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The Day of the Locust and Wise Blood

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The Novel-to-Film Translatability of Satire in the
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Jason T. McEntee

[West's screenwriting] was junk all the way, but it supplied him with the money to keep on with his writing when nothing else would, the writing that in The Day of the Locust finally turned into an examination of the entire junk world of which he was now at the very center. No American writer got as much out of Hollywood as West; the creation of the curious atmosphere of that book is a triumph. No writer was ever as successful as was West in simultaneously destroying the old romantic myth of Hollywood glamour and replacing it immediately with a brand-new one—the one of sinister decay in blazing sunlight. (Dardis, 162)

It comes as no surprise that the critical work focusing on Nathanael West's The Day of the Locust (1933) and Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood (1952) sheds much light on the motifs satirical and otherwise at work in the novels. However, the film versions of the novels, those by legendary directors John Schlesinger (1969's Midnight Cowboy) and John Huston (1941's The Maltese Falcon), respectively, remain open to investigating how satire works within them. On the one hand, for instance, the popular vein of criticism regarding West and his Hollywood novel seems focused by the Frankfurt school of thought—mostly Adorno, and to a lesser extent, Benjamin (Roberts; Simon; Strycharz). On the other hand, the criticism regarding O'Connor tends to focus on the ambiguities of the novel—some critics, for example, read O'Connor's Wise Blood theme as "the necessity of acknowledging one's spiritual heritage" (Cook, 199).

Yet other critics more accurately have assessed her work as satire. For example, in Fables of Subversion: Satire and the American Novel, 1930–1980, Steven Weisenburger writes: "The tropes of Wise Blood emerged not from common southern idiom, as critics too easily supposed, but from the practices of satire itself" (51). And to extend the definition of satire and how it works in each of these novels and their subsequent film versions, I turn to Leon Guilhamet who in Satire and the Transformation of Genre observes that such people as "Grammarians, poets, rhetoricians, scholars, lawyers, dialecticians, philosophers, theologians, religious, kings and courtiers, popes, cardinals, and bishops" receive a great deal of the satiric focus...
because of their “materialism . . . their love of physical pleasures” (30–31). He writes further: “Now such pleasures can be good if they lead to things of the spirit, but since as practiced [in the satire] they do not, that materialism is a perversion of nature” (31). Yet Guilhamet, who bases his study on Erasmus’s Moriae Encomium, also states: “For society to exist at all there must be a delegation of prestige and influence to organized groups: the church . . . the government, all consist of individuals given more than individual power by the institution to which they belong . . . [this individual] represents one of the stumbling-blocks in society which it is the satirist’s business to clear out” (20).

Moreover, in each of the novels and their subsequent film versions, readers and viewers will take notice of the inevitable, violent sacrifices that occur—a trope recently explored by Weisenburger. He writes: “If anything, the obsession with violence in the postmodern satire has produced overdetermined plots, a structural counterpointing so articulated as to seem an intensely reasoned hysteria” (27). But one will need to take a closer look at these sacrificial tropes at work in both the novels and the films. In Violence and the Sacred, René Girard writes that “the proper functioning of the sacrificial process requires not only the complete separation of the sacrificed victim from those beings for whom the victim is a substitute but also a similarity between both parties . . . If the gap between the victim and the community is allowed to grow too wide, all similarity will be destroyed [but] if there is too much continuity the violence will overflow its channels” (39).

If one extends the above “Girardian” thesis—which I will ultimately flesh out—to include the idea that a satirical work will end with a sacrifice of some sort, then assessing these two satires in their novel-to-film translations becomes a different enterprise. By extending Guilhamet’s interpretation of satire combined with Girard’s work, this essay will examine how these novels translate into film by asking the question: How do the satiric elements, in conjunction with the sacrificial tropes, extend themselves to one’s understanding of both the novels, and more importantly as the focus of this essay, the films they have inspired?

THE CASE OF TOD HACKETT IN THE HOLLYWOOD CESSPOOL

“If you talk about adaptations, Day of the Locust was the most difficult one of all. It was really very tough trying to develop it into a story with characters of flesh and blood and a dramatic thrust to the whole thing. When I saw the first cut of the film, I knew it was going to be controversial, but I was very proud of it—and still am, incidentally. I realized that maybe the casting of Karen Black as Faye was fatal [because of her age—she looks quite old for the part], but I felt that we had a really interesting and extraordinary film which by no means was going to be popular” (Locust director John Schlesinger qtd. in Riley, 107).

When in 1974 John Schlesinger took the directorial reigns in bringing West’s The Day of the Locust to the big screen, admirers of his previous work (including the aforementioned Midnight Cowboy and 1967’s Far from the Madding Crowd) sensed that the novel would fit his tendencies as a filmmaker. Schlesinger had invested himself in stories that would focus on “Lost beings in search of security, love, and self” (Brooker, 12). Day’s Tod Hackett does, to some extent, look for these qualities, yet his status as an aspiring artist who works in an artificial environment
Off" signs underneath the set, whereupon Tod tries to stop the filming to clear the eventual disaster area. It comes as no surprise, too, that since West wrote screenplays from 1936 on, he, as Tom Dardis writes: "got more out of his Hollywood experiences—the schlock side of picture-making—than any of the others [screenwriters such as Faulkner and Huxley] ... the result was The Day of the Locust" (139).

As in the novel, the film set crumbles, swallowing the actors as if they have plunged into a ditch—much like Napoleon’s classic mistake which West describes thus: "[his] not knowing that a deep ditch was hidden at its [the hill’s] foot to trap his heavy cavalry" (134). But more importantly, Schlesinger adds two follow-up scenes that depart from West’s novel. In the first, Tod approaches Claude Estee (Richard A. Dysart) in a barbershop immediately after the set disaster. In the first, Tod approaches Claude Estee (Richard A. Dysart) in a barbershop immediately after the set disaster. Other producers have gathered to discuss the incident, and Claude, in tasteless fashion, states: "I’d say it was the classic mistake Napoleon made at Mont St. Claire." And West, of course, seizes upon this in writing Tod’s inner-voice narrative thus: "It was the classic mistake, Tod realized, the same one Napoleon had made" (134). Tod replies by telling the men that he saw the signs gathered near the set, and that the studio might have responsibility in a legal sense, but the producers manage to wriggle out of this responsibility on a legal technicality. A few scenes later, at Claude’s home, he tells Tod: "Sometimes I wonder what we’re doing here. Grown men making mudpies to sell to the great unwashed." Tod queries: "If someone was killed, would it have made a difference?" to which Claude flatly replies "No."

A second scene that departs from the novel occurs a bit earlier in the film. Tod, Homer (Donald Sutherland), and Faye (Karen Black) all take an infirm Harry (Burgess Meredith, in an Academy Award nominated performance) to a “faith-healer” of sorts—a healing evangelist, replete with neon signs and canned music, reaffirming the “Hollywood as façade” motif evident not only in West’s novel but also in several veins of cultural criticism. The “healer,” a woman in blinding white robes, preaches: “Lord, I’m just a poor woman. But I am yours. I give myself to Thee. Possess me.” She begins healing the members of the congregation—mostly folks who look like, as West writes, the “people who come to California to die ... the pick of America’s madmen and not at all typical of the rest of the land” (118). The “healer” “cures” a wheelchair-bound woman, but Harry’s receiving the “healing hand” barely improves his condition. He tries to stand, stumbles, falls, and, ultimately, sweaty and strained, gains the strength to stand. Schlesinger, to add depth to the scene, keeps in the background a blue-neon-lit crucifix that reads: “Give to Jesus” (“give” meaning money, my emphasis). Schlesinger, by adding these two scenes, actually builds upon the satiric elements in West’s story by focusing on what Guilhamet labels the "materialism ... [an effect of] their love of physical pleasures." Hence, the message of the artificial environment—the artificial institutions (film sets and “churches”) existing within the artificial institution Hollywood—becomes clear. And one might ultimately reason that, in both of these “departing” scenes, Schlesinger has the intelligence to realize that translating an acclaimed novel into a film version does not necessarily mean the director (and by extension, the writers, etc.) must compromise the novel’s integrity. For one example, Schlesinger in painstakingly slow fashion emphasizes Homer’s “busy” hands making a “church and steeple,” in large part paying homage to West’s description of him: “His big hands left his lap, where they had been playing ‘here’s
enables one to see him search for warped visions of “security” (his Hollywood job), “love” (Faye Greener), and “self” (his ultimate disillusionment with his life). Certainly, when the novel concludes with Tod laughing hysterically, howling like the ambulance siren, readers have little sense of a restored order—of, perhaps, an intended “normative” satire that will: “take a moral stand, make a judgment, and place or distribute blame” (qtd. in Weisenburger, 21).

Interestingly, too, one can extend Guilhamet’s satire criteria to include such people as those folks who work in what Adorno so distrustingly labeled “the culture industry”—in large part, those people at work in Hollywood as producers, directors, actors, and, yes, even production-sketch artists like Tod Hackett. Indeed, the critical consensus on West’s novel concurs that Hollywood—as an institution—receives the brunt of West’s satire. Further, critics of Hollywood (again, Adorno) have few reservations as to the negative influence of Hollywood’s film products, prompting one to question the degree of (self-given?) prestige the institution maintains.

Critics, too, swiftly flocked to Schlesinger’s film, yet not without a sense of disarray regarding what, exactly, Schlesinger attempted to reveal about West’s novel, if he attempted to reveal anything at all. In “That’s Wormwood: The Day of the Locust,” Edward T. Jones writes that (before giving the film a negative critique): “So much of West’s novel is funny, particularly the audacious and exuberant descriptions of clothes and architecture, yet these egregious parodies of taste do not quite get translated in the same tone into the film” (223). Conversely, in her essay “‘Human Need’ in The Day of the Locust: Problems of Adaptation,” Joanna E. Rapf comments that one of the problems of Schlesinger’s film occurs in “the fact that although it is a satiric novel, it is not a comic, and the world of external action, of comedy, is inherently more adaptable than the inner world of West’s ‘sadness’” (30).

To untangle the satire at work in West’s novel, one might look at key scenes of Tod at work in Hollywood. For example, Tod works on film sets at “National Films,” themselves a “plastic,” sterile representation of an artificial world. But these sets will ultimately represent an artificial reality. Conversely, that Tod strives to complete his “The Burning of Los Angeles” painting reinforces the idea that he wishes to create Art in an artificial environment. One has to believe that author Nathanael West experienced these same feelings as a serious author working in the “culture industry.”

These ideas, then, lead one to the very heart of the simulacrum, for what does one ultimately make of the Waterloo sets based upon Tod’s production paintings? For example, the set disaster in the novel reveals one of West’s satiric looks at Hollywood. West writes: “Mont St. Jean was unfinished. The paint was not yet dry and all the struts were not in place. Because of the thickness of the cannon smoke, he had failed to see that the hill was still being worked on by property men, grips and carpenters” (134). And of course, the sets crumble, leading to much mayhem—hurt actors and destroyed studio property—that West sums up thus: “Waterloo instead of being the end of the Grand Army, resulted in a draw. Neither side won, and it would have to be fought over again the next day. Big losses, however, were sustained by the insurance company in workmen’s compensation” (134).

Schlesinger pushes the satiric look at Hollywood as dilapidating institution even further by having Tod (William Atherton) find all of the set’s “Danger—Keep
the church and here the steeple, and hid in his armpits. They remained there for a moment, then slid under his thighs. A moment later they were back in his lap" (160). Yet Schlesinger's attention to this detail also exemplifies the satiric element of religion—or the lack thereof—in Hollywood. But still, one might further investigate the various modes of satire at work in the film version of Locust. Whose satire do viewers end up reading in a novel-to-film translation, and does this translation become nothing more than the viewer reading the director's reading of the author's reading of a situation? Or can it go beyond this to show us something new?

Joanna E. Rapf thinks the film version cannot accomplish much in terms of "going beyond" because of the film's problematic nature—a result directly linked to the subject matter of the novel. In discussing the myriad translation problems, such as a loss of Tod's "narrative point of view," she writes: "And this, perhaps, poses an insurmountable problem in making a film of The Day of the Locust: it must be a film about the bad influence of film... It is problem enough to make a film from a novel with no strong central character or situation, but how much more of a problem where the very premise of that novel implies a film should not be made of it" (23).

But yet Schlesinger's Hollywood, filled with vile, burned-out has-beens and wannabes, set-disasters, crooked producers, and prostitute-/pornography-loving folks does not represent a positive picture of filmmaking—indeed, the aforementioned scenes lend themselves to painting a negative image of the Hollywood-as-institution façade, reinforced in the film by Claude's pragmatically telling Tod: "Hollywood's a disaster area." Moreover, Harry's salesman routine (he sells "Miracle Solvent") comes across in the film as a painfully pathetic display of an actor who knows his career never quite took off. Tod, too, consistently sketches horrific images of the inhabitants of L.A. For instance, he continually transforms the faces of real people he has sketched into grim reaper-like freaks whose mouths contort into perpetual screams. Ultimately, these sketches serve as his apartment's grotesque wallpaper—an apartment that also features a mirror shaped like a coffin. And finally, as Tod moves into his "earthquake cottage," he places a red flower in a hole in the wall—a hole once covered by a sign reading: "Thank God for calamities now and then to remind us HE is greater than men." In scenes such as these, Schlesinger, for the most part, captures the essence of the "disaster area" known as Hollywood.

Randall Reid, in discussing the novel's concluding riot scene, writes: "In The Day of the Locust, the victims turn victimizers. The Burning of Los Angeles is the inevitable vengeance of those who, cheated by life, find that even their dreams have betrayed them" (157). Reid also writes: "To discover the falseness of illusion is not, however, to be delivered from it" (135). The characters in The Day of the Locust certainly have achieved no deliverance in a positive sense, and one might reason that only Homer, dismembered and dead, "escapes" the Hollywood cesspool.

Most interestingly, in the film's most radical departure from the novel, Schlesinger does not conclude with Tod laughing in the ambulance. Rather, audiences see Tod lying bloody and broken on the L.A. street as the violent, screaming mob, whose members morph into hideous creatures that resemble locusts, dismembers Homer Simpson, thus capturing what Weisenburger calls "[West's and O'Connor's] experimentation with the regressive form, grotesque style, and carnivalesque
topos that are all so distinctive to postmodern satire” (33). But in pushing the story further, and hence the radical departure, Schlesinger closes the film with a scene of Faye wandering through Tod’s abandoned apartment, finding only a rose stuck in a wall crack. In their essay “Humor into Film: Self Reflections in Adaptations of Black Comic Novels,” Nancy Pogel and William Chamberlain comment upon this scene: “As the end credits roll, the last freeze-frame shot is the camera’s—alone, and the empty room is our last unnerving image—an excellent metaphor for the world which the sophisticated and self-reflexive black comic film has uncovered” (193). But the meaning of the scene, one might reason, becomes bound up in the idea that Tod has left Hollywood as, perhaps, a better man (as implied by his leaving a rose). And this crucial scene becomes not only intriguing in terms of reading West but also problematic in terms of translating West and, more importantly, his satire.

West has distanced his sacrificial victim Homer Simpson from the “beings for whom [he] is a substitute” in that he primarily associates with the pathetic “Hollywood crowd” of wannabes such as Tod Hackett and Faye Greener as well as has-beens such as Harry Greener. Further, and in accordance with Girard, when the mob dismembers him in the climactic scene, one might gather that Homer shares their same fate: a disillusionment with the supposed pleasures of Los Angeles—pleasures which remain out of his reach. He has become them. And since they ultimately sacrifice him, they sacrifice one of their own, which, as I will explain in greater detail momentarily, promotes further violence.

Ultimately, Tod must break free from the Hollywood façade if he will establish himself as the budding artist of his “The Burning of Los Angeles” painting. Certainly, this tension creates interesting satire. Even in the midst of the mob violence, Tod has cogent thoughts of his painting, most notably in his assessment of those in the cesspool: “For the faces of its [the mob’s] members, he was using the innumerable sketches he had made of the people who come to California to die; the cultists of all sorts, economic as well as religious, the wave, airplane, funeral, and preview watchers—all those poor devils who can only be stirred by the promise of miracles and then only to violence” (West, 184). Yet, as Weisenburger writes, “Tod progresses toward a satirical painting that by novel’s end is completed, at least in his mind” (43). But outside of Tod’s mind, in the world of Hollywood, Tod has become nothing but a man “selling mudpies to the great unwashed.”

Girard writes: “the sacrificial process requires a certain degree of misunderstanding. The celebrants do not and must not comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act” (his emphasis 7). As West describes it, the crowd “at the sight of their heroes and heroines...would turn demoniac” (176). Schlesinger seizes upon this, of course, by having the crowd shriek in delight at the premiere of “C.B. DeMille’s The Buccaneer,” at which such stars as Anthony Quinn make an appearance. Further, West describes the crowd thus: “They don’t know what to do with their time. They haven’t the mental equipment for leisure [Homer, of course, has little, if any, fun], the money nor the physical equipment for pleasure. Did they slave so long just to go to an occasional [like Homer] Iowa picnic?” (178). But as Girard writes: “The victim is not a substitute for some particularly endangered individual. . . . Rather, it is a substitute for all the members of the community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself” (his emphasis, 8).
West describes the crowd in those terms: "They realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment [as does Homer, indicated by his fleeing L.A.]. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, wars. This daily diet made sophisticates of them" (178). Hence, the old adage "you are what you eat" becomes apparent in the crowd feeding upon violence prior to unleashing its own violent tendencies—"its own violence."

Vis-à-vis the "Girardian thesis," one can read the novel/film's concluding scenes more critically:

All sacrificial rites are based on two substitutions. The first is provided by generative violence, which substitutes a single victim for all the members of the community. The second, the only strictly ritualistic substitution, is that of a victim for the surrogate victim. As we know, it is essential that the victim be drawn from outside the community. The surrogate victim, by contrast, is a member of the community. Ritual sacrifice is defined as an inexact imitation of the generative act. Why, we may ask, does sacrifice systematically exclude those who seem the most appropriate victims, who bear the closest resemblance to the original: the members of the community? (269)

Thus, when the crowd attacks Homer, it attacks a man but does not know the full reason why, exactly. As the crowd whips itself into a frenzy, various members give reasons: "A pervert attacked a child," "He ought to be lynched," and "this is a regular free-for-all" (West, 183). Sure, Homer has attacked Adore, but Adore did deck him in the forehead with a rock, perhaps stunning and dazing him. Certainly, Homer does not deserve to die. Yet one might reason that Homer, in attacking Adore, may in effect begin the "generative violence" of sacrifice by substituting the boy for the members of the community. But the community seizes upon this crisis—a sacrificial crisis—by turning Homer into the surrogate as well as a "pervert" monster. And Homer does hail from the community, so his death might restore order. Girard writes: "The surrogate victim thus appears as a monster. He is no longer regarded in the same way as the other members of the community. That is why ritual victims are chosen from outside the community, from creatures ... that normally dwell amidst sacred things and are themselves imbued with sacredness" (270). He writes further: "We should not conclude, however, that the surrogate victim is simply foreign to the community. Rather, he is seen as a 'monstrous double'" (271).

Yet, one cannot label Homer as monster, exactly, nor can one label him as a doppelgänger, per se, even though West (and Schlesinger) has him desiring to leave L.A. for "Wayneville" at the end of the story. He has established the appropriate Hollywood connections—Tod, Faye, and Claude—to claim status as a community member, even though at times he does not seem like one. Thus, one might reason that the crowd, in killing one of its own (Homer) by protecting one of its own (Adore), does not dispel the violence—it promotes it, fulfilling Girard's claim: "If the sacrificial victim belonged to the community ... then his death would promote further violence instead of dispelling it" (269). Thus, Schlesinger captures this idea by showing haunting images of the ghoul-like crowd still in full riot after Homer's death. But why does the crowd pass over more logical sacrificial choices like Tod, a somewhat successful artisan who, like the crowd's frustration with L.A., becomes disillusioned with the callousness of Hollywood? Or Faye, an aspiring...
actress who "wasn't sentimental" and "had no need for tenderness?" (West 68) ... who hooks up with Homer for the "business arrangement?" (137) ... who becomes a literal whore by novel and movie's end? Whose own father, in the film, calls her a "CT," the acronym, I believe, that stands for "cock tease?"

Girard defines the sacrificial crisis as "a crisis affecting the cultural order" (49). The crowd does not want to embody the "pervert"—Homer—so their logical choice will result in killing him. Girard writes: "The surrogate [read substitute] victim dies so that the entire community, threatened by the same fate, can be reborn in a new or renewed cultural order. ... Death, then, contains the germ of life" (255). But with Tod laughing and mimicking the ambulance siren at the end of Locust, one obtains a sense that Homer's death restores no order—perhaps the crowd killed the wrong guy. Thus by filming the final scene in which Faye finds the flower in Tod's apartment, Schlesinger restores order to a story that, in its initial novel incarnation, has no restored order—only the notion that like Tod's imitated ambulance-siren-howl, the restless souls of L.A. will continue to imitate violence in the Hollywood cesspool until they find the right victim to restore order. Perhaps they have missed this right victim, this outsider, by allowing Tod and Faye to escape, which represents why he laughs in the ambulance—possibly, he laughs at their luck in escaping death. Might Schlesinger have realized this by allowing Tod to "get out," so to speak, fulfilling Girard's claim that "the surrogate victim is generally destroyed, and always expelled from the community" (my emphasis 266)? But the flower in the wall indicates a sense of rebirth—of restored order—and in this notion, the satire of West's novel does not translate onto the screen. And certainly, when the novel concludes with Tod laughing hysterically, howling like the ambulance siren, readers have little sense of a restored order—of, perhaps, the intended "normative" satire of O'Connor's Wise Blood (Weisenburger, 27).

HAZEL MOTES: JESUS CALLED, WHERE ART THOU?

"As the final image of the film fades, Hazel is less a prophet and more a figure in a parable—a contemporary American Dream quest for meaning, value, wholeness and connection in an increasingly fragmented, nominalist, alienated, commercial, capitalist society" (Klein, 235).

To investigate satire in novel-to-film translation even further, one can look at Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood and its subsequent film version, directed by John Huston and released in 1979. Huston's decision to direct O'Connor's novel ultimately makes sense, given his track record as a director. In his essay "Heroic, Antihero, Aheroic: John Huston and the Problematical Protagonist," Martin Rubin describes Huston: "The supreme litterateur of classical American cinema, Huston frequently based his films on strong literary sources, so that it is not easy to disentangle a 'Huston point of view' from those of the authors he adapts, such as Dashiell Hammett...Flannery O'Connor, and James Joyce" (137-8).

And Huston wastes little time asserting his point of view in Wise Blood—a point of view at once his own while at the same time quite devoted to O'Connor's novel. In the opening scene, one sees a scene outside of Taulkinham in which a dirty, faded sign reads: "If you repent God Has Forgiveness For You In Jesus Our
Savior” (irregular caps noted), after which viewers see the famous “Last Supper” painting juxtaposed with the Confederate flag. Immediately following this, viewers see a scene of a grave littered with candles and flowers. But director Huston adds an especially nice touch to this scene in that he places a telephone on the grave as well—a telephone with a sign that reads: “Jesus Called.” Huston, who (I suppose tongue-in-cheekily) also misspells his name on the opening credits as “Jhon” Huston, sprinkles his film with various images and scenes that consistently reinforce the elements of religion and, more importantly, religiosity, at work in O’Connor’s text—that of Motes (Brad Dourif) perhaps representing the ultimate source of “religiosity”: the Protestant religion, for even his status as an idiot subverts the idea of the Protestant Ethic.

O’Connor does indeed take clear shots at Protestants in the novel. One of Hazel’s more intriguing speeches has him shout: “‘Listen, you people, I’m going to take the truth with me wherever I go. I’m going to preach it to whoever’ll listen at whatever place. I’m going to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgement because there wasn’t the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar’” (O’Connor, 105). Hence, when Michael Kreyling comments that “The second reason why O’Connor’s fiction is interpreted with such solid consensus is that almost no one doubts her own testimony as to its Christian meaning” (3), one begins to key in on the idea that this Christian meaning can extend itself to connotations both positive (pro-Catholic) and negative (Motes as proselytizing sham). Moreover, on the day after his aforementioned rant, Motes meets Mrs. Flood, his future landlady, and tells her that he calls his church the “Church Without Christ,” to which she responds “‘Protestant?’ she asked suspiciously, ‘or something foreign?’” (O’Connor, 106). The narrator then states: “He said no mam, it was Protestant” (O’Connor, 106). And one can explore O’Connor’s satire by again looking at Guilhamet. Certainly, the theologians and Protestant religious folk about whom Guilhamet writes receive the brunt of O’Connor’s satire. The church “institution” becomes a focal point of O’Connor’s satire as well, ultimately becoming her “business to clear out.”

In conjunction with Guilhamet’s discussion of materialism, perhaps in the sense that commercialism (and capitalism) allows one to “shop around” for the best available products, O’Connor suggests that the proliferation of new Protestant “ministers” in Taulkinham allows people the same option of “shopping around” for a religion. Interestingly, the combination of “Taulkin” and “ham” suggests that perhaps the residents, to spin the cliché, represent “talking hams”; hence, these people can talk about religion, but can they act out a religion’s beliefs? Have they become, as Anthony DiRenzo writes, “cynical materialists who believe in nothing” (24), or do they wander in a state of disillusionment—a state perpetuated by encroaching consumerism?

O’Connor herself displayed suspicion in regards to consumerism, as Jon Lance Bacon reveals in a “A Fondness for Supermarkets: Wise Blood and Consumer Culture”: “When she discussed consumerism with interviewers, O’Connor tended to emphasize its detrimental effect on regional identity. In a 1959 interview she maintained that Southerners were losing their ‘regional sense’ primarily ‘because everybody wants the good things of life, like supermarkets…”” (27). He writes
further: "In *Wise Blood*, forms of advertising and marketing envelop the self, submerging it in a world of salable objects" (32). Huston seizes upon this early in the film version as well, staying faithful to O'Connor's novel by showing Haze's $11.98 price tag hanging from his new coat—the coat that serves as his black "minister's" coat. At first glance, this translated element might not signify much but an homage to O'Connor. But in reality, the subtle touches of a masterful director like Huston reinforce the novel's strengths. Haze's price tag dangling from his jacket becomes symbolic not only of his hick-like mentality but also of his unknown connection with the very consumerism O'Connor distrusted.

Moreover, the representation of Hazel Motes as a "minister" in a hypothetical church serves as the focal point of not only O'Connor's satire but also Huston's—the film version indeed possesses many qualities that one might determine as accomplished filmmaking from a director whose accomplishments speak for themselves. Of course, one might extend Guilhamet's "materialism" to include "consumerism," for the two do indeed carry striking similarities. For instance, in the background whenever Haze "preaches," Huston takes care to make sure a neon sign advertises that "Jesus Cares." Later, when Solace Layfield (William Hickey) preaches, Huston has as backdrop the side of the "Pepsi Cola Bottling" building, making a connection with Onnie Jay's (Ned Beatty) advice to Hazel: "If you wanna get anywhere in the religion business, you gotta keep it sweet ... All it needs is a little promotion" (my emphasis). But Guilhamet also states: "For society to exist at all there must be a delegation of prestige and influence to organized groups" (31); one of which he mentions, the "church," becomes key in O'Connor's satire.

And Enoch (Don Shor), of course, becomes the key symbol not only for the negative aspects of consumerism but also the key extended symbol of the ape-like absurdity of the sudden "abundance" of for-sale "ministers" in Taulkinham. Advertising—the superfluous presence mimicking ideal lifestyles for which, advertisers hope, prospective consumers aspire—in many ways draws Enoch into the gorilla costume. He can then mimic that for which he aspires: to become noticed—in this case by becoming a successful movie "star," Gonga. And like the manner in which cultural critics often tendentiously dismiss advertising as base and, even worse, inauthentic, Huston treats Enoch as an inauthentic character in the film, relegating him to various scenes in which his character stumbles around, hideously choreographed to cacophonous carnival-like music.

Moreover, other scenes in the film relegate Enoch to nothing but an ape-like presence before he dons Gonga's suit. When the real Gonga stumbles and falls out of the truck (a hilarious Huston touch), Enoch's face registers a look that suggests he can barely contain his excitement to meet the movie "star." Enoch waits in line to shake the ape's hand, and then immediately enters the line again. On the second handshake, Enoch introduces himself, whereupon the gorilla says in a gruff voice: "Cain't hear ya!" Before he gets pushed away by Gonga's assistant, Enoch responds by stating his name more loudly. A few moments later, with Enoch waiting in line yet again amongst several giddy children, viewers hear Gonga's assistant whisper to Gonga: "Fourth goddam time this idiot showed up." Upon Enoch's turn to meet Gonga yet again, he says: "Hi Gonga. I'm only eighteen years old, but I already work at the city zoo!" whereupon Gonga says: "You idiot, go to hell! Get lost!"
The perpetual nature of Enoch entering the Gonga line suggests the consumer-like mentality that O'Connor continually pokes at. But even Enoch cannot embody a successful consumer in this case, as Gonga (in a supremely hilarious scene, I might add) disregards him. Furthermore, if, as Bacon writes, “O'Connor suggests that consumer society reneges on the advertised promise of self-expression. Consumers who identify themselves with products, or with the imagery used to advertise these products, will be disappointed and betrayed in their search for self-realization” (34), then ultimately—by extension—those people who subscribe to these “fake” ministers who pitch nothing but religion as a “product” ultimately will experience the same disappointment and betrayal. And if, as Anthony DiRenzo states, “Wise Blood is so scandalized by the grotesqueness of commercialized Christianity that it can only depict the absence of Christ” (51), then one might begin to trace the origins of what might have become the angry mob (as in Locust) in Wise Blood—those souls, like Enoch, continually searching, continually waiting in line, for something that never arrives. The false promise of advertising? Perhaps. The false nature of Protestantism? Perhaps even more so. Yet, the angry mob never appears, and Motes, who must resort to killing himself, would not satisfy the “Girardian thesis” per se.

He does, however, represent the victim of a self-sacrifice, and in this notion I intend to take issue with and extend our comprehension of Girard. As one can puzzle over Homer Simpson as the sacrificial victim in Locust, looking for such an exchange in Wise Blood leads one to such characters as not only Hazel and his faux-disciple Solace Layfield but also such characters as Enoch and the "mummy." Even Enoch's actions set him up clearly as the substitute outsider who seems primed for sacrifice—indeed, he has only lived in Taulkinham for "but two months" (O'Connor, 44). But these two months have not provided Enoch with enough time to make the community connections that Tod Hackett so quickly makes in Locust. When Enoch tells the police officer that he will “look after [Haze],” the officer asks Enoch: “How long you been here?” (O'Connor, 45). Enoch replies: “I was born and raised here....This is my ol’ home town” (O'Connor, 45). But Enoch then tells Haze that he moved around with his father for a while, a conversation in which he ultimately reveals: “You ain’t gonna know [people in Taulkinham] neither. This is one more hard place to make friends in. I been here two months and I don’t know nobody. Look like all they want to do is knock you down” (O'Connor, 48). One might reason, then, that by donning the Gonga costume, Enoch saves himself from sacrifice—from "outsider" status—by assimilating into a community of consumer-oriented apes.

If, like Weisenburger, one reasons that “As an archetypal (sacrificial) victim, Haze would transform violence into something literally monstrous and vagrant” (55–56), then one might extend this to reason that Motes kills himself, a form of self-sacrifice to which ultimately nobody bears witness. Such a reader might interpret the end result as that of Motes's sacrifice at the hands of a "religious" entity (if one accepts that O'Connor has constructed a community bound by religion)—an entity that, like the police officer who bonks him over the head with his billy club, simply says it “[doesn’t] want to have no trouble with him” (231). He has at once distanced himself from this entity not only by offering an alternative to the Christian doctrine—The Church Without Christ—but also by sharing similarities
with it—becoming it—in that ultimately religion serves as the very force behind his religiosity. But what one might find at stake in this idea occurs in that perhaps religion itself has become outdated much like yesterday’s “new” product (like Wise Blood’s potato peeler) so quickly loses its luster. Ultimately, the crowd does not “care” about Hazel in the manner that they “care” about Onnie Jay Holy/Solace Layfield, at least in terms of reaction to his word—the crowd lines up to give Holy/Layfield money.

Girard writes: “As soon as the sacred—that is, violence—has found its way to the interior of the community, the motif of the surrogate victim will start to emerge” (261). In Wise Blood, of course, Haze “kills” the mummy by throwing it against the wall and eventually throwing it out the door (O’Connor, 188). Schlesinger faithfully adapts this scene as well. But more importantly, in order to stop Onnie Jay’s vile new religious institution “The Holy Church of Jesus Christ without Christ,” Haze kills Solace Layfield, “the other Prophet” double that Onnie Jay hires to preach themes similar to Haze’s. Prior to killing him (in the novel and the film), Haze makes Solace strip off his suit so as to erase their similarities. Indeed, these two men, by preaching in the middle of the city, have found their way to the interior of the community. And Haze, by “killing” the mummy, reveals that the sacred—the violent—has penetrated the community as well. For example, when Weisenburger writes: “To Girard, the monstrous, like Wise Blood’s mummy (Haze’s double), always and in spite of itself gives access to that which is unique in terms of categories, therefore exterior to culture and threatening, an embodiment of absolute violence” (55), he focuses on a crucial moment in the text—figuring out who gets sacrificed and, more importantly, why.

But I extend this reading by suggesting that in addition to reading the mummy as Haze’s “monstrous double,” one can also read Solace as Haze’s twin, as Girard writes: “Twins invariably share a cultural identity, and they often have a striking physical resemblance to each other. Wherever differences are lacking, violence threatens” (57). In the film, of course, Haze and Solace look like each other physically and their clothes match as well. Further, with the aid of Onnie Jay Holy, Solace learns, badly, how to preach like Hazel. On the surface, their differences remain few. Yet violence will indeed threaten as Haze attempts to establish himself as the sacrificial victim, evident in one of Huston’s scenes: Hazel preaches against the “Jesus Cares” backdrop whereas Solace preaches against the “Pepsi Cola Bottling” building. Therefore, Haze must eliminate his faux-self in order to achieve the criteria of sacrificial victim. But as Huston so carefully shows with the placing of signs, Haze has the power to serve as the sacrifice that will restore order. O’Connor hints at this as well. For one example, she elevates Haze to the status of a holy man (perhaps even a Catholic priest?) who “[leans] his head closer to [Solace] to hear the confession” (205). With his fake now destroyed, Haze emerges in a new sense. But what can audiences make of this, exactly?

Hazel, unlike Homer Simpson, initially comes across as an outsider. He comes to Taulkinham from his home of Eastrod in order to “do some things I never have done before” (O’Connor, 13). But it makes sense to read his eventual status as the real sacrificial victim because Haze has become a part of the community. Indeed, he has made strong community connections with his landladies Mrs. Watts and, eventually, Mrs. Flood. In fact, the community will not let him leave, evident in
the novel and the film when the patrolman destroys his means of leaving: his car. After the patrolman offers Haze a ride, he follows up by asking: "Was you going anywhere?" to which Haze replies "No" (O'Connor, 209–10). By killing the "mummy," Haze in effect promotes more violence, thus creating a chaos whose order he must restore. Once he eliminates his "fake-self," then the path becomes clear for him to sacrifice himself.

But one can complicate the idea of sacrifice in Wise Blood through its religious themes. Girard writes: "The victim must be neither too familiar to the community nor too foreign to it" (271) whereas: "Religion invariably strives to subdue violence, to keep it from running wild. Paradoxically, the religious and moral authorities in a community attempt to instill nonviolence, as an active force into daily life and as a mediating force into ritual life, through the application of violence" (20). Therefore, Haze, as religious entity, does not want Solace to become his double because Haze wants the role of minister, yes, but even more so he wants the role of sacrificial victim. He wants to die, like Christ, and restore order to the materialist city of Taulkinham. Hence in the film, when Hazel's grandfather gives a sermon to a crowd, he refers to the young lad Hazel by saying: "Jesus will never leave him, ever," one might begin to see that Hazel serves as Christ's servant—he actually wants to bring Christ back (but in a non-Catholic sense) into focus and dispel the religious consumerism that has taken over the city, reiterating that "When the religious framework of a society starts to totter ... the whole cultural foundation of the society is put in jeopardy." (Girard, 49). Haze wants to alleviate that jeopardy, and he does so by killing himself—by attempting to restore order.

Girard writes: "The surrogate [read substitute] victim dies so that the entire community, threatened by the same fate, can be reborn in a new or renewed cultural order ... Death, then, contains the germ of life" (255). Indeed, Hazel's death in the film signals this rebirth as Huston films the last scene amidst a gentle rain. His death, moreover, dispels future violence, for O'Connor, by naming Hazel's landlady Mrs. Flood, hints at the possibility of this—a flood of Biblical proportions perhaps. But after this flood will come rebirth and, eventually, a renewed cultural order. Girard writes: "Religion instructs men as to what they must and must not do to prevent a recurrence of destructive violence" (259), which explains why Hazel places rocks in his shoes, wraps barbed wire around his torso, and has flashbacks to his youth when his grandfather preaches to the crowd, telling it that "Jesus will never leave [Haze]," and that "Jesus will have him in the end." He then tells the crowd, "You're like stones ... you're all like stones." Hence, Hazel's role becomes that of one who needs to change these "stones" into real Christians—people who believe in the power of Christ as opposed to their current belief in the power of consumerism and materialism.

Within Wise Blood the novel and Wise Blood the film, one certainly can see satire work clearly and efficiently within their contexts. One might read Hazel Motes verbatim as the "evil man protected by the prestige of an institution" (Guilhamet, 20)—a man whose hypocrisy and foolishness come across as hilariously beside the point. This idea becomes especially evident in Huston's film because, although he does stay faithful to O'Connor's humorous scenes, he continually emphasizes the dark, satiric nature of O'Connor's novel as well. On the surface, Motes has little that one can label "good," and this becomes apparent as the satire unfolds.
But Motes also represents what O'Connor wants readers to see—a Protestant—and in terms of representation, one might sift through his negative qualities to see Motes in, perhaps, a positive light: as the sacrifice that restores order. And in seizing upon this crucial element of satire, Huston effectively translates O'Connor’s satire. By exploring the novel-to-film translation of both *The Day of the Locust* and *Wise Blood*, this essay attempts not to discredit either of these film versions. Rather, with a more critical look at how certain thematic elements (in this case, those satiric) translate from the written to the visual, one can assess more specifically how films can enhance the reading of a novel. In many ways, a novel-to-film translation in the hands of an accomplished director like John Schlesinger and John Huston—or more recently Martin Scorsese (1993’s *The Age of Innocence*) and Jane Campion (1996’s *The Portrait of a Lady*)—can become a critical interpretation. However, in director Roland Joffe’s abysmal rendition of *The Scarlet Letter* (1995), this idea of critical interpretation comes across as pure money-making schlock—tack on a couple of hot actors (in this case, Demi Moore and Gary Oldman) to reel in the masses and, voila!, a film emerges from a literary masterpiece.

In his dated but useful study *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (1957), George Bluestone argues that:

film versions of the novel [abandon] ‘novelistic’ elements. This abandonment is so severe that, in a strict sense, the new creation has little resemblance to the original. With the abandonment of language as its sole and primary element, the film necessarily leaves behind those characteristic contents of thought which only language can approximate: tropes, dreams, memories, conceptual consciousness... That is why a comparative study which begins by finding resemblances between novel and film ends by loudly proclaiming their differences. (vii i-x).

I have argued that Huston effectively translates O'Connor’s satiric tropes in a way that Schlesinger ineffectively translates, despite his finely crafted efforts in interpreting many of West’s ideas. But both directors bring unique visions to these novels—visions that by themselves do not discount the prose of West and O'Connor. The debates regarding novel-to-film translation continually need to explore not how films-from-novels destroy literary masterpieces—a loud proclamation of their differences—but rather how these films, effective or not, eerily similar or radically different, can enhance one’s understanding of both an author’s prose and the many ways a text can yield various interpretations.

**WORKS CITED**


