

Mystery and Meaning in “The Enduring Chill” by Flannery O’Connor

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the theme of mystery and meaning in the short story “The Enduring Chill” by Flannery O’Connor according to the principles the author lived and wrote by. These are well expressed in a collection of her essays (Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose. Eds. S. & R. Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux). As a twentieth century American writer of the South, and a Christian, O’Connor used the genre of grotesque literature in a unique manner imbuing, especially in “The Enduring Chill,” the literal meaning of mystery with religious significance. The story probes the main character’s physical and spiritual health, establishing the author’s intention to associate body and soul in a diagnosis of his illness.

Key Words: Flannery O’Connor, “The Enduring Chill,” grotesque literature, mystery, Asbury, Holy Ghost, revelation, grace.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the theme of mystery and meaning in “The Enduring Chill” by Flannery O’Connor according to the principles the author lived and wrote by.

1. Grotesque Literature and Mystery

The short-lived Flannery O’Connor (1925–1964), American writer of the South, is associated with the genre of grotesque literature. In her essay, “Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction,” she wants the reader to “consider the kind of fiction that may be called grotesque with good reason, because of a directed intention that way on the part of the author” (O’Connor, 1961e, p. 40). She continues:

[I]f the writer believes that our life is and will remain mysterious, if he looks upon us as beings existing in a created order to whose laws we freely respond, then what he sees on the surface will be of interest to him only as he can go through it into an experience of mystery itself. His kind of fiction will always be pushing its own limits outward toward the limits of mystery because for this kind of writer the meaning of a story does not begin except at a depth where adequate motivation and adequate psychology and the various determinations have been exhausted. Such a writer will be interested in what we do not understand rather than in what we do. He will be interested in possibility rather than in probability...and in characters who are forced out to meet evil and grace and who act on a trust beyond themselves—whether they know very clearly what it is they act upon or not. (O’Connor, 1961e, pp. 41–42)

O’Connor further elucidates her sense of mystery in fiction in her essay, “The Fiction Writer & His Country,” where she candidly affirms:

In the greatest fiction, the writer’s moral sense coincides with his dramatic sense, and I see no way for it to do this unless his moral judgment is part of the very art of seeing, and he is free to use it. I have heard it said that belief in Christian dogma is a hindrance to the writer, but I myself have found nothing further from the truth. Actually, it frees the storyteller to observe. It is not a set of rules which fixes what he sees in the world. It affects his writing primarily by guaranteeing his respect for mystery. (O’Connor, 1961c, p. 31)

As a Christian writer, her moral sense does coincide with the dramatic and many of her stories include aspects of drama related to an investigative logical process. The logic or reason O’Connor uses is related to her moral sense. She admits in a letter to frequent correspondent, “A.,” now known to be Betty Hester, an early influence by Edgar

Allan Poe [often referred to as the Father of Detective Fiction], whose *The Humorous Tales of E.A. Poe* were to her “mighty humorous”(28 August 55; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 98). Her brief accounts of the themes of some of the tales indicate their impression upon her and of grotesque elements, which can be related to her own stories. Certain anthologies have recognized her stories of grotesque mystery. *The Best American Mystery Stories of the Century* lists “The Comforts of Home” (Hillerman & Penzler) as does *Crime Classics: The Mystery Story from Poe to the Present* (Burns & Sullivan). *The New Mystery: The International Association of Crime Writers Essential Crime Writing of the Late 20th Century* lists “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (Mosley).

1.1 “The Enduring Chill”

1.1.1 Theme and Setting.

“The Enduring Chill” is a unique dramatic manifestation of a mystery with clues and a surprising conclusion. O’Connor struggled with its elements of mystery to render it to her satisfaction as a moral dramatist. “The Enduring Chill” is the fourth story in the second collection of stories by Flannery O’Connor, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, published posthumously in 1965, one year after the death of this talented southern writer at the young age of 39 from the debilitating complications of the disease lupus erythematosus. As is found in “The Comforts of Home” and “Everything That Rises Must Converge,”ⁱ “The Enduring Chill” expresses the tension in parent–child relationships, in this case, between the 25 year old protagonist Asbury Porter Fox and his 60 year old mother. The story also probes the mystery of what is causing the pain and misery in Asbury’s affliction in body and spirit. The crime in this tale of woe is what Asbury is doing to himself—a self–inflicted wounding of soul, which affects the body it inhabits.

The town to which the ailing Asbury returns in order to die is aptly named Timberboro,ⁱⁱ a setting introduced with the words, “The sky was a chill gray and a startling white–gold sun, like some strange potentate from the east, was rising beyond the black woods that surrounded Timberboro” (O’Connor, 1988d, p. 547). Asbury is now a part of the woods’ enclosure, a being wooden in the appraisal of his condition and in his resignation to what he believes is the nothingness of what is to come.

1.1.2 Main Character: Asbury.

O’Connor prepares the reader early in the story for the expected appraisal of Asbury—brash, insensitive, and quarrelsome. His mother Mrs. Fox picks him up at the railroad station with her daughter Mary George, the 33 year old principal of the country elementary school, who at this time is attired in a black suit and a white rag unsuccessfully hiding metal curlers. She is asleep in the back seat of the car. Mrs. Fox, seeing her son, with his bloodshot left eye, puffy and pale, and with a receding red hairline, is aghast and consequently solicitous as she suggests he remove his coat. His loud and rude response is “You don’t have to tell me what the temperature is! . . . I’m old enough to know when I want to take my coat off!”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 547).

Believing he has been terminally ill for four months and suffering penury from having lost his part–time job in the bookstore, from too many absences, Asbury has come home to die and refuses to see the local Doctor Block about his condition. Mrs. Fox thinks he has returned to suffer a nervous breakdown and his sister, who awakens at the end of the drive home, sees that indeed he has something the matter with him: “He looks a hundred years old”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 553).

His New York friend Goetz, “certain that death was nothing at all,” has taken “the news of Asbury’s approaching end with a calm indifference”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 549). Jesuit friend of Goetz, Father Ignatius Vogle, S.J., has listened politely as Asbury discusses his approaching death. When Asbury asks the cleric about his reaction to Goetz’s comment, “Salvation is the destruction of a simple prejudice, and no one is saved,” the priest responds, “There is. . . a real probability of the New Man, assisted, of course. . . by the Third Person of the Trinity”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 550). The comment of the Jesuit, whose name relates to the German word for bird (*vogel*), may refer to Paul’s injunction to the Ephesians: “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man” (Eph. 4:23–24 King James Version) or it may reflect O’Connor’s interest in the writings of the Jesuit

paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin.ⁱⁱⁱIn either case, Asbury does need renewal of the spirit through the Holy Ghost. His attitude toward life, what little remains of it, in his estimation, is severe depression, often a prelude to self-inflicted damage to one's body.

When Mrs. Fox persists in Asbury's seeing Doctor Block who, she argues, unlike New York doctors, would have a personal interest in him, Asbury recalls Father Vogle, "a man of the world, someone who would have understood the unique tragedy of his death"(O'Connor, 1988d, p. 550). The remembrance indicates to the reader that Asbury is concerned with the questions of salvation and with the meaning of his death. The significance of Vogle's reference to the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, temporarily eludes Asbury but suggests to the reader its relationship to the sickness he suffers in the soul—as oppressive as the disease he thinks afflicts his body.

Recalling his proclaimed interest, last year on a visit home, in writing a play about the Negroes, Mrs. Fox asks about the project and Asbury reproaches her with the words, "I am not writing plays....And get this through your head: I am not working in any dairy. I am not getting out in the sunshine. I'm ill. I have fever and chills and I'm dizzy and all I want you to do is leave me alone"(O'Connor, 1988d, p. 551). This condescending attitude toward his mother extends to his sister who has downgraded his artistic talent and whom he views as of low IQ and unattractive. Asbury also considers the death of his father, "one of the courthouse gang, a rural worthy with a dirty finger in every pie," twenty years before, "a great blessing" because of the stupidity of his correspondence (O'Connor, 1988d, p. 554).

Asbury intends to inform his mother via a letter in two notebooks, written in New York, that he has forgiven her for pinioning him—for repressing his ability to imagine, to have talent, to create, in a sense, for killing his soul. He compares his going to New York as an escape to liberate his imagination, "like a hawk from its cage," but it was "incapable of flight. It was some bird you had domesticated, sitting huffy in its pen, refusing to come out!"^{iv}Asbury thinks it "was not that she ever forced her way on him. That had never been necessary. Her way had been the air he breathed and when at last he found other air, he couldn't survive in it." He wants the long letter he has written to his mother to "leave her with an enduring chill and perhaps in time to lead her to see herself as she was"(O'Connor, 1988d, p. 554). It is obvious to the reader at this point that Asbury has little or no respect for familial relationships. He is obsessed with his forthcoming demise and blames others rather than himself for a fruitless existence, which he equates with the frustration of a flightless bird.

1.1.3 Asbury's Image.

Asbury's image of himself as less than a human being, as of a lower life form but with the majesty and predatory nature of a hawk reveals the confusion of an understanding of who he is.^vThe vague expression of what his mother has done to Asbury is consistent with his unsubstantiated reasons for denigrating his sister and his deceased father. He believes she has stifled him in the development of his talent, but does not give reasons why. He cannot see clearly nor think rationally that even away from the farm, he has not been creative. He sees not the flaw in himself but in the one who has given him life. He refuses to see himself as *he* is; to escape such revelation he exaggerates his illness to a terminal one. This is a kind of suicide for Asbury—a release from the world in which he believes he cannot function—and a crime against himself. His thoughts are akin to those of Goetz but still there is lurking in his mind the consideration of salvation suggested by the priest Vogle in the image of the Holy Ghost. The cleric has planted a seed or rather left a clue for solving the mystery of Asbury's place in the world—becoming a New Man, but Asbury chooses the confines of his room to be his present terminal universe.

Solicitous of her son, Mrs. Fox tries to reassure Asbury about this return home, suggesting he write plays in the mornings and help in the dairy in the afternoons. His response is his turning to her with "a white wooden face" and saying "Close the blinds and let me sleep"(O'Connor, 1988d, p. 555). This image of Asbury bears out well what he has become—a piece of timber in Timberboro, lifeless and unwilling to see a future for himself, not even in what he believes is little remaining time for the substance of his being.

1.1.4 Asbury's Room.

Asbury's room has water stains on the gray wall and ceiling: "[L]ong icicle shapes had been etched by leaks and, directly over his head on the ceiling, another leak had made a fierce bird with spread wings. It had an icicle crosswise in its beak and there were smaller icicles depending from its wings and tail"(O'Connor,1988d, p. 555).This image, present since childhood, has irritated and sometimes frightened Asbury. Its illusion as often being in motion in a mysterious descent is the product of a creative imagination and perhaps more—the desire to be overwhelmed with its embrace. It is the coldness and emptiness of the spirit of Asbury that do not enable his making the connection between the bird image on the ceiling of his room and the one suggested by Vogle, the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, who on Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Church, descended upon Christ's Apostles to fire them with the zeal to continue the work of the Lord on earth, for Christ had ascended to His heavenly Father. Instead of taking inspiration from the Jesuit's remarks, Asbury prefers to bask in the enduring chill he wishes upon his mother.

According to Richard Giannone,

The bird-shaped stain watches over Asbury. Its presence suggests that flesh destined to decay could be transformed into something free and new, something like the accidental spoiled smudges posed for flight into the eternal. Sick in the Georgia desert, Asbury has before and above him the sheltering Spirit of God. This bird and room are all he needs to get well.(2000, p. 241)

However, at this point of self-confinement in what Giannone calls his "Georgia desert," Asbury seems ready for death and not for "something free and new."

1.1.5 Asbury's Relationship with Others.

The condescension of Asbury toward his family extends to Doctor Block when the physician attempts to diagnose his mysterious condition by drawing blood. Asbury denigrates him for his lack of intelligence. To both the doctor and his mother, he announces separately, "What's wrong with me is way beyond you"(O'Connor, 1988d, p. 557). Ironically, his condition is way beyond him. While he worsens, Asbury finds he is mentally acute and recalls how he tried last year in the interest of his project to develop a sense of community with the two Negroes, Morgan and Randall, who work in his mother's dairy. He got them to smoke with him but couldn't get them to drink milk with him, even though he poured the milk and drank from their jelly glass. He despised milk and tried for days to have them join him in the drinking of it but their responses were, "I ain't drinking noner that" and, referring to his mother, "She don't 'low it"(O'Connor, 1988d, pp. 559, 560). Apparently, their employer's mandate and perhaps their common sense accounted for refusal.

Since Asbury is not willing to write a book or just poems, Mrs. Fox suggests someone intellectual to talk to like Dr. Bush, the retired Methodist minister, but Asbury wants to "talk to a man of culture before he die[s]" and asks that she summon a Jesuit priest to his bedside. The warm impression Father Vogle has made on him contrasts with the enduring chill he has wished upon his mother. With no diagnosis from Doctor Block and Asbury's worsening condition, including a new chill, Mrs. Fox in desperation calls a priest to see her ill and mentally wrought son. Subsequently Asbury overhears his mother and sister conversing about his condition. Mary George thinks he is psychosomatically ill telling her mother, "You've got to face the facts: Asbury can't write so he gets sick. He's going to be an invalid instead of an artist (O'Connor, 1988d, p. 563). While she believes he needs two or three shock treatments, Asbury believes he has failed his god, Art, who is sending him Death. Christina Bieber Lake views Asbury as O'Connor's "philosophical idealism's most monstrous creation: the disembodied modern artist who worships art as his god, . . . O'Connor clearly connects Asbury Fox's spiritual problems to his artistic failings" (2005, p. 184).^{vi}Had he devoted himself to some exercise of his talents, his torpor might be not only spiritual but also physical. Asbury subsequently dreams of his sister and mother's indifference at his funeral procession with an ascetic—and corrupt—faced priest who follows his bier and after Asbury is laid in a shallow grave, who retires beneath a dead tree to smoke and meditate. The warm presence of Art awakens Asbury.

The Jesuit has disappeared and one large white spotted cow among many cows “softly licks his head as if it were a block of salt”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 564). The imagery in the dream relates to Asbury’s belief in his imminent death and its lack of effect on the people who know him.

His awaking to life by Art and the ministrations of a milk-generating animal suggest his desire for continuing life. However, his head’s being like a block of salt, a symbol of wisdom,^{vii} does not describe Asbury, hardly wise in thoughts, words, or actions. Consistent with his sense of failure, Asbury is resigned to dying soon.

“Father Finn—from Purgatory” arrives the next day—ignorant of James Joyce—and questioning Asbury about purity and enjoining him to “pray to the Holy Ghost for it. Mind, heart, and body”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 565). The priest quizzes Asbury and answers himself, in catechism fashion, articles of faith,^{viii} emphasizing the importance of the coming of the Holy Ghost, to which Asbury reacts with the blasphemous words, “[T]he Holy Ghost is the last thing I’m looking for!”, but the priest counters with “And He may be the last thing you get. . . . Do you want to suffer the pain of loss for all eternity?” The priest roars, ““The Holy Ghost will not come until *you see yourself as you are*—a lazy ignorant conceited youth’ . . . pounding his fist on the little bedside table” (my italics). In response, Mrs. Fox chastises Father Finn with the words: “How dare you talk that way to a poor sick boy? You’re upsetting him. You’ll have to go.” The priest rises and in turn castigates Mrs. Fox for having neglected her duty as a mother and then amiably blesses Asbury and says, within earshot of Asbury, “He’s a good lad at heart but very ignorant”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 567).

The next day Asbury is convinced of his approaching end and feels “as if he were a shell that had to be filled with something but he did not know what”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 568). This something, is, of course, the spirit or soul of self, which, in his self-pitying attitude much of his life, he has not nourished. He observes things outside of himself and searches for “some last significant culminating experience”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 568). He has little within himself that he can rally forth to face what he considers inevitable and soon. He remembers when he was five, his thirteen year old sister promised him a present, in a large tent of people; Mary George later identified the present as Salvation which he refused by running away from the preacher to whom she was introducing him, after she declared, “I’m already saved but you can save him. He’s a real stinker and too big for his britches”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 568). That he should recall the incident so soon after Father Finn’s catechism lesson and chastisement of him and his mother suggests he is starting to understand, to have the beginnings of a revelation that could be a significant experience.

As a final meaningful action, he seeks communion with the Negro dairy workers and he asks his mother to summon them for a good-bye. He intends to smoke with them for the last time. He prepares “himself for the encounter as a religious man might prepare himself for the last sacrament”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 569). This desired communion with Randall and Morgan repeats the ritual of the previous visit, which was a sharing of the substance of tobacco with the substance of milk—a seeming parody of the Eucharistic species—which they refused. This occasion does not include the offering of milk, an omission that is interesting because of Asbury’s dream of the white spotted cow, which “softly licks his head as if it were a block of salt”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 564). Although Asbury is a Christian and possibly initiated in baptism with salt, a symbol of wisdom, on his tongue, his head does not hold much wisdom and therefore it is ironic that he omits the sharing of milk with Randall and Morgan because it is eventually revealed that unpasteurized milk is definitely not good drink for him or for anyone! When the Negroes arrive, they aver too much about how fine he looks. Because he forgets to shake from the package of cigarettes those intended for their communal smoke, Randall takes the package. Seeing how sullen Morgan is, Asbury fumblingly takes another package, unopened, from the drawer of the table and hands it to the appreciative Negro. Irritated and awkward with the exchange between the Negroes which follows, Asbury calls upon his mother to rid him of their presence. With his head spinning, “[h]e knew now there would be no significant experience before he died”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 570). After a few hours of heavy sleep, he awakens to his mother’s presence and hands to her the key to the desk holding the letter of castigation he has written to her, but she lays it aside and he drops off to sleep again. He awakens an hour later to the sound of Block’s car and lies “absolutely motionless, as still as an animal the instant before an earthquake”(O’Connor, 1988d, p. 571), an appropriate simile for an instinctive response in his reduced state of being.

He is as sly as a fox in this inactive state but not clever enough to hope for an escape to life instead of a succumbing to death. Death would be as catastrophic as an earthquake, which annihilates all in its activity, but Asbury is to experience a surprising revelation that spells not annihilation but preservation—and possibly salvation.

1.1.6 The Revelation.

At her son's bedside, Mrs. Fox announces the good news—the solution to the mystery of Asbury's health condition. She commends Doctor Block for his brains, "I think you're just as smart as you can be!" and with relief tells Asbury, "[Y]ou have undulant fever. It'll keep coming back but it won't kill you!" Doctor Block satisfyingly says, "You ain't going to die"(O'Connor, 1988d, p. 571). Asbury's low moan and quiet cause his mother to say softly, "He must have drunk some unpasteurized milk up there" (meaning New York).Mrs. Fox's conjecture must have reduced Asbury to either one of two states: disappointment for not achieving what he strived so hard for—a proper preparation for his death or humility for the beginning of his revelation. With Asbury the reader makes the connection of his physical illness not to an experience in New York but to the communion he wished to experience with the Negroes on his visit last year. Only *he* took of the cup and drank while they refused for the good reason of obeying his mother and perhaps the good sense of realizing drinking raw milk is not a healthy thing to do.

The story ends with the significant images meant to typify and redeem Asbury's life. When he looks at the mirror, he sees his eyes paler and "shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him." Here, after the revelation about the actual condition of his body, is a clue to a revelation of soul, the mystery of grace he can accept or reject. At last, Asbury is truly beginning to see and to know that he is going to experience—not a culmination but a beginning. When he stares out of the window, "A blinding red-god sun moved serenely from under a purple cloud. Below it the treeline was black against the crimson sky. It formed a brittle wall, standing as if it were the frail defense he had set up in his mind to protect him from what was coming."The Holy Ghost descends upon him, terrorizing and purifying him at the same time, "emblazoned in ice instead of fire"(O'Connor, 1988d, p. 572) and with a chill more enduring than the physical one that marked his condition and what he wished upon his mother. Perhaps as Ralph Wood opines, "Asbury enters the purgatorial life that has the power to cleanse all his unrighteousness . . . as the Holy Ghost descends on him not as a dove carrying the olive branch of peace but as a fierce bird bearing the icicle of judgment in its beak" (2004, p. 116). Indeed the mystery of revelation is often a chilling fiery encounter with the saving grace of God, which one can accept or reject.

1.1.7 Revelation related to mystery.

This mystery of revelation is related to O'Connor's pursuit of the mystery of grace in her own writing. A study of the history and development of "The Enduring Chill" indicates the importance of developing this sense of mystery in her stories. According to Stephen G. Driggers, Robert J. Dunn, and Sarah Gordon, the final copy of its publication in the July 1958 issue in *Harper's Bazaar* differs significantly from its early drafts in which the characters of New York friend Goetz and the priests are not present. Asbury recognizes his illness as "personal, psychomatic," as well as a "cosmic element. The meaninglessness of life had entered his frame and was devouring him. The personal form it took was his desire to create without the power." The image on the ceiling of Asbury's room is "a kind of bird with spread wings and an icicle in its beak, or perhaps it was a winged face poised in flight."Its ambiguity causes Asbury's intimidation "because he could not identify it conclusively."The final paragraph is short and rendered less dramatically in its description of the watermark as "the fierce winged face (Driggers, Dunn, & Gordon, p. 117).

2 Development of "The Enduring Chill"

The changes in the development of the story render its telling as spiritually symbolic. Asbury's encounters with Goetz and Father Vogle allow for foretastes of conflict between the seemingly rational temporal order and the mysterious transcendent order.

Asbury's body and soul become the battleground between the temporal and the spiritual when actually they are one in his being. They are not forces but complementary aspects of his nature, which accounts for the fire in his ire against his mother, sister, and Dr. Block as he experiences an enduring chill. Rather than reconcile the contraries in his understanding—nothingness vs. salvation—he prefers to succumb to the inevitable termination of his existence—now!

In a letter dated 16 November 57, O'Connor admits to "A." her wild pleasure that I have finished the story ["The Enduring Chill"] once through as of today and that when I go over it about three more times, I think I will have done it; another month I guess. Right now I am highly satisfied with all its possibilities and all that's already in it. This can be a delusion. Monday it may appear hopeless to me, but I doubt it. Nobody appreciates my work the way I do. (Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 253).

Four days later, she writes "A." she has torn up the story and is reworking it and considering, "Parts of it are very funny and it contains a memorable Jesuit, but I haven't got it right yet (14 December 57; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 258). Open to criticism, allowing others to share her story, O'Connor reports to "A." that Allen Tate read it to the Cheney^{ix} before Christmas and his good advice was to "get the Holy Ghost in the first page or two." Lon [Brainard] Cheney said the Holy Ghost came too fast and so O'Connor plans to have Asbury realize "the new knowledge that he knows nothing . . . that he is frozen in—humility. Faith can come later." She also plans to develop Asbury further in other stories (28 December 57; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 261). O'Connor continued corrections into January 1958 in sending her literary agent, Elizabeth McKee, corrected sheets of earlier submissions (25 Jan 1958; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 271). On March 15, 1958 she sent Alice Morris, fiction editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, a fresh last page (Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 273).

2.1 O'Connor's Assessment of "The Enduring Chill"

After its publication she admits to friend Maryat Lee, a playwright living in New York, the last paragraph is too long and When I have another collection, I am going to have to do some operating on it before I put it in. The problem was to have the Holy Ghost descend by degrees throughout the story but unrecognized, but at the end recognized, coming down, implacable, with ice instead of fire. I see no reason to limit the Holy Ghost to fire. He's full of surprises. (25 August 58; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 293). She writes Cecil Dawkins, a frequent young teacher correspondent, over a year later that the end of the story still worries her because a recent reader thought Asbury died because "the bird began to move down . . . and Asbury started to move up" (28 January 60; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 372). Years later in response to Dawkins' wanting to adapt "The Enduring Chill" with other O'Connor stories into a full-length play, O'Connor has a question about its use. She is considering incorporating it into a longer piece she is working on [probably *Why Do the Heathen Rage*]^x or rewriting it for her next collection because of her dissatisfaction with it (5 November 63; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 546). A subsequent letter to Dawkins expresses her intention to keep "the situation of the boy coming home thinking he's going to die and . . . the dialogue between him and Fr. Finn" (8 November 63; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 547).

A letter to Elizabeth McKee on May 7, 1964 confirms the story's inclusion in her collection (Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 547) with her follow-up in a letter to Dawkins of her intention to do some rewriting "on that particular story & . . . on a couple of others" (19 May 64; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 579). She informs Robert Giroux^{xi} she is home "a week from the hospital and can work a few hours a day. I've completed one story ["Judgement Day"]. There is considerable rewriting . . . on the one called 'The Enduring Chill'" (28 June 64; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 589). O'Connor's abiding interest in trying to detect a more satisfying rendition of the mystery of grace in the story relates to her respect for mystery and desiring to connect its presence in the temporal order with the spiritual, dramatically and believably. Ever attentive to the near perfection of her craft, her final consideration of the story is in a letter to Harcourt editor, Catharine Carver, "I don't much like it but I am afraid once I get to messing with it, I'll make it worse than it is" (15 July 64; Fitzgerald, 1979, p. 593). Hospitalized with her debilitating illness, O'Connor was no longer intent on solving the mystery of this tale's missing elements. Less than three weeks later, on August 3, 1964, O'Connor experienced her own very real chill of death, which in her case was not enduring because of her acceptance of the mystery of grace in her own brief but rich life.

3 Conclusion

Readers of “The Enduring Chill” probably would not agree with the final assessment the author makes of her work. The story has suspense in the dramatic development of its narrative and certainly meaning beyond the literal in the spiritual sense, which the main character Asbury may or may not accept. “The Enduring Chill” seems to fulfill the writing principles Flannery O’Connor espouses: The writer “will be interested in possibility rather than in probability... and in characters who are forced out to meet evil and grace and who act on a trust beyond themselves—whether they know very clearly what it is they act upon or not (O’Connor, 1961d, pp. 41–42). Asbury is such a character.

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Notes

ⁱ "The Comforts of Home" was first published in 1960 in the *Kenyon Review* and "Everything That Rises Must Converge" a year later in 1961 in *New World Writing*.

ⁱⁱ O'Connor's towns often have significant names. In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," Toombsboro is the town (actually in Georgia approximately twenty-five miles from O'Connor's hometown, Milledgeville, Georgia), visited by the family of the grandmother before the tragedy they experience at the hands of The Misfit.

ⁱⁱⁱ O'Connor read and reviewed many works not only by Teilhard de Chardin but also by his commentators. She concluded her review of *The Divine Milieu* by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin with a tribute to his making the twentieth century Christian fully aware of his religion when seen "in the cosmic light Teilhard has cast upon it" (see O'Connor F., (1961a).

^{iv} The choice of hawk for this simile is revelatory of O'Connor's attempt to communicate to the reader the predatory aspect of the character of Asbury. A more likely caged bird is a dove, but such a creature would relate to the Holy Ghost, disparaged by Asbury.

^v This mystery of self-knowledge is related to the doctrine of hylomorphism evidenced in other works by O'Connor as argued in Andretta (2005).

^{vi} For more information on the shaping by O'Connor of the character of Asbury and other characters according to her understanding of Art, see the study by Lake (2005).

^{vii} According to Andretta (2008), "Before the onset of Christianity, pagan peoples recognized that newborn babes must be initiated to the taste of the wisdom of life and so on the eighth day, salt was placed on

the tip of their tongues" (p. 3). According to Hardon (2000), until 1969, "a small quantity of salt was placed on the tongue of the person to be baptized, with the words 'Receive the salt of wisdom: may it be for you a propitiation into eternal life'" (p. 485).

^{viii} Another priest, Father Flynn in "The Displaced Person," similarly instructs Mrs. McIntyre as she awaits the closing of her life. Contrarily, however, she does not counter the articles of faith as does Asbury but passively accepts their declarations by the priest; see O'Connor (1988d).

^{ix} Allen and Caroline Gordon Tate were longtime literary friends of O'Connor as were also Brainard and Fanny Cheney.

^x *Esquire* 60 (July 1963) published the fragment "Why Do the Heathens Rage" as a work in progress by Flannery O'Connor. See Driggers et al. (1989), pp. 134-135 for the controversy engendered by the word "Heathens" in the title rather than "Heathen" and pp. 135-151 for the synopses of fragments related to the projected novel.

^{xi} Robert Giroux was editor-in-chief of Harcourt, Brace, and Company Publishers until March 31, 1955 when he left to join Farrar, Straus, and Company. Catharine Carver became O'Connor's new editor.