

## ANALYSIS

“The Displaced Person” (1955)

Flannery O’Connor

(1925-1964)

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

Henry LeClerq  
“Peacock”

*Dictionnaire D’Archeologie Chretienne et de Liturgie* (1937)

“The displaced person did accomplish a kind of redemption in that he destroyed the place, which was evil, and set Mrs. McIntyre on the road to a new kind of suffering, not Purgatory as St. Catherine would conceive it (realization) but Purgatory at least as a beginning of suffering. None of this was adequately shown and to make the story complete it would have had to be—so I did fail myself. Understatement was not enough. However, there is certainly no reason why the effects of redemption must be plain to us and I think they usually are not. This is where we share Christ’s agony when he was about to die and cried out, ‘My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ I needed some instrument to get this across that I didn’t have. As to the peacock, he was there because peacocks might be found properly on such a place but you can’t have a peacock anywhere without having a map of the universe. The priest sees the peacock as standing for the Transfiguration, for which it is certainly a most beautiful symbol. It also stands in medieval symbology for the Church—the eyes are the eyes of the Church.... Nothing survived but him and the peacock and Mrs. McIntyre suffering. Isn’t her position, entirely helpless to herself, very like that of the souls in Purgatory? I missed making this clear but how are you going to make such things clear to people who don’t believe in God, much less in Purgatory?”

Flannery O’Connor  
Letter (25 November 1955)

“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 all ‘off center,’ out of place.”

Caroline Gordon  
*Critique* (Fall 1958)

“Now, I can easily conceive a reader thinking the peacock just incidental decoration, though the peacock is mentioned first, and a vanishing point for the story’s perspective is suggested by his gaze.... An unpredictable splendor, a map of the universe, doted upon by the priest, barely seen by everyone else: this is a metaphor, surely, for God’s order and God’s grace....

The danger to be measured is the arrival of a Polish D. P., Mr. Guizac, with his family, on the farm of Mrs. McIntyre, for whom Mrs. Shortley’s husband works as a dairyman. The countryside is the Deep South, and just to make the intrusion thoroughgoing it is an old Catholic priest who has arranged to place the Guizacs with Mrs. McIntyre.... Intimations of the abysmal, like the previous hint of a horizon beyond the actors’ vision, should warn us that the story is religious....

There are several kinds of pleasure in reading Flannery O’Connor, and I find one kind in her dialogues between Negroes and whites.... The wife of the countryside, standing embattled, becomes an exponent of the countryside’s religion. The intrusion of the D. P.’s kindles Mrs. Shortley’s inner life to great intensity... In three weeks the Pole, who is expert, industrious and clean, has made such an impression on Mrs. McIntyre that she remarks to Mrs. Shortley, ‘That man is my salvation’.... Several further revelations come

to Mrs. Shortley before the last and most enlightening. She perceives that the Negroes are not the only ones who may have to find another place. Her husband's job is also in danger, especially if the vigilant Pole should discover that he is running a still on the side. It occurs to her that the priest, who is trying to convert Mrs. McIntyre, hopes to bring still another Polish family to the place....

She overhears Mrs. McIntyre telling the priest that she is going to give Mr. Shortley notice. Mrs. Shortley...makes her husband help her to pack with fury all night, and loading their old car they decamp with their two girls before milking time in the morning. Only when they are on the dark road does he ask for the first time where they are going. At this, Mrs. Shortley's final revelation begins, coinciding with the heart attack that kills her.... That is Part I of 'The Displaced Person'....

We have had frequent intimations that the action is to be understood in religious terms. Mrs. Shortley herself so understands it...[in] a widening of focus, at high velocity, from simple fear of the wicked nations to an apocalyptic inner light. Miss O'Connor's insight into what is left of Christianity in backcountry Bible-reading sections is profoundly empathic and satiric at the same time. Mrs. Shortley belongs to a great company of O'Connor revivalists and visionaries who are funny but by no means figures of fun....and I can think of nothing in literature that teaches better than they do why the Old Testament had to be completed by the New.... After Mrs. Shortley's death, her role as the giant wife of the countryside devolves upon Mrs. McIntyre, who being still more formidable will engage in a harder struggle.... Miss O'Connor...is Pauline [like St. Paul] in abiding not the lukewarm....

The industrious D. P. had imperiled the Shortleys' position; for Mrs. McIntyre he soon appears to imperil the social order that she must govern, and on which she depends. Mrs. Shortley's discovery, now repeated by Mrs. McIntyre, is that the Pole has promised his sixteen-year-old cousin to the colored boy, Sulk, if Sulk will pay half the expense of bringing her from a refugee camp to America. As Sulk explains, 'She don't care who she marry she so glad to get away from there.' For Mrs. McIntyre, in her complacency over having found at last a really efficient hired man, the discovery is a terrible blow. Nothing the Pole could have done would have been more hopelessly wrong.... It is not merely that he has stumbled against the color bar. It is the classic situation of tragedy in which each party to the conflict is both right and wrong and almost incomprehensible to the other....

When the priest comes to see her again, Mrs. McIntyre cannot listen to his talk about Purgatory. She interrupts to tell him that if she can find a white man who understands her Negroes, Mr. Guizac will have to go.... Mrs. McIntyre does not in fact try to find another hired man. She doesn't have to; after a few weeks Mr. Shortley turns up again. In her relief she tells him she will give the Pole notice on the first of the month, but the day arrives and she does not do so. Before firing the Pole she wants to persuade the priest—who has been staying away—that she has no moral obligation to keep him. Meanwhile the sight of the D. P. moving quickly about the place becomes more and more irritating to her. When the priest returns, she is so wrought up that in the course of giving him all her arguments she tells him fiercely that as far as she is concerned, Christ was just another D. P.

Mrs. McIntyre's inner life, like Mrs. Shortley's before her, has now become intense, and her expression of the countryside's religion more pointed. Still she delays. The first of the month comes again, and again she cannot act on the choice that she has made. There are sleepless nights, debates in dreams. But now Mr. Shortley turns the town against her, and when this comes home to her she realizes that she has a moral obligation to get rid of the Pole. As she approaches the tool shed for this purpose, Mr. Guizac is getting under the small tractor to repair it and Mr. Shortley is backing the large tractor out of the shed.... 'She heard the brake on the large tractor slip and, looking up, she saw it move forward'...

The catastrophe is of course Mrs. McIntyre's. Her hired helpers leave her, she must sell her cows, and she lives on, bedridden with 'a nervous ailment.' It is a powerful and moving tale, but it is not the tale of an innocent Pole nor except incidentally of the South's color bar. It is a tale of the displacement of persons, or better, of the human Person displaced. (When Mrs. McIntyre came to, she 'felt she was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives, and she watched like a stranger while the dead man was carried away in the ambulance'....

[O'Connor] sees the South...as populated by displaced persons. Almost all her people are displaced and some are either aware of it or become so. But it is not a sectional or regional condition; it is a religious condition, common to North and South alike, common indeed to the world we live in. The stories not only imply, they as good as state again and again, that estrangement from Christian plenitude is estrangement from the true country of man. Peacock and priest in this story are not really exotic; the fantasies of Mrs. Shortley are, and so is the self-sufficient pragmatism of Mrs. McIntyre. The story goes beyond most in exploring the reformed religion. Clearheaded and hard beset, Mrs. McIntyre embodies the giant wife of our countryside more effectively than Mrs. Shortley, and is the worthy protagonist of a tragic action. For, as I have said, her situation is tragic in the classic sense, and tragic in the commitment of will. Being what she was, she must reject not only the salvation offered, in terms of farm work, by the Pole, but that other salvation that she finds so exasperating to hear of from the priest."

Robert Fitzgerald  
"The Countryside and the True Country"  
*Sewanee Review* 70.3 (July-September 1962)

"The Displaced Person' is essentially a probing of two deeply theological themes, the nature of Christian love or divine, supernatural charity, which in turn reflects its source in a theological event, the Incarnation.... Interestingly enough, 'The Displaced Person' is one of the few O'Connor stories without a demoniac, but it is in fact more metaphysically subtle, for in it evil is not defined in a person nor in an action but in an absence, the absence of love....

For a moment, let us be over-schematic and say that the peacock, as a Christ figure, forms a thematic center for the story, with the major characters ranged around it. Thus the priest, literally in theological teaching an *alter Christus*, is drawn most deeply to the peacock, admires and reverences its beauty most, and connects it with the most super-eminent Being of his own experience, Christ. Mrs. McIntyre's feelings toward the bird and its predecessors are grudging and hardfisted. At the most she tolerates the peacocks, retaining them on the farm because of some connection they seem to have with her late husband, the Judge, who is, incidentally, the only creature for whom Mrs. McIntyre has been able to experience anything approaching love. She has decided that 'when that peachicken dies there won't be any replacements,' for 'she kept the peacock only out of a superstitious fear of annoying the Judge in his grave. He had liked to see them walking around the place for he said they made him feel rich.' Of her three husbands, the Judge was the one most present to her although he was the only one she had buried.' Mrs. Shortley, on the contrary, sees the peacocks with her physical eyes but scarcely acknowledges their presence and certainly grants them no significance.

But there is another and more obvious thematic center of the story: Mr. Guizac, the 'displaced person.' Miss O'Connor so manipulates the story's 'overthought' and 'underthought' that the major characters also range themselves around Mr. Guizac on a descending scale from love to hate. Thus the priest's charity toward the Guizacs is most active and Christ-like, the Negroes are almost tolerant of him, while Mrs. McIntyre's and the Shortleys' feelings regress from neutrality to suspicion to hatred. Moreover, and here the symbolization begins to be an end as well as an instrument, a character's feelings toward the peacock may coincide with his feeling toward Mr. Guizac. The priest is attached to both, while Mrs. McIntyre's deepening indifference to the birds parallels her growing alienation from Guizac, and indeed from everyone. Mrs. Shortley calls the cock 'nothing but a peachicken,' her callousness in this regard exactly paralleling her lack of feeling for the Guizacs.

From a more 'horizontal' viewpoint, the first half of the story is Mrs. Shortley's, and the action imitates her life and death as defined and controlled by the Guizacs. The second half of the story, Mrs. McIntyre's, is the playing out of her destiny as defined, also, by Mr. Guizac. As [Robert] Fitzgerald puts it, 'After Mrs. Shortley's death, her role as the giant wife of the countryside devolves upon Mrs. McIntyre, who being still more formidable will engage in a harder struggle.' Uniting both halves of the story's 'overthought' are the physical peacock and the Displaced Person; they unite the halves as 'underthought' through their analogue, Christ, and the reality of supernatural love. As each major character defines himself in relationship to Mr. Guizac, so that character defines himself in relation to Christ. 'As long as you did not do it for one of these least ones'....

Van Treeck and Croft have noted that 'The Peacock was the ancient symbol of eternity and divinity. It was adopted by the Christians and is used in connection with symbols of the Savior to show His divine character.' It is this ancient and accessible symbology which Miss O'Connor exploits in 'The Displaced Person.' The most explicit use of the peacock as symbol for Christ comes in a scene where the two are directly identified by the priest. Mrs. McIntyre has just explained her reasons why the Guizacs must leave the farm; the priest answers obliquely... 'The priest let his eyes wander toward the birds. They had reached the middle of the lawn. The cock stopped suddenly and curving his neck backwards, he raised his tail and spread it with a shimmering timbrous noise. Tiers of small pregnant suns floated in a green-gold haze over his head'.... "Christ will come like that!" he said in a loud gay voice and wiped his hand over his mouth and stood there, gaping.'

Miss O'Connor introduced the peacock with these same symbolic overtones at the very beginning of the story. In the opening line she depicts a strange procession-in-reverse in which 'The peacock was following Mrs. Shortley up the road to the hill where she meant to stand,' a line in which in fact Mrs. Shortley's entire story is forecast. A few lines later the bird is described more fully: 'The peacock stopped just behind her...as if his attention were fixed in the distance on something no one else could see.' The final detail underlines once more the spiritual blindness of Mrs. Shortley, who not only cannot see what the peacock sees but cannot even see the peacock....

After the Guizacs' arrival, there are a few moments of conversation during which Father Flynn first sees the peacock, a scene stressing Mrs. Shortley's blindness and Mrs. McIntyre's hardness and introducing for the first time the thematic associations of the peacock with the Displaced Person.... Mrs. McIntyre's annoyance at the nocturnal crying of the peacock provides an ironic commentary on her spiritual state, for according to the bestiaries, the night cry of the peacock resembles the call of the Christian in fear of losing grace in the darkness of life (as does the peacock's cry in Wallace Stevens's 'Domination of Black').

The parallel between Mrs. Shortley's relation to the Guizacs and to the peacock is further emphasized in a conversation Mrs. Shortley holds with the two Negroes not long after the arrival of the Poles. Displaced Persons, she explains... 'ain't where they belong to be at'.... Conscienceless, incomprehension and self-seeking callousness have so blinded Mrs. Shortley, the essence of 'good country people,' that she can 'see' neither the peacock nor the Displaced Person but only the inner side of her own capacious ego, a consciousness later inflated to the dimensions of a pseudo-apocalyptic vision. At death, though, 'her eyes like blue-painted glass, seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country.

The last appearance of the peacock coincides with the last sentence of the story, in which the bird is again juxtaposed with the priest. Mrs. McIntyre, abandoned and invalid, almost sightless and voiceless, now lives alone, and 'Not many people remembered to come out to the country to see her except the old priest. He came regularly once a week with a bag of breadcrumbs and, after he had fed these to the peacock, he would come in and sit by the side of her bed and explain the doctrines of the Church.' The peacock is deliberately associated here with the bread of the Holy Eucharist, for, at the literal level, the peacock was and is a common decoration for repositories and other vessels containing the Blessed Sacrament. Ironically, though, Father Flynn can feed breadcrumbs only to a bird, unable to nourish Mrs. McIntyre with the true body and blood of Christ.

Eucharistic imagery has played a significant part previously also in a detail characterizing Mrs. McIntyre—she loves money above all things—as she goes 'into the back hall, a closet-like space that was dark and quiet as a chapel.' Miss O'Connor depicts Mrs. McIntyre sitting down at the Judge's old roll-top desk containing bankbooks and ledgers stacked in the half open drawers and 'a small safe, empty but locked, set like a tabernacle in the center of it.' When Mrs. McIntyre sat 'with her intense constricted face turned toward the empty safe, she knew there was nobody poorer in the world than she was.'

Obviously, detaching the peacock symbol from the total weave of the story for purposes of a separate analysis is almost as impossible as it is to dissociate the peacock from the story's other thematic center, the 'displaced person' motif. However true it is that the centers eventually coalesce in their analogue, Christ, the 'displaced person' motif is developed more explicitly and has a more important part to play in the

unfolding of the action. The depth and power of the motif ultimately derives, though, from Miss O'Connor's deliberate identification of the Displaced Person and Christ, sometimes directly by means of the prior identification of the peacock with Christ, as in the scene...in which the priest has exclaimed of the peacock, 'Christ will come like that!'....

Ironically, in an earlier fit of enthusiasm over Mr. Guizac's success as a money-saver for her, Mrs. McIntyre had declared, 'That man is my salvation!' The culmination of the 'underthought' of the Mrs. McIntyre plot thus occurs in the revelation of the woman's moral and spiritual condition as it is refracted through her view of Mr. Guizac, and beyond that, of Christ. Mrs. McIntyre's equation is, of course, perfectly logical and perfectly knowing, but it is also perfectly inverted; instead of seeing Christ in the Displaced Person, as Christian love demands, she sees Christ only as a Displaced Person. But on another level, it is precisely her spiritual blindness and hardness that have caused Christ to be for her a Displaced Person. The revelation of Mrs. McIntyre's spiritual state through her view of the Guizacs is carefully prepared for and paralleled in other details that show she is totally self-centered and thus completely incapable of love....

Of Mr. Guizac, she says to the priest, 'He's extra.... He doesn't fit in,' and 'I don't find myself responsible for all the extra people in the world'.... Since she is capable only of self-interest and lacks any capacity for a true response to persons, Mrs. McIntyre, typically enough, has placed money at the center of her interest and endeavor. (The patent ironies of the process by which she is cheated first by the Judge and then by herself in her search for money need not be recapitulated here.) Mrs. McIntyre repeatedly refers to herself as not 'made of money,' but these demurs only underline her greed and acquisitiveness, and culminate in a scene in which she asked the priest 'if he thought she was made of money and the old man suddenly let out a great ugly bellow as if this were a comical question.'

By a variation of the 'displaced person' motif, then, Flannery O'Connor shows that it is the displacer who is truly displaced.... Abandoning every altruistic and generous impulse, every vestige of natural compassion, the egoist abandons at once his capacity to love and to be loved supernaturally. He loses his self. But even in the process of hardening his heart toward others-in-Christ and Christ-in-others, he experiences with Mrs. McIntyre that 'some interior violence' has already been done. The abandoner experiences most deeply of all his own abandonment; as Guizac died, Mrs. McIntyre 'felt she was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives, and she watched like a stranger'....

Thus the fullest exploitation of the two thematic centers, the peacock and the Displaced Person, and their analogue, Christ, is reached in this final revelation that the displacer is the displaced. The denouement in the story's 'overthought' coincides exactly with maximum revelation of the 'underthought.' Without the peacock symbol and the ironies playing about the 'displaced person' motif, the story might not have been more than the *Time* (June 6, 1955) reviewer called it, 'a powerful and moving tale of an innocent Pole who stumbles against the South's color bar.' Flannery O'Connor's ability to create and control a strong story line and her use of realistic and naturalistic detail enables us to accept without question the physical reality and 'inevitability' of both the Poles and the peacock, and they can thus serve perfectly as instruments."

Eileen Baldeshwiler (formerly Sister M. Joselyn)  
"Thematic Centers in 'The Displaced Person'"  
*Studies in Short Fiction I*  
(Winter 1964) 85-92

"'The Displaced Person' is the longest and most ambitious story in the book. In it a Polish Catholic refugee, Mr. Guizac, comes to work for Protestant Mrs. McIntyre, a widow who runs a dairy farm. He is the displaced person, but in the course of the complex tragic action, Mr. Shortley, the native hired man, becomes a displaced person when Mrs. McIntyre fires him, Mrs. Shortley becomes a displaced person when she dies of a stroke as they depart, Mr. Guizac becomes further displaced when the rehired Mr. Shortley carelessly allows a tractor to run over his spine, and Mrs. McIntyre herself becomes a displaced person at the end, collapsed, bedridden, and alone.

None of these melodramatic events, however, is the significant action of the story. The central figure in the story is a peacock, who enters in the first sentence, following Mrs. Shortley up the road, and exits in the last, when the priest feeds him breadcrumbs on his weekly visit to instruct the bedridden Mrs. McIntyre in the doctrines of his Church. The peacock is a traditional symbol of Christ's divinity and the Resurrection. In the story he functions as a kind of spiritual test: Mrs. Shortley never notices him; Mrs. McIntyre sees him only as 'another mouth to feed'; her husband the late Judge had kept peacocks because 'they made him feel rich'; the priest is overwhelmed by the peacock's beauty, and says of the spread tail, 'Christ will come like that!'

As the peacock symbolizes Christ's divine nature, so the displaced person symbolizes His human nature. In the story's key conversation, Mrs. McIntyre says, in reference to Mr. Guizac, 'He didn't have to come in the first place,' and the absentminded old priest, mistaking her reference, answers, 'He came to redeem us.' Later, annoyed with all the religious talk, Mrs. McIntyre says indignantly to the priest, 'As far as I'm concerned, Christ was just another D. P.' But Mr. Guizac does more than embody Christ as he is displaced, suffers, and is slain. 'That man is my salvation,' Mrs. McIntyre had said earlier, in praise of Mr. Guizac's hard work, and the remark has Miss O'Connor's usual double meaning. 'I am not responsible for the world's misery,' Mrs. McIntyre tells Mr. Guizac later. But his death, in which they are all equally guilty, is redemptive for her insofar as it abases her pride and prepares her to accept the burden of the world's misery."

Stanley Edgar Hyman  
*Flannery O'Connor*  
(U Minnesota 1966) 17-18

"Mrs. McIntyre is persuaded by the local Roman priest, whose Church she of course despises, to hire a family of Displaced Persons—Polish refugees from World War II—to work on her farm. That will show the poor-white Shortley family and those shiftless Negroes that she means business and that they had better watch their step. And all at first seems rosy. The Guizacs are paragons indeed; and, in her delight, Mrs. McIntyre speaks of them almost blasphemously, though of course she would be the last to know that. Talking to Mrs. Shortley, one of Miss O'Connor's Greek-chorus figures, usually poor whites or Negroes, who perceive and comment on the folly of the Mrs. McIntyres, she observes, 'But at last I'm saved!... That man there—he has to work! He wants to work! That man is my salvation.'

But ironically it is this 'savior,' the Displaced Person, who begins to 'displace' Mrs. McIntyre's whole way of life: he indirectly causes the Shortleys to leave and unsettles the Negroes without whom she cannot run the farm. And when she remonstrates with the Roman priest ('I'm not theological. I'm practical!'), she says, 'As far as I'm concerned, Christ was just another D. P.' At one point there is even an ironic—and characteristic—breakdown of communication between Mrs. McIntyre and the priest. Speaking of Mr. Guizac, Mrs. McIntyre insists, 'He didn't have to come in the first place,' to which the priest, misunderstanding, replies, 'He came to redeem us.'

Then, in a dream, Mrs. McIntyre cries out, ostensibly of the D. P., 'He's extra and he's upset the balance around here.' And, ironically, she has spoken more wisely than she knows. In the Christian view, Christ is the...Great Displaced Person, resented and scorned by the righteous and the self-justified but Himself a Great Displacer of those very same righteous: He *does* upset the balance in their lives. And judgment comes to Mrs. McIntyre in a particularly shocking—and perhaps appropriate—form, as it had earlier to Mrs. Shortley, who had been all too inclined to fancy herself 'a giant angel with wings as wide as a house,' protecting her traditional way of life against those Poles who did not have an 'advanced religion.'

But Miss O'Connor is grinding no ax here, either Roman or ecumenical. She is, however, dramatizing the predicament of the willfully blind... (*Vision*, it should be noted, is a recurring motif in her work, with physical sight often used symbolically to suggest inner, spiritual knowledge.) When Mrs. Shortley dies, apparently of a stroke and with her eyes twisted askew in death, her family 'didn't know that she had had a great experience or ever been displaced in the world from all that belonged to her.' And her eyes then 'seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country.' We are all, finally, Miss O'Connor suggests, *displaced persons*, displaced from our 'true country,' whose 'tremendous frontiers' we re-cross only through the grace of God in Christ."

Robert Drake  
*Flannery O'Connor*  
(William B. Eerdmans 1966) 27-28

“Miss O'Connor was generally in sympathy with [the] views of the Agrarians.... [in *I'll Take My Stand*, 1930] In ‘The Fiction Writer and His Country’ she seems almost to be echoing their beliefs: ‘The anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that every day we are getting more and more like the rest of the country, that we are being forced out, not only of our many sins but of our few virtues’....

‘The Displaced Person,’ a short story that recounts the intrusion into a widow’s farm of an efficient and effective displaced person, is typical of the way in which Miss O'Connor’s situations can be read in frames not unlike those of the Agrarians. Here the ‘displaced person’ may be taken as symbolic of the mechanical world intruding itself from the outside to disrupt the ‘order’ of a Southern farm [an expression of the traditional pastoral myth of the machine in the Garden].... Yet a careful examination of Miss O'Connor’s tone and action makes one, I think, suspicious of such a reading, a suspicion confirmed for the reader by the fact that Mrs. McIntyre...rejects [her] chance of salvation by Mr. Guizac, effectively destroys him, and declares to Father Flynn, who has been his friend and advocate ‘As far as I’m concerned...Christ was just another D.P.’”

C. Hugh Holman  
“Her Rue with a Difference: Flannery O'Connor and the Southern Literary Tradition”  
*The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor*  
eds. Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson  
(Fordham 1966, 1977) 79-80

“Mrs. Shortley is so narcissistic that she considers herself the ruler of the community. (She and her family are tenant farmers.) Despite her name—another wonderfully chosen one—she is ‘the giant wife of the countryside.’ Her granite nature, which has displaced her from humanity, does not allow her to see the D. P., Mr. Guizac, and his family as more than demoniacal intruders... Mrs. McIntyre...is unable to love others. She retreats inward, loving herself so much that she turns upon the D. P., and she is, finally, an accomplice in his murder... She begins to take instructions from the foreign priest. Again the imagery reinforces the grotesque, making us doubt the validity of Mrs. McIntyre’s conversion.”

Irving Malin  
“Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque”  
*The Added Dimension* (1966, 1977) 117

“Mrs. Shortley’s initial attitude is just exactly the opposite of humility. Religion to her was for the weak, not the strong, among whom she placed herself. By the end of the story her eyes ‘seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country’.... Mrs. Shortley is another false prophet... Though earlier she prays to be delivered from the ‘stinking power of Satan,’ one suspects that her intuitions about her own part as the ‘valiant woman’ in the mystery of the world’s meaning may be of diabolical inspiration. Her vision is prophetic, all right: a gigantic figure in the sky, indefinite in shape, with fiery wheels starred by fierce dark eyes and spinning rapidly all around it. The ‘monster’ then turns blood-red... ‘A voice, very resonant, said the one word, ‘Prophecy.’”

It is somehow significant that her eyes are shut tight as she responds: ‘The children of wicked nations will be butchered.’ The falsity of this prophecy is that adjective *wicked*. The rest of the words come true in the murder of ‘the displaced person,’ a crime committed by Mrs. McIntyre, Mr. Shortley, and a Negro servant. They let a truck run over the innocent farmer from Europe who had built up her property even as Helton does Thompson’s in Katherine Anne Porter’s ‘Noon Wine’.”

M. Bernetta Quinn, O.S.F.  
“Flannery O'Connor, a Realist of Distances”  
*The Added Dimension* (1966, 1977) 169-70

“The absence of grace is shown...in those who are aware enough of religious values and believe in them, but who fail to act upon their belief or to see a correlation between it and the moral problems that confront them. Mrs. McIntyre in ‘The Displaced Person,’ Mrs. Cope in ‘A Circle in the Fire,’ and Joanne and Susan, the adolescent girls in ‘A Temple of the Holy Ghost,’ are like Aunt Bessie and Aunt Mattie in ‘The Partridge Festival’: ‘They were both good low-church Episcopalians but they had amoral imaginations.’ Mrs. McIntyre...has a strong sense of what is, in her personal interpretation, right. Like many other O’Connor characters, her morality depends heavily upon trite aphorisms. Most of these she attributes to the Judge, her first husband, whom she married for money ‘when she was thirty and he was seventy-five.’ Although he left her almost nothing when he died, she revered the Judge as the source of truths such as... ‘Money is the root of all evil.’ She is similar to Mrs. Shortley...who suspects the priest because he does not have an ‘advanced religion’....

Mrs. Shortley...[has a] misguided proud commitment to expose and rout Mr. Guizac, a European Roman Catholic, for his backward and dangerous notions.... She identifies Mr. Guizac with the Roman Catholic priest who has placed him on Mrs. McIntyre’s farm, and ascribes to both of them dark plots against the righteous. Her own calling to carry out some violence against them is...tantamount to crucifixion, throwing Mrs. Shortley into the role of false prophet and antichrist.... The figure who is grotesque because he does not fit in is only apparently so, while those who thus apprehend him are the truly grotesque.... There is macabre humor in the irony that...details [of her death] are similar to Mrs. Shortley’s ignorant associations regarding the image of a mound of European Jews exterminated by the Nazis.... She struggles against death, grasping at everything within reach as if to preserve life by holding on to material things—somewhat in the manner of Everyman in the medieval morality play....demonstrat[ing] ludicrously the vanity of possessions...

The old Negro, Astor...is in harmony with God’s charity... Astor is...absent from the death scene at the conclusion of the story. Thus, he is not linked with the guilt of Mr. Guizac’s death. Although it is from this old man that Mrs. McIntyre ultimately learns about Mr. Guizac’s plan to marry his cousin to Sulk, Astor declares to her also...that Mr. Guizac is a special kind of person on the farm and not like...the Shortleys .... As a point of reference for Christian virtue [he is] an ancient, almost timeless old man, nearly blind. Having lived on the farm long before Mrs. McIntyre’s arrival, Astor passes his wisdom on to her by sitting beneath her window conversing with himself loudly enough for her to hear.... Astor’s humility is often evident... ‘Occasionally he spoke with the peacock’ ... Feelings toward [Guizac] coincide with...attitudes toward the peacock... Whether or not one is aware that the peacock is a traditional symbol of Christ, specifically associated with Holy Communion, the Christian meaning soon becomes apparent to him through the repetition of the symbol in sympathetic association with the priest, Astor, and Mr. Guizac, and through Mrs. McIntyre’s hostility toward the peacock....

Mrs. McIntyre’s religion...is a managerial religion, the one by which daily business...gets done.’ Her chief concerns in life are money, her property and possessions, and what she considers her upright image in the eyes of others.... When the old priest who visits her talks about purgatory, she declares proudly that she is practical, not theological. Later, he attempts to draw a parallel between Mr. Guizac’s situation and that of ‘Christ Our Lord,’ and Mrs. McIntyre protests in exasperation, ‘I’m a logical practical woman and there are no ovens here and no camps and no Christ Our Lord and when he leaves, he’ll make more money’.... Mr. Guizac’s ‘monstrous crime’ has been an attempt to marry Sulk, the young Negro worker, to Mr. Guizac’s cousin in Europe in order to release her from a camp for displaced persons after World War II.... In trying to explain to him that one who calls himself a Christian would not try to marry an innocent child to ‘a half-witted thieving black stinking nigger,’ she brings her self-righteous moral position to a clear climax when she declares that she is ‘not responsible for the world’s misery’....

In spite of her later disclaimers, Mrs. McIntyre recognizes and admits early in the story that she does indeed owe something to Mr. Guizac.... She says that he has ‘saved’ her and that ‘That man is my salvation’.... Clearly the displaced person allegorically represents an opportunity for Mrs. McIntyre to accept grace; and it is an opportunity that is first passed up in the name of morality and later violently disposed of when Mrs. McIntyre, Sulk, and Mr. Shortley tacitly assent to the death of Mr. Guizac as they watch silently, transfixed by their hatred of the man, while his body is crushed under the wheels of a tractor. The religious implications of her guilt are boldly shown by the continuing visits of the priest and



the persistent Christian symbol of the peacock in contrast to the disintegration of her life. Mr. Shortley leaves, the Negroes abandon her, she is hospitalized with a nervous affliction, and the farm is sold by an auctioneer. These are the wages not of violent and perverse sins, but of the rejection of grace offered in the circumstances of life at its most ordinary level.... Mr. Guizac is not only the repository of grace, but an occasion for the acceptance of grace by others... All reject the opportunity.”

Carter W. Martin

*The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor*  
(Vanderbilt 1968) 31-34, 44-45, 93-95, 97, 138, 173, 212

“The good man sought throughout the collection [*A Good Man Is Hard to Find*] and found at the end in Mr. Guizac, the DP of ‘The Displaced Person,’ appears in fulfillment of prophecy: he is the ‘one good man,’ the ransom foretold in the Old Testament.... Guizac’s goodness goes far beyond the secular standard.... The peacock, explicitly associated with Christ’s transfiguration and second coming, appears in the opening paragraph.... Mrs. Shortley was a secularist blinded by ignorance, prejudice, and self-interest.... Miss O’Connor at once contrasts the tenant woman’s bulk with the peacock’s delicacy and relates the two.... The bird follows the woman about on more than one occasion....

The three sections of ‘The Displaced Person’...function largely as do the three sections of the two novels. Part two contains the elements which enable the reader to understand the meaning of Guizac’s final sacrifice, of the peacocks, and of the statue on Mr. McIntyre’s grave.... The Displaced Person’s lack of racial discrimination has already alienated his employer, and Shortley’s return to the farm will seal his fate, but that fate is made meaningful by his cutting away the barrier between Mrs. McIntyre and her husband’s grave, adorned with a headless angel and associated with the peacocks. The final section, containing Mrs. McIntyre’s intended repudiation of her ‘salvation’—her ‘good man’—is the inevitable reversal which makes Guizac’s subsequent death meaningful.... The priest says: ‘He came to atone for our sins’....

Thus Miss O’Connor’s opening story, particularly the materialistic scene at The Tower [“A Good Man Is Hard to Find”], leads inevitably to the last story and the sacrifice of Guizac, the good man who throws everything off balance because of his inability to speak English, his efficiency and hard work, and his lack of racial prejudice.... ‘The Displaced Person’ climaxes the collection by finally providing a good man and dramatizing the vicarious atonement. The story places the guilt for the death of the Savior squarely on the shoulders of sinful man, but it also extends the promise of grace.... *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* achieves thematic unity of the sort usually accomplished only in the novel.”

Leon V. Driskell & Joan T. Brittain

*The Eternal Crossroads: The Art of Flannery O'Connor*  
(U Kentucky 1971) 11, 59, 65-67, 75

“In ‘The Displaced Person,’ Miss O’Connor created another haunted character, Mrs. McIntyre, who also deifies her farm... Whereas Mrs. Cope [“A Circle in the Fire”] is wont to ‘recite a litany of her blessings,’ to give thanks for her good fortune, and to pity others, Mrs. McIntyre recites a litany of her troubles, believes that she owes nothing, and complains repeatedly about the Negroes, white-trash tenants, and ‘incidental bloodsuckers’ who have misused her. Yet her complaining of struggle and poverty serves basically the same purposes as Mrs. Cope’s gratefulness: it reduces the unknown to the known, the whole to a part. For Kierkegaard [19<sup>th</sup>-century Christian existentialist] this is the essence of philistinism... Trying to ‘tranquilize itself in the trivial’ and being devoid of imagination ‘carries possibility around like a prisoner in the cage of the probable’...

Mrs. McIntyre is, in her own limited sense, a good woman, a hard-working, honest, and fair landowner. In fact, she turns against her financial savior because she discovers that the displaced person intends to marry his white sixteen-year-old cousin to one of the Negro hands. Although she is somewhat worried that the thought of marrying a white woman will upset her Negroes, whom she needs on the farm, her reaction is mainly a moral and social revulsion (‘What kind of monster are you!’) Of course, the narrow and shallow morality is itself determined by her lack of vision. After she has discovered the D.P.’s intentions, she retires in despair to the roll-top desk which she has preserved as a memorial to her first husband.... In her weariness and disgust with petty struggles, she senses her spiritual and emotional poverty. Apparently this had not always been so much the case. Although she married the Judge for his money, she liked the

eccentric old man, even if she could not admit to herself; but when he died, he left a bankrupt estate and the small farm that his widow struggled to preserve as her symbolic remnant of security....

Father Flynn, the eighty-year-old priest, floats with a gentle and often comic detachment. The down-to-earth women of the farm consider him to be in his second childhood because of his concern for the peacocks, which they consider a profitless nuisance: he gathers bouquets of feathers, feeds crumbs to the peacocks, stands in slack-jawed wonder before a bird with its feathers spread, and even likens it to the transfigured Christ. Although Father Flynn has arranged to have the displaced Poles come to work on Mrs. McIntyre's farm, he is most unworldly and has no conception of the practical and narrowly moralistic problems that bother Mrs. McIntyre about her immigrant workers. When she says that the Guizacs might leave her for more money, his answer is simple, but it shows him to be completely obtuse about the tight-fisted woman he is dealing with: 'Arr, give them some morre then,' [Flynn] said indifferently...

Later, when she has discovered Mr. Guizac's plan to marry his cousin to a Negro, Mrs. McIntyre complains violently to the priest that the Pole does not fit in, but Father Flynn merely reassures her that the Pole will learn to fit in, and he turns his attention to the peacocks. In part, the Jesuit often changes the subject because he is hurt and embarrassed by the woman's selfishness and practicality. He feels much more at ease speaking about the Redemption than about running a farm, and he is puzzled that other people are not humane. Mrs. McIntyre and Father Flynn are a comic pair; they misunderstand each other repeatedly; they talk at cross-purposes; they compete to push the conversation to either religious instruction or business complaints.

In the end Father Flynn prevails, but not without a touch of lightly humorous irony. After Mrs. McIntyre has had a nervous breakdown and is bedridden, the priest visits her weekly to feed the peacocks and to explain the doctrines of the church to the captive and conquered woman. Father Flynn's comic weaknesses are merely the practical deficiencies of his spiritual wisdom, as is true of the nuns in 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost,' for the wisdom of God is often the foolishness of man. Like the peacocks, the old priest seems useless, because he is not concerned with utility. He does not try frantically to build defenses against nothing or to stuff himself with symbols of plenitude. Since he knows that Christ came to redeem us, he is essentially, if absentmindedly, at peace. Father Flynn is a stock character, a lovable, childlike man with a deeper wisdom than sensibleness allows....

The most clearly developed case of demonic revelation is that of Mrs. Shortley... In the opening of the story this wife of the hired dairyman seems to be a fully stable philistine who...has no interest in such unpractical things as a peacock's tail that looks like a map of the universe. She considers religion to be, at best, 'a social occasion providing the opportunity to sing,' and she is scornful of Father Flynn and his unreformed church. But the coming of the displaced Poles begins to unsettle Mrs. Shortley. Practically, she is afraid that the Guizacs have come over to replace good, nearly honest American workers. She talks of the replacement of the Negroes, but as she finds out how valuable a worker Mr. Guizac is, she begins unconsciously to worry about her own place. Less rationally, she also feels threatened by their foreign speech, manners, and religion. Recalling a newsreel showing a heap of dead bodies in a concentration camp, she begins to associate the Guizacs with the murderous ways of Europe, where people are 'not as advanced as we are.' In one of Miss O'Connor's excellent brief insights, Mrs. Shortley confounds the victims of an appalling evil with the evil itself, a common confusion in which the victims begin to seem guilty because they have suffered so much and because they have been vaguely involved with a persecution too overwhelming for analysis.

As her anxiety grows, Mrs. Shortley...becomes aware of the devil, but she mistakenly thinks that Mr. Guizac is his representative. Out of fear and hatred of the displaced person, she begins reading her Bible, particularly the Apocalypse and the Prophets, and she comes to feel that she has reached 'a deeper understanding of her existence.' She sees that the meaning of the world is a mystery and that she is one of the strong ones chosen to play a special part in the divine plan. Then one Sunday afternoon she has a vision.... With imagistic help from Ezekiel and the newsreel, Mrs. Shortley has called herself to prophesy. She has summoned up a vision to justify her hatred, to flatter her pride, and to subdue her impotent fears. She has assumed righteousness and distinguished herself from the wicked whom she condemns...

In her self-imputed righteousness Mrs. Shortley cannot admit her share of guilt in the persecution that she is helping to continue; in fact, in referring to 'the children of wicked nations,' she even gives her prophecy the arrogantly nationalistic sense which many Christian theologians criticize as demonic... And most obviously, she dwells upon vengeance and destruction, ironically ignoring the clouds that look 'like rows and rows of white fish,' suggesting Christ's mercy and the Redemption. Mrs. Shortley does not have her vengeance, because her practical fears come true and her family is ousted by the smarter, more energetic Guizacs....

As the defeated woman, who has become a displaced person herself, drives off with her possessions, she has another revelation, but this one destroys her pride and shows her 'for the first time the tremendous frontier of her true country.' She struggles to resist the vision of her emptiness: she clutches to herself everything she can reach—her husband's head, her daughter's leg, the cat, bedding, her own knee—as if to prevent what is hers from slipping away and to fill her emptiness by ingesting the whole world. This climactic experience, which ends in a stroke and her death, recalls her prophecy of mangled bodies and ironically helps to answer her prophetic question: 'Who will remain whole? Who?'"

David Eggenschwiler  
*The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor*  
(Wayne State 1972) 40-41, 78-80, 95-97

"In 'The Displaced Person,' one...sees in microcosm all of Flannery O'Connor's main themes.... Mr. Guizac...does not speak the language of his new country nor understand its social customs. Eventually the prosperity he brings to the farm has its own price: the Shortleys leave to keep from being fired; Mrs. Shortley dies from a heart attack caused by their sudden departure; and the Negroes become sullen. Mrs. McIntyre herself turns against the Pole when she learns that he has promised his sixteen-year-old cousin in marriage to Sulk, a half-witted Negro... Mr. Guizac's virtues become faults....

Throughout the story the displaced person suggests the divine displacement, the Incarnation; and the peacock suggests the glory of spiritual reality.... 'The Displaced Person' suggests man's alienation from his true country—the supernatural realm; symbolically the story unites the historical coming of Christ in his humanity and his final coming in glory.... The priest sees the peacock...[and] murmurs, 'Christ will come like that,' as he envisions the glory of Christ's coming at the end of time.... While his mind is filled with Christ's glorification, Mrs. McIntyre has been defending her intention to dismiss Mr. Guizac. As the cock lowers his tail, she repeats her previous sentence about the displaced person: 'He didn't have to come in the first place.' Still caught up in his own thoughts, the priest's mind moves from the glory of Christ's divinity to the grace of his humanity, and he replies, 'He came to redeem us'....

There are two prophets in this story, which pits the laws of the countryside against the precepts of the 'true country,' and each prophet is overtaken suddenly by death. Mrs. Shortley...suffers a fatal heart attack; Mr. Guizac is, in effect, murdered by his employer and her two farm hands.... Mrs. Shortley...becomes Mr. Guizac's chief foe. She truly believes he is diabolical because she cannot countenance what she cannot understand.... In her thoughts, she connects him with the 'Europe' which the newsreels have shown her: a mysterious 'devil's experiment station' typified by 'a small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together, a head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered up sticking out, a hand raised clutching nothing.' Looking with unseeing eyes at the peacock in the tree in front of her, its tail like 'a map of the universe,' she experiences an 'inner vision' of millions of D.P.'s replacing all the Negro farm hands. She is afraid of all foreigners...people whose religion had not been reformed.... She pictures the priest as an emissary of the devil, perhaps the devil himself....

In a comic parody of the warnings of the Old Testament prophets [Mrs. Shortley] cried in a loud voice, 'The children of wicked nations will be butchered. Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in palm of hand. Who will remain whole?'... As the Shortleys drive away from the farm, her vision seems to reverse itself, as if she is 'looking inside' herself.... She grasps her husband's elbow and her daughter's foot 'as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs onto herself'.... A false prophet...Mrs. Shortley finds her 'true country' in death; a true prophet whose life is conformed to spiritual reality, Mr. Guizac abides in his true

country. The displaced person does not prophesy; in fact, he hardly speaks in the story. Yet he is a true prophet, one of the men 'who challenge the disorder of the surrounding society with the order they experience as living in themselves'... Mr. Guizac evokes the hostility of the people around him because he orders his life to a reality which they cannot grasp... As Mrs. McIntyre says, 'he's upset the balance around here.' Only at his death does Mrs. McIntyre realize that the center of balance might not be herself.... Dimly aware of an invisible reality, she 'felt like she was in some foreign country'...

Mrs. Shortley becomes a false prophet because she fears the mysterious reality which the displaced person has introduced into her secure world; her husband makes himself an arm of the Lord to avenge his wife's death, for which he blames the displaced person. Mrs. McIntyre is so concerned over the prosperity of her farm that she alienates herself from any other reality. As far as she is concerned, 'Christ is just another D.P.'.... The death-dealing conflict between the European 'old world' with its unreformed religion and quaint social customs and the new, brash, pragmatic American world is epitomized in the death of Mr. Guizac at the hands of a resentful white farm laborer, a sullen Negro, and a fear-filled landowner, all of whom share an intuition that the foreigner is likely to displace them.

Father Flynn is childlike in his attention to reality. For him its numinous quality is immediately evident. As soon as he arrives at the farm he is entranced by the glory of the peacock... Whenever he visits the farm he seems to have two objects in mind: to speak of spiritual reality to Mrs. McIntyre, and to see it in the natural world around him."

Kathleen Feeley, S.S.N.D.  
*Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock*  
(Rugers 1972; Fordham 1982) 172-76

"The Displaced Person'...is divided into three parts, each hinging on a major climax and each centered on the twin symbols of the Displaced Person and the peacock. Mrs. Shortley, who serves as the central consciousness in the first third of the story, perceives the Guizacs as true grotesques. She tends to think of them in non-human terms, likening them to bears, bugs, and monstrous 'Gobblehooks.'

Similarly, in the second part of the story, after Guizac's embodiment of Christ has been effectively established, Mrs. McIntyre, after first considering the refugee Pole as her salvation, finally begins to conceive of him as a monster when she learns of his plan to bring over a cousin in order to marry her to a young Negro. She too now regards Guizac in the metamorphosed aspect of the grotesque, as a pastiche of human and not-human elements: 'His forehead and skull were white where they had been protected by his cap but the rest of his face was red and bristled with short yellow hairs. His eyes were like two bright nails behind his gold-rimmed spectacles that had been mended over the nose with haywire. His whole face looked as if it might have been patched together out of several others.'

Mrs. McIntyre's complicity in the death of Guizac, which is paralleled by the larger complicity of the community as a whole, dominates the third section of the story and makes the absurdity of situation so absolute that no one, except perhaps Father Flynn, can escape from it. Not only is Guizac displaced because of his transgressions upon a rigid caste system, but following his death all the farm's inhabitants become alienated from their environment. Mrs. McIntyre suddenly feels that she is in 'some foreign country,' and as the farm disintegrates she contracts a nervous affliction that renders her virtually indigent. Shortley and Sulk leave, and old Astor refuses to work. In the end the act of displacement comes full circle: everyone is alienated from the farm and from common humanity....

The pace at which the world, typified by the farm, becomes unsteady and the manner in which the placid setting is disrupted by the presence of the displaced person are exceptionally handled. In a manner suggestive of Ellison's *Invisible Man* Miss O'Connor posits an individual who is unseen by humanity. Guizac's fate thus becomes an interpretation of culture; as the historical Christ, the penultimate displaced person, he [is] preordained to wandering, persecution, and crucifixion....

In 'The Displaced Person'...the violence is formulated in terms of a basic social opposition between relatively established individuals like Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortley, and Guizac, who possesses no distinct social identity but who nevertheless threatens the conservative communal patterns of southern farm

life. At the moment of Guizac's death those who are accomplices in it remain remarkably calm and detached and this failure of response serves to define their grotesque state.... Guizac, the refugee Pole, whose concentration camp agonies are mirrored in his face, which seems rearranged from broken and disparate parts...expresses the horrors and indignities which men can commit against each other. One act of violence reduces him to an object which the farm's inhabitants can observe clinically. This remarkable detachment, a form of the destructive intellect which we have observed in many of O'Connor's less laudable characters, reveals these individuals as fallen creatures, for the violence which they cause illuminates the corruption of their souls.... The entire strategy of violence in Flannery O'Connor's stories of the grotesque is to reveal how complicity in destruction carries men away from God....

The exotic peacock in 'The Displaced Person' distinguishes this story from other Christ fables like Melville's superlative 'Bartleby' or the more contrived *A Fable* by Faulkner, because it generates a second theological meaning which counterpoints the figure of Guizac in an inventive and technically successful manner. The peacock appears in the first sentence of the story, and the attitudes of the characters toward its physical splendor serve as an index of their attitude toward Guizac as well. Mrs. McIntyre, preoccupied with the secular pursuit of wealth, sees in the peacock another mouth to feed, and she tolerates the bird, the last of an original brood of twenty, only because her deceased husband, the judge, loved them. To Mrs. Shortley the peacock seems like any other domestic fowl, lacking in any extraordinary beauty or grace. In significance contrast to the women, Father Flynn is immediately enthralled by the beauty of the bird. In the first encounter with the peacock he envisions it 'as if he had just come down from some sun-drenched height to be a vision for them all.'

Later in the story, when the priest resists Mrs. McIntyre's threat to displace Guizac, he takes consolation in the physical presence of the peacock.... It is precisely at this juncture that the peacock as Christ—and Guizac as Christ—merge, for Father Flynn, himself transfigured by the splendor of Christ as revealed in the peacock, mistakes Mrs. McIntyre's reference to Guizac—'He didn't have to come in the first place'—and replies absently, 'He came to redeem us'.... There is a longstanding tradition in Christian iconography and symbolism in which the peacock serves as a figuration of Christ. Miss O'Connor compounds this inherited symbol with that of the Displaced Person in an effort to present a complete narrative of the Christian experience, centered on the theme of displacement. Just as Guizac is representative of the historical Christ, the peacock implies a Christ transcendent and divine.... The peacock is even more mysterious than Guizac; yet it is not detached from the historical context, because the legend of the displaced Christ is absorbed into the transcendent."

Gilbert H. Muller

*Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque*  
(U Georgia 1972) 35-36, 85-86, 109-10

"The peacock is not only himself an image of unearthly majesty, but has fixed his sight on something in the distance that 'no one else could see'—particularly Mrs. Shortley.... Standing directly in front of the peacock's tail, Mrs. Shortley remains oblivious to the wondrous thing.... 'She was having an inner vision instead.' She imagines billions of European refugees pushing their way onto America while she—'a giant angel'—tells the Negroes to move elsewhere.... The woman's visionary apparatus (a vestigial organ of Southern fundamentalism) is an inner light that shines solely for Mrs. Shortley... The reader's authority for taking the peacock as a spiritual touchstone is established by O'Connor in her description of other reactions to the bird, particularly that of the Catholic priest, Father Flynn, who has engineered the arrival of the Polish family in the first place. 'What a beautiful birdrrrd!'...

The conclusion of section one, from the packing of the car to the moment of Mrs. Shortley's death in the front seat from an apparent heart attack...is narrated objectively... The climax of this section has been masterfully prepared for... She herself has become the dismembered European, she the child of wicked nations, she the displaced person.... O'Connor shifts our attention to Mrs. McIntyre, who, in section one, had rejoiced in the economic advantages of Mr. Guizac's labor.... When Mrs. McIntyre finally confronts Mr. Guizac...the Pole replies: 'She no care black... She in camp three year.' And in what amounts to her first significant action, Mrs. McIntyre responds from the depths of her own complacent, ordered universe that she is not responsible for the misery of the world.... It is the classic situation of tragedy in which each party to the conflict is both right and wrong and almost incomprehensible to the other.... Mrs. McIntyre's

identity is founded on her own reiterated sense of power, of dispensation, of material ownership. Her pride is in her hardheaded practicality and shrewdness....

Submerged in the picture of the Pole mowing the field like the grim reaper is, instead, an image of the Pole riding what will be the instrument of his own death. As he circles in toward the center, the Judge's grinning death's head seems to disdain all this transitory world.... The first of several conversations between Father Flynn and the lady of the farm, in which the latter tries to explain her reasons for dismissing the superb worker, is a beautifully designed counterpoint... For while Mrs. McIntyre is arguing the superfluity of the Pole, the priest's attention is fixed on the superfluous beauty of the passing peacock, which, raising its glorious tail, causes Father Flynn to exclaim gaily, 'Christ will come like that!'... In a subsequent conversation...as the priest is speaking of Christ the redeemer, the obstinate Mrs. McIntyre interrupts fiercely, 'As far as I'm concerned...Christ was just another D.P.' Christ, Mr. Guizac, the peacock—they are all one and all of no use."

Miles Orvell

*Invisible Parade: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor*  
(Temple U 1972) 141-48

"Mrs. McIntyre rejects the priest's message and finds herself a participant in a communal murder... Without God, man drifts into seeming moral vacuums where the devil, in fact, is in control... The central theme of 'The Displaced Person' is guilt and redemption, but the primary complication arises from the racial issue. The story develops as a series of betrayals, of which the whites' betrayal of the blacks reflects the larger betrayal of Christ by all humanity. Mr. Guizac's ignorance of American racial mores leads to a series of misunderstandings, which culminate in major disaster and universal guilt. In effect, the Pole dies because he fails to perceive that Christian [charity] does not extend to marriage between white and black in the American South.... Misunderstandings arise not only from the provincial whites' distorted notions of...Europeans but also from the foreigner's unwitting violations of the rigid Southern social codes.... There is a third level of misunderstanding, seen in the vast discrepancy between ultimate spiritual reality and the petty concerns of those obsessed with their own immediate material welfare....

The farm is a community where the fate of one involves the destinies of all.... The final action is one of mutual involvement in guilt and sorrow, and the consequences fall on each impartially.... The black helpers, Astor and Sulk, are a seemingly worthless pair, for they lie, steal, and exert themselves as little as possible; indeed they are barely articulate. Yet they fill their roles as workers at some minimal level. When Sulk fears they will be replaced by the foreign workers, old Astor consoles him: 'Never mind... Your place too low for anybody to dispute with you for it.' The white workers, though classed as superior according to the Southern social structure, are, in fact, little better than the blacks. Mr. Shortley, the hired man, will not take orders, smokes in the barn, and operates a still on the sly. The blacks, too, have a still on Mrs. McIntyre's land, and they and the Shortleys have an unspoken understanding to respect the privacy of each other's illegal operation. Mr. Guizac, the Polish immigrant, is...a model of proficiency, he can operate the various farm machines with total dexterity, is an indefatigable worker, is scrupulously clean, and does not even smoke. Mrs. McIntyre regards him as her salvation...

To Mrs. Shortley, Mr. Guizac represents the unholy continent of Europe, which to her is 'the devil's experiment station'.... Mr. Guizac too has difficulty understanding... He is impatient with the blacks, and he makes the mistake of reporting to Mrs. McIntyre that he has caught Sulk in the act of stealing a turkey from her pen. He is troubled by Mrs. McIntyre's lack of concern and is confused by her offhand explanation that 'all Negroes would steal.' But, despite Mr. Guizac's intolerance of certain black characteristics that the native Southerners accept as inherent, he is only too accepting in other ways. On his arrival, he shakes hands with the blacks as if they were his equals. His democratic attitude violates Southern notions of propriety and decency when he sets in motion a scheme to bring his young niece to America as Sulk's bride. Mrs. McIntyre has felt a growing irritation toward the Guizacs, even though they have contributed substantially to her own material prosperity, but her discovery that Guizac is plotting miscegenation causes her to explode in indignation....

Father Flynn, the aging priest who automatically attempts to convert Mrs. McIntyre in the course of his visits, is a reminder of the larger spiritual frame within which all human action occurs.... He alone

responds to the deep symbolism of the peacocks strolling about the farmyard; to him, the magnificence of their spreading tails is emblematic of the transfiguration. Mrs. McIntyre has no notion of what he is talking about: 'As far as I'm concerned...Christ was just another D.P.'.... Father Flynn's orthodox faith is contrasted with the bizarre visions of Mrs. Shortley... In particular, she directs her sinister warnings against the Guizacs, who are, she insists, the devil's emissaries.... She is surprised to discover that it is her husband, rather than the black underlings, who is slated for replacement.... Mrs. Shortley...too, proves vulnerable to disaster, like the unfortunate Europeans pictured in the distressing newsreel scene.... [She becomes] in a very real sense a 'displaced person': first, in her husband's loss of position, then in the wild frenzy of her death agony, and finally in her own loss of life....

Further displacements arise through the demise of Mr. Guizac, whose death occurs as a result of unpremeditated conspiracy on the part of the three observers, none of whom can bring himself to shout a warning to the man lying in the tractor's path.... As a result of their mutual participation in the 'murder' of Mr. Guizac, the three culprits now become displaced persons themselves. Mr. Shortley leaves without notice that very night, and Sulk sets off unexpectedly for the southern part of the state. Mrs. McIntyre barely notices their absence, for she collapses and must be taken to the hospital. On her return home, she sells her cattle (at a loss) and lives her declining years enfeebled in mind and body. Her sole regular visitor is the priest, who comes faithfully once a week to feed the peacocks and to expound the mysteries of the Redeemer."

Dorothy Walters  
*Flannery O'Connor*  
(Twayne 1973) 104-05, 121-24

"In 'The Displaced Person,' a story published in 1954, a refugee from Poland is hired to work on a woman's dairy farm. Although he speaks in apparent gibberish, he is a perfect worker. He works so assiduously the woman begins to prosper beyond her greatest hopes. Still, because his ways are not her own (the Displaced Person attempts to get one of the black dairy workers to marry his niece by 'buying' her out of a Polish concentration camp), the woman allows a runaway tractor to roll over and kill him.

'As far as I'm concerned,' she tells the priest, 'Christ was just another D. P.' He just didn't fit in. After the death of the Polish refugee, however, she understands her complicity in a modern crucifixion, and recognizes the enormity of her responsibility for other human beings. The impact of this new awareness debilitates her, she loses her health, her farm, even her ability to speak. This moment of revelation, when the individual comes face to face with her own limitations and comprehends 'the true frontiers of her own inner country,' is classic O'Connor, and always arrives in times of extreme crisis and loss."

Alice Walker  
"Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor"  
*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1975)  
(Harcourt/Harvest 1984) 55-56

"Sister M. Joselyn...shows conclusively how the peacock and Mr. Guizac and their analogue, Christ, draw corresponding reactions from the principal characters on a descending scale from love to hate.... Although Mrs. Shortley 'felt that religion was essentially for those people who didn't have the brains to avoid evil without it,' she tries to arouse fundamentalist fears of 'foreign' religion in order to protect herself and Mr. Shortley from economic displacement by the more efficient Mr. Guizac. 'I would suspicion salvation got from the devil,' she responds ineffectually to Mrs. McIntyre, whose exclamation 'That man is my salvation!' has already exposed her bourgeois preoccupation with material things and concomitant immunity to religious provocation.

Pushed to an extreme of desperation, Mrs. Shortley pours over the Apocalypse and quotes from the Prophets: 'She saw plainly that the meaning of the world was a mystery that had been planned and she was not surprised to suspect that she had a special part in the plan because she was strong.' Her business, in blunt terms, is 'to watch the priest' who had arranged the placement of the Guizacs. 'Here he was,' she reflected, 'leading foreigners over in hoards to places that were not theirs, to cause disputes, to uproot niggers, to plant the Whore of Babylon in the midst of the righteous!'

Urged by the voice accompanying her Sunday afternoon vision, [Mrs. Shortley] ironically predicts the manner of her own self-inflicted punishment and death. Alone in the pasture, she speaks apparently for her own benefit but is deaf to the warning. 'The children of wicked nations will be butchered,' she prophesies. 'Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of the hand. Who will remain whole? Who?' Because she had tried to displace the Guizacs, she is displaced, according to the acknowledged pattern of retribution in the story. The displacers are the truly displaced persons. Refusing to accept her own displacement, she forces a hurried departure of her family before the dawn of the day Mr. Shortley will be given his month's notice. To the repetition of his poignant 'Where are we going?' she is butchered by the stroke her frenzied haste has caused...

Even as her fierce expression fades 'into a look of astonishment' and she dies, her daughters think that she is joking. 'They didn't know,' we are told a bit pointedly, 'that she had had a great experience or ever been displaced in the world from all that belonged to her.' The final sentence of the first section, reporting that in death Mrs. Shortley 'seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country,' can hardly indicate conversion or spiritual renewal. Rather, in view of the violent effect of her stroke, it discloses the consternation of one who is stunned by the realization that her actual part in the planned mystery of the world was totally different from her own self-righteous projection of it....

Father Flynn himself associates the displaced man with Christ as he counsels her not 'to turn the porrr man out': 'Think of the thousands of them, think of the ovens and the boxcars and the camps and the sick children and Christ Our Lord.' Already there is little ambiguity in Mrs. McIntyre's intention, her complaint, following hard upon Father Flynn's appeal, obviously applies to both Mr. Guizac and Christ in the analogical pattern of their dialogue. 'He's extra and he's upset the balance around here,' she says. It is the prevailing balance of racial discrimination that Mr. Guizac would have upset; Mrs. McIntyre's rejection of him is clear indication that she is not ready for the radical community that redemption entails. In trying to marry his cousin into freedom with the young Negro Sulk, Mr. Guizac was quietly offering to rural Georgia a racially unified society that Mrs. McIntyre and 'her class' scorn.

That Mr. Guizac's foreign ways have preserved him from the biases of the American tradition is observed by white and black alike. 'You recollect how he shook [the niggers'] hands,' Mrs. Shortley had reminded her husband, 'like he didn't know the difference, like he might have been as black as them'.... Mrs. McIntyre is willing finally—in the moment of demonic collusion that prevents her, Mr. Shortley, or Sulk from shouting a warning to Mr. Guizac—to forego the clear economic advantage that he offers in order to preserve the ancient taboos. She utterly misconstrues what 'her moral obligation...to her own people' actually is. Rejecting the human savior, she forsakes the very possibility of salvation for herself and her people. Mrs. McIntyre's displacement from her true country is complete, the isolation of her last days, total and pathetic. Her first husband, the Judge, had been absolutely right when he warned, 'The devil you know is better than the devil you don't.'

John R. May  
*The Pruning Word: The Parables of Flannery O'Connor*  
(U Notre Dame 1976) 89-94

"There are two separate confrontations, between Mr. Guizac and Mrs. Shortley, and Mr. Guizac and Mrs. McIntyre; and throughout the encounters, the priest bobs in and out making low-key inquiries and feeding a lone peacock.... An accident is 'allowed' to happen.... As the last rites are administered by the priest, Mrs. McIntyre experiences *the same sense* of displacement that had...characterized Mrs. Shortley's last moments.... The ambiguity of pronoun references to Guizac and Christ is impossible to miss... *At most* and, in my opinion, with greatest effect, the analogy places the experience charted on Mrs. McIntyre's farm in the context of *an archetypal situation of human intolerance*.... I extend this reading even though O'Connor would have been disappointed with it. She consistently resisted interpretations that 'leveled' her writing to its social, psychological, and economic components." [Italics added. This critic disregards and "levels" the religious significance of the priest and the peacock because they enlarge the meaning beyond her own "limits of inference."]

Carol Shloss  
*Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference*  
(LSU 1980) 74-75



“She is now seen as a Christian humanist who has inherited the spiritual anguish and the anagogical vision of Melville and Dostoevsky, but who consciously affirms religious faith and religious humility as antidotes to the pride and angst of the existential agnostics.... She is also now proven to be a scholar of theology and mysticism, and a composer of tragic art... Her true range is... ‘Dantesque...insofar as any spiritual rising or transcendent convergence in God that is hinted at in the epiphanies of *Everything That Rises Must Converge* is achieved only after tragic suffering....”

These epiphanies are always moral or spiritual in nature: an abrupt illumination reveals to the characters how mistaken their way of life and their self-assessment has been up until that moment. The epiphany is not a joyous revelation of God in all his glory but an anguished and often paradoxical glimpse of some indirect evidence that God has interfered with and guided the affairs of man. Such epiphanies are the expression of an individual’s transcendence of the empirical world and his momentary achievement through anagogical vision of an approximation to God’s view of human affairs. The inspirational moment is inevitably preceded by a crushing awareness of one’s unworthiness and by a shedding of self-sufficiency. The penitent yearns for [mystical union] and achieves this state, though often in ambivalent form...

Mrs. Shortley is convinced that she is one of the righteous, in contrast to the priest whom she sees as ‘the Whore of Babylon’ because he indirectly thwarts her social ambitions. Her religious zealotry is so bizarre that the reader needs no comment from the author to savour the full irony of such statements as ‘before long she had come to a deeper understanding of her existence.’ This seems to be one of the few stories by O’Connor where she satirizes rather than sympathizes with one of her primitive visionaries....

Mrs. Shortley had pretended to look down on ‘unreformed’ Europe for its mass murders of Jews and Slavs, but here she equals Hitler and Stalin in her zeal for blood: “The children of wicked nations will be butchered,’ she said in a loud voice. ‘Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of a hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain whole? Who?’ The irony of these words is that when Mrs. Shortley dies of a seizure a few days later it is she who seems dismembered as she grabs at ‘Mr. Shortley’s elbow and Sarah Mae’s foot at the same time and began to tug and pull on them as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs onto herself.’ Flannery O’Connor comments further on Mrs. Shortley’s grotesque lack of spiritual wholeness by having her see clouds as dead white fish and the force of the sun disintegrated into a jetsam of submerged ‘pieces’.”

David A. Myers

“A Galaxy of Haloed Suns: Epiphanies and Peacocks in  
Patrick White’s *A Woman’s Hand* and Flannery O’Connor’s ‘The Displaced Person’”  
*Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 14.4 (1981) 214-24

“With this story O’Connor’s more personalized symbolism opens up an area of change that would overtake the South in the 1950s. Here, her chess pieces are her beloved peacocks, in decline; blacks in a peculiar love-hate association with their employer; a ‘displaced person’ from Poland who offers the ‘new’; and those marginal whites who represent a dispossessed Garden they still think of as Edenic.... O’Connor has miniaturized a changing American South, and indirectly a changing America.... Contrasted with the hired help, the peacock represents glory, indeed a past glory, an Edenic splendor before sin, when only beauty obtained.... Mrs. McIntyre...cannot begin to comprehend what lies behind Guizac’s offer of his cousin to Sulk, for she cannot perceive the death camps, the stacking of bodies, the crematoria, although she has heard of such things. For Mrs. McIntyre, what matters is the survival of a way of life, even as it changes. She must preserve what can be saved.... Mrs. McIntyre has a moment of decision, to warn the Pole of the slipping tractor, but she freezes, says not a word, and lets the machine do its job.... All are now displaced.... The peacocks are completely forgotten [not by the priest] as human lives preempt the earth, displacing God’s grandeur. The South is leached out.”

Frederick R. Karl

*American Fictions 1940-1980*  
(Harper & Row 1983) 233-34

“The point of this story is that human beings concerned with ‘place’ or social status in the modern industrial world can only ‘displace’ each other as they form ranks against anyone who seems at the time to

threaten their position.... Mrs. Shortley is morally incomplete: 'short' on humility and the qualities needed to establish a firm link with others. Mrs. McIntyre is complete ('entire') only in her delusion of total self-sufficiency. The structure of the story forms its contours around this central pair, so that part 1 focuses on Mrs. Shortley (how she differentiates herself from those beneath her and associates herself with those above her on the social scale), part 2 on Mrs. McIntyre (how she struggles for power over Mrs. Shortley and others), and part 3 on the priest, who clarifies the deficiencies of the pair....

All categories collapse when Mrs. Shortley suffers a stroke and participates in a scene similar to what she sees in the newsreel depicting the Holocaust (a small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together...a hand raised clutching nothing.' The farm woman, like the dead Jews, is exiled from her home, a fact pointing to a sameness that transcends racial, social, and national boundaries.... The threat of miscegenation is the ultimate threat to Mrs. McIntyre's desire to feel control over her own fate. In a striking image that occurs following the incident when Mrs. McIntyre openly condemns Guizac's plan to save his cousin from the concentration camp ovens by marrying her to the Negro, Sulk, Mrs. McIntyre 'climbed to the top of the slope...and she narrowed her gaze until it close entirely around the diminishing figure [of Guizac] on the tractor as if she were watching him through a gunsight'....

The priest represents true independence, charity, and faith—what is needed to recognize the mystery of the Incarnation represented, for example, not only in Guizac's gesture to save his cousin but also in the 'tail full of suns.' [the peacock] The priest represents the imaginative unifying of perspective in this story. Mrs. McIntyre is his opposite—standing for isolation. She ends her life as a debilitated, old woman totally dependent on two black figures that serve as symbols for unity through suffering: that is, the priest and the Negro woman.”

Suzanne Morrow Paulson  
*Flannery O'Connor: A Study of the Short Fiction*  
(Twayne 1988) 63-68

Michael Hollister (2014)