

1: Flannery O'CONNOR | Thinking Faith: The online journal of the Jesuits in Britain

O'Connor claims that it is the Christian writer "not one who writes from a sentimental perspective, but rather one who writes with a true "respect for mystery," who is able to write the most striking fiction "as the greatest fiction is that in which the "writer's moral sense coincides with his dramatic sense" ().

Her volume of work was not massive, but it was enough to earn her the status of a worshipped writer. She died at the age of 39, leaving only two novels "Wise Blood and The Violent Bear it Away" and a handful of short stories published in two stages and This shock factor has at least three dimensions. She has a vision of reality; there are no mazes of conscience or romantic memoirs. If a character is wooden, they should have a wooden leg. If their personality changes, then you must get a thief to steal the leg! Characters and events have elements that can be perceived, they are embodied and material. Abstract concepts do not make stories. It is the matter and concreteness of life that gives reality to the mystery of our being in the world. Her vision of reality is never icy and minimalist. And that can happen with just about anything. When this happens, it is as if the author slaps the reader, messing with his perception by moving the face, angling it sideways. This is the domain of the drama of good and evil, salvation and damnation, of grace and of the devil: She was fond of St. And in this respect, the dogma of faith plays a fundamental role: The first of these is that of the incarnation: God became human flesh, dust. It has inspired the novel And the Ass Saw the Angel by Nick Cave, and the atmosphere of the Bible Belt that comes through in many of his songs; but it has also inspired intense theological reflection about the sacramental vision of reality. Why do you write? How do you become a writer? What is a vocation? How is one freed from its self-centeredness? What is the relationship between art and money? What does it mean to be pure? How can you be true to yourself and appeal to your readership? How can you take care of talent? What is a story? What is its significance? How do you give life to characters? How do you talk to them? How do you build a symbolic key? And still there is the central, inescapable question: Would you like to read more?

2: Thoughts on O'Connor's Stories

The Fiction Writer And His Country I just read "The Fiction Writer and His Country," an essay by Flannery O'Connor that was originally contributed in to an anthology of contemporary authors writing about writing.

I can imagine how much use she might have for a blog post. She dismisses him curtly but takes the opportunity to elaborate her own relationship to storytelling as a Christian, Southerner, and artist. Be specific about what you see, what you know, what you hear. The greater your specificity, the more your vision of the real comes alive. This vision of the real is not the same as what is real. It is also far removed from the generality, either good or bad, of a nation of some hundred millions of people. Do not try to capture all. Please, God, kill the whole idea of the Everyman, especially the one Philip Roth wrote. Kill his Everyman so dead that I cannot remember it. Hey, I love Roth. This is not arguable. It has reduced much of our lousy character, but perhaps it has reduced all character. This may be the challenge of the fiction writer: Alienation is also distinction. The specifics of our alienation are the meat of fiction. I think that mass homogenization is more a perverse desire than a fact. We live in an age of mass individualism. No people has ever been more often alone—and lonely—than we are now. Subjectivity has increased to levels we cannot quite calculate. The problem now is how to simulate that subjectivity in a manner many of us can understand. He may not have. Someone almost certainly said it, and if it was him, then Ms. If a writer is to communicate his vision, it is through these distortions, these tweaks of what is all around us. The world must be and must not be recognizable. In , these distortions may come—and are coming—in all sorts of ways: Check out the recent works of Jenny Boully , Padgett Powell , and Blake Butler for three different, wonderful approaches. The artist is never making the world. He is ever re-making the world. Those who believe that art proceeds from a healthy, and not from a diseased, faculty of the mind will take what he shows them as a revelation, not of what we ought to be but of what we are at a given time. The distortion is not the thing to be resisted. It is not a barrier to understanding. Understanding is not the point. Distortion makes a mystery of the mundane, elevates all that to the realm of the beautiful. It is essential to the aesthetic. Our aloneness is strangely evolving: Our ways of feeling and understanding one another are changing too rapidly for us to keep up. A modern writer must try to describe this relationship between the personal country of our minds and the increasingly borderless world. It is also to know the world, and it is also, paradoxically, a form of exile from that world. To find a vantage point requires an increasing ability to detach oneself from the world. If that detachment is done well, the writer will necessarily create the distortions of reality so that, for a time, the reader can be exiled. In that wonderful exile, we can know ourselves in a new way.

3: Project MUSE - "Erasing Angel": The Lucifer-Trickster Figure in Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction

You may have heard that Ms. Flannery O'Connor is one of the great lights in our fiction. Lately I've been rereading her essays and letters, taking down the hard truths, and trying to make sense of them.

Since the novel is an historical by-product of the clash between the emerging middle class and the entrenched aristocracy, he reasoned, it is essentially a cultural archive for the vocabulary of manners distinguishing these two classes. Thus, any country lacking economic theater on this grand scale will also lack the catalogue of social distinctions that serious literature demands. Trilling thought that only this vaguely Tocquevillean thesis could explain, among other things, our lingering inability to produce a homegrown Balzac. We might say in hindsight that he mistook a perceived national lack of interest for such matters as evidence of its absence. What if we suggest that alongside the classic European novel there is something like a classic American novel? The idea is nothing new. When Melville sat down to write "Hawthorne and His Mosses" in , he thought we were well on our way to writing it. Then again, Melville tended to be a better propagandist for the nascent American literary tradition than a robust critic. Yet, ignoring these untimely visions of cultural success, might it still be the case that somewhere along the way the United States shed what Melville once memorably called its "literary flunkysm" Melville , ? If so, sticking to the Trilling line of thought, the question that must be answered is: What is the American equivalent to European class? In recent years a number of critics and theorists have suggested that American literature has always been, at bottom, a reflection on our peculiar institution of race. For example, Toni Morrison has argued that we should be rereading the American canon for the "dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing" Morrison , I take her point to be that for political, moral and aesthetic reasons we must observe how our White men and women of letters have hired a Black or Africanist literary persona to do their narrative dirty work for them. While this proposal may seem modest at first blush, Morrison is proposing nothing less than a systematic reexamination of how the American canon works as a whole. The hermeneutical ambitions of this project are seen most clearly when we find her arguing that the idea of America itself is a consequence of this Africanist presence. Her thesis is that as the blossoming literary tradition explored the anxieties of political freedom through a language of color, a young and quintessentially White American cultural identity was born. From this vantage point, before there could ever be "Walt Whitman, an American," there first had to be a black, nameless, and silent persona to define what it means to not be an American. For this reason, the dominant cultural traditions of the United States rest on the foundations of a literary Africanist presence. It seems promising to think along with Morrison and argue that for Southern Literature at least, the American equivalent to European class has indeed been race. So, rather than only hearing the echoes of a provincial class struggle in Southern fiction, we should also expect to find a vocabulary of manners and social distinctions differentiating Whites from Blacks. The challenge is finding a Southern author who, to lean on Trilling once more, believes "that scaling the moral and aesthetic heights in literature one has to use the ladder of social observation" Trilling , That is to say, both writers struggled to take inherited forms of literary realism and, for lack of a better word, enrich them. In the case of James, this enriched realism can be attributed to two narrative talents. First, James tried capturing "the air of reality" through what he called the "solidity of specification," the meticulous description of well-drawn characters set against precisely noted backgrounds. It is this commitment to "catching the colour of life itself," for example, which accounts for the obsessive social observations in a novel like *The Bostonians*. Second, James pushed beyond mere description by cultivating an unparalleled power "to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern. Nevertheless, for James the duty of the literary artist could be paraphrased as the commandment: Yet, she found herself surrounded by a mid-twentieth-century American literary culture that insisted on a pinched notion of realism that forced ambitious authors to either praise the sober virtues of middle class families or expose the kinky things those families were doing in their bedrooms. Manners are so important for great literature, she once observed in a Jamesian mood, "that any kind will do. To my mind few writers have understood so clearly, or represented with such unalloyed artistic force, how Southern culture not

only inherits the vile history of slavery, but also the vast collection of folk traditions that both sides of the color line developed over time. As she commented in *It* requires considerable grace for two races to live together, particularly when the population is divided about fifty-fifty between them and when they have our particular history. Formality preserves that individual privacy which everybody needs and, in these times, is always in danger of losing. Gracious living is a particular kind of moral sensibility, an ethos that is expressed by the "habits of choice" that her characters manifest in every domain of their lives Booth Hopewell in *Good Country People* to insist "that people who looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they were not," and the ultimate reason why Mrs. Taken together, as Olivia Dukakis put it in *Steel Magnolias*, these habits of choice demonstrate that "you were brought up right. To see how these two projects dovetailed in her own mind, consider the following passage from *The Teaching of Literature*: It is the business of fiction to embody mystery through manners, and mystery is a great embarrassment to the modern mind. About the turn of the century, Henry James wrote that the young woman of the future, though she would be taken out for airings in a flying-machine, would know nothing of mystery or manners. James had no business to limit the prediction to one sex; otherwise, no one can very well disagree with him. Or as Martha Nussbaum, another Jamesian disciple, is fond of saying: She insisted throughout her career that the fundamental challenge for any Catholic writer was discerning the presence of grace as it appears in the world; and that as a result, every good story must have "a moment of grace" in which fallen humanity is given an opportunity to be restored. The hard business of literature was to confront the mysteries of the Christian incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection through a style that never separated theological concerns from dramatic sensibilities. These wide-ranging commitments make for a lot of balls to keep in the air at once. Painted in broad strokes the story explores how Mrs. Rather than attempting to rehearse bits and pieces of the story, I have selected a passage where the main themes of the story come together: You can either be a nigger or white-trash," what would she have said? Turpin occupied herself at night naming the classes of people. Above she and Claude were people with a lot of money and much bigger houses and much more land. But here the complexity of it would begin to bear in on her, for some of the people with money were common and ought to be below she and Claud and some of the people with good blood had lost their money and had to rent and then there were colored people who owned their homes and land as well. Although he remains the mere suggestion of a character, and in that sense remains what Morrison calls a "dark and abiding presence" in the story, the two red Lincolns and registered whiteface cattle are essential for the Jamesian literary endeavor of capturing a "world so beautifully and so disastrously solid" Trilling , Another remarkable quality is how quietly she has drawn our attention to the way distinctions based on race and distinctions based on class feed off each other in the South. So instead of a single code of manners separating White from Black, there is a vast library of folk traditions used for distinguishing one kind of White from another, as well as one kind of Black from another. While the complexity of Southern cultural distinctions quickly overwhelms Mrs. A bit later in the story, she gives us a glimpse of the "elaborate manners" the Black side of the color line has assembled for their own protection when Mrs. That is to say, the sense of grace as attention to the markers of style and decorum has left no room for her substantive, theological understanding of grace as love, charity and forgiveness. When considered in this light, the Jamesian aesthetic strategy of thickly describing the cultural meaning of grace is also seen as an attempt to simultaneously draw our attention to the absence of the substantive theological meaning. Thus, we find the matriarch of *Everything That Rises Must Converge* looking at the changing landscape of race relations in twentieth-century America and concluding: Her writing reveals a political vision that is almost Augustinian in tone, in this case crediting the inherited code of manners for establishing enough discipline to forge a coherent cultural identity while criticizing that ethos because there is very little grace in this form of graceful living. They are stories about the grace that makes clowns of us all, liberals no less than reactionaries, the old no less than the young, the genteel no less than the uncouth" Wood , However, I would add that this quality of her writing has more to do with her Jamesian inheritance than her "Catholic" or "theological" heritage. Looking back on her work, it does not look like the product of an artist making do with a thinly composed and historically impoverished culture. References Booth, Wayne *The Company We Keep*. University of California Press. *The Demoralization of Society*. *Literary Criticism*, Volume One. Playing in the

Dark. University Press of Mississippi. The Comedy of Redemption. University of Notre Dame Press.

4: The Fiction Writer and His Country | marcusfactor

In "The Fiction Writer & His Country," she comments, "The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these distortions appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural."

In other words she is among the luminaries of modern American letters whose work has provided the basis for numerous dissertations, classroom discussions, and critical tomes. She populated her fiction with febrile preachers, proud country matrons, conniving Bible salesmen, year-old Confederate veterans, and any number of other eccentrics whose physical deformities provide perfect physical correlatives for absence of the humility that presages Christian salvation. To be able to recognize a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological. Man is a creature of entirety, physical and spiritual, and if spirituality is missing, man might as well be missing an arm or leg. Pointer, who knows all too well how cunning human nature can be. Shiftlet, whose very name is packed with thematic possibilities, shows an absence of basic human decency in his attempt to manipulate an old woman and her mute daughter out of an automobile with, it must be noted, the mother in complicity. Nevertheless a close reading of these novels and stories reveals an acute criticism of post-World War II American manners and mores, rampant materialism, pride, vanity, and, the logical consequence of all these human failings, lack of the honest piety that gives a civilization coherence and continuity. *Wise Blood*, her first novel and published book, has as its setting, ostensibly, a large Southern city, a world in which materialism and mendacity rule the day, a world of hucksters, conniving preachers, prostitutes, aimless youth, men and women who, in the absence of genuine spirituality, must find some substitute in money or casual sex. Into this world wanders Hazel Motes, ex-soldier and practically the only character in the book whose concerns are spiritual. But Haze has come to Taulkinham, this fictionalized city is it Birmingham? Motes is not the only character in the book with the potential for spiritual wholeness. A third character, Enoch Emery, also exhibits the potential, but he seems hungrier for human companionship and approval than redemption. The general enveloping action of her stories is a state not predominately but absolutely secular and material, in which her heroes and heroines miss salvation because of complete selfishness and self love. Actually it is impossible to find any society so given over totally to the evil nature of man. This can only be done in an art form. Hence the monstrosity and grotesqueness of her characters. I would say her fiction. McIntyre, is the proprietor of a farm bequeathed to her by her late husband and is struggling to make ends meet with the help of poor black and poor white sharecroppers. They have been brought to her in the wake of the Second World War by a Roman Catholic priest who is anxious to discuss religious doctrine with Mrs. McIntyre, who will hear none of it. I want to talk to you about something practical! That man is my salvation! McIntyre is a modern woman. Guizac, behind her back, is attempting to bring over to the United States his young cousin by marrying her to one of Mrs. By the end of the story, paralyzed by shock at Mr. McIntyre has no choice but to listen to the lectures on Catholic doctrine delivered by the well-meaning priest. His antagonist in this search is an atheist named Mr. McIntyre, she has transferred her faith to something else, in this case human intellect. His own faithfulness is symbolized by a phony Bible, hollowed out to hold a whiskey flask. This faithlessness, or transferal of faith to industry, intellect, science, sex, the Gross National Product, etc. But what is interesting, and distressing, is that this same spiritual paralysis has almost completely overtaken contemporary Southern letters. What we are left with, even below the Mason-Dixon line, is a literature grounded in the materialism and morbid self-centeredness that has overwhelmed the remainder of the nation. She is indicative of a culture engulfed by media and materialism, that expects the immediate gratification provided by a thirty-minute sitcom. Hobson expresses it more eloquently: What we have here are characters who inhabit shopping malls and drive-ins with no idea of and no concern for what was there fifty years before, no idea of how they fit into the whole picture, temporally or spatially. For literature, such divorce poses dire results, as the late critic Walter Sullivan, notes in his collection *In Defense of Blood Sports*. Sullivan, paraphrasing Jacques Maritain, says that only a Christian can be a good novelist. Man, after all, is more than a mere collection of corpuscles,

ligaments, and follicles. He is both body and spirit, and any truly serious artist must be prepared to face this duality or be content to populate his novels with one, perhaps two-dimensional characters. The Romantic notions of the nineteenth century, fathered by Wordsworth, among others, in which man becomes the master of his own destiny and casts off the conventions of society, including religious tendencies, have found their monstrous realization in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In place of piety comes vanity, pride, appetite. I know you come from nice people! On the bottom of the heap were most colored people, not the kind she would have been had she been one, but most of them; then next to them. But here the complexity of it would bear in on her, for some of the people with a lot of money were common and ought to be below she and Claude. Turpin, cleanliness and respectability are the highest priorities, and anyone who violates these standards suffers her harsh judgement. The revelation of the title comes at the hands of a homely girl a couple seats down from Mrs. But the girl, unmannered and unacceptable in Mrs. Turpin; she brings Mrs. Turpin an awareness of her own sinful pride, an awareness made clearer at the end of the story by a vision in the night sky of the true order of heaven, with her type, Mrs. The vision comes in the form of a celestial bridge stretched the length of the night sky: Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white trash clean for the first time. And bringing up the rear. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and respectable behavior. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away. New American Library, , preface. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, , Essays in a Time of Disorder Baton Rouge: LSU Press, ,

5: Flannery O' Connor | Tolle Lege

Almanac: Flannery O'Connor on art and moral judgment October 2, by Terry Teachout "In the greatest fiction, the writer's moral sense coincides with his dramatic sense, and I see no way for it to do this unless his moral judgment is part of the very act of seeing, and he is free to use it."

While at Georgia College, she produced a significant amount of cartoon work for the student newspaper. He later published several of her stories in the Sewanee Review, as well as critical essays on her work. Workshop director Paul Engle was the first to read and comment on the initial drafts of what would become *Wise Blood*. She received an M. She published two books of short stories: She also has had several books of her other writings published, and her enduring influence is attested by a growing body of scholarly studies of her work. Fragments exist of an unfinished novel tentatively titled *Why Do the Heathen Rage?* *Wise Blood* completed and published. In this period, satirical elements dominate. Influences include Jacques Maritain Mid: In this period, the mystical undercurrents begin to have primacy. *Everything That Rises Must Converge* written. In this period, the notion of grotesque is expanded to include the good as grotesque, and the grotesque as good. Most of her works feature disturbing elements, though she did not like to be characterized as cynical. When I see these stories described as horror stories I am always amused because the reviewer always has hold of the wrong horror. She wrote ironic, subtly allegorical fiction about deceptively backward Southern characters, usually fundamentalist Protestants, who undergo transformations of character that, to her thinking, brought them closer to the Catholic mind. The transformation is often accomplished through pain, violence, and ludicrous behavior in the pursuit of the holy. However grotesque the setting, she tried to portray her characters as open to the touch of divine grace. Another source of humor is frequently found in the attempt of well-meaning liberals to cope with the rural South on their own terms. Politically, she maintained a broadly liberal outlook in connection with her faith, voting for John F. Kennedy in and supporting the work of Martin Luther King Jr. Her daily routine was to attend Mass, write in the morning, then spend the rest of the day recuperating and reading. She died on August 3, , at the age of 39 in Baldwin County Hospital. From through , she wrote more than one hundred book reviews for two Catholic diocesan newspapers in Georgia: *The Bulletin*, and *The Southern Cross*. *I Was in It Too with the Chicken*. I was just there to assist the chicken but it was the high point in my life. Everything since has been an anticlimax. Fascinated by birds of all kinds, she raised ducks, ostriches, emus, toucans, and any sort of exotic bird she could obtain, while incorporating images of peacocks into her books. She described her peacocks in an essay entitled "The King of the Birds". National Book Award for Fiction [39] and, in a online poll, was named the best book ever to have won the National Book Awards.

6: Flannery O'Connor - Wikipedia

Mary Flannery O'Connor (March 25, - August 3,) was an American novelist, short story writer and essayist. She wrote two novels and thirty-two short stories, as well as a number of reviews and commentaries.

My own approach to literary problems is very like the one Dr. These are not times when writers in this country can very well speak for one another. Today each writer speaks for himself, even though he may not be sure that his work is important enough to justify his doing so. I think that every writer, when he speaks of his own approach to fiction, hopes to show that, in some crucial and deep sense, he is a realist; and for some of us, for whom the ordinary aspects of daily life prove to be of no great fictional interest, this is very difficult. The first necessity confronting him will be to say what he is not doing; for even if there are no genuine schools in American letters today, there is always some critic who has just invented one and who is ready to put you into it. If you are a Southern writer, that label, and all the misconceptions that go with it, is pasted on you at once, and you are left to get it off as best you can. I have found that no matter for what purpose peculiar to your special dramatic needs you use the Southern scene, you are still thought by the general reader to be writing about the South and are judged by the fidelity your fiction has to typical Southern life. I am always having it pointed out to me that life in Georgia is not at all the way I picture it, that escaped criminals do not roam the roads exterminating families, nor Bible salesmen prowl about looking for girls with wooden legs. The social sciences have cast a dreary blight on the public approach to fiction. There was a time when the average reader read a novel simply for the moral he could get out of it, and however naive that may have been, it was a good deal less naive than some of the more limited objectives he now has. Today novels are considered to be entirely concerned with the social or economic or, psychological forces that they will by necessity exhibit, or with those details of daily life that are for the good novelist only means to some deeper end. Hawthorne knew his own problems and perhaps anticipated ours when he said he did not write novels, he wrote romances. Today many readers and critics have set up for the novel a kind of orthodoxy. They associate the only legitimate material for long fiction with the movement of social forces, with the typical, with fidelity to the way things look and happen in normal life. Along with this usually goes a wholesale treatment of those aspects of existence that the Victorian novelist could not directly deal with. It has only been within the last five or six decades that writers have won this supposed emancipation. This was a license that opened up many possibilities for fiction, but it is always a bad day for culture when any liberty of this kind is assumed to be general. The writer has no rights at all except those he forges for himself inside his own work. We have become so flooded with sorry fiction based on unearned liberties, or on the notion that fiction must represent the typical, that in the public mind the deeper kinds of realism are less and less understandable. The writer who writes within what might be called the modern romance tradition may not be writing novels which in all respects partake of a novelistic orthodoxy; but as long as these works have vitality, as long as they present something that is alive, however eccentric its life may seem to the general reader, then they have to be dealt with; and they have to be dealt with on their own terms. When we look at a good deal of serious modern fiction, and particularly Southern fiction, we find this quality about it that is generally described, in a pejorative sense, as grotesque. Of course, I have found that anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic. But for this occasion, we may leave such misapplications aside and consider the kind of fiction that may be called grotesque with good reason, because of a directed intention that way on the part of the author. In these grotesque works, we find that the writer has made alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life. We find that connections which we would expect in the customary kind of realism have been ignored, that there are strange skips and gaps which anyone trying to describe manners and customs would certainly not have left. Yet the characters have an inner coherence, if not always a coherence to their social framework. Their fictional qualities lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected. It is this kind of realism that I want to consider. All novelists are fundamentally seekers and describers of the real, but the realism of

each novelist will depend on his view of the ultimate reaches of reality. Since the eighteenth century, the popular spirit of each succeeding age has tended more and more to the view that the ills and mysteries of life will eventually fall before the scientific advances of man, a belief that is still going strong even though this is the first generation to face total extinction because of these advances. If the novelist is in tune with this spirit, if he believes that actions are predetermined by psychic make-up or the economic situation or some other determinable factor, then he will be concerned above all with an accurate reproduction of the things that most immediately concern man, with the natural forces that he feels control his destiny. Such a writer may produce a great tragic naturalism, for by his responsibility to the things he sees, he may transcend the limitations of his narrow vision. On the other hand, if the writer believes that our life is and will remain essentially mysterious, if he looks upon us as beings existing in a created order to whose laws we freely respond, then what he sees on the surface will be of interest to him only as he can go through it into an experience of mystery itself. His kind of fiction will always be pushing its own limits outward toward the limits of mystery, because for this kind of writer, the meaning of a story does not begin except at a depth where adequate motivation and adequate psychology and the various determinations have been exhausted. He will be interested in possibility rather than in probability. To the modern mind, this kind of character, and his creator, are typical Don Quixotes, tilting at what is not there. I would not like to suggest that this kind of writer, because his interest is predominantly in mystery, is able in any sense to slight the concrete. I do believe, however, that the kind of writer I am describing will use the concrete in a more drastic way. His way will much more obviously be the way of distortion. Henry James said that Conrad in his fiction did things in the way that took the most doing. I think the writer of grotesque fiction does them in the way that takes the least, because in his work distances are so great. It is a quality which no one can put his finger on in any exact critical sense, so it is always safe for anybody to use. Usually I think what is meant by it is that the writer excuses all human weakness because human weakness is human. The kind of hazy compassion demanded of the writer now makes it difficult for him to be anti-anything. Certainly when the grotesque is used in a legitimate way, the intellectual and moral judgments implicit in it will have the ascendancy over feeling. In nineteenth-century American writing, there was a good deal of grotesque literature which came from the frontier and was supposed to be funny; but our present grotesque characters, comic though they may be, are at least not primarily so. They seem to carry an invisible burden; their fanaticism is a reproach, not merely an eccentricity. I believe that they come about from the prophetic vision peculiar to any novelist whose concerns I have been describing. The prophet is a realist of distances, and it is this kind of realism that you find in the best modern instances of the grotesque. To be able to recognize a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological. That is a large statement, and it is dangerous to make it, for almost anything you say about Southern belief can be denied in the next breath with equal propriety. But approaching the subject from the standpoint of the writer, I think it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows, particularly in our literature. In any case, it is when the freak can be sensed as a figure for our essential displacement that he attains some depth in literature. There is another reason in the Southern situation that makes for a tendency toward the grotesque and this is the prevalence of good Southern writers. I think the writer is initially set going by literature more than by life. The presence alone of Faulkner in our midst makes a great difference in what the writer can and cannot permit himself to do. Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down. The Southern writer is forced from all sides to make his gaze extend beyond the surface, beyond mere problems, until it touches that realm which is the concern of prophets and poets. When Hawthorne said that he wrote romances, he was attempting, in effect, to keep for fiction some of its freedom from social determinisms, and to steer it in the direction of poetry. I think this tradition of the dark and divisive romance-novel has combined with the comic-grotesque tradition, and with the lessons all writers have learned from the naturalists, to preserve our Southern literature for at least a little while from becoming the kind of thing Mr. Van Wyck Brooks desired when he said he hoped that our next literary phase would restore that central literature which combines the great subject matter of the middlebrow writers with the technical expertness bequeathed by the new critics and which would thereby

restore literature as a mirror and guide for society. For the kind of writer I have been describing, a literature which mirrors society would be no fit guide for it, and one which did manage, by sheer art, to do both these things would have to have recourse to more violent means than middlebrow subject matter and mere technical expertness. We are not living in times when the realist of distances is understood or well thought of, even though he may be in the dominant tradition of American letters. Whenever the public is heard from, it is heard demanding a literature which is balanced and which will somehow heal the ravages of our times. In the name of social order, liberal thought, and sometimes even Christianity, the novelist is asked to be the handmaid of his age. James was then obliged to sit in the crowded carriage with the satchel on his knees. All through the South the poor man was ignobly served, and he afterwards wrote that our domestic servants were the last people in the world who should be employed in the way they were, for they were by nature unfitted for it. The case is the same with the novelist. The novelist must be characterized not by his function but by his vision, and we must remember that his vision has to be transmitted and that the limitations and blind spots of his audience will very definitely affect the way he is able to show what he sees. This is another thing which in these times increases the tendency toward the grotesque in fiction. Those writers who speak for and with their age are able to do so with a great deal more ease and grace than those who speak counter to prevailing attitudes. I once received a letter from an old lady in California who informed me that when the tired reader comes home at night, he wishes to read something that will lift up his heart. And it seems her heart had not been lifted up by anything of mine she had read. I think that if her heart had been in the right place, it would have been lifted up. I used to think it should be possible to write for some supposed elite, for the people who attend universities and sometimes know how to read, but I have since found that though you may publish your stories in *Botteghe Oscure*, they are any good at all, you are eventually going to get a letter from some old lady in California, or some inmate of the Federal Penitentiary or the state insane asylum or the local poorhouse, telling you where you have failed to meet his needs. And his need, of course, is to be lifted up. There is something in us, as storytellers and as listeners to stories, that demands the redemptive act, that demands that what falls at least be offered the chance to be restored. The reader of today looks for this motion, and rightly so, but what he has forgotten is the cost of it. His sense of evil is diluted or lacking altogether, and so he has forgotten the price of restoration. When he reads a novel, he wants either his senses tormented or his spirits raised. He wants to be transported, instantly, either to mock damnation or a mock innocence. I am often told that the model of balance for the novelist should be Dante, who divided his territory up pretty evenly between hell, purgatory, and paradise. Dante lived in the thirteenth century, when that balance was achieved in the faith of his age. We live now in an age which doubts both fact and value, which is swept this way and that by momentary convictions. Instead of reflecting a balance from the world around him, the novelist now has to achieve one from a felt balance inside himself. There is no literary, orthodoxy that can be prescribed as settled for the fiction writer, not even that of Henry James, who balanced the elements of traditional realism and romance so admirably within each of his novels. But this much can be said. The great novels we get in the future are not going to be those that the public thinks it wants, or those that critics demand. They are going to be the kind of novels that interest the novelist. And the novels that interest the novelist are those that have not already been written. They are those that put the greatest demands on him, that require him to operate at the maximum of his intelligence and his talents, and to be true to the particularities of his own vocation. The direction of many of us will be more toward poetry than toward the traditional novel. The problem for such a novelist will be to know how far he can distort without destroying, and in order not to destroy, he will have to descend far enough into himself to reach those underground springs that give life to big work. This descent into himself will, at the same time, be a descent into his region. It will be a descent through the darkness of the familiar into a world where, like the blind man cured in the gospels, he sees men as if they were trees, but walking. This is the beginning of vision, and I feel it is a vision which we in the South must at least try to understand if we want to participate in the continuance of a vital Southern literature. I hate to think that in twenty years Southern writers too may be writing about men in gray-flannel suits and may have lost their ability to see that these gentlemen are even greater freaks than what we are writing about now.

7: Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works | Library of America

This bold and brilliant collection is a must for all readers, writers, and students of American literature. When she died in , Flannery O'Connor left behind a body of unpublished essays and lectures as well as a number of critical articles that had appeared in scattered publications during her lifetime.

I wish to mention briefly four minor but not insignificant features that attract me and then focus on three main reasons for her enduring stature among readers, teachers, and critics. She did not wear rose-colored glasses, and her eye seized upon the depraved, the vulgar, and the grotesque. But there is no doubt that she captured the Southernness of her region. I think of the way her characters talk. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born! One can easily read all of her published work: Her literary output is small for two reasons: She worked five years on *Wise Blood*, at pages a relatively short novel. Secondly, at the age of twenty-six she was stricken with lupus, an incurable disease that limited her writing time and energy and shortened her life. She died young—in , only thirty-nine years old. When asked by students which authors I recommend as prose stylists for in reading a good author we can pick up some of his virtues , I recommend three: What she writes is clear, pungent, and memorable. She can effectively say more in a few sentences than most of us can ineptly say in several pages. I also like her and recommend her because of her very sensible advice concerning teaching literature to middle- and high-school students. This advice, found in *Mystery and Manners*, has been of value to me as a teacher of college students. Here are a few of her convictions that should interest all literature teachers. And they should read Hawthorne before reading Steinbeck, or her own work, for that matter. I quote her on this point: The high-school English teacher will be fulfilling his responsibility if he furnishes the student a guided opportunity, through the best writing of the past, to come, in time, to an understanding of the best writing of the present. He will teach literature, not social studies or little lessons in democracy or the customs of many lands. And if the student finds that this is not to his taste? Well, that is regrettable. His taste should not be consulted; it is being formed. So all literature teachers have a good work to do: And I believe these and other reasons may have something to do with her continuing presence among us as a noteworthy author. For about forty years her work has been the object of lively popular and critical interest, and all of that work is still in print: Some of her fiction has even made it into television and the movies, an achievement about which she no doubt had mixed feelings. At any rate, all of the publishing activity and the movies indicate something of the fascinated response many readers have to her fiction. First, readers are intrigued by the sense of humor and the hard yet radiant wit evident in nearly all of her productions; second, they are attracted by the Christian vision illuminated in her essays, letters, and incarnational art; and third, they are astonished by her gifts as storyteller, gifts which are evident in the depth of her especially unsentimental realism, in her eye for the absurd and the grotesque for freaks and sinners like you and me , and in the shocking plots and violent characters in her fiction. This suggests something of her integrity as a private person and a public author. She occasionally mentions her sickness in her letters, but there is no sentimentality, no self-pity. When she does mention herself or her sickness in these letters, she reveals a good deal of sardonic humor and comic self-deprecation. But let us sample the comedy, the sparkling wit, and the witty judgments in some of these letters. People in Nashville will wonder what you fed me. My mother is all for it. My mother and me facing Europe will be just like Mr. Head and Nelson facing Atlanta. I forgot whether his name was Tex or Trigger but he was dressed fit to kill and looked like he was having a good time. He doubled the usual attendance. She knew that she did not have to go to California, New York City or any other place to find vulgarity, freaks, or sinners. She knew that poor taste, not to mention modern and ancient vices, easily took root in Southern hearts and minds. One of my nurses was a dead ringer for Mrs. Her Claud was named Otis. She told all the time about what a good nurse she was. She told me all about the low life in Wilkinson County. I seldom know in any given circumstances whether the Lord is giving me a reward or a punishment. It makes us wince even while we laugh. Here are a few examples from her letters. They sat there like a band of genteel desperadoes and never moved a face muscle. I might have been saying the rosary to them. She observed to the Cheneys: Thomas prodigiously and as the audience is never too sure who he is, it is

always much impressed. She did so because her readers initially myself included either did not detect a Christian vision in her work or misunderstood it. The only spiritual purpose I detected was negative: If read in the right spirit and with spiritual perception, her stories are terribly funny and spiritually vivid. Noting that many modern readers complained of a lack of spiritual purpose and the absence of the joy of life in modern fiction her own fiction included, she made this declaration regarding her beliefs: I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that. Our secular, materialistic age has something to do with our blindness. She is a literary artist, not a preacher or teacher of moral philosophy. She believes that fiction is art, not primarily moral instruction, not a type of catechism. Straightforward preaching, explicit prophecy, direct moral instruction—these modes of discourse belong to preachers, priests, and moralists. Nevertheless, her Christian vision is manifested in her literary techniques. In addition to being a brilliant satirist, she was a true humorist and possessed an unusual gift for the grotesque. But she resorted to something far more remarkable to reflect her Christian vision to a secular world. She invented a new form of humor. This invention consists in her introducing her story with familiar surfaces in an action that seems secular, and in a secular tone of satire or humor. Before you know it, the naturalistic situation has become metaphysical and the action appropriate to it comes with a surprise, an unaccountability that is humorous, however shocking. The means is violent, but the end is Christian. When I write a novel in which the central action is a baptism, I am very well aware that for a majority of my readers, baptism is a meaningless rite, and so in my novel I have to see that this baptism carries enough awe and mystery to jar the reader into some kind of emotional recognition of its significance. To this end I have to bend the whole novel—its language, its structure, its action. I have to make the reader feel, in his bones if nowhere else, that something is going on here that counts. Distortion in this case is an instrument; exaggeration has a purpose, and the whole structure of the story or novel has been made what it is because of belief. This is not the kind of distortion that destroys; it is the kind that reveals, or should reveal. Once again the baptism is violent. He drowns, but we are led to believe that he has indeed left this life of sin, sorrow, and suffering for a glorious life in the Kingdom of Christ. These are doctrines that the modern secular world does not believe in. It does not believe in sin, or in the value that suffering can have, or in eternal responsibility, and since we live in a world that since the sixteenth century has been increasingly dominated by secular thought, the Catholic writer often finds himself writing in and for a world that is unprepared and unwilling to see the meaning of life as he sees it. This means frequently that he may resort to violent literary means to get his vision across to a hostile audience, and the images and actions he creates may seem distorted and exaggerated to the Catholic mind. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures. This helps the Grandmother accept her moment of grace moments before the Misfit puts three bullets through her chest. Turpin for her final revelation at the pig parlor at the end of the story. Turpin receives a vision of the end of time: A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and [her husband] Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away. Her illusion of nihilism is shattered, and she may very well leave that barn a different person than she was when she entered it. In nearly all of these stories we do not know whether or not the protagonists accept their moment of grace, but we do sense that they have been exposed to something verging on the borderland of mystery. And if we read this fiction in the spirit in which it was written, our own sense of spiritual realities and spiritual mysteries will be enhanced. Her deeply

grounded and acute Christian understanding of the world made her a vigorous and effective opponent of modern secularism. She traced the secular and rationalizing tendencies of modernity back to the sixteenth century, but especially to the eighteenth century, the so-called age of Enlightenment. Since the eighteenth century, the popular spirit of each succeeding age has tended more and more to the view that the ills and mysteries of life will eventually fall before the scientific advances of man, a belief that is still going strong even though this is the first generation to face total extinction because of these advances. Attracted to abstract reason and scientific materialism, modern man becomes epistemologically narrow, limited, insular, and provincial.

8: Bellatricksy: Flannery O'Connor--The Fiction Writer and His Country

When "The Church and the Fiction Writer" appeared in America in March 30, , Georgia-born Flannery O'Connor had just turned By then her novel, Wise Blood (), and her short stories.

In story after story, she brings her characters to a moment when it is no longer possible for them to continue in their accustomed manner. The proud are repeatedly humbled, the ignorant are repeatedly enlightened, the wise are repeatedly shown that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," and the materialists are repeatedly forced to recognize that the treasures of this world are theirs to possess for a short time only. Most frequently, as we have seen in the stories, the characters gain their new awareness as a result of having undergone an epiphanal experience. In many of the stories, the epiphanal moment is accompanied by violence and destruction. In ten of the nineteen stories which appear in her two short-story collections, the death of one or more of the characters is used to produce the epiphany. In none of the stories, however, is the violence used as anything but a logical extension of the action of the story. Never is it used for its own sake. This same tendency to underplay the violence and to accentuate the positive result of the violence on the character is illustrated in the going to death of Mrs. May in the story "Greenleaf. That she does so is not unusual given her view of literature. In "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," she argues "that for the fiction writer himself, symbols are something he uses as a matter of course. The reader may not see them but they have their effect on him nonetheless. This is the way the modern novelist sinks, or hides, his theme. It is this same attitude which may well explain her tendency to deal with grotesque figures. Thus, when faced with a reminder of his condition, he finds it intolerable. As she notes, "it is only in these centuries when we are afflicted with the doctrine of the perfectibility of human nature by its own efforts that the freak in fiction is so disturbing. The only time he should be disturbing to us is when he is held up as a whole man. Her insistence that a work of literature must have "value on the dramatic level, the level of truth recognizable by anybody," has made it possible for her to produce a body of literature which contains some stories capable of standing with the best literature written during her era. Their actions are those which one would expect from them. Part of her success must be attributed to her ability to select those details and environments which are appropriate to each character. Part, at least, must be attributed to her fine ear for natural dialogue and to her ability to sketch a character with a few deft strokes. In the majority of her stories, the reader is left with the impression that each character "receives exactly what he deserves. The inclusion of the dogma involved provides, as she herself argues, an added dimension to the stories.

9: Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose - Flannery O'Connor - Google Books

â€œFlannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country" Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one.

She argues that his children, John Wesley and June Star, have never been to East Tennessee, and she shows him a news article in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution about an escaped murderer who calls himself "The Misfit" and was last seen in Florida. The next day, the grandmother wakes up early to hide her cat, Pitty Sing, in a basket on the floor in the back of the car. She is worried that the cat would die while they were gone. Bailey finds her sitting in the car, dressed in her best clothes and an ostentatious hat; she says that if she should die in an accident along the road, she wants people to see her corpse and know she was refined and "a lady. She recalls her youth in the Old South, reminiscing about her courtships and how much better everything was in her time, when children were respectful and people "did right then. As he drives them down a remote dirt road, the grandmother suddenly realizes that the house she was thinking of was actually in Tennessee, not Georgia. Bailey then loses control of the car and it flips over, ending up in a ditch below the road, near Toomsboro. Shaking in the ditch, the family waits for help. When she notices a black hearse coming down the road, the grandmother flags it down until it stops. Three men come out and begin to talk to her. All three have guns. The grandmother says that she recognizes the leader, the quiet man in glasses, as The Misfit. He immediately confirms this, saying it would have been better for them all if she had not recognized him, and Bailey curses his mother. The Misfit claims that he has no memory of the crime for which he was imprisoned; when he was informed by doctors that he had killed his father, he claimed that his father died in a flu epidemic. The grandmother begins pleading for her own life. When The Misfit talks to her about Jesus, he expresses his doubts about His raising Lazarus from the dead. As he speaks, The Misfit becomes agitated and angry. She is not identified by name. The Baby Male child of Bailey and his wife. Not identified by name. Red Sammy Butts Restaurant operator who agrees with the Grandmother that the world is in a state of decline. She observes that not a single person in the world is trustworthy. He would have been a good man to marry, she says, because he owned Coca-Cola stock and died rich. Pitty Sing Pet cat of the Grandmother. Bailey flings it against a tree after the accident. She originally perceives herself as a righteous woman, making her able to "justify" all of her actions. Other opinions include that it is contradictory of her character or that she was simply again trying to save herself and that her selfishness was never overcome throughout the story. For example, Alex Link considers how, until the family encounters the Misfit, the South is mainly something to ignore, forget, package in a movie or a monument, or remember with distorted nostalgia, such that the Misfit comes to stand for the persistence of what cannot be bought, sold, or wholly understood, such as death, grace, and "the South. In the story, violence reveals divine grace. Christians believe the imperfect can be reborn spiritually, i. While the two seem to be different, the grandmother and the Misfit both are the same at their core: The sins she commits throughout the story depict her as a severely flawed individual in need of saving. Only at her death does she realize her faults. After he shoots her, the Misfit claims "she would have been a good woman, if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life. She instead conveys a message of the sinful nature of humans; these experiences people may go through do not stick. The film stars noted New York artist Joe Coleman , [12] but according to most reviewers the film does not depict the story or its characters well. Volk teaches as Assistant Professor of Music. The American folk musician Sufjan Stevens adapted the story into a song going by the same title. It appears on his album Seven Swans. The song is written in the first person from the point of view of The Misfit. Little, Brown, , p. Critical companion to Katelyn Smith. Retrieved April 24, Friedman and Beverly Lyon Clark, eds. Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research, vol.

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