

Flannery O'Connor's Witness to the Gospel of Life

Ralph C. Wood

MORE THAN FORTY WORKS have been devoted to Flannery O'Connor's life and art—I myself having recently contributed to this latest weariness in the making of many books on O'Connor. Yet we have not yet begun to fathom the depth of her literary and theological witness. Which is to say: we have not yet comprehended the real power of her art. O'Connor did not write chiefly to entertain and to edify, the two aims of fiction famously set forth by Samuel Johnson. Art was not, for her, a pleasingly imaginative way to re-enforce existing societal norms and *mores*. Nor was she a modernist devoted to the making of autotelic works of art that have no ideological or doctrinal referents. Though much influenced by the New Critics of the 1950s, O'Connor did not believe that a novel or short story could stand like Keats's well-wrought urn, a wondrously self-referential whole, dwelling completely unto itself, in splendid isolation from historical, social, and personal implication.

Far from being a reactionary writer, O'Connor was a post-modernist *avant la lettre*. Well in advance of her time, she knew that we are free at last, and blessedly so, of

the Enlightenment chimera called "timeless and placeless truth," as if we could view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*—standing above time and space like Greek deities, determining the truth autonomously for ourselves and thus controlling it for our own (usually selfish) purposes. Truth is indeed universal because every single truth is related to all others, but we do not determine truth, much less control it, for our individual selves. We know and speak and write the Truth only as we are sustained by convictional communities and shared narratives. Not for O'Connor, therefore, the fantasy of authorial neutrality, as if the artist could pare her fingernails while letting her work takes its own inexorable course.

Quite to the contrary, O'Connor took her place at the post-modernist table of confessedly self-interested art. Like Emily Dickinson, she told the truth whole but also "slant"—*i.e.*, she wrote from an unapologetic bias of vision. "If I were not a Catholic," she declared, "I would have no reason to write, no reason to see, no reason ever to feel horrified by anything or to enjoy anything." O'Connor the post-modern visionary wanted not chiefly to entertain and to edify but to convert her readers. Writing to a post-Christian age, she knew that her fiction would have to embody the Gospel's own *skandalon*, its unremitting offense to all who have ears to

RALPH C. WOOD is University Professor of Theology and Literature at Baylor University and author, most recently, of *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (2004).

hear and eyes to see, but whose deafness requires the raised voice and whose blindness demands large and startling figures. Accordingly, she did not work by gentle persuasion but by grotesque shock and alarm. Like all of our great writers—like Sophocles and Dante, like Chaucer and Milton, like Donne and Bunyan and Dostoevsky—O'Connor sought to alter our vision and thus to transform our lives. By employing literary means that would not violate the integrity of her art, she wanted to reorder our loves to the love of God—or at least to enable our recognition of their terrible disorder.

To put O'Connor in the venerable company of Sophocles, as Thomas Merton did at her death, is to say that she is not only a post-modernist but also a classical writer. Our now-aging *enfant terrible* of literary incorrectness, the boisterous Harold Bloom, defines a classic as a text that makes us permanently rearrange the furniture of our lives. Classic texts possess what Bloom calls "an arresting strangeness," a defamiliarizing of the ordinary so as to open up radical new horrors and wondrous new possibilities that we have thus far managed to avoid. A time-transcending text puts a timely grip on our ethical and religious existence. To read Dante, for instance, is to encounter something far more threatening and infinitely more promising than the discernment of the brilliant imaginative symmetry of his punishments and purgations and paradisaic delights; it is also to be confronted with a demand for radical transformation.

Alisdair MacIntyre is surely right, therefore, to call Dante the chief moral teacher of the West. St. Thomas clarifies, both theologically and philosophically, the nature of the virtues and the vices, but only Dante gives them the imaginative embodiment that prompts his audience to spurn damnation and to seek salvation. To read Dante merely for his fine imagery is, as Walker Percy tartly ob-

served, to dodge the real purport of his work. Despite the extraordinary attention given to O'Connor's work, I believe that we have also dodged the real purport of her fiction, the tremendous power of her literary and theological witness.

I

W. E. B. Du Bois declared, in a much-touted pronouncement of 1903, that the problem of the twentieth century would be the problem of the color-line. Du Bois's prophecy is not lightly to be laid aside. Racial conflict would indeed roil the American nation during the American century—thus besmirching our country's rise to world dominance. While much of the racial violence would strafe O'Connor's own native region, she discerned a far worse evil gnawing at the modern soul—a cancer devouring not only the American nation but the entire Western world. O'Connor detected a new and deadly demonry everywhere in the air. She saw racism as but a single species belonging to a far more pernicious genus of evil, and she called it by its proper name. "[I]f you live today," she wrote to Elizabeth Hester in 1955, "you breathe in nihilism. In or out of the Church it's the gas you breathe."¹ O'Connor marked ours as at once a flabby and emaciated age—one in which, as she said, "the moral sense has been bred out of certain sections of the population, like the wings have been bred off certain chickens to produce more white meat on them. This is a generation of wingless chickens," she added, "which I suppose is what Nietzsche meant when he said God was dead" (CW, 942). Far from dismissing the great nihilist philosopher, O'Connor praised Nietzsche for naming the malaise of our age. "The world seems to be going through a dark night of the soul" (CW, 942), she declared in a phrase owing as much to Nietzsche as to St. John of the Cross.

Rather than exonerate the institution

that claimed her first and last loyalty, O'Connor saw the Church as one of the places where the dark horror resides. As if to forecast the priest-pedophile scandals that lay four decades ahead, she confessed that "you have to suffer as much from the Church as for it." The asphyxiating air suffocates the community of Christ no less than it stifles the circumambient culture. For her, however, the Church is not one among many human associations, destined to fail like all the others. Scrofulous and sclerotic though it is, the Church cannot decay into final decrepitude and death. It remains the *corpus* of the reigning and returning Christ. Hence O'Connor's further affirmation: "I think that the Church is the only thing that is going to make the terrible world we are coming to endure; the only thing that makes the Church endure is that it is somehow the body of Christ and that on this we are fed." (CW, 942)

There are Catholics who believe, perhaps rightly, that Flannery O'Connor will eventually be declared, if not a saint, then surely a doctor of the Church, one of its official teachers. The case for O'Connor's eminence as a theologian of the imagination could well be made by way of the following declaration made to Betty Hester, again in 1955:

I think that when I know what the laws of the flesh and the physically real are, then I will know what God is. We know [these laws] as we see them, not as God sees them. For me it is the virgin birth, the Incarnation, the resurrection which are the true laws of the flesh and the physical. Death, decay, destruction are the suspension of these laws. I am always astonished at the emphasis the Church puts on the body. It is not the soul she says that will rise but the body, glorified.... The resurrection of Christ seems the high point in the law of nature. (CW, 953)

This avowal is not O'Connor's warmed-over version of Teilhard but an altogether revolutionary set of claims. What seems but the chance mating of sperm and egg

is, instead, an utterly unfathomable miracle. What appears only as the emergence of an extra mouth to be fed is a truly wondrous incarnation of the holy in the human. What looks like the body's final collapse into final extinction is, in fact, its entry-way to lasting life.

O'Connor was astonished at the Church's emphasis on the body as its central trope for comprehending God's own life. "I appeal to you," she would have heard St. Paul declare in Romans 12, "by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." The right disposition of our bodies, far from being a private matter left to the individual, is our most important public responsibility. O'Connor saw that, for all its vaunted materialism, modernity is a grotesquely gnostic age in its profound hostility to corporeal existence. The nihilism which she detected as the Zyklon B of our time regards the body as a terrible offense, for corporeal lives cannot be managed and maneuvered as easily as spiritual souls. Hence the grim legacy left by the allegedly most enlightened and progressive century the world has ever known. More people were killed by violent means in the twentieth century than in all of the preceding centuries combined, roughly 190 million. Already in the year 2001, we slaughtered 1.6 million. Dreadfully are we on track for generating yet another century of blood, another epoch of gore, another age incarnadine.

It was against our anti-corporeal and thus anti-communal nihilism—far more than our racism or ageism or genderism or homophobia—that Flannery O'Connor set her face like flint. She saw that the central teaching of the Gospel concerns our bodies: just as the body is a spiritual and physical unity, so does humanity constitute a bodily whole. We cannot violate one without also dishonoring the other. To desecrate even a single human body is to desecrate them all. Our bodies

display our shared human dependence, our singleness as a race, our commonality as the one family which, as St. Augustine said, is meant to form the one city of God. “The divine image,” Henri de Lubac declares, “does not differ from one individual to another: in all it is the same image.”²

Monotheism, it follows, requires monogenism: from one God originates one people. Racism, like Nazism, and most all other “isms,” is but a species of multigenism—a denial of the human commonality that has its life in the one triune and communal God. “*Ubi peccata*,” declared Origen of Alexandria in the third century, “*ibi multitudo*.”³ “Where there is sin,” he insists, “there is multiplicity.” Thus does Origen oppose the modern notion that division and plurality lie at the core of our existence. Humanity has been shattered into a thousand pieces, Maximus the Confessor lamented in the sixth century. Instead of constituting a harmonious whole, we have turned ourselves into a multitude of mere individuals who, as Shakespeare said, prey upon one another like monsters of the deep. St. Cyril of Alexandria put the matter ever so memorably in the fifth century: “Satan has broken us up.”⁴

The calling of the Church—and thus of its artists—is to restore broken humanity to its lost unity, and thus to protest the sundering of the common body and thus the violation of individual bodies. Against the popular notion that salvation means a private relation to Jesus, de Lubac declares that “Christ the Redeemer does not offer salvation merely to each one; he is himself the salvation of the whole, and for each one salvation consists in a personal ratification of his original ‘belonging’ to Christ, so that he not be cast out, cut off from this Whole.”⁵

II

In two little-noticed episodes in her first

novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), Flannery O’Connor deals with a character who fears that she has been severed from this divinely created and divinely redeemed Whole. She suspects that she has been cast into the outer darkness, not only for desecrating a human body but also for destroying an innocent life. I refer, of course, to the daughter of Asa Hawks, the street evangelist who faked his promise to blind himself as proof of his ostensibly prophetic faith. Though Sabbath Lily Hawks is her name, she is neither as holy as the Lord’s Day nor as virginal as the symbolic lily usually indicates. On the contrary, Sabbath Lily is sex-obsessed.

Writing to the 1950s equivalent of Ann Landers, Sabbath has sought succor for her nymphomania. Rather than prescribing the standard program of counseling that Landers would surely recommend today, this advice columnist suggested, instead, the Eisenhower era’s nice equivalent. While “light necking is acceptable,” declared the columnist, Sabbath should learn to adjust herself to the modern world, perhaps by reading books on Ethical Culture: “A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living,” the romance adviser suggested, “if you put it in proper perspective and do not let it warp you.” Ms. Hawks replies with one of O’Connor’s most hilariously devastating critiques of a culture that, already in the 1950s, was being rapidly sexualized. “What I really want to know,” Sabbath Lily responded, “is should I go the whole hog or not. I’m adjusted okay to the modern world.”

The Roman playwright Terence voiced a sentiment that has become the virtual motto of the modern “adjustment” that Ms. Hawks unconsciously embodies: *Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto*: I am human; nothing human can be alien to me. Flannery O’Connor confessed, on the contrary, that a great many things were alien to her. They were abominations in the literal sense specified by C. S. Lewis: they were *ab-homine*—against the

human. Yet while Sabbath appears to be an abominable little slut, she retains a certain innocence even in her libidinous proclivities. She wants to seduce Hazel Motes, not because she truly lusts after him, but because she wants to expose him. Ms. Hawks rightly suspects that Motes's openly nihilistic campaign in behalf of the Church Without Christ is altogether as fraudulent as her own father's secretly nihilistic evangelism.

Ms. Hawks also proves to be much more than a guiltless sex-fiend in the memories that haunt her. As O'Connor observed of other kinds of ghosts, Sabbath's recollections prove at once fierce and instructive. She is obsessed with the murder of a child, a killing that she reports as if it were someone else's act, when clearly it pertains to her own experience. That none of our critics, certainly none of our feminists, has focused on this episode is perhaps a sign of the moral asphyxiation that O'Connor detected at work everywhere in modern life:

"Listen," she said [to Motes] in a louder voice, "this here man and woman killed this little baby. It was her own child but it was ugly and she never give it any love. This child had Jesus and this woman didn't have nothing but good looks and a man she was living in sin with. She sent the child away and it come back and she sent it away again and ever' time she sent it away, it come back to where her and this man was living in sin. They strangled it with a silk stocking and hung it up in the chimney. It didn't give her any peace after that, though. Everything she looked at was that child. Jesus made it beautiful to haunt her. She couldn't lie with this man without she saw it, staring through the chimney at her, shining through the brick in the middle of the night." (CW, 28)

It strains credulity to imagine this story as being literally true—as if two lovers once disguised their infanticide by suspending their dead baby like a smoked ham in a chimney, although the Holocaust allusion may be oddly apt. Yet it is

completely plausible to believe that Sabbath Lily and some anonymous lover have killed their bastard baby. And since Ms. Hawks lives with her failed preacher-father, the infant may, in fact, have been the product of incest. If so, Sabbath is herself a victim of the worst kind of sexual abuse. In either case, Hawks has sought unsuccessfully to drive out the demons of our nihilistic culture, demons that will destroy innocent infantile life when it gets in the way of hedonist charm, silk stockings, and superficial "good looks."

Already in the late 1940s, when O'Connor first began work on *Wise Blood*, she saw that abortion would become the signature on the modern cult of consumption. Twenty-four million babies have been aborted since 1973 in the United States alone. More black babies are killed during any three-day period than all of the blacks who were lynched during the era of slavery and segregation. Twenty percent of all pregnancies are now aborted, more than fifty million per year worldwide—most of them being performed, at least outside the West, on female fetuses. These are all manifestations of what, in *Evangelium Vitae*, the late Pope John Paul II called our nihilistic "culture of death." "The twentieth century will have been an era of massive attacks on life," he wrote in his hallmark encyclical of 1995, "an endless series of wars and a continual taking of innocent human life."

The pope observes the huge irony that, in an Enlightenment era that boasts of its discovery of inviolable human rights, "the very right to life is being denied or trampled upon, especially at the more significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death." Once a nihilistic hedonism and materialism have triumphed, John Paul declared, the human body itself will be defiled:

Within this same cultural climate, the body

is no longer perceived as proper personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world. It is reduced to pure materiality: it is simply a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency. Consequently, sexuality too is depersonalized and exploited: from being the sign, place and language of love, that is, of the gift of self and [the] acceptance of another, in all the other's richness as a person, [the body] increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts. (*Ev. Vit.* 1.23)

Sabbath Lily Hawks's haunted memory of a murdered child concerns precisely this kind of self-assertion and satisfaction of personal desires. It is no mere macabre vignette. It is evidence, instead, of her pained conviction that the slain baby "had Jesus" and thus that the child possessed a life that its killers could not kill. However fraudulent her father's preaching, it has formed his daughter's moral imagination, thus justifying the papal hope that nothing can extinguish an ingrained and carefully formed conscience. Because the triune God has profoundly united himself with every human being—from the very creation of the cosmos, but explicitly in Israel and Christ and the Church—our humankind cannot be so falsely reconstructed as to elide the distinction between good and evil: "All the conditioning and efforts to enforce silence [about the taking of innocent life] fail to stifle the voice of the Lord echoing in the conscience of every individual: it is always from this intimate sanctuary of the conscience that a new journey of love, openness and service to human life can begin." (*Ev. Vit.*, 1.24)⁶

III

The sanctuary of Sabbath Hawks's conscience is haunted yet again when Hazel

Motes seeks to convert her to his nihilistic conviction that "[e]verything is all one" and thus that all moral distinctions are illusory. Motes's attempt to silence Sabbath's guilt only exacerbates it, as she tells yet another story of a child who was cast off—this time not by its mother and father, but by a neglectful grandmother. Perhaps this abused and unwanted child was Sabbath herself, and perhaps Hawks has perpetuated the cycle of destruction by aborting her own baby. In any case, Sabbath discerns the signs of a guilty conscience, even when its only register is an old lady's rampant allergies:

"There was this child once ... that nobody cared if it lived or died. Its kin sent it around from one to another of them and finally to its grandmother who was a very evil woman and she couldn't stand to have it around because the least good thing made her break out in these welts. She would get all itching and swell. Even her eyes would itch her and swell up and there was nothing she could do but run up and down the road, shaking her hands and cursing and it was twice as bad when this child was there so she kept the child locked in a chicken crate. It seen its granny in hell-fire, swell and burning, and it told her everything it seen and she got so swell until finally she went to the well and wrapped the well rope around her neck and let down the bucket and broke her neck." (*CW*, 69)

The treatment of the utterly vulnerable and helpless—for Flannery O'Connor as it should be for all creatures made and remade in the image of God—is the index of both the Church's and the world's moral life. This was not her passing opinion but her deepest conviction, and it was sustained by two millennia of Christian teaching. Whereas Scripture itself remains silent about abortion and infanticide, Christian tradition is astonishingly vocal. From the very beginning, Christians were set apart from their pagan neighbors by not killing their allegedly unwanted babies. By the time of the *Didache*, the early sum-

mary of Christian doctrine and practice recorded in the late first or early second century, the Church had made explicit the rule that had always been implicit: “You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born.” Convinced that they were meant to live against the grain of their own ancient culture of death, these early Christians repudiated the common Greco-Roman practice of infanticide by exposure.

Readers of Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King* will remember that, in the ancient Mediterranean world, unwanted babies—in Oedipus’s case, a club-footed infant—were taken to remote places and left to die from exposure to the ravages either of wild animals or vicious weather. In writing his *First Apology* sometime around 155, Justin Martyr abjures Christians to reject infanticide in all its forms, especially exposure. Justin points out that the sex-traders of his day—akin to those of our own time, it must be observed—were seizing abandoned babies and raising them to become prostitutes. In the figure of Sabbath Lily Hawks, O’Connor creates a character who might herself have become a prostitute, but who suffers instead from a stricken conscience that gives a curious credence to her holy and virginal name.

O’Connor never publicly speculated on the fate of Sabbath Lily Hawks beyond the walls of the novel. Perhaps Asa Hawks overcame his initial rage at Hazel Motes’s exposure of his false blinding, throwing him back into authentic faith and making him a true street prophet. Perhaps Sabbath was herself converted to true belief and stopped “going the whole hog” with anyone except her Christian husband—thus becoming properly maladjusted to the modern world. Rather than aborting her new baby, let us assume that she welcomed the birth of her son and gave him deep moral formation in the theological teachings of the church. Let us further assume that this son was born in 1955, so

that in 1990 he would have been a 35-year old physician living in Louisiana and writing novels. Let us assume, finally, that in 1990, Sabbath’s son wrote the following letter to the *New York Times*. That our national “newspaper of record” refused to print the letter makes it all the more worth our hearing:

The most influential book published in German in the first quarter of [the twentieth] century was entitled *The Justification of the Destruction of Life Devoid of Value*. Its co-authors were the distinguished jurist Karl Binding and the prominent psychiatrist Alfred Hoche. Neither Binding nor Hoche had ever heard of Hitler or the Nazis. Nor, in all likelihood, did Hitler ever read the book. He didn’t have to....

I would not wish to be understood as implying that the respected American institutions I have named [*The New York Times*, the United States Supreme Court, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization of Women] are similar or corresponding to pre-Nazi institutions.

But I do suggest that once the line is crossed, once the principle gains acceptance—juridically, medically, socially—[that] innocent human life can be destroyed for whatever reason, for the most admirable socioeconomic, medical, or social reasons—then it does not take a prophet to predict what will happen next, or if not next, then sooner or later. At any rate, a warning is in order. Depending on the disposition of the majority and the opinion polls—now in favor of allowing women to get rid of unborn and unwanted babies—it is not difficult to imagine an electorate or a court ten years, fifty years from now, who would favor getting rid of useless old people, retarded children, anti-social blacks, illegal Hispanics, gypsies, Jews....⁷

This plea comes, of course, from the pen of Walker Percy. Like O’Connor, Percy discerned that the asphyxiating gas of comfort and convenience was having an especially deadening effect on the elites who occupy the high places of American cultural power. Hence his prediction that

our anti-human humanism, our misanthropic anthropocentrism, would end by slaying bodies no less than suffocating souls. To speak of abortion as a reproductive right of refusal and of euthanasia as a private choice to rid ourselves of suffering—as if such killing were the equivalent of shopping for clothes or selecting an automobile—is to turn the moral life into a consumer's existence.

All the permanent things, by contrast, are products of communal obligation and religious obedience, not of private preference or choice. For each person to determine the moral meaning of the universe for himself is a recipe not only for individualist anarchy and social chaos, but also for what Christians have defined as slavery. True liberty is found—O'Connor teaches in accord with what Christ and all the saints have declared with relentless monotony—not when we define reality for ourselves, but when we conform ourselves to the reality that God has established in Israel and Christ and the Church. The Book of Common Prayer gives this free and faithful life its proper name, calling it "the service which is perfect freedom." For Thomas Cranmer as for Flannery O'Connor, the word "service" retained its Latinate sense: it did not and it does not mean anything akin to civic club volunteerism; it means joyful servitude to the triune God.

For Flannery O'Connor there is a profound connection between the huge genocidal horrors of our age and the individual sinful acts that we each commit: they are all denials of our divine and human commonality. The Church is complicit in these literally abominable evils, she suggests, whenever it fails to teach and preach and enact "the gospel of life," as John Paul II called it. For this gospel alone is capable of creating a community that, for all its failings, remains committed to restoring the broken body of humanity. Its disciples had rather accept unjust death willingly than to take

innocent life guiltily. Hence O'Connor's much-controverted claim: "When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced-labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chambers." (CW, 830-31) "Tenderness" is a euphemism for our modern revulsion against bodily suffering. It allows us to salve our conscience when preventing or ending life, rather than promoting the mutually-borne suffering which is real Life.

Knowing perhaps that the Greek word *martyr* can be translated as "witness," O'Connor offered her testimony—in both her fiction and her essays and letters—against such a terrible tenderness. Yet she had no desire to be a martyr in the literal sense, even if (as the young girl says in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost") they killed her quick. She made her witness with her art and thus with her life. Rather than grimly bearing it, she regarded her yoke as a buoy rather than a burden—as the yoke of real freedom and thus as the law of the spiritual and the physical world. When confronted, therefore, with the complaint that Catholicism is far too easy a faith, O'Connor offered a surprisingly affirmative answer. "You are quite right," she replied to her critic, "that it is easier to be a Catholic than something else. It is easier than anything else and if any Catholic should tell you otherwise, you can tell him to go to the devil. The Church does not demand any sacrifice out of proportion to what she gives" (CW, 928). It demanded of Flannery O'Connor that she consecrate her life to an art that endures four decades after her death. It will last for many decades to come, I predict, because it gives fresh imaginative life to the *evangelium vitae*—to the Good News that the broken human body can be healed, that the sundered human community can be saved, that the deaf can be made to hear and the blind to see, if only by the summons of the raised voice and by large, startling figures.

1. *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York, 1988), 949. All further references to O'Connor's work, unless otherwise indicated, will be paginated as CW. 2. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, originally published in French in 1947, trans. Lancelot C. Shepard and Elizabeth Englund, O.C.D. in 1950 (San Francisco, 1988), 29. 3. *Ibid.*, 33. 4. *Ibid.*, 34. 5. *Ibid.*, 39. 6. The feminist Eileen McDonagh puts the pope's faith in the inviolabil-

ity of conscience to a severe test by speaking of "the coerced imposition of pregnancy": "the fetus is not innocent but aggressively intrudes on a woman's body so massively that deadly force is justified to stop it" (qtd. in J. Budziszewski, "The Furies of Conscience: Denial & the Wages of Sin," *Touchstone* [September 2003]: 34). 7. Walker Percy, *Signposts in a Strange Land*, ed. Patrick Samway (New York, 1991), 350-51.

Complaint of the Jay

The jay in blue and black majesty
Finds much to complain about. But bears up
Anyway, in fact, he's tough,
And when the others head south for winter,
You may see him finding his nourishment
Under the firs where the snow failed to reach,
Or in a morsel which the dog overlooked.
Not only that, he's also fearless
And flies, shrieking, to attack the dog
Or cat which threatens his family.
Which makes me think there's hope for us poets
In whom complaint is great: hope for all
Dissatisfied with what the world calls real—
Property, status, or the stock exchange.
Why not squawk, holding out for something better?

—Mark Christhilf