

When describing the preacher, John says, "His name is Harry Powell. But the names of his fingers are E and V and O and L and E and T and A and H and that story he tells about one hand being Hate and the other hand being Love is a lie because they are both hate and to watch them moving scares me worse than shadows, worse than the wind."

This description shows the absolute essence of the preacher's character in Davis Grubb's *The Night of the Hunter*. The preacher's real intentions are the hate of the left hand, and he rationalizes his evil through the false facade of the love of the right hand. Even though he may appear good and holy to some people, throughout the novel, he still has evil motives towards virtually everyone.

In one of the preacher's dreams while he is in prison, he recalls an incident in which he rationalized an evil act by claiming it was God's will. After being solicited by a prostitute in Charleston, West Virginia, with the intention of killing her because of her "unholy" vocation, he takes her up to a room to murder her. Just as he is about to whip out the switchblade and fulfill his holy mission, he suddenly hears "God's" voice telling him not to bother because "there were too many of them." At the moment when this revelation takes place, the woman of the night sees the preacher in the midst of taking out the knife, and she screams. The shouting brings a Negro servant, and the preacher is forced to kill both the servant and prostitute. In Powell's sick and twisted mind, God had merely changed His mind when Preacher's life was in danger. There is a contradiction in "God's words" and clearly the preacher is merely using his "conversations" to aid in his own egotistical self-interest.

The fact that Preacher lies to most people that he meets is a way in which he puts up the holy act to mask his evil soul. He is an expert in sandwiching lies between truths, weaving them in a tangled and intricate web and thus making his lies all the more difficult to discover. When he first rides into town, he tells the people that he knows Ben Harper because he was the preacher at the jail that held Ben. In actuality, he and Ben shared the same cell. Powell does not want anyone to know he stole a car and he can substantiate his lie because he knows things about Ben from being in the same cell. As a result, the people (except John) do not suspect Preacher to be the malicious murderer that he is. The preacher also tells people that Ben told him that he threw the ten-thousand dollars he stole into the river. Harper actually never leaked his secret and even stuffed a sock in his mouth to keep himself from telling. This lie made practically everyone believe the money was gone and no one (except John) anticipated the preacher's greedy plan to steal it. In addition, Powell also lied after he killed Willa. This time his lie was intended to conceal an act rather than a motive. He said that Willa drove away in the car to leave him and even drove himself to shed false tears so that he would not get into any trouble. Throughout the course of the novel, the preacher's lies gradually become more convoluted.

The instrument with which the preacher "spreads God's glory" is the knife. This weapon is a direct extension of the hate in Preacher's heart. He claims that the reasons for the switchblade's usage are "to fulfill God's wishes," but the opposite is the case. When referring to the knife, he screams, "This is what I use on meddlers! Get me? For meddlers!" These meddlers that he talks of are not interfering with God's work but instead are interfering with the preacher's personal desires. Frequently, the phrase, "Its steel tongue licked out." is used to indicate the action when the preacher presses the knife's button. Because of this novel's many biblical references, this phrase suggests that the knife resembles some sort of serpent like the one in the Garden of Eden. In the garden, the serpent represents evil like the evil in Preacher's soul. Also whenever Powell holds the knife, it is with his left hand, and he would press its button with "the finger called H" on his left hand. Traditionally the left hand is associated with evil and the devil's work. Preacher is probably a natural lefty who was swaddled in his infancy in order to force him to use his right hand. This interpretation explains why the preacher uses the knife with his left hand but

writes with the right. He uses the left hand of hate to do his evil work. The knife which he always uses with the left hand is an integral part of his madness.

Because he is prone to do evil acts, the preacher creates a wall of goodness to make himself appear more Godly. Powell probably decided to become a preacher as an outgrowth of this elaborate act. Eventually, Preacher became so accustomed to this charade that he began rationalizing his evil by saying he was in fact doing good.