Chapter VII

CONCLUSION
Rogert Sharrock, in *The Figure in a Landscape*, says that a poet is "not a camera, but a consciousness." This profound observation is very useful in analyzing not only poems but all creative writing. The novels and short stories analyzed in the preceding chapters are not photographs of life as it is lived; they are recreations of life as perceived and transformed by the writer's perception and imagination. Writer as a person need not confirmed herself/himself to a system of values, but as a creative writer her/his consciousness is moulded by a sort of value system. Flannery O'Connor is a serious artist but is not committed to any one system except that of the self and its relation with other selves.

The predominant feature of O'Connor criticism is its abundance. From her first collection, O'Connor garnered serious and widespread critical attention, and since her death the outpouring has been remarkable, including hundreds of essays and numerous full-length studies. While her work has occasioned some hostile reviews, including those which label her an atheist or accused her of using the grotesque gratuitously, she is almost universally admired, if not fully understood. In addition to wide-ranging studies of her style, structure, symbolism, tone, themes, and influences, critical discussion often centres on theological aspects of O'Connor's work. In inquiries into the depth of her religious intent, critics usually find O'Connor to be the orthodox Christian that she adamantly declares herself.

O'Connor's world is a curious mixture of the traditional and the modern. Using conventional themes for new effects, she writes about the collision of the present with the past, reflecting the diversity of life in an art of violent contradictions. In general,
O'Connor's short stories have been viewed as vignettes about the search for redemption in Christ. Her novels are seen—most notably by Stanley Edgar Hyman—as similar quests which also involve the hero's recognition of his vocation and end in his ordination. For example, Sister Bertrande Meyers writes only about the effects of redemptive grace in O'Connor's fiction and Bob Dowell reduces the action of her stories to a common sequence: an initial rebellion against belief, a crisis of faith, and a resolution in a moment of grace.

Flannery O'Connor remained a devout Catholic throughout, and this fact, coupled with the constant awareness of her own impending death, both filtered through an acute literary sensibility, gives us valuable insight into just what went into those thirty-two short stories and the two novels: cathartic bitterness, a belief in grace as something devastating to the recipient, a gelid concept of salvation, and violence as a force for good. At first it might seem that these aspects of her writing would detract from, distort or mar the fiction they are wrapped up in, but in fact they only serve to enhance it, to elevate the mundane, sometimes laughably pathetic events that move her plots into sublime anti-parables, stories that show the way by elucidating the worst of paths.

What at first seem senseless deaths become powerful representations of the swift justice of God; the self-deluded, prideful characters that receive the unbearable revelation of their own shallow selves are being impaled upon the holy icicle of grace, even if they are too stupid or lost to understand the great boon God is providing them with. The last lines from "The Enduring Chill" prove this point: "...and the last film of
illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes....But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued to descend” (572).

In his long essay Flannery O'Connor, Robert Drake claims O'Connor saw herself as an evangelist who had come “to call the wicked to repentance.” He thinks “Jesus Christ is finally the principal character in all O'Connor's fiction . . . and her heroes' confrontation with Him is the one story she keeps telling over and over again.”

Critics who have said that her work is not religious ever fully said what it is. Irving Howe has mentioned her orthodoxy as only one aspect of her work, the French novelist, J. M. G. Le Clezio, sees her as a writer of existential tales of initiation, and her sometime correspondent John Hawkes goes so far as to say that her Catholicism and moral bias disappear in the creative process. Howe says, O'Connor

...could bring into play resources of worldliness such as one might find in the work of a good many sophisticated modern writers . . . . Except for an occasional phrase, which serves partly as a rhetorical signal that more than ordinary verisimilitude is at stake, there are no unavoidable pressures to consider these stories in a strictly religious sense. They stand securely on their own, as renderings and criticisms of human experience.

John Hawkes has noticed that there is very little emphasis on the soul, the mind, or any other form of transcendent reality in O'Connor's work. He thinks that O'Connor committed herself creatively to characters who have no soul, no transcendent quality. He says:
The point is that in the most vigorously moral of writers the actual creation of fiction seems to depend on immoral impulse... My own feeling is that just as the creative process threatens the holy throughout Flannery O'Connor's fiction,... 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... the disbelief that we breathe in with the air of the times emerges fully as two-sided or complex as attraction for the holy.6

Many of O'Connor's stories move by a process of constriction in which abstract, spiritual, or expansive longings shrink into a concrete act, an act that is with remarkable frequency akin to murder or suicide. Since she never treats interiors of thought or feeling, these acts are forced to bear the entire meaning of the story. O'Connor's heroes have lost all sense of human kinship. Some, like Tarwater, feel they are incarnations of righteousness free to create and destroy at will. Having taken the right to act as inexplicably as God, O'Connor's hero finds himself in godlike isolation, alien to human suffering and joy. He can kill without pleasure or remorse. At best, like Mr. Shiflet or Haze, he can feel love for a machine.

O'Connor wrote about what she knew best: what it means to be a living contradiction. For her it meant an eternal cheeriness and loathing for life; graciousness and fear of human contact; acquiescence and enduring fury. Whether through some great effort of the will, or through some more mysterious and unconscious force, she created from that strife a powerful art, an art that was both a release and a vindication for her life. From the conflict she lived she created an uneasy alliance of the traditional
and the modern where familiar Southern or Christian preoccupations explode in unexpected and unconventional directions.

Life makes O'Connor's heroes crumble. Both *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away* explore the long moment of fear in which, after years of resentful obedience, they discover they must choose their life. Yet both are incapable of making a choice. No matter what Haze does, he can never stop looking at the world through his mother's glasses; nor can young Tarwater see very far beyond the old prophet's suspicion. Although O'Connor mocks Haze and exalts Tarwater, she gives them a similar fate. Their sheer inability to tolerate complexity, ambivalence, and human passion, and their overwhelming rigidity, force them to run from whatever alternatives life presents, to abdicate adulthood in favour of their old familiar pain. Both Haze and Tarwater are, in a sense, freed from adult complexities by their ability to play out a childhood role for a lifetime.

O'Connor's characters are often paralyzed by a mixture of hatred and guilt, by their yearning toward violent rebellion and their fear of losing their mother's protection or being punished in some other way. She deals with their mingled fear and guilt in a number of ways. In some stories she displaces their rage at their mothers onto other characters who are their mother's doubles. In other stories, she has the children's fantasies of revolt fulfilled by their more potent doubles. In still other stories, it is an impersonal force of nature that brings about the destruction the children, who are too weak or guilty to effect. In a letter to "A," dated 24 September 1955, O'Connor wrote, "To have sympathy for any character, you have to put a good deal of yourself in him."
But to say that any complete denudation of the writer occurs in the successful work is, according to me, a romantic exaggeration. A great part of the art of it is precisely in seeing that this does not happen. . . . Everything has to be subordinated to a whole which is not you."  

Louis D. Rubin, Jr. provides a list of characteristics of Southern writers during the "Southern Renascence," a list which summarizes much of the earlier thought on this subject. These characteristics include:

... a sense of the past, an uninhibited reliance upon the full resources of language and the old-fashioned moral absolutes that lay behind such language, an attitude toward evil as being present not only in economic or social forces but integral to the "fallen state" of humankind, a rich surface texture of description that would not be confined to the drab hues of the naturalistic novel, an ability to get at the full complexity of a situation rather than seeking to reduce it to its simplified essentials, a suspicion of abstractions, a bias in favor of the individual, the concrete, the unique, even the exaggerated and outlandish in human portraiture.  

Rubin's list describes the general southern writer in what Lewis P. Simpson has termed the "First Southern Renascence." In the "Second Southern Renascence," Simpson sees a shift of controlling conflict in the Southern literary imagination: "The struggle between the moral order of memory and history tends to be transformed into a struggle between Gnostic society and the existential self." O'Connor belongs somewhere in between these last two.
At a Modern Language Association Special Session in San Francisco in 1979, John R. May raised the question of O'Connor’s historical consciousness. Although history does not seem to dominate O’Connor’s fiction, May pointed out that it is there in regional racial prejudice, in regional communication, in social class distinctions, and in the biblical, and therefore human, history of salvation. He concluded that “the stories in which the inner experience of the protagonists seems of greatest importance and is most successfully portrayed are those in O’Connor’s canon with the broadest and most convincing social base, i.e., those in which a sense of historical community also dominates.”¹¹

Humour, a term commonly associated with entertainment, is another aspect that O’Connor combines effectively with violence. The technique is not new. When O’Connor has The Misfit say about the grandmother, “She would have been a good woman if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life” (153), we smile at least momentarily at the simplicity of truth in the statement, though O’Connor’s message is serious. O’Connor’s humour fits in the southern tradition and is comical because of her setting and the characters who inhabit it. It is not, however, limited to Southerners, but it does enhance her readers’ appreciation of her country. As Eudora Welty writes in her essay “Place in Fiction,” “one place comprehended can make us understand other places better. Sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is sense of direction too.”¹² If we follow it to its intended end, O’Connor’s direction leads us inevitably toward religion. One of her essential themes is man’s infinite capacity limited by himself: “Man was always more than what he knows, or can know,
about himself."¹³ The identification of O'Connor's central theme, her subject matter, as the possibility of gain implies more than it states. Gardner's claim that "great art celebrated life's potential, offering a vision unmistakably and unsentimentally rooted in love"¹⁴ pertains unequivocally to O'Connor's subject. Her characters all stand to gain love, a divine love (agape) bestowed through Grace.

In a 14 April 1960 letter to John Hawkes, O'Connor explained the difficult term "Grace" this way:

Grace, to the Catholic way of thinking, can and does use as its medium the imperfect, purely human, and even hypocritical. Cutting yourself off from Grace is a very decided matter, requiring a real choice, act of will, and affecting the very ground of the soul. The Misfit is touched by the Grace that comes through the old lady [the Grandmother] when she recognized him as her child, as she has been touched by the Grace that comes through him in his particular suffering.¹⁵

However, it has been noted that O'Connor's concerns with death, grace, and the devil; her sacramental vision; and her concentration on the mysteries imbued in the realities of life are, as Sister Kathleen Feeley has observed, pertaining to Christian theology rather than to Catholic dogma.¹⁶ According to O'Connor the images become symbols only if within the context of the story they accrue special meanings that operate validly at a deeper level for the reader. All of this constructs functions as the creative process: "Language brought us to style [or form], style to choice, choice to the variety and complexity of technique, technique finally to meaning and theme."¹⁷ But meaning, O'Connor said, "cannot be captured in an interpretation."¹⁸ In every story there is some
minor revelation which, no matter how funny the story may be, gives us a hint of the unknown, of death.”

John Hawkes, in “Flannery O’Connor’s Devil,” makes a very interesting observation:

Though he died in 1940 [Nathanael] 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.

However, every short story has its own epiphany: in “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” it is the instant when Mr. Shiftlet “felt that the rottenness of the world was about to engulf him.” In “A Temple of the Holy Ghost,” it is the recognition of the hermaphrodite’s human dignity, its status changing from that of a curiosity seen at a fair to that of a temple of the Holy Ghost. In “A Circle in the Fire,” it is when Mrs. Cope, in shock over the fire, drops the mask of rigid self-righteousness, thus revealing an expression that her daughter had never noticed before. Maurice Levy says:

In this special moments in which the characters’ experience is made pure and universal, there is no place for either the ironic or the grotesque, and God Himself seems to live again – not the triumphant, security-giving God that societies need and constantly restore for their own particular ends, but He who is an open wound ....
This is Catholic writing, moreover, since, at the end of the journey, it places universal agony once more at the centre of the human condition.21

In her fiction O'Connor frequently criticizes the materialism and spiritual apathy of contemporary society, faulting modern rationalism for its negation of the need for religious faith and redemption. Employing scenes and characters from her native South, she depicts the violent and often bizarre religiosity of Protestant fundamentalists as a manifestation of spiritual life struggles to exist in a non-spiritual world. Another recurrent motif in O'Connor's thirty-two short stories is that of divine grace descending in an often bizarre or violent manner upon a spiritually deficient main character. She often depicts a rural domestic situation suddenly invaded by a criminal or perverse outsider – a distorted Christ figure who redeems a protagonist afflicted with pride, intellectualism, or materialism.

O'Connor's characters are not complete persons; they lack compassion, love, confidence, self-knowledge -- at least one of the attributes which would enable them to be whole. That Rufus Johnson has a club foot or that Hulga has a wooden leg, per se, is not the point at all. In fact, O'Connor uses those physical limitations as symbols of bigger limitations – Rufus's meanness, Sheppard's club soul, Hulga's wooden soul. O'Connor reveals her incomplete characters through manners, that is, through the customs, conventions, and convictions of their society. Most of her characters are the poor, because they "only symbolize for [the writer] the state of all men."22 Often her Protestant characters find the world unbearable because they lack that belief, that understanding which has as its basis Catholic dogma. That dogma, O'Connor contends,
is “a gateway to contemplation and was an instrument of freedom and not of restriction.”

As a writer with professedly Christian concerns, O'Connor was, throughout her writing career, convinced that the majority of her audience did not share her basic viewpoint and was, if not openly hostile to it, at best indifferent. In order to reach such an audience, O'Connor felt that she had to make the basic distortions of a world separated from the original, divine plan "appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural." This she accomplished by resorting to the grotesque in her fiction.

To the "true believer," the "ultimate grotesqueness" is found in those postlapsarian individuals who ignore their proper relationship to the Divine and either rebel against it or deny that they have any need to rely upon It for help in this life. In the first category, one would find characters like Hazel Motes (Wise Blood) or Francis Marion Tarwater (The Violent Bear It Away), who flee from the call of the Divine only to find themselves pursued by It and ultimately forced to accept their role as children of God. Likewise, the Misfit, having finally decided to reject the account of Christ having raised Lazarus from the dead because he had not been there to witness it, accepts this world and its temporal pleasures only to discover that there is no real pleasure in life.

In the second category, one can find prideful, self-reliant individuals such as the Misfit and the grandmother ("A Good Man Is Hard to Find"), Mrs. McIntyre ("The Displaced Person"), and Hulga Hopewell ("Good Country People"), who feel that they have conquered life because they are especially pious, prudent, and hardworking. To
make these individuals appear grotesque to the secular humanist, O'Connor creates, for example, the psychopathic killer, the pious fraud, or the physical or intellectual cripple. This display of what some critics have labeled the “gratuitous grotesque” became for O'Connor the means by which she hoped to capture the attention of her audience.

The world of Wise Blood is a spiritually empty, morally blind, cold, and hostile place. Over the years, critics have often referred to Flannery O'Connor's first novel as dark and grotesque. They also use words such as repulsive, depraved, and unredeemable to describe its characters. There can be no denying that the inhabitants of Wise Blood are frequently deceptive, chronically unkind, and brutally violent. Both the principal character, Haze, and his young and simple follower, Enoch Emery, inflict and become the victims of acts of violence. Haze murders a man by running him over with his car, while Enoch beats and strips a man for his own personal gain. Yet despite the violence and seemingly unconscionable behaviour exhibited by these and other characters, they do have another trait in common: they are searching for something better. The car leads Haze past signs that read “Jesus Saves” (42), but he does not heed them. It is not until the car is destroyed that he recognizes his mistake and ceases to flee that which he knows he must accept. Similarly, it is only when Enoch delivers the manifestation of the new jesus to Haze’s door that he recognizes its worthlessness. He realizes that his false idol is merely the incarnation of all people who reject the true God and make a god in their own image.

A passage from William Rodney Allen's reading of the novel explains what O'Connor seems to imply. Allen likens secular man living without God's grace to the
many caged animals in the novel – both are hopelessly trapped. Stripped of its spiritual dimension, Allen argues, the world “is merely a prison for an odd collection of inmates – a zoo for the human animal.” 26 But not every critic focuses on the religious aspects of O’Connor’s novel. Jon Lance Bacon, for example, offers a reading of the novel that provides a different twist to some of the scenes. He argues that in *Wise Blood* O’Connor depicts a society pervaded by advertising and marketing techniques. In short, Bacon reads the novel as a critique of American consumer culture.

Gary M. Ciuba examines how most of the characters in *Wise Blood* are unable to look beyond the surface of people and things. Only Hazel Motes, who himself begins by judging people at “face value,” learns how to look beyond the literal and thus understand the divine nature of the universe. Daniel F. Littlefield explores how the materialism of modern society shown in *Wise Blood* helps articulate O’Connor’s major themes of Christian redemption and the grotesque. Critics agree that the characters in *Wise Blood* exhibit animal-like tendencies. Not only do their names and appearances suggest beasts, but their actions also simulate those of animals. For example, Daniel Littlefield, Jr. says in *Mississippi Quarterly* that Hawks’s name corresponds with the bird of prey, and that he turns his back on his daughter like a bird might throw its baby out of the nest. Littlefield also notes that several animal images relate to Emery, who resembles a hound dog with mange. Like a dog, he crawls on his belly and burrows under bushes to watch the woman at the pool. He even becomes a gorilla. Literary experts speculate that O’Connor uses animal images in this story to emphasize the characters’ grotesqueness and their distorted spirituality.
*The Violent Bear It Away* is a deeply religious novel, one that offers up a dark and disturbing portrait of spiritual states, faith, and Christian fanaticism. Religious symbolism permeates the work, and everywhere there are Biblical allusions and references. The dominant images in the novel – water, fire, loaves and fishes, and eyes – are all religious in nature. They emerge organically from the story but are also interconnected and woven together, taking on multiple forms to enrich the religious questions and concerns. Throughout the novel, fire and water are purifying forces that serve also to destroy. The book, of course, is about baptism; both Tarwater and Bishop are drawn to water; and the turning point of the action is Bishop’s drowning. Water can reflect light, it can purify and refresh, but it can also conceal sin and suffocates. It is one of those images which, like the figure of Janus, look in two directions at once, and that quality makes it particularly appropriate for this novel. Water can both baptize and it can drown.

O’Connor was attracted by Freud’s emphasis on self-knowledge regarding aggressive and libidinous instincts as a first step toward gaining self-control and maturity. To declare that psychology is not relevant to O’Connor studies is tantamount to declaring her stupid and unable to predict that Freudian suggestiveness would be identified by her readers. O’Connor does say that Freud is inadequate to understanding “the religious encounter.”27 She does not say he is inadequate to understanding human nature. “The Comforts of Home,” “The Enduring chill,” and “Greenleaf” subtly develop some of the same ideas about male/female conflicts that were posited by the psychoanalytic theorists writing in the 1950s and early 1960s, especially Carl Jung and
Erich Neumann—modern thinkers O’Connor read and respected. Jung defines the psyche as being divided between masculine and feminine impulses, the animus and the anima. He further asserts that an integrated and mature self should achieve a balance between these impulses—as does a constructive society. Neumann worries that the dominance of masculine aggressive values in the modern world threatens the hope for a peaceful and civilized future of humankind. Femininity stereotypically is thought to contribute tenderness in human relations.28

Several O’Connor stories and both novels are in fact distinguished by male protagonists who are antagonistic toward family, express an aversion for femininity, and try to repress all reminders of their own physicality (sometimes represented by a particular woman character). Joseph Campbell’s insights about male perceptions of femininity are relevant in these cases: “When it suddenly dawns on us ... that everything we think or do is necessarily tainted with the odor of the flesh, then, not uncommonly, there is experienced a moment of revulsion: life, the acts of life, the organs of life, woman in particular as the great symbol of life, becomes intolerable to the pure, pure soul.”29

Frederick Asals notes the relevance to O’Connor’s work of the biblical idea that “there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:38).30 Only when sex-related differences are harmoniously integrated can spiritual development take place. Revulsion for femininity and the body self provides a measure of alienation from the community and signifies a lack of evolutionary progress toward unity within the family and within God’s community.
O'Connor always liked short stories. The author she cites as the earliest influence on her desire to write was the first theorist and self-conscious practitioner of the form in America, Edgar Allan Poe. In a letter in 1955, she said that as a child she read a lot of slop, but following the “Slop Period,” was the Edgar Allan Poe period, which lasted for years. Later in her career, however, she recognized that her true precursor was Nathaniel Hawthorne. In 1961, she told John Hawkes, “I think I would admit to writing what Hawthorne called ‘romances’ .... Hawthorne interests me considerably. I feel more of a kinship with him than with any other American.” In her essays and talks, her many reviews, and her letters, O'Connor often affirmed her commitment to the short story and to the romance form out of which it developed and with which it has always been aligned.

She knew that the style and narrative technique demanded by the short story was quite different from that expected in the novel. She once said:

“I believe that it takes a rather different type of disposition to write novels than to write short stories, granted that both require fundamentally fictional talents.” In a good short story, she argued, “certain of the details will tend to accumulate meaning from the story itself, and when this happens, they become symbolic in their action.” In response to the question, “What is a Short Story?” she insisted that it is not a joke, an anecdote, a lyrical rhapsody in prose, a case history, or a reported incident, for it has an “extra dimension” that occurs when the writer puts us in the middle of some “human action and shows it as it is illuminated and outlined by mystery.”
In every story, O'Connor insisted, there is some minor revelation which, no matter how funny the story may be, gives us a hint of the unknown, of death.

Flannery O'Connor knew that there are two basic modes of experience in prose fiction: one that involves the development and acceptance of the everyday world of phenomenon, sensate, and logical relation – a realm that the novel has always taken for its own – and the other that involves an experience that challenge the acceptance of the real world as simply sensate and reasonable – an experience that has dominated the short story since its beginnings. The novel involves an active quest for reality, a search for identity that is actually a reconciliation of the self with the social and experiential world – a reconciliation that is finally conceptually accepted, based on the experience one has undergone. The short story in general, and Flannery O'Connor's short stories in particular, more often focus on a character who is confronted with the world of spirit, which then challenges his or her conceptual framework of reason and social experience.

As Flannery O'Connor knew well, the short story has always remained close to the folk tale, the ballad, the romance, and the mythic forms that constitute the very source of narrative. If the novel creates the illusion of reality by presenting a literal authenticity to the material world, then the short story creates a similitude of a different realm of reality, that reality of the sacred which primitive man saw as true reality. Flannery O'Connor's short stories attempt to be authentic to the immaterial reality of the inner world of the self in its relation to eternal rather than temporal reality. The short story form is, as Flannery O'Connor knew throughout her short life, closer to the
nature of "reality" as we experience it in those moments when we are made aware of the inauthenticity of the everyday life, those moments when we sense the inadequacy of our ordinary categories of perception.

O'Connor uses many themes throughout all of her works. Her most criticized themes are alienation, true country life, and the demonic. Throughout the short stories "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "Good Country People," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "The Geranium," "A Circle in the Fire," and "The River" O'Connor speaks of her heritage and her religious faults. Stanley Hyman notes, "Miss O'Connor created characters and their dramatic oppositions by separating, exaggerating, and polarizing elements in herself."32 O'Connor could be considered a writer of "apocalyptic violence, a grotesque vision, and vulgarity."33 Her themes are a reflection of her own life, and her characters are a reflection herself. She shows the reader her life in a religious, alienated south.

Alienation of the classes is strong throughout most of O'Connor's works. Racism is not the only alienation O'Connor uses, but she also alienates against physical deformities. Hulga, who is alienated by her mother, in "Good Country People," is a prime example of O'Connor's reflection of her own deformity. In the story Hulga has a wooden leg by which O'Connor reflects her own handicap, by the disease disseminated lupus, of having to use crutches to walk. Mrs. Hopewell, Hulga's mother, thinks of people as "classes and kinds" showing her naive southern nature. In "The Life You Save Might Be Your Own" Mr. Shiftlet, who has one arm, runs off and leaves Lucynell, a mentally challenged girl isolated from society, at a gas station by herself.
This story shows how Mr. Shiflet was alienated against and forced to become a drifter, who stumbles upon the isolated Lucynell. Julian in “Everything That Rises Must Converge” is strongly against alienation of blacks, but with a twist of irony he is alienated from his own mother, who is a naive southern woman. In the end of the story Julian’s mother feels alienated from her son when she is confronted by her black double.

O’Connor can be considered a local colour writer, in that she writes about the true southern country life: “These families of tenant farmers usually include a man who is stupid, incompetent, and malevolent; a wife with an eye for defaults upon her children; and two or more mindless and voracious children.” In “Good Country People” Mrs. Hopewell is the stereotypical lady that Hyman talks of, finding faults in her daughter, Hulga, and so quick to judge others by their outward appearance. In “The Life You Save Might Be Your Own” O’Connor shows the barren landscape of the countryside and the kind of people who dwell in it.

In the story Lucynell’s mother takes care of herself and daughter with no help from any male, until Mr. Shiflet shows up. This shows O’Connor’s true country life, which is quite contradictory to the common man of the house stereotype of southern life. Another example of this contradiction is “A Circle in the Fire,” in which the main character, Mrs. Caldwell, runs a prosperous farm. O’Connor’s true country can be summed up with a quote from Hawkes “O’Connor committing herself creatively to the antics of soulless characters who leer, or bicker, or stare at obscenities on walls, or maim each other on a brilliant but barren earth.” These characters roaming
O'Connor's true country is evil and demonic, and what Walter Allen called "God-intoxicated."^36 O'Connor's short stories, with devilry as a theme, revolve around a central character, who later in the story has an encounter with some sort of a demonic character which ends in tragedy. In "The River" the central character is a young boy named Bevel, who later returns to where he was baptized to find Jesus. When Mr. Paradise, an atheist, tries to stop him, Bevel flees - from what he thought was an ancient water monster - underwater drowning to death. In "Good Country People," Hulga plans to seduce a young naive Bible salesman. She coaxes him up to a hayloft, but the young Bible salesman transforms into the seducer and gets Hulga to remove her wooden leg along with her dignity. In an ironic twist, Hulga, who thought she was the predator, turns into the prey with an opening of the salesman's briefcase revealing a hollowed out Bible filled with whiskey, pornographic playing cards, and other fake limbs. Hulga's wooden leg and her dignity belong now and forever to a demonic Bible salesman.

O'Connor's most famous and demonic character of all her short stories is The Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find." The Misfit in the beginning of the story is a heathen, when in fact he is quite the intellectual with strong views on religion and society. The Misfit and the grandmother have an intellectual war with the grandmother on the side of God and the Misfit preaching "from a different pulpit, Satanism."^37 The grandmother, having won the battle of wits, reaches out to The Misfit in a Christ-like manner to forgive him: "The Misfit recoils in horror, aware that the grandmother has opened herself to the Christian mysteries and therefore is threatening, if not totally
undoing, his life founded on the impossibility of knowing Christ.” The Misfit cannot believe in something he has never seen before, and O'Connor uses these demonic characters to vent her own religious doubts. The main theme, expressed through a variety of symbols, is humanity’s relationship with God and God’s grace. Although the grandmother portrays herself as a good, model Christian, the story leads most readers to understand that she is more concerned with the outward appearance of Christianity and charity than the actual motives and inner beliefs behind it. The Grandmother's concern with how she was dressed, so that “anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once she was a lady” (12) is just one of the more glaring examples of the façade she had created for herself. Her interactions with the children are terse and, based on the children's comments to her, their relationship is strained. The very fact that her description of Bailey's wife as generic and bland is another pointed reference to the grandmother's upbringing and feeling of being superior to most.

O'Connor's short stories reflect her society in the alienated, religious South. Although a devout Catholic, O'Connor had an immense intellectual background, which refused her to be a gentile, naive, doubtless, Southern woman like so many in her time, and it shows in her short stories: “She could put everything about a character into a single look, everything she had and knew into a single story. She knew people with the finality with which she claimed to know the distance from hell to heaven.” Throughout her life O'Connor encountered face to face the themes she dealt with in all her short stories. Living in an alienated society, O'Connor purged herself of her heritage by writing such stories as “Good Country People,” “The Life You Save Might
Be Your Own,” and “Everything That Rises Must Converge.” O’Connor, tired
of the stereotypical Southern life, brought out the truth in the stories “A Circle in the
Fire,” “Good Country People,” and “The Life You Save Might Be Your Own.” When
she doubted her faith, she wrote “The River,” “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” and
“Good Country People” to cleanse herself through her writings. O’Connor in her time
did what other writers tried. She dealt with the “decay” in society in a truthful yet
painful way.  

O’Connor’s rare gift of expressing the comic impulse in all-too-human portraits
of serious intent is what has caused her art to earn so much interest today. Her mix of
the comic and the tragic elements of human life is also what will preserve her art in the
centuries to come – especially as her insights into modern life and “the mystery of
personality” are better understood.
REFERENCES:


22. Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners 132.


27. Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners 165.

28. Flannery O'Connor does say "What I call a moral basis is a good deal more than a masculine drive" (Letters 126) and "all that feminine principle stuff . . . is . . . a regression . . . from what St. Paul means by charity" (Letters 394), but she read Jung and Neumann in 1955 (Letters 103) and declares "I admire [Jung] and . . . have been interested in the subject for some time" (Letters 382). C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (London: K.


