



Flannery O'Connor

(self-portrait)

(1925-1964)

“I am the one on the left; the one on the right side is the Muse. This is a copy of a self-portrait I painted three years ago. Nobody admires my painting much but me. Of course this is not exactly the way I look but it's the way I feel. It's better looked at from a distance.”

Letter (20 October 1955)

“In the self-portrait that is not a peacock. That's a pheasant cock. I used to raise pheasants but they got too much for me as they require attention and have to be caged. The peacocks take care of themselves. But I like very much the look of the pheasant cock. He has horns and a face like the devil. The self-portrait was made ten years ago, after a very acute seige of lupus. I was taking cortisone which gives you what they call a moon-face and my hair had fallen out to a large extent from the high fever, so I looked pretty much like the portrait. When I painted it I didn't look either at myself in the mirror or at the bird. I knew what we both looked like.”

Letter (19 June 1963)

The Peacock Roosts (1953)

The clown-faced peacock
Dragging sixty suns
Barely looks west where

The single one
Goes down in fire.

Bluer than moon-side sky
The trigger head
Circles and backs.
The folded forest squats and flies
The ancient design is raised.

Gripped oak cannot be moved.
This bird looks down
And settles, ready.
Now the leaves can start the wind
That combs these suns

Hung all night in the gold-green silk wood
Or blown straight back until
The single one
Mounting the grey light
Will see the flying forest
Leave the tree and run.

“You can’t have a peacock anywhere without having a map of the universe. The priest [in “The Displaced Person”] sees the peacock as standing for the Transfiguration, for which it is certainly a most beautiful symbol. It also stands in medieval symbology for the Church—The eyes are the eyes of the Church.”

Letter (25 November 1955)

“The peacock is a great comic bird with five different screaming squawks. The eyes in the tail stand for the eyes of the Church. I have a flock of about thirty so I am surrounded.”

Letter (25 February 1963)

“The peacock, which is indisputably the most sumptuous of the domestic birds in our clime, offered a ‘ready-made’ symbol. Its incorruptible flesh, its plumage reappearing in the spring, permitted making it an image of the Savior, who had escaped the corruption of the tomb and who was reborn each year in the spring in a dazzling burst of splendor.”

Henry LeClerq
“Peacock”

Dictionnaire D’Archeologie Chretienne et de Liturgie (1937)

“Lately I have had a recurrent dream: I am five years old and a peacock. A photographer has been sent from New York and a long table is laid in celebration. The meal is to be an exceptional one: myself. I scream “Help! Help!” and awaken.”

O’Connor
“The King of the Birds” (1961)

