

50 CRITICS DISCUSS

Flannery O'Connor

(1926-1964)

"There is in Flannery O'Connor a fierceness of literary gesture, an angriness of observation, a faculty for catching, as an animal eye in the wilderness, cunningly and at one sharp glance, the shape and detail and animal intention of enemy and foe. The world of *Wise Blood* is one of clashing in a wilderness.... Miss O'Connor's style is tight to choking and as direct and uncompounded as the order to a firing squad to shoot a man against a wall. One cannot take this book lightly or lightly turn away from it, because it is inflicted upon one in the same way its people take their lives; like an indefensible blow delivered in the dark."

William Goyen
New York Times
(18 May 1952) 4

"*Wise Blood* is the first novel of a twenty-six-year-old Georgia woman. It is a reasonably accomplished, remarkably precocious beginning. Written in a taut, dry, economical and objective prose, it is an important addition to the grotesque literature of Southern decadence. It is also a kind of Southern Baptist version of 'The Hound of Heaven'....The stifling world which emerges from these pages is an animalistic world. The author's predilection for zoological symbolism is more than a trick of style....Nobody here is redeemed because there is no one to redeem."

John H. Simons
Commonweal
(27 June 1952) 297-98

"The theme of *Wise Blood* is Christ the Pursuer, the Ineluctable, with a satire on Protestantism thrown in....It is quite clear what Miss O'Connor means to say...is...there is no escaping Christ. But the author's style, in my opinion, is inconsistent with this statement. Everything she says through image and metaphor has the meaning only of degeneration, and she writes of an insane world, peopled by monsters and submen....Let me say of *Wise Blood* that it does deal with one of the themes, and shows a variety of sensibility, out of which the kind of fiction that matters can be made."

Isaac Rosenfeld
New Republic
(7 July 1952) 19-20

"Miss O'Connor is a regionalist in the best sense of the word; that is, she understands her country and its people so well that in her hands they become all humanity. The stories in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* take place in Georgia, but they are moving for their inescapable reality and not because of picturesque and local color. Such things, we recognize, could happen anywhere; some are grotesque and some terrible but we dare not say of any, 'This only took place in the writer's imagination.' For she lays hold of the significant detail; her poetic awareness is constantly receiving, selecting the illustration which gives us a man or a woman or a certain kind of hot summer evening living and whole."

Sylvia Stallings
New York Herald Tribune
(5 June 1955) 1

"Miss O'Connor's works like Maupassant's, are characterized by precision, density and an almost alarming circumspection. There are few landscapes in her stories. Her characters seem to move in the hard, white glare of a searchlight—or perhaps it is more as if the author viewed her subjects through the knot-hole in a fence or wall....Miss O'Connor for all her apparent preoccupation with the visible scene, is also fiercely concerned with moral, even theological problems. In these stories the rural South is, for the first time, viewed by a writer whose orthodoxy matches her talent. The results are revolutionary."

Caroline Gordon
New York Times
(12 June 1955) 5

“Scarcely thirty years old, and Georgian by birth and chance, Flannery O’Connor is not easily fitted into any identifiable group of Southern writers. She stands among, but is not of them. To be sure, her characters have certain traits linking them with the Southern tradition in fiction: for the most part they are poor and rural folk dominated by the old ancestral fears—of death, the unknown, the foreign, and all the shadows of evil. But they are strangers to despair, and this is their distinction. They hold their fears at bay with a rustic religiosity that is as functional as their speech or dress.”

James Greene
Commonweal
(22 July 1955) 404

“*A Good Man Is Hard to Find* certainly presents an abundance of victims of grotesque fate and weird villains.... Beyond the grotesquery and the symbolism, this reviewer finds in these diamond-hard, diamond-brilliant stories a fiery rejection of Bible Beltism, of small, mean minds, and small, mean ways. Interestingly enough, the critical touchstone in Catholicism.”

Riley Hughes
Catholic World
(October 1955) 66-67

“Something about Miss O’Connor’s work is reminiscent of the best work of another Georgia writer, Erskine Caldwell. Perhaps it is subject matter most of all. Though in no sense concerned with the pornography and lasciviousness to which Caldwell often resorts, she too goes in for the miseries of the poor whites....Perhaps the similarities are enhanced, too, by the style of Miss O’Connor’s stories—realistic, plain, literal....Where Miss O’Connor’s art differs—profoundly—from Caldwell’s is not in language and subject matter as much as in the attitude of the author. Caldwell is the Naturalist, out to make a social point....More kin to the Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying* [by Faulkner], her people confront spiritual and moral problems, not economics. There is in her characters a dignity, a human worthiness, that shows the real respect Miss O’Connor had for them.”

Louis D. Rubin, Jr.
Sewanee Review
(Autumn 1955) 678-79

“This first collection of short stories by Flannery O’Connor exhibits what Henry James, in ‘a partial portrait’ of Guy de Maupassant, called ‘the artful beauty of a master.’ James added that Maupassant was ‘a case, an embarrassment, a lion in the path.’ The contemporary reviewer, called upon to evaluate the achievement of the young American writer, may well feel that a lioness has strayed across *his* path. O’Connor works, like Maupassant’s, are characterized by precision, density and an almost alarming circumspection. There are few landscapes in her stories. Her characters seem to move in the hard, white glare of a searchlight—or perhaps it is more as if the author viewed her subjects through the knothole in a fence or wall.... She is, like Maupassant, very much of her time.”

Caroline Gordon
writer friend and wife of Alan Tate (1955)
quoted by Suzanne Morrow Paulson
Flannery O’Connor: A Study of the Short Fiction
(Twayne 1988) 135

“These ten witheringly sarcastic stories come from a talented Southern lady whose work is highly unladylike....Her instruments are a brutal irony, a slam-bam humor and a style of writing as balefully direct as a death sentence. The South...simpers, storms and snivels in these pages....Nobody is noble in these stories....Only in ‘The Displaced Person’ does Ferocious Flannery weaken her wallop by groping about for a symbolic second-meaning—in this case, something about salvation.”

Review of *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*
Time (1955)

“When it comes to seeing the skull beneath the skin, we may remark that the heroes of both O’Connor novels are so perceived within the first few pages, and her published work begins and ends with coffin dreams. Her memento more is no less authentic for being often hilarious, devastating to a secular world and all it cherishes...Her best stories do the work that Eliot wished his plays to do, raising anagogical meaning over literal action. He may have felt this himself, for though he rarely read fiction I am told that a few years before he died he read her stories and exclaimed in admiration at them....

For one thing, it is evident that the writer deliberately and indeed indifferently, almost defiantly, restricted her horizontal range; a pasture scene and a fortress wall of pine woods reappear like a signature in story after story. The same is true of her social range and range of idiom. But these restrictions, like the very humility of her style, are all deceptive. The true range of the stories is vertical and Dantesque in what is taken in, in scale of implication.”

Robert Fitzgerald
Introduction
Everything That Rises Must Converge
(1956; Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1965)

“Flannery O’Connor had a realistic intelligence, an ironic and unsentimental approach to literary creativity. There is a simplicity in her novels and short stories, a basic acceptance of the human situation, that illuminates and justifies her choice of subject matter. She admitted to a preference for the vulgar and the grotesque, but her sympathetic detachment presents her characters...in an appealing and unforgettable light....She was a serious craftsman who acknowledged and exploited her southern Catholic background, yet she was genuinely concerned with the enigmatic, subconscious levels of experience. She had the gift of countering the mystical with reality.”

Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, E. Hudson Long, eds.
The American Tradition in Literature, 3rd edition
(Norton 1956-67) 1676

“She proposes that the Catholic writer is one who is humble before reality, never manipulating it and never turning his eyes away from its ugly or unpleasant phases. True humility is based upon the recognition that God has given man whatever portion of the ‘good’ he possesses; in the case of the writer it is his talent...with all its limitations as well as its powers....If the grotesque is an important part of reality today, the Catholic writer must not only portray grotesquerie but make sure that readers are shocked into realizing it as such, in an age when the perverse is accepted as the normal....

The center of all Catholic fiction is the Redemption. However mean or miserable or degraded human life may seem to the natural gaze, it must never be forgotten that God considered it valuable enough to send His only Son that He might reclaim it; the old priest in [“The Displaced Person”] tries in vain to bring this divine mission home to the spiritually wizened Mrs. McIntyre, who on behalf of her world proclaims: ‘As far as I’m concerned...Christ was just another D.P.’ Contemporary society in recent years has made a business of denying its need of redemption, the advertising agencies being among its chief allies in this endeavor. The sacraments, by explication, or implication, are represented there: Baptism in ‘The River,’ Confirmation in ‘A Temple of the Holy Ghost,’ Matrimony in ‘A Stroke of Good Fortune,’ Extreme Unction in ‘The Displaced Person,’ Penance in ‘The Enduring Chill.’ The nature of man revolves around his possession of moral intelligence, as even unethical Mr. Shiftlet points out. Prayer is a real force, and hell is a certainty, its entrance symbolized by the opening to sewer passages on the streets of Atlanta....

Flannery O’Connor pities the poor and afflicted denizens of the rural South who people her [fiction]. They are largely warped in spirit, a warping which becomes increasingly evident as their tales unfold; but somehow the shriveling of their souls has taken them by surprise and one cannot help feeling sympathy for their abortive efforts to break through the cocoon of ice that surrounds them—despite all barriers, to reach some sort of fulfillment. The evangelical religion of her area holds out to them little promise for communion either with the Deity or with each other.”

Sister M. Bernetta Quinn
“View from a Rock: The Fiction of Flannery O’Connor and J. F. Powers”
Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction 2.2 (1958) 19-27

“According to critics, Flannery writes better than nearly anybody else now living. Her writing has been compared to the works of Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, and the Russian novelist and short-story writer Dostoevsky [*sic*]. All are distinguished by their character studies which are in the realm of abnormal psychology.”

Margaret Turner
Atlanta Journal and Constitution (1960)

“Her first two novels, *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), are somber tales of southern religious fanaticism. Her colorful description and realistic dialogue are combined to produce a fascinating picture of Georgia backwoods society. *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955) is a collection of grotesques which show the writer’s talent in treating traditional Southern themes.”

Max J. Herzberg & staff
The Reader’s Encyclopedia of American Literature
(Crowell 1962) 824

“Though he died in 1940 [Nathanel] West is the one writer who, along with Flannery O’Connor, deserves singular attention as a rare American satirist....They are very nearly alone in their employment of the devil’s voice as vehicle for their satire....Both West and Flannery O’Connor write about the devil...but seem to reflect the verbal mannerisms and explosively reductive attitudes of such figures in their own ‘black’ authorial stances....As a writer [O’Connor] is on the devil’s side.... [!] Flannery O’Connor does not agree with my notion of her central fictional allegiance... [Nor does anyone else.]

The very revivalist or circuit-preacher Protestant world of her fiction, with its improbable combination of religious faith and eccentricity, accounts in large part for the way in which ‘unknown country’ and ‘actuality’ are held in severe balance in her work....My own feeling is that just as the creative process threatens the Holy throughout Flannery O’Connor’s fiction by generating a paradoxical fusion of improbability and passion out of the Protestant ‘do-it-yourself’ evangelism of the South, and thereby raises the pitch of apocalyptic experience when it finally appears; so too, throughout this fiction, the creative process transforms the writer’s objective Catholic knowledge of the devil into an authorial attitude in itself in some measure diabolical....Flannery O’Connor’s writing stands out against all those immediate fictions which are precious or flatulent or tending to retreat into the security of a constraining realism. The voice of her devil speaks with a new and essential shrewdness about what Nathanael West called ‘the truly monstrous’.”

John Hawkes
“Flannery O’Connor’s Devil”
Sewanee Review (1962)

“In a certain sense Flannery O’Connor has replaced Carson McCullers as the image of the young writer; although her face is perhaps more rounded and less ‘dreaming androgynous’ than her older contemporary, she still manages a talen ‘as real as her face’ and a prose which is both ‘chaste and severe.’ She is the darling of *Kenyon Review* and *Sewanee Review* on the one hand, of *Commonweal* and *Catholic World* on the other. She has proved agreeable to most of the literary and quasi-literary factions which pass judgment on contemporary literature. She has failed to please only the most rigidly party-line Catholics who find her brand of Catholicism not orthodox enough and the most ‘textual’ literary critics who find her language too bare and her experiments with structure not eccentric enough. The reviews of her three books have been overwhelmingly favorable...”

Words like ‘grotesque,’ ‘redemption,’ and ‘violence’ appear with astonishing regularity. Miss O’Connor insists on a delicacy ‘for the grotesque, for the perverse, and for the unacceptable’ in the kind of fiction she writes. This would seem to be paradoxical until one examines her novels and short stories, which abound in sordidness and poverty and yet maintain a delicate aesthetic balance on the side of gentility and religious

affirmation....Her place (the South), her religion (Catholicism), her hobby (peacock raising) reinforce her stories and novels at every turn. One can even attach the three words most appropriate to her fiction to each: 'grotesque' to the South; 'redemption' to Catholicism; and 'violence' to peacock raising. All of these qualities, however, spring from the humility which she asks for the creative writer....Indeed the last word is always that of one of her characters as Flannery O'Connor manages in each of her successive works to (in Joyce's words) 'refine herself out of existence'....

A Flannery O'Connor story or novel is always the slowly paced, leisurely uncovering of a series of unusual people and circumstances. She seems always intent on at first disenchanting us—mainly through a systematic puncturing of the myth of southern gallantry and gentility—and then restoring our confidence when she has forced us to view her world on her own terms. She forces us to go through a complete Cartesian purgation; our minds are cleansed of all previous notions. When we have forgotten the other books we have read, we can then allow for the existence of her Hazel Motes (*Wise Blood*), her Rayber (*The Violent Bear It Away*), and her 'The Misfit' ('A Good Man Is Hard to Find'). We almost willingly 'suspend disbelief' in the face of impossible happenings to unlikely people. This is part of what we must go through when we read most fiction writers. But never have I felt the compulsion to reject everything and start over again that I feel with Flannery O'Connor.

This is all the more curious because the demands she makes are not in the direction of new techniques or startling dislocations of structure. Her novels and stories are in every sense traditionally constructed and make no use of the experimental suggestions of a Joyce, a Proust, a Faulkner, or even a Styron. Her work is usually completely faithful to chronology, with no attempt at reproducing an atmosphere of psychological time....We should make clear that Flannery O'Connor has learned nothing from Faulkner's prolix style, from his experiments with structure and technique, from his frequent use of the devices of stream-of-consciousness fiction. Her chaste, unimposing sentences, her fairly strict chronological narratives, her refusal to tamper with consciousness place her at the other extreme from the Faulkner of *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Bear*....Prose paraphrase does no justice to Flannery O'Connor's plots and characters. She convinces us of things which are quite outside our experience through means which require considerable aesthetic reorientation....

Where Flannery O'Connor is most unlike her contemporaries is in her almost Dickensian devotion to oddities of character. While so many recent novelists have begged for anonymity in their notion of character....Flannery O'Connor insists on precise and detailed delineation. Her creatures are usually rounded personalities, believable if only on their own terms....'In Miss O'Connor's vision of modern man—a vision not limited to Southern rural humanity—all her characters are 'displaced persons,' not merely the people in the story of that name. They are 'off center,' out of place....' [Caroline Gordon] Flannery O'Connor's characters are almost all fanatics, suffering from what we might diagnose as an acute sense of dislocation of place. Almost everywhere in her fiction some person is trying to fulfill a mission in unfamiliar surroundings. The mission is usually self-imposed and the role assumed is invariably self-appointed."

Melvin J. Friedman

"Flannery O'Connor: Another Legend in Southern Fiction"

English Journal LI

(April 1962) 233-43

"There were affinities in the fiction of John Hawkes and William Burroughs with nightmare and surrealism, which in turn blended into the grotesque visions of Flannery O'Connor, James Purdy, and Carson McCullers....The most productive centers of postwar fiction in America were situated in the Gentile, rural South of Carson McCullers, Truman Capote, Flannery O'Connor, Peter Taylor, and William Styron, and in the Jewish urban North of Saul Bellow, J. D. Salinger, Norman Mailer, Harvey Swados, Bernard Malamud, and Philip Roth. The evidence against conformity was geographical as well as cultural. Southern novelists, Jewish writers, Negro authors, and Beat pundits had emerged from the tragic underground of culture as the true spokesmen of mid-century America....Writers as different as Berger, Bellow, Hawkes, Burroughs, Heller, Purdy, and Flannery O'Connor shared only a grotesque and ironic view of man. Through irony the fictional imagination endeavored to redeem reality....

Flannery O'Connor, a Southern, Catholic novelist, showed extraordinary powers in depicting the contortions of the spirit with steady eye and relentless pity. Her collection of stories, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955) contained some of the best and most unsettling fiction of the period. And her two religious novels, *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), enhanced her terrible vision. Her avowed interest did not lie in the creation of grotesques as such but rather in the disorders that create or deflect spirit."

Ihab Hassan
Literary History of the United States, 3rd edition
(1946; Macmillan 1963) 1414, 1420, 1423-24

"When I read [O'Connor] I don't think of Hemingway, or Katherine Anne Porter, or Sartre, but rather of someone like Sophocles. What more can be said of a writer? I write her name with honor, for all the truth and all the craft with which she shows man's fall and his dishonor."

Thomas Merton
Raids on the Unspeakable (1964)

"If, as Flannery O'Connor has explained, most Southern writers are considered by the world outside 'to be unhappy combinations of Poe and Erskine Caldwell,' they have, largely, only themselves to blame.... But that a new treatment of the South is possible in fiction Flannery O'Connor herself demonstrates. She approaches the religious primitivism of the South, traditionally Protestant, from the standpoint of a Roman Catholic, and her theme, if I understand it right, is the spiritual distortions that are the consequence of Protestant primitivism. Her characters are grotesque precisely because they are spiritually primitive and afflicted both in mind and body. Their lives are like nightmares that are both brutal and farcical, and this is because they are God-intoxicated, one might say doomed to God. God is the sole reality in their lives, and this is so even when they repudiate Him."

Walter Allen
The Modern Novel in Britain and the United States
(Dutton 1965) 307-08

"Mary Flannery O'Connor had the luck of the Irish, or seemed to. At 25 she was pretty, witty, and had published fiction in some of the best little magazines. At 26, she came down with an incurable form of lupus...But Author O'Connor had the stubbornness of the Irish, too....Before her death last August, she had published two novels...of rare intensity, and one volume of ten short stories (*A Good Man Is Hard to Find*) that included four macabre masterpieces....

A lifelong Catholic...O'Connor wrote exclusively of ultimate things: sin and salvation, death and rebirth, the old Adam and the new life. But she was a poet of region as well as religion, and in this new collection of nine stories, which belong among the finest examples of American Gothic, she celebrates in Southern guises the old violent dialogue of the demonic and the divine....O'Connor was a verbal magician whose phrases flamed like matches in the dark revealing a face in a flash (a child's features contorted with grief into 'a puzzle of small red lumps'), a life in a single insight (a sniveler after the ineffable')."

Time
Review of *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965)

"With rare exception, Miss O'Connor explored in all her fiction the same private world, a world of corrosion and decay, invested with evil, apparently God-forsaken, but finally redeemed by God. Despite her somewhat solemn concerns, at her best her fiction is mordantly comic. The practice of life is an eternally serious business, but the world which gives it occasion is a grotesque and absurd place....All of Flannery O'Connor's work, *Wise Blood* (1952), *The Violent Bear It Away* (1961), and the short story collection, *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1956), has the same rigidly defined religious concerns, the same theological pattern....

A highly specialized initiatory ritual takes place in both of Miss O'Connor's novels which are more explicitly religious than most of the stories. The ritual configuration is a reversal of the *rite de passage*; that is, her central characters do not fall from innocence. They are fallen from the outset and move, doomed, through an infested world proliferating its evils, until at the heart of darkness they discover light, or God,

and through renunciation and extreme penance achieve redemption for themselves and, in extension, for all of us. Hazel Motes, in *Wise Blood*, like Tarwater in *The Violent Bear It Away*, is by metaphysical ordination a man of God (each protagonist is the grandson of a preacher) who resists His calling only to discover God at last in an awesome revelation.

During his term in the army, Haze, disillusioned by the existence of evil in the world, sins for the first time. As a consequence he denies Christ in order to justify his behavior and then continues to sin in order to justify his unbelief. To whoever will listen, and to some who won't, Haze preaches against redemption, insistently and obsessively denying Jesus....Haze blasphemes, seeking proof and reproof, seeking his own salvation. The novel's irony resides in that no one is willing to save him, that his blasphemy passes virtually unnoticed. In Miss O'Connor's world, a sea of evil, one more iniquitous drop is hardly perceptible. No one will redeem Haze, he must redeem himself; he must transform his life in Christ's image, which means a self-crucifixion. It is the only redemptive possibility in a depraved world. At the end, Haze immolates himself, re-enacting, in effect, the redemption of Man....

Even if we have reservations about the significance of what she did [this critic is not religious], we must admit that she did it incomparably well. Her best stories, 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find,' 'The Artificial Nigger,' 'The Displaced Person,' and *Wise Blood* sear the consciousness with the acid of their vision, burn away the euphemisms and confront us with the absurd nightmare of existence. Miss O'Connor's world, encrusted by evil, is populated by the physically and spiritually deformed, distorted images of ourselves, whose redemption is possible only, if at all, through an exemplary and violent act of self-sacrifice. Though she permits us to laugh at the nightmare of our moral deformity, it is a painful laugh tortured by the agony of recognition. We are doomed, she is telling us, to the hell of our own souls unless, at the last extremity of suffering, at the risk of everything we discover the awesome judgment (and love) of God. It is a small and terrifying hope she leaves us. The rest, the life we live, is merely a comedy, a deadly comedy, of horrors."

Jonathan Baumbach
"The Acid of God's Grace"

The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel
(New York U 1965) 87-8, 99-100

"All that emphasis on old-style femininity in the South which produced the typical 'belles' had also produced an even more highly developed version of the 'misfits.' At that time it was also a particularly good thin to be a Southern misfit, just as today it is helpful to be a Jewish one. There were Faulkner and Eudora Welty and Miss McCullers and Robert Penn Warren; there were *Kenyon Review* and *Sewanee Review* and Mr. Ransom and Mr. Tate; there was a sense of cultural authority...

Flannery O'Connor...had such a quick, deft, animating touch that brought her characters and milieu to life by means of a few details and the flick of a metaphor, it is easy to forget that she was not portraying Southern life so much as her own lurid sensations of religious life....Her people are so solitary or isolated, their degree of alienation is so extreme that they seem to know no one else except the other characters they meet in the tale. Divested of all social ties and acquiring none, they are the creatures of a vision, and though their speech, manners, and dress bespeak the Bible Belt, their real existence is meant to lie in the eternal mysteries of sin and redemption, which they grotesquely and usually blindly enact.

This weird procession of teen-age prophets, backwoods nihilists, and demented acolytes, as well as orphans and widows, frauds and psychotics, is intended to create a world that was as close as possible to pristine Christianity. *The Violent Bear It Away*, for example, depicts the transmission of a prophetic vocation from a crazed old bootlegger to his fourteen-year-old grandson whom he had kidnap, baptized, and raised in the wilderness and who, though aided by the Devil himself, is eventually unable to resist the fate of baptizing his idiot half-brother by drowning him and trudging on 'in the bleeding, stinking, mad shadow of Christ.' Besides allowing Flannery O'Connor to let rip her talent for the vulgar and violent, her latter-day counterparts of Galilee and Nineveh enabled her to start at rock bottom, as it were, and put her much more rational Catholic beliefs through the fire of a barbarous and frequently perverse faith. It also kept her in a highly subjective, almost solipsistic relation to the South and made her seem like the country

preacher she describes near the beginning of *Wild Blood*: 'a waspish old man who had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger.'

Embodied in such defective human clay, moreover, the religious moral was often consumed in the fire of her grotesque melodramas. In *Wise Blood* a young backwoods ascetic is released from the Army, buys a glaring blue suit and a ministerial hat, travels to a city, where he immediately visits a prostitute and then sets forth in a broken-down jalopy to found 'The Church Without Christ.' The first thirty or forty pages are brilliantly unexpected, but the comedy soon breaks down into a macabre phantasmagoria of a sort of Baptist sideshow in which both faith and its perversions seem equally deranged. Though *The Violent Bear It Away* is a much more convincing and powerful book, it too, suffers from being so claustal and freakish, as though, like beggars' children, her characters must first be lamed before they can function. Over the longer stretch of her novels, though neither is very long, Flannery O'Connor seems also to lose much of the sly casualness and wit that is the leaven of her vision of sin and the agents of timing and contrast to those two marvelous early stories 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find' and 'Good Country People,' and instead fills in by piling up one lurid effect upon the other. [this analysis is not very deep, professor]

In most of the stories collected in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* her consciousness begins to open out to full range and to contend with the actual disjunctions and disparities between modern Southern culture and 'the Catholic sacramental view of life' that she regarded as her ruling perspective. I am thinking particularly of such stories as 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost,' 'The Artificial Nigger,' and particularly of 'The Displaced Person,' which seems to me to mark the turning point in Flannery O'Connor's career—the first full merging of natural and religious experience as well as a subtle assimilation of social meanings to anagogical ones. Paraphrasing 'The Displaced Person' is like whistling a Bach cantata, but it is mainly a manifold study in uprootedness that connects the concentration-camp inmates of Europe to the itinerant farm laborers of the South and associates a Polish refugee, who puts a rundown farm in order and tries to marry his relative to a Negro farmhand, with Christ.

'He's extra and has upset the balance around here,' complains Mrs. McIntyre, the owner of the farm, to the old priest who has brought Guizac to her. Unable to bring herself to make the efficient refugee leave, she stands dumbly by while the native white farmhand, whom Guizac has displaced, runs him over with a tractor. In the aftermath, the Negro, the farmhand, Guizac's family, and eventually Mrs. McIntyre herself abandon the farm, leaving it to the Judge, her dead husband, who lies 'grinning' under the desecrated tombstone, from which another farmhand had stolen an angel on his way through....

Everything That Rises Must Converge is a book by a major writer who in the last years of her painful and foreshortened life achieved a mastery of form and a strength of vision that enabled her to create tales such as 'Parker's Back' and "Revelation' that raise a truck driver's tattoo and a housewife's sense of insult to the level of spiritual illumination. It is as though in the struggle against her illness she had come to find enough grotesqueness and grace in the common life of men and that she had no more time or talent to waste on merely being sardonic and bizarre....But I do not wish to gloss these stories. They each exist on their own complex terms and within their own profound sense of the mystery of sin and grace. They steadily confront the contradictions...and then, as often as not, by a visionary power transcend them."

Theodore Solotaroff
"The Development of Flannery O'Connor"
The Red Hot Vacuum and Other Pieces on the Writing of the Sixties
(1965; Atheneum 1970) 171-77

"Negroes in the fiction sometimes carry profound spiritual meaning, as in 'The Artificial Nigger' or that figure of Buford Munson in *The Violent Bear It Away*. In several stories, and in the fragment of the unfinished novel, Negroes are images of fraternity. In the deepest sense, Harry in 'The River,' who goes to his death because he wants to count, or Norton in 'The Lame Shall Enter First,' who hangs himself because he wants to be somewhere, are...symbolic Negroes or 'artificial niggers'....Miss O'Connor insists with Dostoevski that the only equality is to be found in the spiritual dignity of man, in the mystic communion of the Sacraments....The European writer Flannery O'Connor most profoundly resembles (in method, not in scale) is Dostoevski....

Georgia Snopesism...is principally embodied in two families, the Shortleys in 'The Displaced Person' and the Greenleafs in 'Greenleaf,' but there is more than a touch of it in the Pritchards in 'A Circle of Fire' and the Freemans who are the 'good country people' of the story of that title....More than any other figures in Miss O'Connor's work, these Snopes families are social, even class, symbols (as are their Mississippi counterparts in Faulkner). They represent the southern poor white class...

Half a dozen important themes run through all Miss O'Connor's work. One is a profound equation [?] of the mysteries of sex and religion....Another recurrent theme is change of identity, transformation, death-and-rebirth....Parker in 'Parker's Back' is transformed by the tattoo, but most often in the fiction transformation occurs by renaming....A theme of great power in the work is what might be called the perverse mother...[Another] is the False Christ...Miss O'Connor's principal theme is... 'the God-intoxicated'...[One] form God-intoxication paradoxically takes is Rationalism....Rayber...is a mock-pastor (he named his son 'Bishop')...Rayber's views caricature enlightened secular humanism by being stated as the negatives of Christian dogma....If the male characters are all God-intoxicated, the female characters in Flannery O'Connor's fiction are mainly self-intoxicated. Smugness and self-satisfaction, often represented by women, is another important theme....The peacock is [a] complex symbol..."

Stanley Edgar Hyman
Flannery O'Connor
(U Minnesota 1966) 29-30, 32-36, 38, 41-42

"In many of her stories...Flannery O'Connor portrays narrow-minded, self-righteous women whose status is threatened (by history, by Negroes, and so forth) but who affirm their 'superiority' by virtue of the Negroes' lower position in society. The ability of these women to understand or even acknowledge their own motives, rationalizations, and fears gives Miss O'Connor an opportunity to let them 'hang themselves' with their own words, thoughts, and acts."

Barbara McKenzie, ed.
The Process of Fiction: Contemporary Stories and Criticism
(Harcourt 1969) 537

"While Flannery O'Connor was by any standard Southern, perhaps a Southern lady, in a literary sense she is that and something more....O'Connor abandoned the traditional concerns of Southern fiction for her own peculiar obsessions, obsessions which sprang from the unique circumstances of her life....Her reductive, leveling impulse may be part of the demythologizing process in American fiction, a process usually associated with Northerners like William Carlos Williams or the more urbane Wallace Stevens."

Josephine Hendin
The World of Flannery O'Connor (1970)

"This collection brings together for the first time in one book all of Miss O'Connor's stories. Every one is good enough so that if it were the only example of her work to survive, it would be evident that the writer possessed high talent and a remarkably unclouded, unabstract, demanding intelligence. The best are among the best American short stories ever written."

Time
Review of *The Complete Stories* (1971)

"The greatest of Flannery O'Connor's books is her last, posthumously published collection of stories, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*....O'Connor has dramatized the tragic consequences of the locked-in ego in earlier fiction, but in *Everything That Rises Must Converge* nearly every story addresses itself to the problem of bringing to consciousness the latent horror, making manifest the Dream of Reason—which is of course a nightmare. It is a measure of her genius that she can so easily and so skillfully evoke the spiritual while dealing in a very concrete, very secular world of fragmentary people. Despite her rituals of baptism-by-violence, and her apparently merciless subjecting of ordinary 'good' people to extraordinary fates, O'Connor sees the world as an incarnation of spirit; she has stated that the art of fiction itself is 'very much an incarnational art'....As Christ suffered with his real, literal body, so O'Connor's people must suffer in order to realize Christ in them."

Joyce Carol Oates
"The Visionary Art of Flannery O'Connor"
Southern Humanities Review 7.3 (Summer 1973)

"Flannery O'Connor was preeminently a prophetic writer, a woman of apocalyptic vision. No matter how erroneously certain readers have sought to convert her art into theology, the fact remains that her work is religious to the core. One scans her fiction by reading it any other way—as, for example, the product of the Southern humorist tradition. The single religious concern woven through the tapestry of the entire O'Connor *oeuvre* is that the heedless secularity of the modern world deserves a withering judgment. It is fitting that 'Judgement Day,' Miss O'Connor's last completed story, should contain her central theme in its very title, thus bringing her career to an explicit culmination....

Critics have often remarked the repetitive character of Flannery O'Connor's fiction. Over and over again her stories are peopled with arrogant ingrates who suffer a harrowing encounter with their own presumption. When they are not purged with a grace which is consuming fire, they are left reeling with a startled sense of their own inadequacy. Neither readers nor characters can escape the searing judgment which stares from the tree line, the terrible wrath which blazes from the sky....

She deliberately chose, I believe, to concentrate her art on what to her was the prime modern problem: the unprecedented apostasy whereby contemporary man has abandoned faith in anything transcending himself. Her fiction attempts, therefore, to bring harsh judgment upon a world determined to get along without an ultimate source of righteousness and redemption. Hence also the apocalyptic character of her work, where evil is depicted as becoming surpassingly sinister (and nonetheless, perhaps all the more comical), the hunger for grace increasingly ravenous, and the confrontation with mercy ever more violent."

Ralph C. Wood
"From Fashionable Tolerance to Unfashionable Redemption"
The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin 7 (Autumn 1978)

"In her opinion, conflicts between ways of being constituted a challenge to Christian truth that could not be brooked, and with this certainty of outlook, she reserved final narrative authority for herself. For the hard of hearing she would 'shout,' for the blind she would 'draw large and startling figures.' Yet with all this allusion to rhetoric, to bold and unambiguous fictional strategies, O'Connor was curiously reluctant to exploit the potential of the omniscient voice. Rarely in all these tales of bizarre and violent experience does she reflect on the meaning of the grotesquerie or give explicit value to fictional events. She infrequently enunciates in her fictional world what she had no trouble conveying in personal life—that Christian orthodoxy was the consistent measure of experience. This is usually left for the reader to infer, to come upon through the indirections of allusion, incongruities, and distorted hyperbole....

I have the image of O'Connor creating her audience from her own fears and isolation, creating a composite image from antagonistic reviews that arrived in the mail, conjuring a reader who was not only ignorant but, like so many of the characters of her own imagination, resistant to her theological point of view. Any author as removed from live, intelligent, and informed readership as O'Connor was must evolve a complicated kind of 'double-think' to deal with this distance. As Martha Stephens has noticed, 'Flannery O'Connor seems to have sought, all her writing life, a means of approach to an audience whose religious sense she believed to be stunted and deformed.' She thought as a Christian and wrote as a Christian while constantly second-guessing her 'monstrous reader,' anticipating the workings of a mind that did not know by experience or explicit heritage the forms and assumptions of Christianity....It was in the precarious territory where one neither offended nor obscured by excessive indirection that I think O'Connor tried to live artistically....

We can deduce from O'Connor's work her concurrence with the notion that truth is concealed from us except in extraordinary circumstances, but her portrayal of the nature of that truth or the manner of its disclosure reveals a sensibility radically removed from either Joyce's or Woolf's. She seemed to feel more of an affinity with the ancient concept of epiphany, and hence she tended to emphasize a divine movement-

human response pattern, whereby people are no longer agents of epiphany through the movements of their minds but the recipients of some great and even unsought knowledge.”

Carol Shloss
“Epiphany”

Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference
(Louisiana State U 1980)

“The Gothic romance...seeks extremes; it proceeds...by means of the logic of the excluded middle. ‘It is not made from the mean average or the typical’ [unlike Realism], Flannery O’Connor has written, ‘but from the hidden and often the most extreme’; ‘it is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially’....Origins are always what O’Connor calls ‘mystery,’ the manifestation and apprehension of the Sacred within quotidian reality. The Gothic tradition arose...‘at the dead end of the Age of Reason, [when] the Sacred reasserted its claim to attention, but in the most primitive possible manifestations, as taboo and interdiction....[The Gothic tradition] reasserts the presence in the world of forces which cannot be accounted for by the daylight self and the self-sufficient mind’....

The writer and the reader must...recognize the literal reality of the devil, the poverty of our self-sufficiency, and the necessity of grace. Such self-knowledge is a form of agony; as O’Connor says in what I believe is her best story, ‘The Artificial Nigger’—a story whose plot literally repeats the plot of St. Cyril’s parable, with the artificial nigger a silent figure on the side of the road....O’Connor seeks in her work to ‘reassert’ the Sacred in the quotidian world, to situate her characters on the mysterious passage between the ‘manners’ of novels and the ‘mystery’ of union with secret causes....The Gothic, that is, presents a world beyond the understandings of metaphor, a world of mysterious inhuman forces that cannot adequately be explained by the metaphors of psychology or sociology or well-meaning humanism....‘While the South is hardly Christ-centered,’ O’Connor says, ‘it is most certainly Christ-haunted’....This is O’Connor’s literary problem, to make the Sacred literal in a world in which it seems at best metaphorical, originating in a mode of perception rather than in the created world....

O’Connor’s Gothic fiction [aims] to discover or create light out of the dark frontier of rural Georgia.... Most of O’Connor’s heroes fall into terror: they find, as Parker does, the terrifying cost of God’s enduring eye; or they find, as the Misfit does, the senselessness of not knowing God is there. As O’Connor herself says, ‘Often the nature of grace can be made plain only by describing its absence,’ and such absence is inhuman; it leaves our world literally senseless and results in the senseless violence...of all those who do not fit: the Misfit, Rufus, Shiftler, and all the rest. But others—Mrs. Turpin, Mr. Head, Bailey’s mother—discover love amid their terror: they discover the literal language of God already in their own Southern slang....What the rural Southern frontier finally offers O’Connor is that position in the world—that situation—where the strangers you meet can be anyone, can, in fact, be supernatural: Jesus, the devil, the Holy Ghost.”

Ronald Schleifer
“Rural Gothic”

Modern Fiction Studies 28.3 (Autumn 1982)

“O’Connor’s people are among the least introspective in modern fiction, with minds at once so unaware and so absurdly assured that they have refused to acknowledge any deeper self. None of them are interested in what one character calls his ‘underhead,’ and the result is the very fury of their responses, for the unconscious exists in O’Connor’s fiction not as a psychic area to be probed but as a violent force denied. The ironic upshot of their denial is that her characters thereby become obsessive figures, clinging in outrage to their narrowly rigid self-definitions in the face of all challenges. Incapable of doubt or self-questioning, her protagonists are incapable of the flexibility of development, and the climaxes of the stories confront them with the startling image of all they have denied. Their eyes are finally ‘shocked clean,’ but the shock is sometimes sufficient to kill them as well....

In her work the configuration always takes one of two classic forms. Either one character discovers that another is a replica of himself, an almost identical reflection—here the paradigm would be twins—or, much more often, one character is presented as an alter ego of another, the embodiment of qualities suppressed or ignored by the first, a mirror image or inverse reflection....The heroes of both of the novels are deeply split

within themselves. Almost inevitably, it seems, they also encounter everywhere doppelgangers [doubles] who reflect aspects of their self-division. In the more compressed form of the story the central figures may not be so obviously dramatized as internally divided, but they are nevertheless forced again and again to gaze into an appalling mirror. Language and imagery heralding the doppelganger abounds....

Double, replica, twin, brother, negative image, mirror—this is the classic language of the doppelganger motif. Of the traditional terms, only *shadow* seems to be missing; yet one recollects her comment on the appearance of the Negro in southern literature as ‘a figure for our darker selves, our shadow side,’ and certainly the image of the shadow is notably employed in both novels and in ‘The Artificial Nigger.’ While Hazel Motes strides through Taulkinham spewing forth blasphemies, he trails behind him ‘a thin nervous shadow walking backwards,’ and both Tarwater and the Heads discover ‘ghost-like’ transparencies in train and store windows, shadowy selves that appear to have a being of their own....

The revelations in O’Connor’s works, so often precipitated by those double figures, come only when the consciousness of the protagonist, with all its presuppositions and defenses, is finally overthrown and a deeper awareness forces its way through. O’Connor clearly saw the human unconscious not only as, say, the repository of repressed sexual and aggressive urges, but as a realm of inherent theological dimension from which could come intimations of the demonic and the divine. Those potent doubles thus embody the link between the unknown within the self and the unknown beyond it, between the ‘other’ hidden inside and that Other dimension which transcends the self, between the deepest roots of one’s being and the furthest reaches of Being....

Her protagonists meet the challenge of the double only with repudiation, outraged resistance, an increased hardening of attitude that presses the tensions of her stories to the bursting point. There is no gradual awakening, no glimmer or growth of recognition, only the sudden, shocking revelation as the veil is ripped aside. Indeed, the characteristic action in O’Connor’s fiction is the reverse of a process of confrontation between protagonist and ‘other’: it is a progressive stiffening into ‘the extreme situation,’ the movement toward polar positions. The upshot of this is that her protagonists never truly reach either of the classic conclusions of the double tale: a final disintegration of personality (madness, suicide), or the reintegration and strengthening of the self. Images suggesting the reconciliation of self and other that do appear are highly ironic.... One comes to feel finally that the two sides of the self are so deeply inimical that no prolonged confrontation is possible, that O’Connor could hardly imagine a full reconciliation, that the fierce clash renewed in story after story had no permanent resolution this side of the grave. Psychologically, at least, Flannery O’Connor seems to have been an inveterate ‘Manichean’....

Thus the double figure is always a profound threat to the protagonist, for by definition he embodies all that has been denied in order to create the inflated invulnerable self. And thus, too, for Flannery O’Connor there can be no final reconciliation between them, for the impulse to rebel against death, to assert the self in the face of annihilation, to insist on the power of one’s uniqueness can never be harmonized with the demand to submit, to risk the chaos of the physical, the dissolution of the self, and the certainty of death.... The double in O’Connor’s fiction represents an ineluctable human dualism, the divided self that is the inheritance of fallen man, who is thereby doomed not only to incompleteness but to rending conflict. It is little comfort that those doubles often carry about them the overtones of the numinous, for their advent brings only the harrowing violence which ends not in a coming together but in a splitting apart, the sundering of the protagonist from his sense of himself and his world and even from life itself. O’Connor repeatedly stressed her concern as a writer with the operations of supernatural grace... The Christological passage she most often cited (Matt. 10:34) gives a precise description of the effect of her double figures: ‘Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword’....

Surely the radical tensions in O’Connor’s fiction—its polar images, its extremities of conflict, its apocalyptic tendencies, its deeply self-divided heroes, and, not least, its numerous double figures—emerge from... a creative inner dialogue, a dialogue that indeed seems to have lasted a lifetime. And if her fiction almost never presents images of self-integration, it is surely because, unlike young Tarwater, she could not still that ironic voice that questions and contradicts, that mocks and rebels and says no.... O’Connor’s own integrity as a writer lay in her projecting those conflicts into her fiction, dramatizing and exploring the

clash without pretending to a spurious reconciliation she could not feel. One result is the obsessive recurrence of the double motif.”

Frederick Asals
“The Double”

Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity
(U Georgia 1982)

“Though she insisted that her vision of humanity was not ‘Manichean’ (her catchword for all things gnostic, which as a devout Catholic she regarded as heretical), she is interested above all in the distances which humans are at pains to place between themselves and the spiritual in themselves, the sacred in and around them, and in the terrible violence with which the Holy finally and inevitably erupts into their willfully profane lives. ‘The theologian,’ she wrote, ‘is interested specifically in the modern novel because there he sees reflected the man of our time, the unbeliever, who is nevertheless grappling in a desperate and usually honest way with intense problems of spirit’....

O'Connor sees ‘the man of our time’ as having created the dualistic world which he occupies in her stories. His darkness, ignorance, distance from the Holy are consequences of his own unbelief. His spiritual [wishfulness] and intellectual agnosticism put modern man in the very state of grotesque decrepitude in which gnostic theology would place him. The natural world is good because it emanates from God. This is a Catholic, not a gnostic sentiment. Evil, however, in O'Connor's universe, has made the natural world and the human beings in it grotesque; it has distorted and occluded their goodness. Evil can only come into being as a negation of the world, the Holy. It is derivative and can only deny, vitiate. It can only become intelligible as a destructive force and a necessary consequence of our moral freedom. Evil is what blinds us to the Holy and it is the state of blindness. But we have blinded ourselves....

Her fictions can be read as a catalog of the unbeliever in his many incarnations. In addition to the simple atheist, there is the one ‘who recognizes a divine being not himself, but who does not believe that this being can be known analogically or defined dogmatically or received sacramentally’.... Again, she sees this type as a self-made gnostic. Finally, there is the sort which holds the greatest interest for her, the ‘modern man who can neither believe nor contain himself in unbelief and who searches desperately, feeling about in all experience for the lost God.’ This is her archetype of the gnostic, a seeker after a knowledge that cannot be known. The chief consequence of this partly willful, partly inherited alienation from the sacred is that the sacred can only intrude upon human perception as a violence, a rending of the fabric of daily life... The novelist cannot but see a distorted world, cannot but see men as monsters, the more so as he feels himself to be in monstrous discord with that world....

In her stories, her world, death is the force which invades and undoes the negation of unbelief. Death appears as a negative force only because we see it from an already negatively defined context, which is our own unbelief. The unbeliever—which describes most of her critics—reads O'Connor's stories much as the atheist Mr. Paradise watches the boy Bevel drown himself in ‘The River’.”

Jefferson Humphries
“Proust, Flannery O'Connor, and the Aesthetic of Violence”

*The Otherness Within:
Gnostic Readings in Marcel Proust, Flannery O'Connor, and Francois Villon*
(Louisiana State 1983)

“Georgia author, whose Gothic novels are *Wise Blood* (1952), about a young religious fanatic who tries to establish a Church Without Christ in his Georgia mountain region; and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), a macabre tale set in the backwoods of Georgia and presenting the fanatical mission of a boy intent on baptizing a still younger boy. Her stories, set in the South and also grotesque, are collected in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955, titled *The Artificial Nigger* in England). *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), and *Complete Stories* (1971). Occasional prose was collected as *Mystery and Manners* (1969) and letters as *The Habit of Being* (1979).”

James D. Hart
The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 5th edition
(1941; Oxford 1983) 550

“She wrote: ‘I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that.’ Hers is no simple or easily grasped vision. She said that she discovered from reading her work that ‘my subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil.’

Sometimes the violence of the action and the grotesqueness of the characters seem to preclude the manifestation of grace. But she believed that when the audience viewed the repugnant as normal, the writer must shock: ‘To the hard of hearing you shout and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling pictures.’ She also found that ‘violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace.’ But she is not propagandistic, and the reader who does not share her theology or values can still enjoy and benefit from her work. She does not oversimplify human experience in order to fit it neatly into a mold or to prove a point. Though often her characters seem larger than life, perhaps caricatured, they lead their own lives, find their own destinies, make their own hells. Also, O’Connor tells good, exciting yarns in which important things happen to people, usually her fellow Georgians.”

Wilfred Stone, Nancy Huddleston Packer, Robert Hoopes
The Short Story: An Introduction
(McGraw-Hill 1983) 469-70

“Before she went to graduate school, the first work to attract her attention...was, not surprisingly, the *Humorous Tales* of Edgar Allan Poe. Although she was later to describe this as ‘an influence I would rather not think about,’ she never disclaimed it, and we can see in his cast of characters figures who lingered in her deepest memory and didn’t have to be thought about in order to affect her imagination and be turned to her later, more profound, purposes. There is, however, considerable evidence to suggest that when she came to begin her first novel [*Wise Blood*], she had been much affected—possibly even set going—by another writer and his work. The writer was the poet T. S. Eliot, and the work that seems to have moved her so powerfully was *The Waste Land*....This should come as no surprise, for in Eliot she found no alien philosophy, or vision, or sense of life, but another writer ‘with Christian concerns,’ as she described herself to be, one who, like herself, openly avowed and embodied them in his work....

She knew her gift for creating grotesque figures with grotesque ideas, in grotesque situations, and in the beginning she planned to contrast them to the then relative innocence and good will of her protagonist. She invented a stream of weird types, all of them talkative, and the confusion grew. In time, she realized that she had to clear the air and either eliminate some of her characters or replace them with people whose actions, as well as their talk, could carry her story forward....

When the book [*Wise Blood*] appeared in print, there was an initial rush to oversimplify, given the provenance of the writer, and the southern aspects of her characters. Commentators tended, in the light of their own prejudices and preoccupations, to see her as another chronicler of southern grotesqueries or, more often, to use a term she loathed: another ‘Southern Gothic’ writer, an eccentric writing about eccentrics. Southerners disliked it for what they saw as mockery of themselves and of Protestantism, and in her own locale it was regarded as a shockingly immoral book. It was anything but immoral, of course. Nor was it meant to reflect ill on the South or southerners, least of all on their religion. The particular scene was intended to reflect the general one...in the mid-twentieth-century United States. Northerners, too, including critics, though professing themselves not to be surprised by anything that happened in the South, found it too strong for their blood, and they, too, almost uniformly misunderstood it.

With such a reception, it was no wonder that the book had no wide circulation, except perhaps among other writers, many of whom greatly admired it, and recognized the emergence of a strong and original talent. Robert Lowell had met her at Yaddo, and had come to admire her both as a person and as a writer. He gave her his full approbation for this first book. It was not long before John Crowe Ransom had offered her a Kenyon Fellowship to facilitate her future work; and personal letters of commendation from many others armored her against the general disapproval and incomprehension. The novelist Caroline Gordon, who had seen the manuscript just before publication, and made instructive technical suggestions quickly acted upon by the author, was most enthusiastic. She sent the book to J. F. Powers, mentioning that in her

opinion only Kafka had previously succeeded in achieving some of O'Connor's effects. He wrote back to add his praise to the book...

Much has been said concerning Flannery O'Connor's own unwavering religious commitment. No one doubts it now, and it seems strange to remember that for some time it was unrecognized, if not taken for its opposite, even by her fellow Catholics. It had not been until 1957 that she made any public statement, at least in print, on the subject....She did not declare that what she called her 'Christian orthodoxy' was specifically Catholic. No doubt she thought that to do so would only confound the confusion, since so few people (including many Catholics) fully or clearly understood much that such a statement implied....Her sympathy for sincere Protestants, and even for vividly subjective Christians, is manifest in her work, although she shows herself to be intolerant of distortions. She said only that such orthodoxy meant for her that 'the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ,' adding that what she saw in the world she saw in relation to that....What she called the Catholic sacramental view of life—that the sensible, material world and all of 'real' human life was in itself sacramental, the visible container of the invisible—was not longer a familiar one in secularized culture....Flannery O'Connor's mind was deeply Catholic, but her fiction was no more parochial than it was regional....

The family in an O'Connor story is more often than not incomplete: one or more parent is dead or gone, children or the young do battle with widowed mothers or fathers, or with uncles, great-uncles or grandparents; the old chafe under lives lived with hostile or indifferent children. The trouble does not seem to lie with the incompleteness of the family, although in some instances the presence of a second parent, or actual parents, would surely have had its effect, although not necessarily for the better...The trouble lies in the pride, egotism and plain cussedness of the individuals. Original sin, as she called it, in all its forms. The inscape of the characters themselves is the 'territory held largely by the devil,' in which she occupied herself with showing 'the action of grace.' If she stuck with family relationships and situations as a ground, it was because she wrote of obscure, 'unimportant,' people, and some kind of family community is where most of us live, and where even our cosmic dramas are enacted and our souls won or lost."

Sally Fitzgerald

Introduction

Three by Flannery O'Connor

(Signet/Penguin 1983) ix-xi, xiv-xv, xx-xxiii

"Perhaps the most singularly unique voice [in the 1950s] was that of Flannery O'Connor. Her mixture of wit, irony, paradox, and traditional belief in the devil and God gave her prose a maturity that belied the age at which much of her fiction was written. Like [John] Hawkes, with whom she corresponded during her last years, she early on discovered a voice that distinguished her from those influencing her. O'Connor's frame of belief was to be found within the Roman Catholic Church, which she saw as a church of great diversity, great paradox, and great profundity for the individual willing to give his/her life to it....

Aside from providing her with the title 'Everything That Rises Must Converge,' Teilhard [de Chardin] was for O'Connor a more pervasive influence than any purely literary figure. For she found, in Teilhard's ability to turn his face toward science and evolution without losing his sense of where pieces fitted into a spiritual plan, a view sympathetic to her own sense of suffering and achievement. O'Connor had to account for her affliction, a degenerative disease called lupus, within a framework of great creative energy. She came to identify with Teilhard's 'passive diminishment,' the phrase suggesting acceptance of an affliction which, while determined and unavoidable, is accompanied by a strengthening of the will. Thus, she becomes a battleground of diminishment and response, the affliction leading to a countering achievement which may not have been otherwise present. This grounding in suffering and increase makes her work far more than Southern or regional, as she suggests in her essay 'The Grotesque in Southern Fiction'....Being 'Christ-haunted' and seeking her self in Teilhard's paradox has given her a vision not grotesque or peculiar to any region, but one which parallels that of Jesus himself.

Although anyone who writes intensely about the Deep South recalls the work of Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor is only superficially similar. Her type of Gothic or grotesque differs from Faulkner's in essentials, and her style, while less convoluted, is more unbending....O'Connor resembles John Hawkes,

although she is far less experimental or daring in her arrangements and in her demand upon the reader. O'Connor's antecedents in fiction, besides Faulkner, are not difficult to seek. We look to the obsessed and monomaniacal: aspects of Hawthorne and Melville, for example, are apparent. The vision of sin which keeps Hazel Mote [Motes] alive and intense is one that not only hovers over the South but enters into writers as different as Purdy, Bellow...Walker Percy. But someone even more immediate—mordant, witty, parodic, deeply committed to loneliness and to questions of sin, sinning and repentance—was Nathanael West, particularly in his *Miss Lonelyhearts*....

O'Connor's shorter fiction is remarkable. Not only have half a dozen stories entered anthologies; the very titles have entered the language: 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find,' 'The Artificial Nigger,' 'Everything That Rises Must Converge'....[Her] words, witty, religious, penetrating, go against the grain of nearly all major American fiction of the time and the ensuing decade. Had O'Connor lived beyond 1964 and continued to write, she could have been a major countering voice to the dominant tones of the period.... O'Connor's religious emblems bridge the gap to the nonbeliever."

Frederick R. Karl
American Fictions 1940-1980
(Harper & Row 1983) 229-30, 233, 235

"Speaking of Flannery O'Connor, Anne Tyler is now nearing the age of thirty-nine, at which O'Connor died. After the eight inventive, polished novels of American life that the younger woman has produced since 1964, the only question remaining about her talent is: will it ever, in its scintillating display of plenitude, make a dent as deep in our national self-awareness and literature as that left by the work of O'Connor, and Carson McCullers, and Eudora Welty?"

John Updike
Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism
(Random House/Vintage 1984) 287, 291

"As a college student in the sixties I read her books endlessly, scarcely conscious of the difference between her racial and economic background and my own...The perfection of her writing was so dazzling I never noticed that no black Southern writers were taught. The other writers we studied—Faulkner, McCullers, Welty—seemed obsessed with a racial past that would not let them go....O'Connor's characters—whose humanity if not their sanity is taken for granted, and who are miserable, ugly, narrow-minded, atheistic, and of intense racial smugness and arrogance, with not a graceful, pretty one anywhere who is not, at the same time, a joke—shocked and delighted me.

It was for her description of Southern white women that I appreciated her work at first, because when she set her pen to them not a whiff of magnolia hovered in the air (and the tree itself might never have been planted), and yes, I could say, yes, these white folks without the magnolia (who are indifferent to the tree's existence), and these black folks without melons and superior racial patience, these are like Southerners that I know. She was for me the first great modern writer from the South, and was, in any case, the only one I had read who wrote such sly, demythifying sentences about white women as: 'The woman would be more or less pretty—yellow hair, fat ankles, muddy-colored eyes.'

Her white male characters do not fare any better—all of them misfits, thieves, deformed madmen, idiot children, illiterates, and murderers, and her black characters, male and female, appear equally shallow, demented, and absurd. That she retained a certain distance (only, however, in her later, mature work) from the inner workings of her black characters seems to me all to her credit, since, by deliberately limiting her treatment of them to cover their observable demeanor and actions, she leaves them free, in the reader's imagination, to inhabit another landscape, another life, than the one she creates for them. This is a kind of grace many writers do not have when dealing with representatives of an oppressed people within a story, and their insistence on knowing everything, on being God, in fact, has burdened us with more stereotypes than we can ever hope to shed....

It mattered to her that she was a Catholic. This comes as a surprise to those who first read her work as that of an atheist. She believed in all the mysteries of her faith. And yet, she was incapable of writing dogmatic or formulaic stories. No religious tracts, nothing haloed softly in celestial light, not even any

happy endings. It has puzzled some of her readers and annoyed the Catholic church that in her stories not only does good not triumph, it is not usually present. Seldom are there choices, and God never intervenes to help anyone win. To O'Connor, in fact, Jesus was God, and he won only by losing. She perceived that not much has been learned by his death by crucifixion...

Whether one 'understands' her stories or not, one knows her characters are new and wondrous creations in the world and that not one of her stories—not even the earliest ones in which her consciousness of racial matters had not evolved sufficiently to be interesting or to differ much from the insulting and ignorant racial stereotyping that preceded it—could have been written by anyone else...One can tell an O'Connor story from any story laid next to it. Her Catholicism did not in any way limit (by defining it) her art. After her great stories of sin, damnation, prophecy, and revelation, the stories one reads casually in the average magazine seem to be about love and roast beef....

I remind myself of her courage and of how much—in her art—she has helped me to see. She destroyed the last vestiges of sentimentality in white Southern writing; she caused white women to look ridiculous on pedestals, and she approached her black characters—as a mature artist—with unusual humility and restraint. She also cast spells and worked magic with the written word. The magic, the wit, and the mystery of Flannery O'Connor I know I will always love."

Alice Walker

"Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor"

In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens (1975)
(Harcourt/Harvest 1984) 42, 51-52, 55-57, 59

"Excluding five short stories eventually rewritten and integrated into the two novels, we find female protagonists in eighteen of the remaining twenty-six short stories. Next, erring males like Mr. Head or Mr. Shiftlet do populate her fiction. But because O'Connor used a large cast of females to satirize those beset with pride and an ensuing sense of superiority, anyone may think her a traitor to her sex. On the contrary, O'Connor's stories dramatize the ludicrousness of women who have denied the spirit of femininity, the *anima*. Such angular, ludicrous women in one archetypal class are the managerial women who scorn any beliefs in mystery of interest in creation. Their doubles are fat women of the earth. O'Connor's trick on some readers is to arouse sympathy with the lean, joyless, women of the work ethic and rejection of the women akin to the 'lilies of the field.' A look at the doubling of the angular female with her obese counterpart in several of the stories shows the former possessed of *animus*, the latter of *anima*.

O'Connor records in her stories a period of cataclysmic change in the South. Three apocalyptic stories signifying a violent breakup of an old way of life feature the pairings of managerial women and their obese chthonic doubles: 'A Circle in the Fire,' 'Greenleaf,' and 'The Displaced Person.' Mrs. Cope, Mrs. May, and Mrs. McIntyre are the respective managers; they are angular, careworn, joyless, humorless women who lack any qualities associated with the *anima*. Indeed, they constantly mouth shallow beliefs in the Puritan work ethic: industry, cleanliness, reason, and righteousness. On the other hand, their doubles, sharecroppers' wives, are fat, indolent, fascinated with mystery, whether of reproduction or whatever, and show close affinities with mother earth.

The managerial type in each story represents a woman who has abandoned the *anima* and consciously adopted a masculine ethic. At some point in each story, she assumes some of the characteristics of the chthonic archetype, with results varying from increased wisdom to total destruction—not only of self, but of a total way of life. First of all, managerial women who avow themselves rationalists and exhibit contempt for any belief in the supernatural and irrational are shown to be notoriously blind to their predicaments. Each fancies herself in control of a farm and of the people around her, but each story dramatizes the opposite in fact."

Mary L. Morton

"O'Connor and Jung"

"Doubling in Flannery O'Connor's Female Characters: Animus and Anima"

Southern Quarterly 23.4 (1985) 57-63

“In fully half the stories published in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* and the posthumous *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, widowed or divorced mothers are central female characters who are tricked, deluded, or violently chastened. These stranded women have been left to raise bad-tempered sons or, more often, daughters, but they prove tough and resourceful in their dealings with the outside world and thus create modest little matriarchies where their sour children can lead comfortable lives. O’Connor satirizes the [matriarch’s] stinginess, smugness, wariness of strangers, and determination to see things in a cheerful light, which are the side effects of the widow’s struggle. In most of these stories the mother’s pride is ultimately smashed by a vindictive male force, perhaps most extremely in ‘Greenleaf,’ ‘The Comforts of Home,’ and ‘Everything That Rises Must Converge,’ where she dies under assault.... Most of O’Connor’s daughters keep their intolerance under...control and try to maintain an aloofness from the world their mothers and people like Mrs. Turpin [“Revelation”]. Involvement with men eventually destroys their pretensions of independence, however, and forces them to share their mother’s vulnerability.”

Louise Westling
*Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens:
The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O’Connor*
(U Georgia 1985)

“In Flannery O’Connor’s fierce vision, the children of God, all of us, always are asleep in the outward life....For O’Connor, we are back in or rather never have left Christ’s time of urgency...Hawthorne’s descendant she certainly was, by way of Faulkner, T. S. Eliot, and Nathanael West, but though Hawthorne would have approved her mode, he would have been shocked by her matter. To ignore what is authentically shocking about O’Connor is to misread her weakly. It is not her incessant violence that is troublesome but rather her passionate endorsement of that violence as the only way to startle her secular readers into a spiritual awareness. As a visionary writer she is determined to take us by force, to bear us away so that we may be open to the possibility of grace....O’Connor’s audacity reminds us of the Faulkner of *Sanctuary* and the West of *A Cool Million*. Her theology purports to be Roman Catholicism, but her sensibility is Southern Gothic, Jacobean in the mode of the early T. S. Eliot.”

Harold Bloom, ed.
Flannery O’Connor
(Chelsea House/Modern Critical Views 1986) 1-4

“The difficulty of human contact with transcendence is, of course, Flannery O’Connor’s central subject. It is what is at issue in *The Violent Bear It Away* between Tarwater and his mysterious friend (and, in an attenuated form, between Tarwater and Rayber), and it is also what is at issue in *Wise Blood* between Hazel Motes and himself. The same issue is debated hotly, and in similar terms, by O’Connor’s critics. It is no surprise, then, that the struggle between Tarwater and his friend over the nature and value of religious belief can be translated into the struggle in the criticism over whether Flannery O’Connor’s stories and novels can fairly be described as works governed by orthodox Christian habits of thought. *To claim contact with transcendence is to leap outside of the [secular] rules which govern the conventional discourse of [politically correct Postmodernist] unbelievers and to speak a language which from without must be indistinguishable from nonsense...[making] interpretation, or even appreciation...impossible.*” [Italics added to highlight the Atheist bigotry.]

John Burt
“What You Can’t Talk About”
Flannery O’Connor
ed. Harold Bloom
(Chelsea House/Modern Critical Views 1986) 127

“She was a determined regionalist whose work never lapses into a comfortable provinciality, a devout Catholic who found her themes and characters in the ‘Christ-haunted’ southern Protestant Bible belt, and, for much of her adult life, a confined invalid who could be as resistant to sentimentality and what she called ‘hazy compassion’ as the most hard-boiled detective novelist...She shaped her stories around moments of unexpected comic violence. Yet unlike [George Washington] Harris, her literary commitment to comedy and violence never seems gratuitous but rather was deeply rooted in religious and aesthetic convictions. “My subject in fiction,’ she said, ‘is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil’....”

Flannery O'Connor hated abstraction. 'The first and most obvious characteristic of fiction is that it deals with reality, through what can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched.' Following the great Catholic philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas, she believed that human knowledge begins through the senses. She disliked critical abstractions as well, feeling that a good story must resist sociological, psychological, philosophical, or religious paraphrase....Her irritation with [reductively naïve] questions has less to do with a dislike for symbolism than with a dislike for a symbol-hunting mentality that thinks it has 'understood' a story when it has completely discarded the work's literal level and discovered, as in an algebraic equation, what every detail 'stands for.'

In Flannery O'Connor's own critical articles, collected posthumously in *Mystery and Manners* (1969), she is always careful to respect the essential mystery of art. She saw the preservation of mystery as fundamental to both art and religion....The novelist's sense of mystery, she believed, grows out of a recognition of the world's incompleteness; the writer's profound sense of something lacking in the world gives serious fiction its value and meaning."

David Minter
The Harper American Literature 2
(Harper & Row 1987) 2099-100

"As her stories and novels came in, I noted the spectacular development of her sense of comedy, and I marveled at the fecundity of her imagination, her great intelligence, and unsparing honesty. With the posthumous publication of her essays and letters, I recognized the whole truth: she is a genius and a classic, whose work belongs in the pantheon of American writers."

Robert Giroux
O'Connor's publisher
Letter to Suzanne Morrow Paulson (1987)

"Flannery was the most sensible and self-aware student ever at Iowa. She had no illusions whatsoever about the complexity of life, and that's why she put so much complexity into her fiction. No writer was ever more aware of what she wrote. She was a complicated person—a subtle person. Simple and unsubtle readers are not her proper readers."

Paul Engle
Director, University of Iowa Writer's Workshop
Interview by Suzanne Morrow Paulson (1982)
Flannery O'Connor: A Study of the Short Fiction
(Twayne 1988) 129

"I found her to be a Southern liberal, concerned with problems of integration and racism. Like a growing number of Catholics in our day, she did not see any incompatibility between her political liberalism and the practice of her religion....Both Cervantes and O'Connor sympathize deeply with their characters because they are at least concerned with the individual and communal values, whereas the actions of people they encounter spring from selfishness. But both authors make it plain that even though the characters' hearts may be in the right place, they nevertheless are possessed by a fanatical madness...I think it is clear to the careful reader that Flannery's great subject is the person of *wise blood*, to use her phrase, who is driven to seek God while fleeing Him. Flannery's South has at its center this person, who seems grotesque to those who have accepted our machine-dominated society in the belief that it is the only reality they can know. Her gift gave her the power to bring to life these strange modern Don Quixotes."

Ted R. Spivey
friend of the family
Professor, Georgia State University
Interview with Suzanne Morrow Paulson (1972)
Flannery O'Connor: A Study of the Short Fiction
(Twayne 1988) 136, 138

“It was a common occurrence on Saturday afternoons for itinerant preachers to gather on the courthouse square. This went on throughout Georgia and most of the South. I can remember any number of very intense preachers, not ordained at all, preaching to only three followers. Maybe as many as twelve. Flannery didn’t have to invent her characters or her plots....She was not writing about a decadent Southern aristocracy but about the human condition....I never was made aware of whether she did or did not adhere to the Catholic modes of behavior or whether she ever missed mass. I would never have known her religious affiliation if I hadn’t known her family....Her work is almost entirely symbolic, ironic.”

Margaret Meaders
family friend
Interview by Suzanne Morrow Paulson
(Twayne 1988) 132, 144

“One possible response to Flannery O’Connor’s work is to consider it ‘odd’ because it blends, as she puts it, ‘the Comic and the Terrible.’ It is also ‘odd’ that whatever version of O’Connor critics adopt, there is some evidence of a contrary version. Sometimes critics see O’Connor as, for example, a Roman Catholic satirist of Protestant Georgia, while others identify her with the nihilist Hulga, a character O’Connor called her ‘heroine.’ Such contradictions in the criticism and the tragicomic mix of her work may seem different, but she still did not consider herself or her work ‘odd’—even though both critics and members of her own community emphasized her ‘peculiarity.’

Flannery O’Connor...called herself ‘a Catholic peculiarly possessed of the modern consciousness’.... Many of O’Connor’s characters, like others in the modern tradition, are primitive and grotesque. They struggle for a sense of significance in a scientific/industrial world that undermines the human capacity for meaningful relationships and defines humanity not in terms of spirituality but as animals, or worse, machines. Almost half of O’Connor’s published stories end with a shocking death: a young boy hangs himself, an escaped convict exterminates an entire family, a grandfather murders his granddaughter....The grotesque elements in O’Connor’s work are even more understandable considering that she went through an ‘Edgar Allan Poe period’ lasting ‘for years’....Try to keep in mind that these ‘freaks’ are symbolic of human nature generally....She should be placed with the best twentieth-century American, British, and European Modernists obsessed with alienation, the dark side of Nature, and death. She should also be counted among the greatest comic writers of all time.”

Suzanne Morrow Paulson, ed.
Flannery O’ Connor: A Study of the Short Fiction
(Twayne 1988) ix-x

“Miss Flannery O’Connor’s literary art combined a disarming Catholic orthodoxy with a Hawthorne-like knowledge of the effect of sin on human relationships, which she then set in the Protestant South. It proved to be an irresistible mix even for secular critics, who found her parodies and celebrations of Bible Belt religion compelling and strangely disturbing. Her fiction succeeded not in making Christianity more palatable but in making its claims unavoidable....

Wise Blood was published in 1952 to the applause of astonished critics, startled to find its initially nihilistic protagonist, Hazel Motes, the creation of a genteel, mild-mannered young Southern woman. Motes, a Christian *malgre lui*, exemplifies one of O’Connor’s main themes, that the mystery of free will is not the war between one will and another but of many wills conflicting in one character....Praised for its psychological realism [*The Violent Bear It Away*] shows O’Connor returning to the theme of the antiques found in *Wise Blood*, as the protagonist, Francis Marion Tarwater, runs away from a prophetic career ordained by his deceased uncle until, unable to escape the call of God, he succumbs; he ends up drowning a young boy in order to save his soul....*Everything That Rises Must Converge*...derived from a key concept in the work of French Catholic theologian Pierre de Chardin. These stories, like those of *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, feature familiar O’Connor protagonists, souls torn between heaven and hell, looking for solace in self-willed religion or high-handed and vain intellectualism....

For “the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures,” she said, alluding to the grotesque imagery that she employed to communicate her Christian orthodoxy to

readers no longer conversant with common Christian symbols. Her fiction was calculated to subvert the habitualization of Christian truth, to raise such notions as sin, redemption, and resurrection out of the realm of the commonplace and into the modern consciousness. For her, there was no middle ground, no neutral corner, and her most admiring critics were often the irreligious intellectuals whom she parodied in her fiction.

Attempts have continually been made to place her fiction into some convenient pigeonhole: Southern gothic, Catholic grotesque, the school of Southern degeneracy, and so on; however, her work resists such facile generalizations. Her themes, admittedly repetitious, were best suited to the medium of the short story, where here sharp, shocking characterization could have full impact upon the reader. Yet her re-creations of the Southern disposition—its religiosity and its distinctive orality—were too vivid, her spiritual vision too piercing to be ultimately embodied by a single critical label. O'Connor's reputation remains intact as one of the most important Southern writers of the twentieth century."

Bruce L. Edwards
Cyclopedia of World Authors II, volume 3
ed. Frank N. Magill
(Salem 1989) 1124-25

"Grotesque, Catholic, Southern—each of these labels has been affixed to Flannery O'Connor's writing, yet none fully captures its scope. For her work is all of these and more....She wanted to push the reader to experience a sense of something beyond the ordinary, a sense of the mystery of life. She wanted to shock the reader into recognizing the distortions of modern life that we have come to consider natural: 'for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures,' she has noted in an essay. Her writing was also fueled by her Roman Catholic beliefs. The something beyond the ordinary that she wanted the reader to experience, starkly, unsentimentally, was a sense of the sacred. But the reader of fiction doesn't need to be Catholic to appreciate the extra-ordinary, to experience the mystery of life.

This Catholicism probably contributed to O'Connor's sense of living in a fallen world. And she also probably absorbed such a sense of having fallen from past grandeur by growing up white in the post-Civil War South. Yet her characters are not so much fallen aristocrats as poor or middle-class whites, who often don't realize what their lives are lacking. Her portrayal of these characters, their thoughts, their speech is true, funny, powerful—and devastating....O'Connor completed two novels, *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, but is better remembered for her two volumes of short stories, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* and the posthumous *Everything That Rises Must Converge*....'A Good Man is Hard to Find' is typical of many of O'Connor's stories, with its jolting disruption of the mundane, its satire, its toughness. Yet even more than O'Connor's other work, this story provokes extreme reactions: it is funny but also horrifying."

Beverly Lyon Clark
The Heath Anthology of American Literature
(D. C. Heath 1990) 1935-36

"In the opinion of many critics...the one young writer of the fifties who seemed most likely to establish a permanent niche for herself in American literature was Flannery O'Connor...The term 'comic'...points to the aspect of caricature that characterizes all her writing and caused it to be read by some as a Catholic author's satire on the fundamentalist religion of the South's Bible Belt. It came as a shock to some readers of the title story in O'Connor's first collection, 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find,' that she regarded the grandmother there as the heroine. Most had thought of the grandmother mainly as a stereotype, an ignorant and foolish old woman, who in her senility causes the family to stumble into the path of an escaped criminal called The Misfit and by recognizing him as such prompts him to kill them all.

Almost none had been able to read sympathetically O'Connor's representation of the old woman's frantic attempts—even as The Misfit cohorts are leading her family away to be shot—to appeal to the man's better nature and persuade him to turn to Jesus. Nevertheless, O'Connor insisted that for all the woman's general lack of comprehension she has a moment of real insight when, having seen the deaths of the others and now facing her own, she murmurs, 'Why, you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!' and moves to touch her murderer-to-be on the shoulder. At this point he shoots her three times in

the chest. There is nothing grotesque here, O'Connor later declared, simply the literal depiction of an action of grace and the inevitable satanic reaction to it....

The best of her stories had appeared in the collection she published in 1955; but there were others.... The title *Everything That Rises Must Converge*...she...borrowed from Teilhard de Chardin, the priest-anthropologist whose work she greatly admired. These stories are not so arresting as the ones she had published earlier, but they were good enough to justify reprinting six years later in *The Complete Stories*, which won a National Book Award. All the work of her productive fiction years taken together was certainly sufficient to earn O'Connor a place of distinction in America's literary annals, although the exact degree of that distinction is still difficult to predict. As an example of sustained wit and craftsmanship her work undoubtedly will continue to stand on its own. The religious bias of it, however, which contributed in large part to the extraordinary vogue it enjoyed among academic critics during the late sixties and early seventies, has become less attractive as the climate of literary criticism and study has shifted. [Postmodern academic critics are intolerant atheists like Hazel Motes.]

J. A. Bryant, Jr.
Twentieth-Century Southern Literature
(U Kentucky 1997) 149, 151-52

INTOLERANCE OF HER RELIGION

“‘The task of the objective critic,’ [Allen D.] Lackey writes, ‘is to identify clearly his criteria for judgment without resorting to the subterfuge of presenting his own philosophy (or opposition to Miss O'Connor's theology) under the guise of objective literary criticism’.”

John R. May
The Pruning Word: The Parables of Flannery O'Connor
(U Notre Dame 1976) xvii

LIBERALS ENFORCING POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

“Only in her longest story, ‘The Displaced Person,’ does ferocious Flannery weaken her wallop by *groping about* for a symbolic *second-story* meaning—in this case, *something about* salvation.” [Italics added.]

Anonymous illiterate reviewer
Time (9 June 1955)

“Mustered with the regularity of battalions on parade, [her] complex ironies have a way of crystalizing into simple and even smug [Christian] conclusions.”

Irving Howe
New York Review of Books (1965)

“I propose to view her fiction not for the dogma it illustrates, but [to ignore its meanings and impose my intolerance of her beliefs].”

Josephine Hendin
The World of Flannery O'Connor
(Indiana U 1970) 17

“Since she knows that her audience does not hold her beliefs...” [This implies that nobody agrees with her and that no Christians read her fiction.]

David Eggenschwiler
The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor
(Wayne State 1972) 102

“Her vision is essentially that of another age.”

Dorothy Walters
Flannery O'Connor (Twayne 1973) 154

“Many of us are simply too far gone in anthropocentric irreligiosity.”

Martha Stephens
The Question of Flannery O'Connor
(Louisiana State 1973) 40

“A statement of faith is easier for an agnostic reader to accept than O'Connor's usual tendency toward oblique insult, which ensues from the intimation that her fictional world is fraught with portentous meanings that we could see if only we were not such monstrous readers, and too limited to understand.”

Carol Shloss
Flannery O'Connor: The Limits of Inference (LSU 1980)

“This [novel by Anne Tyler] is O'Connor cartooning without the cruelty, without the pinpoint tunnel to Jesus at the end of all perspectives.” [Yet Updike claimed to be a Christian.]

John Updike
Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism
(Random House/Vintage 1984) 291

“*The Habit of Being* [collection of her private correspondence] is filled with O'Connor's ill-tempered responses to reviewers, critics, and even friends who she believed misunderstood her work. Yet except for early misreadings, unfounded accusations of her fiction shamefully indulging in the ‘gratuitous grotesque,’ she generally fared rather well with her commentators.”

Melvin J. Friedman, ed.
Critical Essays on Flannery O'Connor (1985)

“Her pious admirers to the contrary, O'Connor would have bequeathed us even stronger novels and stories, of the eminence of Faulkner's, if she had been able to restrain her spiritual tendentiousness.” [Bloom is a blowhard.]

Harold Bloom, ed.
Flannery O'Connor (1986)

“To claim contact with transcendence is to leap outside of the [politically correct] rules which govern the conventional discourse of unbelievers and to speak a language which from without must be indistinguishable from nonsense...[making] interpretation, or even appreciation...impossible.” [This politically correct bigot in effect dismisses Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Blake, Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson and most of the other classic writers in American literature.]

John Burt
Flannery O'Connor (1986)

Michael Hollister (2014)