of ersatz religions exists in O’Connor’s early, mid, and late work. In *Wise Blood* (1952), Enoch Emery believes that the shrunken man from the museum represents “the new jesus” (*Collected* 98). Just as Hulga must take care of her leg with her eyes turned away, so too Enoch takes the shrunken man out of the sack, “hardly daring to look at him” (98). As we have seen, in “Good Country People” Hulga worships her intellect, her leg, and eventually “the boy, with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom.” And finally, in “A Partridge Festival” (1961), we meet the mass murderer Singleton, whom Mary Elizabeth sees as a “Christ-figure” and Calhoun believes will be his “salvation” (787, 789). In each case, these substitutes prove to be pathetic and even comic. When Enoch gets the new jesus home, he places him in an improvised shrine and sits before him awaiting his life-changing transformation: “He pictured himself, after it was over, as an entirely new man, with an even better personality than he had now” (98). By this point Enoch has shown himself to have no personality, so

his belief that his stolen mummified man will change this fact comes across as both funny and sad. When we last see the shrunken man, “One side of his face had been partly mashed in and on the other side, his eyelid had split and a pale dust was seeping out of it” (104). Rather than evoking awe and a sense of mystery, this religious substitute evokes disgust. Manley Pointer turns out not to be a boy who embodies real innocence but rather a creepy, sinister man who gets erotic pleasure from stealing women’s prosthetic devices, and Singleton ends his “holy” encounter with Mary Elizabeth by making lewd suggestions to her and jumping on the table to expose himself, literally and figuratively.

Coles first noted O’Connor’s thoughts about Freud and Jung in *Flannery O’Connor’s South* (1980), but he spends only three paragraphs discussing her position in regard to these two men (152). However, O’Connor’s interaction with these two writers deserves much more than three paragraphs because Freud and Jung haunt her letters and embody concerns that run throughout her fiction. In July 1957, O’Connor wrote to Betty Hester, “You have to push as hard as the age that pushes against you” (*Habit* 229). If in *The Future of an Illusion* Freud argues that religion stands as an illusion while psychoanalysis represents the truth, O’Connor pushes back using Freud’s own language. At the beginning of “The Enduring Chill,” Asbury’s Buddhist friend, Goetz, tries to convince Asbury that he should “see it all as illusion,” and Hulga believes with her intellect that “I don’t have illusions” (*Collected* 549, 280). Both Asbury and Hulga chase what O’Connor sees as illusory idols, and both characters end by having their illusions peeled away and revealed to them.

O’Connor pushes back against Freud and Jung in her stories as well as in her letters. In January 1961 O’Connor wrote to Betty Hester and related the story of

This girl . . . who shows up here from time to time, was a seminarian at Union in New York and quite snarled up in the emotions, etc. When the psychiatrist got through with her, her emotions flowed magnificently and she believes nothing and herself is her God. . . . She is charming and very generous but headed for some major crack-up if she doesn’t somehow get back some of what she lost in the psychiatrist’s office. (*Habit* 427)

The description of “this girl” could be a description of Hulga: she believes in nothing and her intellect stands as her god. Hulga too appears headed for a crack-up at the story’s end if she cannot get back what she

lost, not in a psychiatrist's office, but in a professor's classroom. Later, in December 1961, O'Connor seemed to direct her critique of "this girl" to Betty Hester herself; she wrote to Hester, "Right now you are confusing a personal psychological revolution with the eternal truth" (*Habit* 457). Her critique of Hester approximates her critique of Jung: one can imagine that O'Connor would accuse Jung of confusing his client's personal psychological revolution with the eternal truth, of raising the relative of the analysand's therapeutic experience to the absolute of religion.

O'Connor willingly granted Freud and Jung their place and uses, but she always pulled back, always had a "but." In "Novelist and Believer" (1963), O'Connor declares, "Freud brought to light many truths, but his psychology is not an adequate instrument for understanding the religious encounter or the fiction that describes it" (*Mystery* 165). She used a similar formulation when discussing Jung in a March 1960 letter to Ted Spivey: "The kind of 'belief' that Jung offers the modern, sick, unbelieving world is simply belief in the psychic realities that are good for it. This is good medicine and a step in the right direction but it is not religion" (*Habit* 382). That O'Connor needed to clarify that Jung's theories do not constitute religion points to the issue for her: she worried that Americans were taking up Jung and Freud and psychotherapy as just that, a religion. In "The Church and the Fiction Writer" (1957), O'Connor, regarding the modern world, describes "part of it trying to eliminate mystery while another part tries to rediscover it in disciplines less personally demanding than religion" (*Mystery* 145). One could read this as a direct reference to Freud and Jung—Freud trying to eliminate mystery and Jung trying to rediscover it in disciplines less personally demanding than religion. O'Connor believed that what the Catholic "sees at all times is fallen man perverted by false philosophies" (*Mystery* 177) and, therefore, as a Catholic writer, O'Connor saw her task, like that of the biblical prophets she continually invokes in her writing, as calling her reader and culture away from these false philosophies and back to forgotten truths. Manley Pointer inadvertently calls Hulga back from "false philosophies"—she has a doctorate in philosophy—and, true to his name, points her to forgotten truths. Twice in her lectures and interviews, O'Connor stated that the South has "a sense of the absolute . . . a sense of Moses' face as he pulverized the idols" (*Conversations* 109; see also *Mystery* 59). Whether this statement holds true of the South in

general, it certainly holds true for O'Connor: when she wrote, in her mind she saw Moses as he came off of Mount Sinai to find his people worshipping the golden calf. Like Moses, she wanted to pulverize the idols and call her people back from worshipping other gods. For O'Connor, in America, circa 1955, Freud and Jung represented two such gods.

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