

Aberrant Characters in Four Flannery O'Connor Stories

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Literature at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Spring 2007

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Flannery O'Connor Stories

Although one made a living through language and the other by music, it is intriguing to note that author Flannery O'Connor and composer and musician Johann Sebastian Bach share a similar trait. Bach is famous for having taken two well-known musical forms, the prelude and fugue, and composed twenty-four versions of each in the twelve major and minor keys. His efforts resulted in the complete work, The Well-Tempered Clavier. Musicians all over the world enjoy playing Bach's preludes and fugues today. But why would Bach have wanted to take a form and reproduce it *twenty-four* times? Perhaps he viewed it as a challenge: he had the ability and gift for composition, so why not? Or maybe Bach wondered whether he possessed enough creativity and ingenuity to take a form and create twenty-four unique pieces.

Bach and O'Connor are alike in this way. Just as Bach experimented with the prelude and fugue, so O'Connor took the model of the aberrant character and crafted thirty-one stories exploring the different ways in which a character might repulse and irritate. Some of her characters land at the far end of the spectrum, since they are hideous and grotesque both in their appearance and actions. Others, however, are merely aberrant: the reader finds them to be disagreeable, sometimes abnormal, but certainly not hideous. O'Connor herself said, "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"

(The Grotesque 44). She wrote about these deviant characters because she noticed them in society and they fascinated her.

O'Connor has created characters that are blatantly aberrant: they disregard the conventional norms of society by being publicly rude, selfish, and sometimes even violent. Traditionally, a reader is able to find a way to relate to the protagonist of a story. In O'Connor's case, however, the characters are despicable; they have no qualities with which to endear themselves to the reader. An examination of the characters and their actions will determine how O'Connor portrays aberration, and more importantly, why. The four stories this paper will focus on are from The Complete Stories, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux: "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "The Lambe Shall Enter First," "Revelation," and "The River."

According to M. H. Abrams in his A Glossary of Literary Terms, a writer fashions characters by considering dialogue, action, and motivation. Thus in order to convey a complete, three-dimensional character, a writer must settle not only upon the obvious -a physical description- but also on dialogue, action, and motivation. Using these four elements, O'Connor has fashioned unforgettable, aberrant people that readers will long remember.

Although she lived a relatively short life spanning from 1925 to 1964, Flannery O'Connor managed to become a well-known name in literary circles. She was a true southerner, born in Savannah, Georgia, and living out the rest of her life in the town of Milledgeville. O'Connor only spent five years away from her native state: she pursued a

graduate degree at the University of Iowa and spent time on the east coast of the United States, staying with friends. Writing wasn't a fling for O'Connor; it was a passion. Ted R. Spivey observes in his book, Flannery O'Connor: the Woman, the Thinker, the Visionary, that, "She wrote every morning, six days a week, and she wrote with a profound sense of concentration" (18). O'Connor understood that the secret to being a writer is not only to write, but write constantly. And yet her passion physically drained her. "Rightly, she said that she wrote every morning and spent the rest of the day recovering" (Spivey 18). O'Connor was diagnosed with lupus in 1951. The incurable disease often forced her to take to her bed for long periods of time. She died at the age of thirty-nine.

The four O'Connor stories examined in this paper best reflect the sweeping range of her aberrant characters. In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" a grandmother goes on a road trip to Florida with her son and his family. Partially as a result of several of the grandmother's selfish and deceitful choices, the family gets lost, the driver loses control, and they find themselves stranded on the side of the road in a lonely, isolated area. In a matter of time, a vehicle stops and the man who alights is revealed by the shocked grandmother to be the infamous Misfit, a murderer whom she has recently read about in the newspaper. She is forced to watch her family led away into the woods where they are mercilessly shot. The grandmother eventually dies at the hand of the Misfit as well. Both the Misfit and the grandmother prove to be bizarre characters.

"The Lame Shall Enter First" is the story of a father, Sheppard, casting his son to the side in an attempt to save a juvenile delinquent. Unnoticed by Sheppard, the young son, Norton, grieves the loss of his mother. Meanwhile, the crafty delinquent gains

Sheppard's trust, while duping him into thinking that he is truly reforming his old ways. At the end, when Sheppard comprehends how much he has truly abandoned Norton, he discovers the boy's lifeless body hanging from the attic rafters: in a tragic attempt to join his mother, Norton has committed suicide.

"Revelation" presents the reader with Mrs. Turpin, a woman whom Jesus would have rightly termed a Pharisee. While sitting at the doctor's office, she is quick to notice the shortcomings of others, yet remains blind to her own prideful, bigoted behavior. It takes a nasty insult flung from a crazed college student and a surreal vision before Mrs. Turpin begins to turn her pointing finger inward in self-examination.

The protagonist of "The River" is Bevel, a neglected boy who suffers from a lack of parental love and attention. He searches for meaning in a life that has thus far been miserable. Hearing about the Kingdom of Christ, he tries to get there by drowning himself in the river.

O'Connor's characters are made aberrant in three ways. She pays great attention to the physical. Anthony Di Renzo, author of American Gargoyles: Flannery O'Connor and the Medieval Grotesque, acknowledges this when he writes, "O'Connor's characters are grossly, graphically physical" (64). Sometimes, a character suffers from physical ugliness, such as Mary Grace, the college student in "Revelation." "Fat" and "scowling," she has a face that is "blue with acne" (O'Connor 490). Other times a character simply suffers from a lack of cleanliness. Sitting in the same reception room as Mary Grace is a woman whose soiled overall appearance O'Connor takes pains to describe. Her clothing is "gritty-looking," the "rims of her lips were stained with snuff," and her hair is "dirty"

(490). Mrs. Turpin notices her condition and thinks to herself that the woman should have purchased for herself "a wash rag and some soap" (492). Physical ugliness also extends to deformities, which is illustrated in "The Lame Shall Enter First" by the character Johnson. His infirmity is a "monstrous clubbed foot," which is portrayed by O'Connor as a repulsive object (450). The foot is a hindrance to what might have otherwise been a healthy boy. Di Renzo agrees when he writes that O'Connor's large range of characters are not only "overweight, suffer from acne and eczema, have enduring chills, swollen joints, and missing limbs," but they also "suffer heart attacks and strokes, are beaten, gored, and sodomized" (64). This is a more complete list of the grotesque, disturbing elements that make up O'Connor's characters.

O'Connor is also concerned with behavior. Through her characters, she explores the various abnormal and atypical ways in which people can break away from society's conventional, accepted rules. The behaviors these characters adopt are such that might be expected from children, but certainly not from adults; that is why they are abnormal. Mary Grace scorns society's unspoken conventions by behaving rudely towards a stranger. The fat girl turns "her lips inside out again" and "her eyes fixed like two drills on Mrs. Turpin" (497). She is making faces at the older woman in public. This is outrageous behavior. As an adult and a student in college, Mary Grace ought to know better. When Mrs. Turpin asks her a question, Mary Grace pointedly ignores her. Her actions, which are not those of a polite adult, shock Mrs. Turpin.

Although her behavior is not quite as blatant as Mary Grace's, the Grandmother from "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" acts childishly as well. Her rudeness is harder for

the reader to comprehend, since she is not only an adult, but a grandmother. Instead of being a kind, compassionate woman, the sort most people envision when thinking of a grandmother, she is dislikeable from the very first paragraph. Her primary concern is herself. Her son and his family are driving south, but the very first sentence of the story is "the grandmother didn't want to go to Florida" (117). She wants to go to Tennessee, the state where her family lives. Her grandson asks why she doesn't just stay home and her granddaughter replies, "She wouldn't stay at home for a million bucks" because "she'd miss something" (118). The children can see her for who she is by how she is treated: a child, just like them. The grandmother tries reasoning with her son about switching the location of their trip; she secretly brings her cat along in the car, even though her son doesn't want it going; and she lies about there being a secret panel in the house with the six columns. These are all the sorts of tricks young children would pull to get what they want. When the family finds themselves stuck on the side of the road, it is partially the fault of the grandmother, who has been selfish and manipulative throughout the trip.

She is also caught up in appearances, another childish quality that one certainly doesn't associate with a mature adult, much less an elderly grandmother. While she is very interested in what it means to be a lady, the grandmother only concentrates on the physical qualities a lady should possess -not the necessary virtues. At the beginning of the trip, the grandmother dresses herself carefully in a nice dress, a hat, and pins flowers to her dress. Her idea is that "in case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady" (118). When she encounters the misfit, her primary concern is to convey to him that she is a lady. The grandmother's reasoning

is that his knowledge of her status will persuade him not to kill her. She mentions this to the misfit, saying, "You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?" (127). The grandmother never mentions what interior characteristics are necessary for a woman to be a lady; only what is required on the exterior.

Characters such as Mrs. Turpin exhibit deviance through their contemptible, self-righteous attitudes. Gilbert Muller says of her in his book, Nightmares and Visions, Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque. "Ruby Turpin is one of the author's countless grotesques who are largely the creations of themselves" (49). She floats through life thinking that she is much better than others. Walking into the waiting room of the doctor's office, she notices a small child "slumped down in the seat" of a sofa that has one more available spot on it (488). It doesn't enter into her mind that she might sit down in the spot directly next to him. Instead, the child "should have been told to move over and make room for the lady" (488). Mrs. Turpin shows no kindness or compassion for the ailing child, who probably needs the seat much more than she. Her only thought is that she is the lady, therefore he should move over so that she might have a place on the sofa. O'Connor really succeeds in alienating Mrs. Turpin from the readers when she reveals the woman's favorite pastime: contemplating who she would choose to be if God gave her the option between being "white-trash" or "nigger" (491). Neither option is satisfactory. But if a decision had to be made, she would be "a neat clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black" (491).

In "The Lame Shall Enter First," Sheppard's ugly attitude surfaces quickly within the first few pages when the reader discovers that everything about his son Norton

irritates him. He mistakes the boy's grief over his dead mother for selfishness. After all, "She had been dead for over a year and a child's grief should not last so long" (447).

What sort of father berates his eleven-year-old son for grieving a deceased parent?

Sheppard thinks to himself, "Almost any fault would have been preferable to selfishness -a violent temper, even a tendency to lie." He further alienates the reader when, after scorning his own flesh and blood, he chooses to instead pour out his affection and energy into a young juvenile delinquent named Johnson.

O'Connor's characters exhibit violent behavior. Di Renzo's comment about them being "graphically physical" has a double meaning. Not only is Mary Grace's physical appearance disturbing, but her behavior is disorderly as well. Midway through "Revelation," in a very socially unacceptable move, Mary Grace unexpectedly heaves a large book at Mrs. Turpin. Next thing the woman knows, "...the raw face came crashing across the table toward her, howling." This isn't the end of Mary Grace's physicality, however. "The girl's fingers sank like clamps into the soft flesh of her neck" (499). People in the reception room jump to the rescue, prying the girl off of Mrs. Turpin at once. But O'Connor leaves lingering questions in the reader's mind: what would have happened if Mary Grace *hadn't* been pulled off of Mrs. Turpin? How much violence is she capable of? Would she have killed Mrs. Turpin? These questions broach the distinct possibility that Mary Grace might actually be capable of much more violent behavior than the text indicates.

O'Connor's language is central to her aberrant characterizations. Dark, sullen, and streetwise, the character Johnson has an infirmity: a clubbed foot. O'Connor offers a

superb description of the deformed ligament: "The foot was in a heavy black battered shoe with a sole four or five inches thick. The leather parted from it in one place and the end of an empty sock protruded like a gray tongue from a severed head" (450). O'Connor is well-practiced in the art of language. She chose the perfect image to help readers visualize what the disfigured foot looks like in the shoe. Words like "tongue," "black," and "battered" stand out as very descriptive words. What reader wouldn't grimace at the thought of a limp tongue hanging from a lifeless disembodied head? The description is ugly.

There are many reasons O'Connor may have chosen to portray her characters as deviant. She herself said that she created them that way because their very presence demands the need for redemption and grace (*The Grotesque*). Claire Katz, author of "Flannery O'Connor's Rage of Vision," comments that, "...she (O'Connor) unleashes a whirlwind of destructive forces more profound than her Christian theme would seem to justify - murder, rape, mutilation - for ostensibly religious purposes" (55). O'Connor takes people who do not find themselves deviant or abnormal and by the end of the story, causes them to see themselves in a new light. Mrs. Turpin and Mary Grace are both despicable. Katz affirms this when she says, "For in each work, it is the impulse toward secular autonomy, the smug confidence that human nature is perfectible by its own efforts, that she sets out to destroy, through an act of violence so intense that the character is rendered helpless, a passive victim of a superior power" (54-55).

Although neither Mrs. Turpin nor Mary Grace is a likeable character, surprisingly, it is Mary Grace who offers the older woman a second chance at redemption. It is through

her violent behavior and rude words that Mary Grace proves to be the catalyst of grace for Mrs. Turpin. The older woman might never have turned her pointing finger at herself if Mary Grace had not called her an "old wart hog." In this case, rudeness was necessary for Mrs. Turpin to experience a spiritual awakening: "The execration which the girl hurls at Ruby Turpin is both shocking and convincing, for it calls Ruby's self-contained egocentric existence into question" (Muller 48). Her eyes are finally opened to her own sin and she begins questioning whether she is truly the good, righteous, kind woman she thought she was.

The story concludes with Mrs. Turpin's vision of herself at the end of the heavenly line. To her amazement, she finds those ahead of her to be "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" (508). The vision profoundly affects her. Even after the vision is over, "...she remained where she was, immobile" (509). Her entire view of life and the people in it has been shaken. O'Connor makes sure the reader knows that Mrs. Turpin is not taking this vision lightly. As she walks home, Mrs. Turpin's eyes are not on the scenery around her. Instead, "...what she heard were the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah" (509).

Although the grandmother is selfish and conceited, she too is redeemed by the end of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The Misfit has brought up Christ's resurrection and the fact that he can't attest to it, since he wasn't there. He tells the grandmother, "...if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now" (132). The

following sentence is the pivotal turning point for the grandmother. "His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant" (132). The plight of her son, his wife, and their children doesn't affect the grandmother. But this pathetic, warped man has. She utters the now famous line, "Why you're on of my babies. You're one of my own children!" (132).

In his article, "Flannery O'Connor's Misfit and the Mystery of Evil," John Desmond explains that, "What the Misfit fears is the mystery of love, the demands of love which the grandmother mysteriously responded to when faced with the criminal's suffering, and her own impending death" (4). It is only after she sees the Misfit's misery that the grandmother is able to forget about herself and to love him for the human being that he is. In Mystery and Manners, a book of O'Connor's articles, essays, and other personal writings, she tells us that, "It is true that the old lady is a hypocritical old soul; her wits are no match for the Misfit's, nor is her capacity for grace equal to his; yet I think the unprejudiced reader will feel that the Grandmother has a special kind of triumph in this story which instinctively we do not allow to someone altogether bad" (111). Through the characters of Mrs. Turpin and the Grandmother, the reader sees grace at work. Katz observes that, "O'Connor's conscious purpose is evident enough, and has been abundantly observed by her critics: to reveal the need for grace in a world grotesque without transcendent context" (54).

The very presence of O'Connor's aberrant characters demands divine redemption. In her article "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace," Thelma J. Shinn recognizes O'Connor's satirical attitude at work in the stories. She says about O'Connor,

"Her satirical humor even more clearly illustrates the dichotomy of spiritual awareness and secular blindness in the modern world" (65). O'Connor's characters are all at a particular spiritual stage: some, upon recognizing Christ, turn to Him, while others fiercely resist a spiritual savior, relying instead on their own intuition and strength for salvation.

In her book, Understanding Flannery O'Connor, Margaret Early Whitt explains that O'Connor created two kinds of grotesque characters: those that are "Christ-haunted" and those "in denial" (10). The former are people who "do not follow 'typical social patterns,' but rather have an inner coherence," whereas the latter "see the world separate and apart from a meaning vested in Christ's redemption, but ultimately understand that some mystery lurks, that there is more to this world than meets the eye..." (Whitt 10).

The Misfit, from "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is "Christ-haunted." He doesn't feel a connection to Christ. Gilbert Muller says that the Misfit's "...sense of alienation is intensified by his belief that God has abandoned him" (31). Johnson, from "The Lame Shall Enter First" and Bevel from "The River" are also Christ-haunted. None of these characters have ever had a true understanding of Christ or what it means to follow Him. The Misfit and Johnson don't see a Savior in their lives and can't identify with one. Bevel, on the other hand, desperately desires to see Christ but can't seem to find Him.

Some of O'Connor's other characters, especially those who are intellectuals, are prime examples of those "in denial." It is through characters such as these that O'Connor has made use of ugliness -whether through a character's appearance or actions- in order to reveal the deviant disposition of the mind. Critic John F. McCarthy, who wrote his

article "Human Intelligence Versus Divine Truth: The Intellectual in Flannery O'Connor's Works" in the 1960's, shortly after O'Connor's death, asserts that, "...in Miss O'Connor's estimation, they (intellectuals) have abused God's most generous gift to man -rational intelligence- and have committed the most heinous of sins -intellectual pride" (1144). Sheppard from "The Lame Shall Enter First" is a secular humanist. Director of City Recreation, his interest lies in helping clever boys with no opportunity make something of themselves. Johnson believes in what he can see, what is concrete and real. He doesn't condone what he considers to be a blind faith in an abstract place like Heaven. In O'Connor's eyes, Johnson is attempting to replace God by himself becoming God. McCarthy agrees with this when he comments, "They (O'Connor's characters) frequently attempt, with the power of their minds, to be God, and in so attempting they are lost because they refuse to recognize the divine scheme of redemption" (1143).

There exists yet another way in which O'Connor uses makes of aberration: through the existence of her youngest characters. While they themselves are not aberrant, their parents - of whom the children prove to be the victims - are. She takes children, who should be the most innocent members of society, protected from the dangers and horrors of the world, and shows what can happen when parents make the poor decision to not involve themselves in their child's life.

In "The Lame Shall Enter First," Norton is mourning his mother deeply, but his father, Sheppard, does not sympathize. He wants the boy to act like a man: grief is something that others should not notice. But all Norton wants is to be reunited with his mother. Sheppard tries to impress upon him how a juvenile delinquent's life is so much

worse than his, saying, "And your mother is not in the state penitentiary" (447). The father's intent behind such a statement is to show the boy that at least he doesn't have to visit his mother in prison like some boys do. But this doesn't satisfy the child. "If she was in the penitentiary," he begins, "I could go seeeee her" (447). Norton doesn't care where his mother is as long as she is still alive. Later Sheppard finds the little boy in a closet, wrapped in his mother's old coat: "Norton stood in it, his face swollen and pale, with a drugged look of misery on it" (457).

The pivotal point of the story takes place when the juvenile delinquent tells Norton since his mother was saved, she is now "on high," which he explains as, "It's in the sky somewhere.. .but you got to be dead to get there. You can't go in no spaceship" (462). Sheppard, who does not believe in heaven, refuses to converse about such a place. He scorns the Christian faith, reminiscing that, "His lot would have been easier if when his wife died he had told Norton she had gone to heaven and that some day he would see her again, but he could not allow himself to bring him up on a lie" (461). Norton, however, believing every word Johnson says, does his very best to get "on high." His father finds him in the attic: ".. .the child hung in the jungle of shadows, just below the beam from which he had launched his flight into space" (482). Norton reasons that if his mother was in Heaven, he wants to be there as well. Using childish logic, he assumes that by ascending to the highest place in his house -the rafters in the attic- he will be able to fly to heaven.

Another example of a child who is the victim of the adults around him is Bevel from "The River." Neither one of his parents pays much attention to him, sending him

away for the day with a babysitter so that they might be free to party at home. His mother is constantly "sick." But even at a young age, Bevel understands what ails her. He tells the preacher, "She hasn't gotten up yet...She has a hangover" (168).

The time he spends away from home with the sitter isn't good. The woman caring for him, Mrs. Connin, has three sons who decide to play a mean prank on Bevel. They tell him to look into the pen for a glance at the pig. "Bevel had never seen a real pig but he had seen a pig in a book and knew they were small fat pink animals with curly tails and round grinning faces and bow ties" (161). But what he sees inside is not a pig. It is a large hog that succeeds in scaring the boy into hysterics. "Something snorted over him and charged back again, rolling him over and pushing him up from behind and then sending him forward, screaming through the yellow field, while it bounded behind" (162).

But life at home isn't any better for the young boy. The scant amount of attention Bevel does receive isn't the sort a child wants or needs. When he returns home later that evening, his mother is upset to learn that Bevel was baptized. She is suspicious of Christianity and has very little faith in the goodness of her son, which she proves by inquiring, "What lies have you been telling today, honey?" (170). She also asks, "What did that dolt of a preacher say about me?" (170).

Bevel takes his fate into his own hands after hearing the words of the preacher. Before agreeing to baptize him, the preacher had told him, "If I baptize you.. .you'll be able to go to the Kingdom of Christ. You'll be washed in the river of suffering, son, and you'll go by the deep river of life. Do you want this?" (168). The thought immediately

flashing through Bevel's mind is, "...I won't go back to the apartment then, I'll go under the river" (168). The next morning he sneaks out of the apartment while his parents are asleep and takes off to the river. He is taking the preacher's words seriously. "He intended not to fool with preachers anymore but to Baptize himself and to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river" (173). In looking for the Kingdom of Christ underwater, Bevel drowns that day.

It is not Norton or Bevel, but their parents who are the repulsive characters in these two stories. O'Connor is portraying the parents as people who don't bother to take the time to teach, nurture, or even love the eager children who are desperately craving even the smallest amount of love and acceptance from them. Like Norton, Bevel hears an older person speak about Heaven and decides to take his directions literally.

These two stories are about redemption as well. Taking your own life is a sin in Christian theology, since it is considered to be a gift from God. Therefore, it must be treated as such. And yet, a person cannot be punished for doing something that he doesn't know is wrong. In these two stories, O'Connor allows the children to be redeemed through their very innocence. Norton and Bevel's only desire is to be in Heaven: a wonderful place that provides them a loving home and a chance to be reunited with loved ones. And so Heaven is exactly where O'Connor suggests they go.

A large measure of O'Connor's talent as a writer lies in her ability to use ordinary objects, ideas, even people as symbols. Joyce Carol Oates, author of "The Action of Mercy," writes, "...everything is charged with significance" (1). She argues that O'Connor uses symbols to explore the mysterious grotesque. From her point of view, it is

the characters that are symbols. O'Connor uses them as a front for deeper, profound messages, one of which is spiritual. Oates contends that, "...surfaces are masks through which an underlying, far more significant reality asserts itself in ways that may be startling and original and sometimes grotesque" (1-2). As a Catholic, O'Connor is a member of a religion basked in mystery. "In Catholic Orthodoxy... the communion wafer, or host, is not a symbol of Christ's bodily sacrifice, it is -literally, Christ's body" (Oates 2). Although Catholics believe that what they are receiving is the literal body of Christ, its appearance is that of a common wafer. The idea of people eating Christ's actual flesh can very easily be a disturbing one to many people. Di Renzo affirms that O'Connor is indeed writing about the physical body when he writes, "A...preoccupation with the body dominates the fiction of Flannery O'Connor" (64). Oates' view, then, of the repulsive being *symbolic* is a very radical one, far different from the commonly held theory of the physical grotesque. Flannery O'Connor, fascinating, intense, and talented author, is certainly "...the most visual and relentlessly 'symbolic' of writers" (Oates 1).

O'Connor looked beyond the irregularities of her characters and saw so much more. Whereas others look at them and notice only their repulsive qualities, O'Connor saw a malleable tool to work with. "One might surmise that O'Connor was a cartoonist," writes critic Claire Katz, "for here her eye is the eye of the caricaturist who, with an economy of aggressive strokes, degrades by unmasking ugliness or weakness, penetrates character in order to ridicule" (57). Those things that repulse people often are a cover for something deeper. Di Renzo tells us that, "Furthermore, the grotesque's ultimate purpose

is therapeutic: it is a comic shock treatment. Even at its most menacing, it seeks to liberate" (5).

O'Connor knew her aberrant characters would repulse and irritate readers since they are able to see themselves -and their own sins- in them. Some of these characters are utterly repulsive -like the Misfit, Mary Grace, and Johnson- while others such as Mrs. Turpin and the grandmother are merely misguided and confused. Who before has not imitated Mrs. Turpin in thinking himself to be better than another? Or acted selfishly like the grandmother? The characters' abnormalities are not solely their own: they are representative of humanity. So what better way to illustrate a need for redemption than through despicable characters? "It is here that we encounter the crux of Miss O'Connor's vision: the rational world, that is - the world man can perceive through human reason - has replaced the spiritual world, that is - the Body of Christ which can only be perceived through the Grace and Mercy of God" (Shinn 66).

Perhaps O'Connor was using the passage from 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 as inspiration when she wrote her stories: "but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (The Holy Bible 151). O'Connor observed the world around her and noticed people in need of redemption. Her desire was to create characters that would require redemption, as well as provoke readers into contemplating their own lives. Did she succeed? "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "Revelation," and her others stories are still being read and the characters continue

to repulse readers everywhere. As Shinn says, O'Connor "...set out to wake the sleeping children of God. And she succeeded" (58).

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