# The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor Study Guide

## The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor by Flannery O'Connor

BOOKRAGS

# Contents

# "The Geranium"

## "The Geranium" Summary

"The Geranium" is the first in this collection of thirty-one stories. O'Connor writes from the point of view of Old Dudley, an aged father of a woman from the South, now living in a depressing walk-up apartment in New York City. Old Dudley's observations of his "new world" are written through dialect and as internal dialogue. O'Connor reveals her feelings about racism in a period of upheaval in the country at that time, as resentments and adjustments by both whites and blacks are becoming more and more common.

Old Dudley's longing for "home" is poignant and vivid; he sits for hours watching a red geranium in a pot on the windowsill of an apartment across the alley way, worrying that the sun is too hot for it and that it needs water. O'Connor's genius is in her use of the description of the old man worrying about the plant as a symbol of himself in an alien environment. His homesickness becomes even more painful when he finds out the black man next door to his daughter's apartment is not a servant, but the new tenant. His lifelong belief in segregation in his beloved South finds this untenable.

Within a day or two, his daughter sends him downstairs to a friend's apartment to borrow a dress pattern; he goes too far and has to retrace his steps, but manages to get the pattern and start climbing back up the stairs. He hesitates part way up, with dizziness and mild discomfort, when a helping hand assists his climb. Horrified, he realizes it's the "nigger" from next door. The only black Old Dudley had related to before this was a hired hand named Rabie he had gone fishing with "back home." The well-dressed black man is considerate and kind, with manicured fingernails and polished shoes. This is a traumatic encounter for Old Dudley. When he gets back into his daughter's apartment, he goes back to his seat by the window and the geranium across the way is gone from its sunny windowsill. A man is looking at Old Dudley from the geranium's window, and he sees the broken pot down on the cement alleyway, six floors below. The man taunts him, suggesting he go down and get it, if it's that important to him, and to quit looking in his window. The geranium is like Old Dudley's life. Too many changes have uprooted him, just like the dying geranium down on the ground.

## "The Geranium" Analysis

Flannery O'Connor died at the young age of forty-four, of lupus. Her last months were spent in the care of her mother, Regina, at their home outside of Atlanta, Georgia. This small collection of short stories is not necessarily a substantial legacy to be left behind. However, this well-known author has left us a monumental gift, one that students and teachers have treasured since they were written.

In every story O'Connor wrote, there is one main storyline, and another less subtle subplot. The reader cannot perceive the depth of O'Connor's talent unless he or she

reads each story more than once, and absorbs the work after a period of time between the two readings; this will help the reader better understand her rich use of imagery and her incredible talent.

"The Geranium" is particularly significant in that it gives the reader a magical glimpse into the past, as if seeing it in minute detail through a telescope's eyepiece. The reader follows one readily visible storyline, and midway through, realizes the author has pulled him or her into a past that is as bustling and alive as it was for those that lived it. The prejudice of Old Dudley becomes totally believable and current. The symbolism of the geranium tells us life is short and if we live long enough to grow old, we will have to face changes we might not like. In so few words, O'Connor suggests advice on life, interweaved with an interesting and vivid story.

# "The Barber"

## "The Barber" Summary

"The Barber" is set in a southern locale, probably in the late 1940s or early 1950s, when racial conflicts are at their height. This is particularly true for citizens in small towns used to segregation, and in places such as the barbershops of towns where heated discussions and debates are always present.

At the beginning of "The Barber" in the small town of Dilton, a liberal man named Rayber reminisces about an incident that occurred three weeks earlier, which convinced him to change which barber he went to. Rayber remembers getting a shave while the barber asks him which way he is going to vote, and if he is, in fact, a "nigger-lover." Rayber is taken aback by the abrupt and confrontational question and tries to seem middle-of-the-road in his opinions. The barber will have none of it and continues to prod Rayber with argumentative remarks, insisting on an admission from Rayber that there are only two sides to the problem: black and white; every man has to support either one or the other, and cannot be ambivalent. The barber cites several incidents in which blacks acted as the aggressors and caused mayhem in nearby communities. The barber relishes in tales of black hooligans. The black shoeshine boy, George, can hear everything he says.

George understands all that is discussed around him in the barbershop by these white men that control his livelihood. His subservience and his subdued, carefully respectful responses when spoken to, are important to this precisely drawn sketch of the era, in contrast to those of indigent whites swaggering powerfully over the dependence of their uneducated black employees.

The barber accuses Rayber of being influenced by one of the "Mother Hubbards," which is a term used to refer to those who are against segregation. To be called a Mother Hubbard is the worst insult a segregationist can manage against anyone on the other side. The barber quotes a local politician who gives "killeroo" speeches and Rayber's patience begins to erode. The argument gets so heated that Rayber has to remind the barber that he is there to get a shave.

After Rayber leaves, he thinks of all the smart comebacks he could have said and is angry with himself for not saying them at the time. He returns to the barber the following Tuesday for his usual shave and the barber starts again. Rayber desperately searches his mind for the remarks he had thought of and stored up for retaliation. The two each speak in support of their preferred political candidate, Darmon the liberal, or Hawkson the segregationist. Rayber begins to feel he is wasting time. George appears, cleaning the basins, and mutters something about needing "sommo powders," and Rayber wonders how he feels, hearing the accusative words against his race. He goes home and attempts to write then recite his defensive argument to his wife, hoping for her

opinion and positive feedback. Rayber plans to successfully oppose the barber's rhetoric the next Tuesday.

When Rayber speaks to his wife, she is bored and barely acknowledges him or his rebuttal against the comments of his barber. Her only comment is, "That was very nice," and she leaves the room. The following Tuesday Rayber is outnumbered in the barbershop. His words are uncomfortable in his throat and he is interrupted and demeaned as he tries to state his position; he finally explodes, striking out at the barber. He runs out of the barbershop and down the street, still draped in the billowing barber's cloth around his neck, droplets of white shaving cream dripping down his neck.

## "The Barber" Analysis

"The Barber" is a short story that gives those who look carefully a glimpse into the past with the clarity of a microscopic examination. Flannery O'Connor has the ability to realistically and intimately capture specific situations. She presents us with a microcosm of a small southern town during the days of segregation.

Rayber, with his reticent participation in debating his political beliefs, is strongly representative of most of ordinary people who at the time did not want to get involved with controversial and aggressive arguments. The barber, on the other hand, represents our conscience, insisting that we take a side and then stand up for it, regardless of any discomfort or lack of support from our loved ones. O'Connor asks us to learn from the mistakes of the past, and no matter what you believe, make certain it is valid and worthwhile and then make yourself heard. O'Connor's gift is in her ability to express regional speech patterns in a real and vivid way for the reader.

# "Wildcat"

## "Wildcat" Summary

"Wildcat" explores the conscious and subconscious fears of a blind black man, Old Gabriel, who, as the story opens, is alone in a cabin and hears many things that terrify him. He has a powerful sense of smell and thinks he can smell four "niggers" in the beginning of the story, but his main fear is a nearby wildcat that he thinks will tear him limb from limb in the dark. The young "niggers" he senses approach his porch, tease him and mock him, prior to their leaving to go hunt for the wildcat. They tease him because they know he is afraid to be alone, but he puts up a brave front and they depart.

Old Gabriel remembers a time when he was young and had to stay with the women while the men went hunting; the women told him harrowing tales of what a big cat could do to a human. In the dark, he makes his way to his bed, deeply frightened because he can smell the cat more strongly than before. He becomes aware a door is open and he makes his way to it and slams it shut, then sits in a chair in the dark, wondering if the cat can gnaw its way into the cabin.

Old Gabriel hears picking noises coming from outside, against the outside wall. He is soaked in the sweat of terror, thinking the cat is trying to get inside and he scrambles for safety, up on a board shelf, which falls with his weight, making a loud noise. In the cracking sounds of the fall, Old Gabriel recognizes the grunting and snorting of a cow and realizes that the smell is that of a cow, not a wildcat. He concludes the wildcat got to another cow first a half-mile away and that I will be back for him, another day.

The young men return from their hunt and awaken Old Gabriel with the aroma of frying fat. They tease Old Gabriel about being afraid to be alone and he tells them he knows for sure that the cat will be back. They tell him they've set a trap and will have the animal caught no matter how long it takes. Old Gabriel declines their offer of more meat and very quietly holds himself, keeping his fear under control as best he can.

## "Wildcat" Analysis

The main story here is the pitiful predicament of an indigent, old black man who has been blind for most of his years and who has an exaggerated fear of being attacked by a wildcat he thinks he can smell approaching. Everyone has experienced the heart-pounding fear of sheer terror at one time or another. This story captures every nuance of a nightmarish experience, whether we remember it from a battlefield, or from an emergency room, or from a childhood fear of the dark. The dialect is again wonderfully true to the southern blacks of that time, but the essence of this tale is one we can easily identify with. Old Gabriel lives through that night of fear and will live through many more, and so can we.

Old Gabriel is a representation of all of us, an Everyman, with fears of monsters in the dark, lurking out of sight. He also feels overwhelmingly frightened of being alone with a grievous disability. This was O'Connor's deep-seated fear for herself, as she had been diagnosed with lupus and grew more and more crippling every month.

# "The Crop"

## "The Crop" Summary

"The Crop" is an inside joke O'Connor plays on herself, inviting us to participate in the fun. Miss Willerton is one of four aging people who live together, and share duties for the running of the household. One of Miss Willerton's jobs is to crumb the table after a meal, which has been her chore for fifty years. A long, narrow brush with a sterling silver handle is dragged over the tablecloth after the dishes are removed and any debris is swept into a crumb-catcher and dumped outside for the birds. As "The Crop" begins, Miss Willerton is diligently performing her duty, while Lucia and Bertha do the dishes and the one man, Garner, retires to the parlor to work a crossword puzzle. Miss Willerton thinks of herself as a writer, so crumbing the table gives her the opportunity to plan out a story she is anxious write.

Lucia fusses with Miss Willerton about her crumb-sweeping technique, but the job is finally done and Miss Willerton sits down at her typewriter. The internal dialogue of Miss Willerton is masterfully controlled and natural. She mentally runs through several possibilities for characters and plots and comes up with sharecroppers as a good profession for her leading man. She types the first sentence and stares at it, wondering what to do next. She thinks Lot Motun is a good name for a sharecropper and she writes, "Lot Motun called his dog," as a start. From this point on, Miss Willerton's thought processes are extremely comical.

Miss Willerton imagines everything possible about Lot Motun, even to the point of that his dog has hookworm and scraggy ears. She then realizes there has to be a woman in the story. She decides there should be some passionate engagements, perhaps "violent but naturalistic," and her imagination takes over as Lot, comes to life. She daydreams of an existence with this handsome sharecropper.

The woman Miss Willerton creates for Lot is mean and unacceptable, and it is here that she enters her own story and imagines striking a terrible blow on the woman's head from behind, at which point a mysterious fog removes her from the room. Now it is Miss Willerton getting supper for Lot Motun in the cabin, and thinking about whether they should get another cow or have another baby. They converse about the possibilities ahead and Lot is kind and affectionate toward Miss Willerton. She even fantasizes a daily routine for them, such as what time they each arise in the morning and the chores that get done and the importance of getting the crop in before the stormy winter weather begins. Lot fixes the chimney and "Willie" cleans the shack and life between them is good. They work hard, and realize finally that they need one more week of good weather before they can harvest the crop.

The imaginary couple work so hard one day it is night before they quit, and they stumble back into the cabin and fall into bed, exhausted. Willie has a strange kind of pain during the night and doesn't know if she is asleep or awake, but Lot is concerned about her;

she is concerned about an increasing droning filling her head. She realizes it is rain and asks how long it has been raining. Lot tells her two days. She says they've lost everything and Lot tells her that no, he has her and their new daughter, and asks how a man could be so fortunate. Willie asks him softly what she can do to help more and suddenly, Lucia's voice fills her head asking, "How about going to the grocery, Willie?"

Lucia's statement ends Miss Willerton's imaginary world, which is filled with scenes of a differentlife. She gets the grocery order confused. She muses about the lack of time in real life for the arts, creation, or for self-expression, but there seems to always be time for haggling over grocery prices and mundane things that actually do not matter.

Miss Willerton notices a couple walking rather close together and studies the two people carefully, noticing the woman, with swollen ankles and a skirt too short, and the man, with stooped shoulders, sad eyes, and bumps on his forehead. She responds by saying, "Ugh," to herself. She gets back to the house, puts the grocery sack in the kitchen, then walks back to her typewriter and reads over the first two lines of her unfinished story. She decides her prior choice of a subject was not a good one anyway, and pounds the desktop with her fist as she excitedly contemplates writing about the Irish, with their brogue, their music, and their spirit. The Irish would be perfect!

## "The Crop" Analysis

In "The Crop," O'Connor has a field day making fun of herself and most other writers. She lets us in on the secret life of an imaginative writer, who gets lost in the plot of her own creation to the expense of her place in real life. They question for the reader is which world is the real one. In this story, the imaginary life seems much more pleasant than the real one. Lucia can speak sharply to Miss Willerton and the one man in the house can wink at her and make suggestive remarks, raising the eyebrows of the other tenants. However, Lot, the fantasy husband, is hardworking and thoughtful and loves the way she makes hot grits with butter on top. The significant meaning of this story is the pragmatic and humorous way in which O'Connor so graciously and humbly regards her occupation and talent. She admits to escaping from her own reality into her fantasies. She realizes her dream worlds are not real, but at the same time, she forgives herself because there are always other plots and people to write about.

# "The Turkey"

## "The Turkey" Summary

"The Turkey" begins in the imagination of an eleven-year-old boy, Ruller, who is pretending to be a Wild West cowboy capturing a cattle rustler named Mason. Ruller twirls his six-shooters, ties the bad man's ankles up in an imaginary rope, and is preparing to deal the crook a final bullet in the head when he spies the glint of glossy feathers in the distance. It is a big tom turkey, wobbling along, dragging one wing and placing its large three-toed feet high and slow in the sand, swinging its red wattles back and forth as it tries to run. Ruller immediately loses interest in playing cowboys and rustlers and begins to imagine the heroic return to town with the huge turkey draped over his shoulder.

A chase of Olympic dimensions begins to ensue, with Ruller leaping hedges, crawling under fences and scrabbling over dirt to try and reach the turkey, which he realizes is wounded. Eventually the turkey gives up and dies, exhausted from the bullet that has bloodied his feathers and from trying to avoid being caught by the boy. Ruller is triumphant as he manages to get the turkey across his shoulders and hikes back into the town, imagining the pride his mother and father would have in him, so much so they wouldn't even notice his torn shirt.

Ruller's brother had never gotten a turkey like this one, and he plays scene after scene in his mind, each one better than the last until he gets into the edge of town and people begin to notice the young boy with the big turkey on his shoulder. His chest swells as he answers questions and shows people where the turkey is wounded. He prays to see a beggar he can give a coin to for good luck, and he runs across an old woman beggar to whom he gives a dime.

Ruller is almost home when he hears shuffling feet behind him and turns to see a group of local tough men approaching. He lowers the turkey to the ground and raises one wing to show them where the bullet wound is and the largest tough man grabs the turkey, slings it over his shoulder, and they walk away with Ruller's prize without even a thank you. They are a block away before Ruller can move. He runs home as fast as he can, convinced "something awful" is right behind him, about to catch him just like he had chased and caught the turkey.

## "The Turkey" Analysis

"The Turkey" is an adventure in the probing mind of an imaginative eleven-year-old boy. O'Connor, an adult woman, speaks from the point of view of the boy, Ruller, and the voice that arises from his hopes and fears is a true one. The most obvious story is the face value the words give the reader an intimate knowledge of knowing this young boy very well. We want him to get home with the turkey and receive the approval from family

and friends for working so hard and being brave enough to catch the turkey and carry it home. Ruller takes his plan for granted as an inevitable absolute, but as is so often the case, plans are often knocked awry. The moral of this story is to never overestimate one's plan, and to be prepared with an alternative possibility when and if it doesn't work out.

# "The Train"

## "The Train" Summary

"The Train" is a complex story that opens with a nineteen-year-old man, Hazel Wickers, boarding a Pullman sleeper railroad car. He has never slept in a berth on a train and so has requested an upper berth. Wickers watches the white-coated porter at the end of the aisle and wonders when he will lower the berths tucked up into the ceiling from under curved panels. A woman sits across from him and talks incessantly, but Wickers finds this comforting. He remembers how his mother used to talk the same way on the Tennessee Railroad, getting to know all about other passengers, who would only be strangers temporarily. Wickers talks to himself inside his head, revealing that his mother was a Jackson and that he was raised in Eastrod, Tennessee. He tries to befriend the porter, asking inane questions, and doubts the porter's statement that his father was a railroad man, because he is black and blacks are ignorant; even blacks from Chicago, like the porter.

The woman across from Wickers, Mrs. Hosen, chatters about her husband being alone, wonders if it will snow soon, and how it might be to live in Florida with someone waiting on her. Mrs. Hosen and Wickers go to the dining car together, and stand in line, swaying with the train's movement. The headwaiter seats Mrs. Hozen with another woman. Wickers tries to backtrack but the crowd jams the aisle and he has to turn back to the diner. Finally, a single seat opens up and he orders the first thing he sees. He gobbles it down and hurries out of the car, embarrassed and self-conscious, and anxious to climb up in his berth and watch the world fly by.

Wickers gets to the sleeper car and sees the berths are all down and curtained now, but he can't find the porter to assist him up into his, so he gets his sack, goes to the men's room and puts on his night clothes. He runs into Mrs. Hosen in a pink wrapper with her hair in strange knots all over. He finds the porter, and imagines that the porter is the son of a gulch nigger back home, but the porter resents the implication. Wickers climbs up the ladder and the porter wrenches it from under him and he flops into the berth to find there is no window in his cubbyhole.

The more Wickers listens to his thoughts, the more he feels trapped in his coffin-like environment, with the curved ceiling and the darkness with a small sliver of light, and curtained opening like a casket lid. He remembers his mother's old empty shifferobe they had had to leave, and the longer he lays there, the stronger his fears of being buried alive become, until he leaps from the berth and hangs from the outer edge of the bunk, cold and wet, with the silent porter sitting in the dark at the end of the car, watching him. The train turns sharply and Wickers falls back into his berth, feeling sick all over.

# "The Train" Analysis

The silent message of this intricately worded story is Hazel Wickers's fear of death and dying, and his traumatized psyche from the death of his mother, who was an esteemed Jackson. This implies even her blue-blooded ancestry could not protect her from death and her abandoned, empty shiffarobe, left behind in her old vacant house, is a metaphor for his mother's life, with all the drawers empty of all vital signs. Again, O'Connor's mastery of internal dialogue and her execution of precise metaphorical references are excellent.

Wickers comes to life in O'Connor's imagination and as we read his fears and insecurities in his life during an era of such radical change, the reader can easily identify with him, even within modern parameters. Each of the characters portrayed in the story, from the porter, to Wicker's memory of a gulch nigger named Cash, and Mrs. Hosen in the seat across from him, all are evoked vividly as the story progresses. Even the sound and feel of being on the crowded train and the darkness of a sleeper car are visibly real.

# "The Peeler"

## "The Peeler" Summary

Hazel Motes is walking along the main street of a small town and sees a barker hawking potato peelers from a bridge table set up in front of the Lerner's Dress Shop. Some bystanders have gathered around, including a tall blind man, a scruffy young girl, and a yellow-haired boy with pimples named Enoch Emery. The blind man and the girl hand out religious leaflets, angering the peeler salesman, who accuses them of stealing his customers. Motes impulsively buys one of the peelers, and follows the blind man and the red-haired girl down the street, with Enoch Emery close behind.

As Motes attempts to follow the blind man and the girl, Emery is chatting constantly at his side, relating his life story and everything he can think of about his hometown. Motes remains distant and aloof, much to Emery's frustration.

The tall man and the red-haired girl stop and sit high on the steps of a building with many columns and stone lions on each side. Motes realizes it is a theater and the strange couple are waiting for the audience to be discharged so they can distribute their religious flyers. He offers the girl the peeler he bought, and she declines, but the blind man insists she take it, so she stuffs it in her sack. When the program in the theater ends, the blind man asks Emery to take some tracts and distribute them with the girl from the other side of the steps.

All the people leave, as do the blind man and the girl, and Motes begins walking again, trying to rid himself of Emery's endless questions and chatter. He reminisces about sleeping with Leora Watts, and how he was uneasy about visiting her again, but now he wants to. He muses about his visit to a carnival with his father, and the time he sneaked under a tent to see the forbidden fruit that men were enjoying; a nude woman writhing in a smallish box like a casket, while the men leaned over and stared. He hears his father's voice make a lewd comment and it scares him, so he scuttles back under the tent and runs home. His mother wears skirts longer than other women and the guilt she ladles on him causes him to fill his shoes with pebbles and walk in pain for many miles. Even this extreme penance doesn't relieve his heavy burden of shame.

## "The Peeler" Analysis

This story has as many smaller sub-stories, but they are all connected by Hazel Motes as he wanders through a town. He watches a fast-talking salesman hawking potato peelers, then goes to a theater front, and walks with Emery a long way, reminiscing about his visits to a whore, his father's interest in voyeurism, and his mother's puritanical inhibitions. This is as precise a description of the fearful restrictions imposed on lifestyles in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s, bringing to life a colorful

cross-section of several societal levels, and leaving readers a Technicolor memory album of the past.

# "The Heart of the Park"

## "The Heart of the Park" Summary

Enoch Emery reappears in this story, but is a bit more brazen than in "The Peeler." He is working at a local city park and it is summertime, and the pool is open. He wears a pea-green uniform with yellow piping and saunters around, always visiting the pool area first, where he hides in bushes up the slope and spies on women sunbathing, some with their straps pulled down. He has also discovered something in the center of the park in a glass display case with a typewritten card. He considers the case a powerful secret, which he longs to share with someone. He thinks today will be the day he will meet the person to whom he can show this secret. His blood tells him that person will come today. Emery has a specific routine he follows every day. First he visits the pool, hides in the abelia bushes to watch the women, then he goes to the Frosty Bottle stand for an ice cream soda, then to watch the animals get fed their steaks, and then, he goes *there*.

This day Hazel Weaver, dressed in a suit, drives up to the pool area in search of Emery. Weaver is desperate for the address of the blind man and the girl; Emery knows it but won't tell him until Weaver will go with him to see *it*, and he won't tell Weaver what *it* is. Weaver almost loses his patience as he follows Emery through his routine at the ice cream shop and the zoo, then sliding down an embankment, at the bottom of which is a path to the museum on the park grounds. The two strange partners enter the museum, creep past the sleeping guard, and enter a room of antiquities displayed in glass cases, one of which is a shrunken man. Emery is hypnotized by this ancient fossilized human and waits in vain for something momentous to happen when Weaver sees it. A woman and two children enter the room and are reflected in the glass case; Weaver is now ready to demand the address of the blind man and the girl. Emery rushes out and in anger because Emery can't remember the address of the blind man and the girl, Weaver picks up a rock and hits Emery on the head, cutting him and knocking him out. When he comes to, Emery sees the blood on his hand by wiping his forehead. Hazel Weaver is gone and Emery smiles, listening to his blood beating.

## "The Heart of the Park" Analysis

"With The Hear of the Park" we have another story beginning with voyeurism on the part of Enoch Emery, who works at the city park and likes to spy on the women around the pool. His ignorance and superstitious fears make his adrenaline surge as he goes through his daily routine of watching the bathers, getting an ice cream soda, watching the feeding of the jungle animals, and relishing the high point of his day, slipping into the museum and staring down at the mummified pygmy man in the glass case.

Emery feels Hazel Weaver has been sent him to view this wonder in the glass case and that is the purpose of his existence, to share this experience. Hazel Weaver, on the other hand, is desperately trying to find the blind man and the red-haired girl, and Emery

has their address. Their goals overlap as they each fervently attempt to reach them. Emery's goal of sharing the mummy is met and he feels satisfied. Weaver's goal of obtaining the address of the strange couple he had met when he bought the potato peeler is not. The lesson presented is that not everything we wish for is will come true.

# "A Stroke of Good Fortune"

## "A Stroke of Good Fortune" Summary

Ruby, a married woman of thirty-four, enters her apartment building with a heavy sack of groceries, and stares up the steep, dark stairway leading to her and Bill Hill's apartment. She muses about her brother, Rufus, who is soon to return from the "European Theater" to live with her, because their former hometown, Pitman, does not exist anymore. She begins the climb up the dark staircase, growing more and more breathless with every step. She thinks about her recent visit to the psychic, Madame Zoleeda, who told her she was sick but that the outcome would bring good fortune in the end.

Ruby again reinforces her conviction she will never go to a doctor, no matter what, and she continues climbing. Memories of her deceased mother fill her mind. The price her mother paid for having had eight children, with only four surviving, was to age rapidly with each one. Ruby decides that this was due to pure ignorance on her mother's part. Her two sisters have four children each, and Ruby doesn't know how they stand the responsibilities. Rufus had arrived with unbelievable misery and pain to his mother. Ruby believes Rufus has no backbone or incentive to achieve anything and dreads his arrival.

Ruby sits down on a stair to get her breath and feels an object underneath her backside. She pulls out a toy pistol belonging to a six-year-old who lives in the building, another clue to the difficulties of raising messy children. She picks up the toy pistol and climbs again, as her neighbor, Mr. Jerger, opens his door. Mr. Jerger is an eccentric seventy-eight-year-old who likes to impress people with puzzling questions. Ruby listens to him a bit and tries to answer his question about whose birthday today is. It is Florida's birthday, and he tries to shame her for not knowing; she gets away and proceeds upstairs. Ruby becomes short of breath and she worries about having cancer, but puts the fear aside, adopting a false bravado about being able to medicate herself, if necessary.

Ruby's nausea and vague pains grow increasingly frightening and she stumbles against another neighbor's door, knocking and inadvertently brandishing the toy pistol. Laverne Watts, her friend, answers the door and collapses on her sofa laughing at Ruby's impression of a clowning actress with the gun and her strange expression. Ruby gasps that she is ill and then Laverne takes stock of her physical appearance, concluding Ruby is at least four or five months pregnant, perhaps with twins.

Ruby is adamant that Bill Hill's birth control methods for the five years of their marriage are foolproof, but she does recall his self-satisfied grins of late. She pats her fat stomach, tells herself she's just been gaining a little, and remembers Madame Zoleeda's final prediction of an illness with good fortune at the end of it. She doesn't admit it, but her worst fears are coming to pass.

# "A Stroke of Good Fortune" Analysis

Facing hidden fears might be a good subtitle for this story. O'Connor takes us into the mind of Ruby, a young woman, who has been imprinted with the deaths of four siblings and the pain these losses have cost her mother, who at thirty-four, Ruby's current age, looked many years older than that. She has never worried about getting pregnant because she has trusted her husband, Bill Hill, to keep her protected. As she fights nausea, a backache, and breathlessness, however, her friend, Laverne, points out that she is pregnant. She notes that Ruby has edema of the ankles and other obvious symptoms such as a bulging belly.

Ruby has to come to grips with the fact that she is going to have a baby, the worst thing she could imagine for herself. The real fear she has, however, is of losing the baby once the child is born, like her mother did, four terrible times. Every mother alive harbors this terrible fear. It is implied that it is better to try and perceive a more realistic view, and to regard false assumptions of ancestral beliefs at face value. It is not necessarily certain that we will have the same sadness, grief, and pain as our forebears, and O'Connor demonstrated that we have to take the responsibility for seeking the right answers for our own lives, in the present.

# "Enoch and the Gorilla"

## "Enoch and the Gorilla" Summary

Enoch Emery borrows his landlady's umbrella to go out in a downpour and discovers it is almost broken and barely works. The black silk cover almost separates completely from the ribs but the center of the umbrella's frame, while its pointed end and dog-head handle remain intact, so Emery manages to remain a little protected as he walks in the rain. He waits under a movie marquee for the rain to let up and a large wagon pulls up, with a sign on the side advertising Conga, the Gorilla, inside. People began to gather around to see the gorilla and Emery is swept along with them out of curiosity. The driver of the truck steps to the back of the truck and speaks to the interior, muttering about "hurrying up." Then a raincoat is handed inside and eventually a gorilla-type apparition appears, wearing a raincoat buttoned up to the neck.

Emery is terrified of the guttural growls emanating from this creature but bravely moves up until it is his turn to shake the gorilla's paw. As he touches the softness of the creature's hand, Emery mutters his name and age, where he went to school, and where he works. The human eyes behind the celluloid ones glare at Emery and the gorilla growls for him to go to hell, in a human voice. Emery is humiliated and he runs off. Even in the face of the humiliation, however, he is captivated by a strange sense of an imminent hope. His landlady's umbrella finally gives up all its silk, and Emery is left with a walking stick with a pointed end and a dog-faced handle as he enters the Paris Diner for something to eat.

There is only one other customer in the diner, and the waitress ignores Emery presence until he asks for a piece of yellow and pink cake. He sits next to the other diner, who is reading the paper. He asks for part of the paper to read and after finishing the comics, he turns the page over and sees the schedule for the gorilla's public appearances that day. He rushes out and sees the truck parked near The Victory, a small theater, and the pseudo-gorilla star is under the marquee, shaking hands with fans. Emery slips inside the back of the truck and waits for the man in the gorilla suit to finish shaking hands and get back in. When he does, they fight and Emery overpowers him as the truck is heading for its next stop, escaping with the suit under his arm. He scuttles into the park, digs a trench with his pointed walking stick and buries his clothes and shoes in the trench, and changes into the gorilla suit. He feels happy even with the cut under his eye and the lump on his head and swaggers out of the bushes with the sharp walking stick under his arm. He sees a young couple seated on a rock and walks over to them, extending his hand. The man slips away and runs into the woods and the girl shrieks and runs off down the highway. Emery, as a gorilla, feels surprised and sits down on the rock and stares at the distant skyline of the city.

# "Enoch and the Gorilla" Analysis

The theme of this story relates the power of disguise for the shy and insecure person, who can at last feel some pride and self-esteem, as long as his or her real self is hidden from view. When Emery realizes the gorilla is not a real animal and only a human man in a gorilla suit, he wants such gregarious popularity for himself. He suffers even more indignities than the humiliation from the gorilla-man as the waitress demeans him in the diner, though this does not deter him from his goal of having a positive experience. When he reads the gorilla's schedule of appearances, he runs from the diner to intercept the exhibit, stealing the suit after a struggle with the man. The author prompts us to ask ourselves how much of a fight we would put up to obtain a much more popular and successful persona.

Emery jumps from the back of the truck when it slows for a turn, and dons the costume in the woods, burying his clothing nearby. He's jubilant, convinced his outer appearance has changed him inside as well, but when he attempts to befriend a nearby couple, they are terrified of his realistic gorilla look and they run off screaming. Emery is afraid to be himself, and represents the puzzlement many people encounter when they alter their outside appearance, yet their true character remains unchanged.

# "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

## "A Good Man is Hard to Find" Summary

A neat, well-organized grandmother is finishing preparations to take a car trip with her only son, Bailey, and his family, with whom she lives. She doesn't want to drive to Florida via Georgia because a criminal, nicknamed the Misfit, has recently escaped the federal penitentiary near their location and she is afraid they might encounter him. Bailey and his wife, who is feeding their baby strained apricots, continue getting ready to leave. The grandmother suggests Tennessee instead of Florida, and the eight-year-old, John Wesley, asks why she doesn't stay home if she doesn't want to go. The little girl, June Star, remarks that the grandmother wouldn't stay home for any reason.

The next morning, the grandmother is ready early, wearing white gloves and a hat that matches her dress and shoes, and the mother of the children is wearing the same casual trousers and bandana-wrapped hair that she wore the day before. They all climb in the car and leave, with the grandmother chattering every second, even trying to entertain the baby in her lap with silly faces and funny noises. She is in the back seat with her cat hidden under a newspaper on the floor. They argue about the advantages of driving through Georgia quickly and seeing more beauty in Tennessee. They drive past a field with a fenced-off graveyard in the middle of it and the grandmother remarks on the old family burying ground with six grave markers visible. She comments it must have belonged to a plantation.

The grandmother tries to entertain the children with humorous anecdotes and eventually, they stop at a restaurant, the Tower, for barbecued sandwiches. A fat man named Red Sammy Butts runs the place and his wife takes their orders. The grandmother tells Butts that he is a good man because he let strangers charge their gas purchase earlier. He begins to talk about the loss of trust in general, adding, "A good man is hard to find." A monkey chained in a chinaberry tree outside charms the children until the family drives off again.

The grandmother mistakenly insists Bailey retrace their path a few miles to turn down a dirt road and find an old plantation she remembers fondly. As they are approaching where she thinks the dirt road to the old place should be, she remembers it was not in Georgia, but was actually in Tennessee. When she remembers this, she reacts with a start, upsetting the newspaper covering her cat, which leaps up and sinks its claws in Bailey's shoulder. He jerks the wheel, overturning the car, which lands right side up in a ditch on the side of the road. As they untangle themselves from the accident, there are no visible signs of damage except a broken shoulder and cut face of the baby's mother. Bailey throws the cat into a pine tree and his teeth begin to chatter. He wears a yellow sports shirt with blue parrots on it and his face is as yellow as his shirt.

In a few minutes, they see another car coming along the road and it comes to a stop, the three men inside looking down at them. Two of the men brandish guns as they get

out of the hearse-like automobile. They slide down the embankment and approach the frightened family. The most brazen of the three men turns out to be the Misfit, and with methodical precision, he instructs one of the other killers to take Bailey and his son into the woods. Two shots are heard and then he tells another to take the mother, baby, and the young girl into the woods and they, too, are shot.

The grandmother tries to establish a friendly rapport with the Misfit but he resents her efforts and her mentioning any kind of religious "praying." He shoots her three times in the chest, right after she reaches out to touch him benevolently on the shoulder. He contends that there is no pleasure, only meanness, and directs his men to throw her body in the woods with the others, adding that there is no real pleasure in life.

## "A Good Man is Hard to Find" Analysis

There are many prophetic metaphors deliberately placed in the progression of this famous story's plot, beginning with the fears of the grandmother about being accosted by the escaped convict. Others include the sighting of the six gravesites in a family burial plot, the grandmother's thought that if she were to be seen dead on the highway, everyone would know by her attire she was a lady, and finally the discussion with Red Sammy about the loss of trust in society in general.

All of these events have ominous overtones of impending horror on the horizon. The author masterfully pulls the reader into each character's personality with a comfortable familiarity with each of the six family members, the concealed prophecies come to the surface and the reader is hypnotized by amiable to change the unfolding terror and certain death the characters eventually face. Is O'Connor voicing her own philosophy in this story? The story could be her declaration of the futility of trying to trust others, and her struggle to pull away from her own inevitable early death sentence.

# "A Late Encounter with the Enemy"

## "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" Summary

General Sash is one hundred and four-years-old and his granddaughter, Sally Poker Sash, is sixty-two. She is soon to graduate from college and prays every night that her grandfather will live long enough to attend her commencement ceremony. The elderly soldier of the War Between the States those that followed enjoys his fame as such a long-lived decorated veteran. He likes the pomposity of the ceremonies of parades and particularly likes being around the beautiful girls decorating many floats and stages. He doesn't think much of academic ceremonies, because he finds that the speeches drone on forever, and that they are boring. He doesn't want to attend his granddaughter's graduation, but she has promised he will be rolled up onto the stage, so his vanity wins out. He likes his full-dress general's uniform and thinks there is nothing as splendid as he is dressed in it.

General Sash doesn't remember everything anymore and his legs have become relatively useless and shriveled. Whenever he gets a chance, he makes coy remarks about his prowess as a flirt and a romanticist, to the embarrassment of his granddaughter. One of his favorite memories is about a big movie premier when the producers sent a limousine to take him and his granddaughter to the auditorium. Sally forgot to change her shoes and is mortified when she realizes this, but the crowd doesn't notice. Her grandfather is the center of attention.

The day arrives for Sally's graduation and the old man is still alive. Sally arranges for a friend, a fat ten-year-old, John Wesley, to push his wheelchair up to the stage while she is busy in the procession. As the ceremony progresses, the general fantasizes a small hole in the top of his head that grows larger and larger. He begins to see people from his past life, including his deceased wife's face and that of his mother, looking anxious. At the magic moment, John Wesley wheels the old man up to the stage with his "sword" across his knees. After the diplomas are awarded, he rushes the General outside the back way and at high speed down the flagstone path, where he waits with the corpse of the General in the long line at the Coca-Cola machine.

## "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" Analysis

Not many human beings live past the age of one hundred, or even ninety, but the main character in this story makes it to one hundred and four. His legs are shriveled, his memory is failing, and his kidneys are barely functioning, but dying is out of the question in this old soldier's opinion. The General's granddaughter is counting on him being alive in order to see her receive her degree in education, and she has arranged for a young Boy Scout to push his wheelchair, while she is collecting her diploma.

The old man hangs on nearly to the end, but when he is wheeled up to the stage, he is undoubtedly already dead. After the ceremony, the Boy Scout rushes out the back, the author tells us, with the old man as a dead person in line for a cold drink. It appears that living spectacularly long is not as great as many would think, especially for someone like O'Connor, who knows her life will be cut short with lupus. She is telling us in this story to enjoy our days and appreciate every minute of our lives while we can.

# "The Life You Save May Be Your Own"

## "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" Summary

A one-armed man, Mr. Shiflet, walks up the dirt road to the decrepit cabin of Lucynell Carter and her retarded daughter, Lucynell Carter, who can't speak, and is thirty-years-old but looks about nineteen. The mother is a little suspicious of Mr. Shiflet's motives, but she is a widow and longs for a husband for her daughter, who can live on the place. Mr. Shiflet spots the old car in the shed and offers to fix up the place for room and board, and eventually gets the old car in running order and even repaints it.

Shiflet manipulates a marriage between him and the retarded girl, insisting he will treat her honorably and take her to a hotel for two days, at the mother's expense. The mother tearfully bids the newlyweds goodbye and they drive off in the car. The retarded girl eats the sack lunch immediately and about a hundred miles down the road, Shiflet stops at a diner and the sleepy girl puts her head down on the counter and goes to sleep. Shiflet tells the boy waiter that she is a hitchhiker and leaves money for a meal for when she awakens. He leaves her, anxious to reach Mobile by nightfall. He passes a sign that says, "Drive carefully. The life you save may be your own."

Loneliness strikes Shiflet like a lightning bolt and he begins watching for a hitchhiker to pick up and keep him company. He spots a young man dressed like he is running away from home and he offers him a ride, then begins to lecture him about leaving a sweet mother like he himself did. The young man gets fed up with his presumptuous advice and leaps from the car in to the ditch alongside the road. Shiflet rides on in shock, racing a hard rain into Mobile.

## "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" Analysis

The wry humor in this story is priceless. The exacting and precise manipulative dance performed by the tramp, Mr. Shiflet, as he worms his way into the good graces of the widow and her retarded daughter is pure comedic theater. He inveigles the girl who follows him around like a puppy, he deceives the mother, pretending to be fond of the helpless girl, and he manages to steal the car and money from the mother after convincing her he will be a kind husband to the daughter. He tries more conniving on a young stranger he picks up on his way to Mobile. The hitchhiker spots his deception and prefers not to ride with the one-armed con man. The theme and moral of this piece seems to be a warning not to see what you wish for more clearly than the reality of what actually exists.

# "The River"

## "The River" Summary

A babysitter is picking up a young boy of four or at six o'clock in the morning. The boy's father helps him into his plaid coat while his alcoholic mother sleeps in the adjacent bedroom. The sitter notices the full ashtrays and says she would have a problem babysitting the child in that place. The father pays her and she tells him they may be late that night because they are going to a healing service at the river, conducted by an evangelist named Bevel Summers. The little boy tells the sitter his name is Bevel, too, but it really isn't.

The boy and the sitter reach her home and on the porch waiting are her three boys and one young daughter. The boys trick Bevel into removing a board from the bottom of a fence that keeps hogs penned. When he does, a monster boar charges out, shoving him with its nose and scaring him as he runs for his life inside the cabin to the sitter's lap. The hog stares in the screen door and eventually leaves. Later on, the sitter, her four children, and the little boy wander down to the river to hear the preacher and watch the baptisms.

The preacher takes his "namesake" into his arms and talks glowingly about following the river of love and finding Jesus' peace through baptism. He submerges the boy, nearly drowning him. He convinces the boy that baptism will make him "count." When the babysitter returns Bevel to his mother and father, they are starting up their nightly drinking party and the little boy, exhausted, gets into bed in his clothes, reassuring his drunken mother that he didn't speak of her drinking problem to the evangelist. In the predawn darkness, the boy awakens hungry and finds some bread heels and peanut butter to eat and chocolate milk to drink.

The boy takes a streetcar token out of his mother's purse and some Life Savers and leaves with nothing else. He repeats the ride of the day before and gets off at the stop near the sitter's house, which is empty because she has gone to work and her children are in school. Bevel walks along the dirt road and manages to find the path to the river, but is spotted by a kindly old man, who realizes the boy is too young to be headed for the river alone. He gets a big, thick peppermint stick out of a jar on a cabinet and gets in his car and drives down the highway after the boy. The man leaves his car out of sight and walks down the same path the boy has taken, right to the river where he usually fishes by himself.

The man sees the boy in the river and becomes alarmed, raising the peppermint stick and waving it, hollering at the boy to wait, and to come back. The boy, still terrified of the hog chasing him, is trying to baptize himself into the Kingdom of Heaven, deciding it's all a big joke. He turns and sees the head of a giant pig coming after him waving a red and white club and shouting. The boy swivels back into the swift current and escapes from

his fear, trying to find the Kingdom of Heaven. The old man rises far downstream and stands empty handed, staring as far down river as he can see. The boy is gone.

## "The River" Analysis

This is another macabre story with a myriad of implications and nuances. It is dark, heavy with tragedy, but probably a version of millions of similar situations facing many young and neglected children. The message is clear: negligence of our precious children is an unforgivable sin. The worst case scenario, resulting in the loss of a child's life, is the inevitable result of such negligence unless we learn how to treat these gifts from heaven with particular understanding, love, and exceptional care. O'Connor may have witnessed child abuse in her life, as she absorbed personalities and surroundings like a sponge, transmitting them with the accurate details of an electron microscope. She shows here her compassion and desire for helping abused children.

# "A Circle in the Fire"

## "A Circle in the Fire" Summary

Mrs. Cope, the owner of the farm, and Mrs. Pritchard, the wife of the hired hand, are gossiping in the front lawn while Mrs. Cope tugs at nut grass and weeds. Mrs. Pritchard has a morbid fascination with death and goes out of her way to attend visitations at the funeral home. She mentions the latest body she has seen, a young woman who had been in an iron lung but who also got pregnant after being put into the lung. The two older women raise eyebrows over the obvious implications that pertain to conceiving under such circumstances.

Mrs. Cope's twelve-year-old daughter is always peeking outside from an upstairs window, preferring her books to socializing with anyone, but she doesn't miss much. She thinks the sunset looks like a fire in the woods. The Negro worker, Culver, who is lazy, tries to do as little as possible and doesn't like to follow orders. The two women discuss the sadness of the uprooted Europeans because of the war, and are thankful for their own good fortune.

The women look up to see a pickup truck stopped out by the gate and three teenage boys jump off and walk up the pink dirt road toward the women. One is wearing glasses and carries a black suitcase, one is tall and gangly, and the other is shorter, yet they all look alike with their piercing stares. One boy asks Mrs. Cope if she remembers him and he discloses that he is the son of one of her former handymen. He tells her his mother has died and his father has remarried, but he remembered Mrs. Cope's farm and land with longing, as if it were his own "home."

Mrs. Cope jumps up and offers the boys crackers, but they act ungrateful and decline to eat such fare, preferring better. They gradually invade the property and Mrs. Cope struggles with convention and her gracious hospitality, trying to suggest strongly that they leave. They want to ride her horses and she refuses, but they take halters out of the tack room and ride them anyway. They end up swimming in the tank at the edge of the wood and Mrs. Cope's daughter spies on them from behind a tree. She sees them as they pull out matches and begin to set fire to the brush, which spreads to the woods. The girl runs as hard as she can back to the house, screaming for her mama who, with Mrs. Pritchard, has already seen the smoke rising from the woods. The two Negroes amble toward the fire with their shovels and the three delinquents dance for joy.

## "A Circle in the Fire" Analysis

This is a story of determined intimidation, and how powerful it can be under certain circumstances. The three hoodlums, employing the leverage of consistent surreptitious undermining, manage to terrorize a well-to-do widow on her own farm and eventually set fire to the woods beyond the pasture. O'Connor ends the story before the reader

knows how far the fire will spread, but the reader is left with the conclusion that the place will be almost totally destroyed. The theme of this story could well be a warning to not be too trusting of anyone, no matter how young and innocent they may appear.

# "The Displaced Person"

## "The Displaced Person" Summary

Mrs. Shortley, the wife of the hired hand on the widow McIntyre's place, watches as a black car turns in the front gate and Mrs. McIntyre goes down the front steps wearing a nervous smile. The two Negro workers, Sulk and Astor, watch from the barn. Mrs. Shortley sees the priest step out of the car and open the back door. Two children, a boy and a girl, step out, as does a woman in brown, and finally the man of the family, who is short and wearing glasses. He is from the front, the Displaced Person, and the European family has been displaced from their home and city by the war; the priest has helped them escape from Poland. They speak very little English but in no time at all, Mr. Guizac, the Displaced Person, grasps what is needed of him and becomes much more adept at fixing machines and running tractors and other equipment than Mr. Shortley had ever been.

As time goes on, Mrs. McIntyre sees the need to cut back on expenses and because Mr. Guizac is so efficient and works so hard, she decides to fire Mr. Shortley. Mrs. Shortley finds out before this happens and chooses to quit instead, frantically packing up their belongings. They leave in the early hours of dawn. As they reach the main road, Mrs. Shortley has a massive stroke and they drive away, with her paralyzed body twisted in the crowded front seat.

Mrs. Mcintyre is pleased Mr. Guizac can manage so well, working with the Negro help and taking care of the all the chores, until she overhears the young Negro talking to Mr. Guizac about marrying his Polish niece and bringing her to the United States for that purpose, thereby getting her out of the refugee camp she is living in. This is a complete shock to Mrs. McIntyre's system because of the violation of her concept of racial segregation and she tries to talk to Mr. Guizac about it, but with the language barrier, he can't understand what she is trying to say.

Mr. Shortley returns one morning and tells Mrs. McIntyre about his wife's stroke and death, and Mrs. McIntyre is delighted to see him and lets him go back to work for her. Mr. Guizac is working under the small tractor one day and only his legs are sticking out the side, with his boots on up to his knees. Mr. Shortley parks the larger tractor near him but on an incline, sets the brake and gets off, headed for the barn. Mrs. McIntyre, who has decided to let Mr. Guizac go against the advice of the priest, is staring at his legs when the large tractor slips the brake and descends down the slope, its front wheel rolling over Mr. Guizac, breaking his spine. She had not warned the Pole out of the way and neither had the Negro, also watching the whole thing.

The ambulance arrives and the priest with it, who administers last rites as the Displaced Person dies. That same day, Mr. Shortley leaves for other employment. The Negro, who was hoping for the pretty white wife, leaves for work farther south and the other Negro, Astor, cannot work alone without company. Mrs. McIntyre has no help left, and finally,

and she turns everything over to an auctioneer, who sells everything at a loss. Only the old priest remembers to visit her once in a while, always bringing crumbs for the peacock who ruffles his magnificent tail of blue and turquoise and gold.

## "The Displaced Person" Analysis

O'Connor suggests that sometimes we have to question our inherited rules of behavior and adjust them to comply with the changes in society. Mrs. McIntyre's preoccupation with racial prejudice, and her intolerance of someone different than herself, causes her to make terribly wrong choices for her own welfare. She bases her decisions on customs of the past and lets her fear of anything "different" sway her opinion of the true worth of the Displaced Person, who had already proved himself to be much more valuable to her than Mr. Shortley, who smoked and allowed the Negro help to steal turkeys. Interracial marriage was, in general, considered morally wrong in the 1940s and 1950s, and is totally intolerable to Mrs. McIntyre. Because the Polish family is "different," Mrs. McIntyre inadvertently sacrifices her own well being, by not being able to move beyond outdated and close-minded modes of thought.

# "A Temple of the Holy Ghost"

## "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" Summary

Two fourteen-year-old girls, students at the local Catholic convent, come to visit their two mothers' friend and her twelve-year-old daughter, who thinks the two teenaged girls are moronic after observing them a while. The two girls call themselves Temple One and Temple Two because a sister at the convent has told them to consider their bodies as a holy temple if, God forbid, some boy behaves in an unacceptable manner. The twelve-year-old is wise beyond her years and watches the girls as they don high heels and make-up, preparing for blind dates with local boys their hostess has coerced into visiting.

The two visiting boys bring their musical instruments and serenade the two girls with hymns. The girls try not to laugh aloud, as they counter with a complicated anthem in Latin. The boys are suitably intimidated but they stay for supper in the garden and leave afterward for the fair. The younger girl waits up for them and when they return, she bribes them to tell her about the secret in one of the grown-up-only freak show tents they had sneaked into. The freak they saw exposing itself was half-man and half-woman, apparently a hermaphrodite with genitals of both sexes.

An overweight neighbor boy drives them back to the convent, and they all attend a chapel service, where a nun hugs the twelve-year-old firmly, squashing her face into the large crucifix hanging from the nun's waist. On the way back, the girl's mother asks Alonzo, a neighbor boy, how the fair was this year and he says the fair had been closed after some preachers from town inspected what was going on. He is therefore glad he had gone when he did, a week earlier. The young girl is secretly smug because she had already found out what the freak show was all about.

## "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" Analysis

Children are extremely curious and have much more comprehensive concepts than adults often give them credit for, at nearly every age. In her writing, O'Connor seems to be especially interested in the young, crediting them with observational powers no adults around them are aware of, and which leads one to believe she herself had to have been prematurely aware in her own childhood. The author's knowledge of the internal thoughts of her characters are intensely personal, distinct, and unique. In addition, O'Connor stays impartial in her depiction of Protestantism and Catholicism, portraying each religion fairly, and leaving the reader to draw independent conclusions.

# "The Artificial Nigger"

## "The Artificial Nigger" Summary

Mr. Head is sixty-years-old, and lives with his grandson, Nelson, in a room in a house near Atlanta, which the two are planning to visit. They get up early in order to leave at four to get to the railroad junction by five-thirty. Nelson has a new suit in a box next to his pallet and is excited about his "second" trip to the city, his birth being the first. Mr. Head intends to get up first and fry fatback, but Nelson has beat him to it and is cooking their breakfast when Mr. Head arises at three-thirty, all dressed to go even with his hat on his head that is too large.

The man and his grandson look alike, yet Mr. Head has a youthful expression and Nelson wears an ancient look. Mr. Head's wife and daughter have died, and he had reared Nelson since the boy was one-year-old. Eating breakfast, they discuss the coming adventure in the big city and Mr. Head tells Nelson he might not like Atlanta, since it is full of niggers and he has never seen one.

Carrying a sack lunch, they board the train and the conductor takes their tickets. A very large, light-colored Negro man walks toward them down the aisle, followed by two Negro women, both cocoa-colored. Nelson doesn't realize Negroes can be light-colored and is astonished. Mr. Head notices the big sapphire ring and expensive clothing on the Negro man as he goes by. He takes Nelson on a tour of the train, showing him the toilet and the dining car. The train speeds into town and they disembark, Nelson realizing his grandfather is indispensable in this alien setting. They forget their sack lunches and leave them on the train. They walk for many blocks, staring at the sights.

Mr. Head is careful not to walk out of sight of the dome of the terminal, or he might get lost, which happens when they take a wrong turn. They end up in an area full of nigger homes and a black woman gives them directions to get back to the station. Nelson keeps talking about Atlanta being his hometown and yet, he's intimidated by the Negroes and by the scary size of the teeming city. They become thoroughly lost, and Nelson accidentally bumps into a woman carrying a sack of groceries. Mr. Head denies knowing him and Nelson feels betrayed. They meander through an affluent neighborhood and come upon a plaster figure of a Negro leaning over and eating watermelon.

Mr. Head remarks that they don't have enough niggers in town so they made an artificial one. Nelson becomes afraid that they won't catch the return train and Mr. Head feels the same, but they eventually do. Their observations of the sights of the city fill the pages of this story with the smells and colors and people who make their daytrip as vivid for the reader as it was for the two who took the adventure. They both learn a new appreciation for each other and Nelson is proud he went, but concludes that he will never go again.

# "The Artificial Nigger" Analysis

One theme of this story is that of male bonding due to unavoidable circumstances that they must experience together, as well as the dependence everyone has experienced at one time or another on another person. This kind of need is not a bad thing and should be appreciated. The grandson is not as cocky and sure of himself when the two reach the busy, crowded city and realizes he is completely dependent on his grandfather for finding his way around and getting back to the safety of home. The grandfather realizes his grandson's dependence is temporary, but it gives him the self-esteem as he realizes his maturity gives him the privileges of wisdom and seniority.

The racism depicted in this story is not exaggerated. Yet it is not necessarily deeply familiar to the modern reader, who has not experienced the extremity and bitterness of prejudices from that time.

# "Good Country People"

## "Good Country People" Summary

Mrs. Hopewell lives with her thirty-two-year-old daughter, Joy, and a hired couple, Mr. and Mrs. Freeman. Mrs. Hopewell hires the Freemans against the recommendations of their former employers because they are "good country people." Joy is a large blonde girl with an artificial leg, because of an accident when she was young. She is highly educated with a PhD degree and is convinced of her superiority.

A Bible salesman comes to the door and Mrs. Hopewell is kind to the young man because he convinces her he is "good country people." When he meets her daughter, sparks fly. He begins a subtle campaign to seduce the girl and eventually, she allows him to walk with her to the barn behind the pasture and they climb up into the hayloft. He opens his Bible case, disclosing a hollowed-out Bible containing a bottle of whiskey, a deck of pornographic cards, and a box of condoms. He talks her into removing her artificial leg and she is disarmed by his convincing act of being "good country people." After kissing her a few times, the con man steals her leg, packs it in his valise, and reveals his hypocrisy and his malicious nature. Laughing at her, he dashes away, his mission accomplished.

## "Good Country People" Analysis

This story is a trumpet blare of a warning against being hoodwinked by duplicitous conmen. The arrogance of the well-educated young woman is knocked down more than a peg or two when she is fooled by the slick-talking salesman who preys on naive women. He seduces women and often steals something personal from them, as a trophy to flaunt his prowess. The reader wonders if a smooth-talking fellow scammed O'Connor herself, because her history fits the daughter's characterization perfectly.

O'Connor was "crippled" by lupus, which eventually forced her to use crutches. She was also very well educated and lived in a protected existence. If this story is not autobiographical, it could also be inspired by a similar event that she witnessed happen to another woman.

# "You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead"

## "You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead" Summary

Francis Marion Tarwater's great-uncle dies as he is eating the breakfast he has cooked for himself and his nephew. He and his nephew have lived together as long as the fourteen-year-old boy can remember, even in the face of objections from the boy's uncle, his mother's brother. The uncle, Rayber, is a school teacher, who tries to get custody of Tarwater, even taking a social worker with him to the two-story ramshackle cabin where Tarwater lives in the woods. The old man threatens to shoot the first foot that steps on the porch and when Rayber puts his foot on the bottom step to impress the social worker, the old man shoots him in the leg. They leave the boy alone with his great-uncle after that.

Tarwater is sitting at the table when the old man dies, before the first spoonful of his breakfast gets to his mouth. He sits perfectly still a long time, remembering how his great-uncle has, for years, told him exactly what he wants him to do with his body when he dies. He wants Tarwater to dig a grave at least ten feet deep, not eight, and wants him to roll the body to the grave, drop him in and cover it well with firmly packed topsoil. He keeps hearing his uncle's voice in his head, repeating things he's said for years and the reader easily reconstructs the fourteen years of their lives spent in this ramshackle cabin together. Tarwater talks to himself in his mind, as if he were talking to a good friend, and two voices discuss all the alternatives facing the boy now that his great-uncle has died.

The boy begins digging the grave his great-uncle wanted and the two Negroes who work and live on the place walk over from the dirt road. When they see the hole Tarwater is digging, they know it's a grave and that the old man has died. Buford Munson, the Negro man, is respectfully concerned and hopes the old man will be buried properly and soon.

After the grave is about two feet deep, Tarwater hits what feels like bricks. He decides to go to his great-uncle's still and while filling Buford's and his wife's jugs, he has a bit to drink himself, since now there is no one to stop him. He's been drunk only once in his life before this, and now he becomes so drunk, he passes out. When Buford sees the boy is incapable of moving, he returns to the grave, finishes digging it and buries the old man himself.

When Tarwater awakens the next morning, he uses four matches to set fires to the dry grasses under the cabin and it burns down. Tarwater catches a ride out on the highway with a salesman who gives him hours of advice without being asked for it. For a minute, Tarwater thinks they are going back toward the farm and sees a glow on the horizon that looks like the burning cabin. The salesman tells him that no, it is Mobile, where they're headed. Tarwater admits to having fallen asleep and the salesman tells him he should've been listening to things he needs to know, instead of sleeping.

# "You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead" Analysis

The prevalent theme in this story, and one common in O'Connor's works, is the threat of death. The impact the old man's sudden demise makes on his fourteen-year-old great-nephew, Tarwater, who has known no other parent figure, is entertainingly and minutely explored in this story. When the old man's life ends so abruptly, Tarwater remains at the table as if waiting for him to come back to life and give him orders, and continue with their mutually dependent life. Tarwater has trouble realizing that he is no longer dependent on his elderly great-uncle for anything, particularly decisions; he considers cremation rather than burying the old man in a grave, as he had wished.

The imaginary "friend" who converses steadily with Tarwater appears to be a metaphor for his conscience. The two remember many things about the old man, and his definitive wishes about being buried in the wooden coffin he made some time earlier. Tarwater seems doubtful the old man is dead, but he is. When Tarwater drinks himself into a stupor the kindly Negro handyman buries the old man properly.

Tarwater destroys all traces of his early life, and hitches a ride to Mobile. O'Connor most likely would have loved to have burned all evidence of her terminal illness and started over herself. The author's ear for dialect and customs in this story is infallible. She removes any trace of herself as the creator of the story and lets the colorful characters drive the evolution of the plot, so that the story has a life of its own beyond the hand of its author.

# "Greenleaf"

## "Greenleaf" Summary

Mrs. May, a widow, awakens on a moonlit night and from her bedroom on the first floor of a farmhouse, hears the sound of an animal chewing. When she peeks through the slats of a Venetian blind, she sees it is a strange bull grazing on a hedge growing against her house. She assumes it is some nigger's scrub bull and growls at it to go away. It had sounded as if something was eating one wall of the house, and she is relieved when the animal moves away.

Mr. and Mrs. Greenleaf are the hired hands for the house and they have five children, two of which are twin boys named O.T. and E.T. Mrs. May's own two sons, Wesley, the intellectual, and Scofield, the nigger-insurance agent, are lazy and uncooperative, never helping her with anything, and treating her with total disrespect and scorn. The bull keeps grazing where he is not supposed to be and Mrs. May keeps trying to get Mr. Greenleaf to drive the bull off her land, because it can ruin her herd and eat her land bare. Mrs. Greenleaf is a strange creature, obsessed with morbid stories in the newspaper, cutting out frightening pictures and articles, and burying them in the woods. She performs her "healing prayers" over the buried cuttings, but she does not spending any time taking care of her five dirty girls, her twin, thug-like boys, or her snuff-dipping husband.

Mrs. May finds out the bull actually belongs to the Greenleaf twins, yet the bull continues to trespass at will on her property, ruining bushes and eating most of the cattle feed. Mr. Greenleaf ignores her demands to get rid of it. Finally, after days and days of vain arguments and ignored commands, she insists Mr. Greenleaf shoot the bull with his gun and tells him she will drive him to the bull in the back pasture. He gets in her car with his gun and they find the bull grazing contentedly in the middle of a herd of cows. She stops the car and Mr. Greenleaf gets out, and the bull moves into the woods out of sight. Mr. Greenleaf disappears in the direction of the bull.

Mrs. May gets out of her car and sits on the bumper, growing impatient as time passes. She reaches inside the window and blows the horn several times to signal to Mr. Greenleaf to hurry and kill the bull. The bull himself appears at the edge of the woods, his head lowered. Mrs. May, reseated on the bumper, realizes the bull is approaching her with his head lowered and is beginning to lope faster and faster. Before she realizes what his intention is, the huge animal has burrowed his head in her lap, sinking one horn into her heart and the other holding her upright. Her astonished expression never changes, even after Mr. Greenleaf runs up and shoots the bull four times in the eye, killing him. The animal sinks to the ground with Mrs. May impaled on his head, leaning over the top of his head as if whispering a precious secret into his ear.

# "Greenleaf" Analysis

The recurring theme of a majority of O'Connor's stories seems to be the struggle of a single, mature woman trying to keep her authority and her power as an owner of land or people, while trying to solve the problems that occur when managing a farm with insufficient hired help. Once again, Mrs. May, like some of the other O'Connor women, trusts the wrong personalities, follows unrealistic goals, loses control of undisciplined children and ignorant hired hands, ignores the ominous signals of impending death and misfortune, and ends up lost, dead, or abandoned. There is an undercurrent of deep sadness in this story, like many others written by O'Connor, who seems to depict the darkest side of human nature in order to excuse initial gullibility and naivety, before an inevitable betrayal.

# "A View of the Woods"

## "A View of the Woods" Summary

Mary Fortune, nine-years-old, is the youngest of seven grandchildren and their grandfather's favorite. The grandfather, at the age of seventy-nine, is especially partial to Mary Fortune Pitts, because she has an uncanny resemblance to him physically and, he believes proudly, has inherited his penchant for astute business decisions. The grandfather doesn't particularly care for his own daughter or his son-in-law, Pitts, but he allows them to live on part of his land. He occasionally sells off small plots of the land, which angers Pitts each time. He and Mary Fortune watch the construction underway for a fishing club being built along the side of the lake on the property.

Mary Fortune sits on the hood of the Cadillac and props her bare feet on the shoulders of her grandfather, who is himself seated on the bumper, mentally supervising the gigantic machine as it lifts tons of dirt to achieve a large square hole in the center of the lot. Mary Fortune is as sharp as he is about the workers' technique, running along the edge of the pit and pointing out the driver's errors. Nothing makes Mary Fortune's father as angry as when Mr. Fortune sells off some of the land he feels he deserves to inherit, but Mr. Fortune, even at an advanced age, is the viable owner and does what he wants to do.

Mr. Fortune announces he has sold off a large piece of the property directly in front of the Pitts' house to Mr. Tilman, who plans to install a gas pump and a country store there, and then they won't ever have to worry about running out of gas. Mary Fortune is adamant in her anger about the sale of this particular lot, because the children play there and if the country store is put in, they won't be able to see the view of the woods across the road.

Mr. Fortune knows Mary Fortune's father often commands her to accompany him out of sight and he beats her with his belt. She never resists her father's beatings. The grandfather can't imagine his granddaughter's strong personality letting her father beat her and she denies any beatings ever occur. The grandfather tries to bribe her approval for the sale of the lot to Tilman, offering to buy her a boat then an ice cream, but she remains stubbornly belligerent and rebellious. He decides he has no choice but to beat her himself and effect the proper obedience and respect for his seniority.

Mr. Fortune drives her to the edge of the woods and using his belt, whips her mercilessly as she fights like a wild thing. He ends up holding her neck and slamming her head against the ground. Her head hits a rock and kills her. As he reels back from her collapsed body, he sustains a massive heart attack and dies himself, mortified his granddaughter had declared herself more of a Pitts than a Fortune, before he killed her.

# "A View of the Woods" Analysis

"A View of the Woods" is an impressive story illustrating the power and weakness for the need to control, one of the most common flaws of human nature. The grandfather, at the age of seventy-nine, exerts his control by exercising his ownership authority when he sells of portions of his land, even though he does not need the money. He knows selling parcels of the land irritates his son-in-law, who lives on the land with his family of seven children, the youngest of which, at nine, is the grandfather's idolized favorite.

Mary Fortune sleeps with the grandfather and he keeps her close to him every day, basking in the glow of her mirror-like reflections of his intellect and personality. The girl's father responds to the grandfather's influence and authority by beating the girl whenever he wishes, with his belt, out of sight near the woods. The girl does not object and never admits her father beats her. The grandfather sells off a premium piece of land, even in the face of his beloved granddaughter's objections, and ends up beating her himself to insure her acquiescence.

In his rage, Mr. Fortune kills his granddaughter, and when he realizes he has destroyed the one person he lives for, his heart explodes in his chest and he is destroyed as well. Underneath the masterfully detailed descriptions of the scenery and the myriad of details around all the characters, is the inevitable implications their choices have, as one character tries to control another. The tragic ending constitutes a warning that compassion, understanding, and concession will bring more happiness than having the brief resented success of forced control.

# "The Enduring Chill"

## "The Enduring Chill" Summary

Asbury, a writer at the age of twenty-five, returns home from New York City to Timberboro and his mother because he is convinced he is dying. His mother meets his train and is aghast at his appearance. Her expression enforces his conviction that he is terminally ill. He has felt the end coming for four months, experiencing chills and fever, and he has returned home to die broke, with no job and no more savings. Ashbury's disgusted sister, Mary George, sleeps in the back seat of the car at the station, waiting for his arrival, and she awakens as he gets into the car.

Mary George is eight-years-older than her brother and the principal of an elementary school, with no tolerance for his weaknesses and his inability to earn an income with a "real job." Her sarcasm is bitter and vitriolic as they drive back to the family home, a large white farmhouse. The mother assures him she will call the family doctor, Dr. Block, who comes out to the farm and examines Asbury, taking a sample of his blood to check for anything not apparent to the naked eye. Asbury sinks into daydreams about the recent past when he had encouraged two of the Negroes on the farm to assert themselves and sip some of his mother's cows' milk and to smoke in the barn. They did not dare disobey Ashbury's mother's orders, even though they watched Asbury smoke and sip the freshly drawn milk, both actions seriously against his mother's rules.

Asbury begs for his mother to call a priest, preferably a Jesuit, so he can enjoy a brilliant intellect with which to converse. An elderly Jesuit arrives and is shocked at Asbury's lack of knowledge of his catechism, but the priest is deaf in one ear and blind in one eye and has no idea who James Joyce is. Eventually, Dr. Block returns with the blood test results. Asbury is not dying. He has undulant fever, which will come back, off and on, for years, but won't kill him.

The doctor says he must have ingested unpasteurized milk somehow accidentally in the past. Ashbury is almost insulted by not having a dramatic death and remembers to reclaim the small key to his hidden final letter written to his mother and falls back in the bed, staring at the ceiling, numbed by the prospect of his long, boring convalescence.

## "The Enduring Chill" Analysis

This story seems to be a tongue-in-cheek joke of O'Connor's, as she pokes fun at her own efforts to become a writer in the face of constant rejection and physical disability. Her longing for someone who can exchange thoughts about topics she loves to discuss and not having anyone near who has heard of James Joyce, for example, adds a touch of her wry humor to the story. The same ironic humor is brought out when Asbury's sister makes remarks regarding writers and writing, such as, "Well, well, we have the

artist with us again. How utterly utterly," and, "The artist arrives at the gas chamber." The reader wonders if these caustic observations are self-directed.

Asbury's illness is not as serious as O'Connor's terminal lupus, but his belief he is sicker than he really is suggests that through this story O'Connor demonstrates her futile hope for a less deadly ailment as well. The characterizations of the members of the family, the dialect of the Negroes, and the nuances of Dr. Block's personality and the Jesuit are wonderfully done.

# "The Comforts of Home"

## "The Comforts of Home" Summary

Thomas, thirty-five-years-old, is living at home with his impressionable mother, who was so moved by the picture in the paper of a nineteen-year-old girl thrown in jail for passing a bad check, that she had a lawyer parole the girl to her custody. Thomas is incensed and threatens his mother with leaving unless she gets rid of the young con artist, but the mother argues for hours in favor of helping the poor girl, who has a disease she calls "nimpermania." The girl mocks Thomas and his suspicious nature at every turn, even attempting to accost him in his room wearing nothing or manipulating the mother into doing more for her.

The girl, Star Drake, takes over the guest room and a cold war begins. Thomas mourns the death of his father, wishing he could be present to help him show his mother the foolishness of her ways and the risks of letting this stranger into their lives. A lawyer finds out the girl's real name is Sarah Ham and Thomas tries to tell his mother that she is nothing but a slut, but the mother refuses to listen to him. The girl fakes an attempted suicide and evokes more sympathy from the mother, resulting in Thomas choosing a last resort tactic. He digs out a revolver in the hopes the girl would find it after he hides it in the guest room, and would then shoot herself.

On his way to hide the gun in her purse, the girl suddenly appears, catching him in the act. His mother appears from the parlor and his father's ghost screams at him to shoot. In the confusion, as the girl lunges for Thomas's throat and his mother sees the gun and moves to protect the girl, Thomas fires the gun and kills his own mother. The sheriff, entering just as the shot is fired, concludes the son and the cheap tart had planned all along to kill the mother.

## "The Comforts of Home" Analysis

The title comes from the mother's repetition of the phrase, emphasizing the "nimpermaniac" she rescues from the jail has never known any comforts like she and her son take for granted. The discussions seem to be endless in this vignette of several lives eternally intertwined together. The son argues with his mother, but never admits to his inability to support himself away from her house. The mother's identity depends upon being needed by the most needy personalities she can find, and the wayward, misguided, duplicitous young woman becomes her nemesis as well as her ultimate challenge. Once again, the older mother figure in the story is a widow and the son is not as strong as his deceased father. The story suggests that trying to save the world is a fruitless endeavor.

# "Everything That Rises Must Converge"

## "Everything That Rises Must Converge" Summary

Julian, one year after graduating from college, lives with his mother in an apartment that is descending into obsolescence, just as she is. Her memory is of better days, when her grandfather was governor of the state, her parents were prominent landowners, and Negroes were barely free from slavery. She is completely prejudiced against blacks and talks little else. Her doctor has told her she has to lose weight because of her high blood pressure, so Julian agrees to ride with her on the bus to the Y on Wednesday nights to her exercise class.

Julian hates riding the bus with his mother because she is so obviously patronizing to any blacks that get on. When she puts on a hideous purple hat, she fusses about feeling guilty for having bought it. Julian reassures her and resents her ugly insinuations about the blacks on the bus to the point where he gets up and sits next to one, just to defy her. To her mortification, a black woman gets on the bus with her cute young son, and the woman has on an identical purple hat. She tries to make light of it, but the irony is too much for her to overcome.

Julian's mother plays peek-a-boo with the young boy and when the black woman rises to get off the bus, Julian realizes with horror they have to get off at the same place. He is fearful his mother will offer the little boy a nickel, and she tries to, but finds only a penny. When the four of them get off the bus, the boy's mother refuses the penny and throws it back at the mother, hitting her with her black fist, and stomping away. He reprimands his mother, telling her that there are changes now and she needs to face reality, but she stumbles and speaks crazily asking for her grandfather to come get her. She falls to the sidewalk with a massive stroke and Julian weeps with belated remorse.

## "Everything That Rises Must Converge" Analysis

This is one of O'Connor's most famous tales; it is one of her most piercing attacks against the prevailing racism in this country and the stubborn ignorance of southern whites during the 1940s and 1950s. Once again, the main character is a widowed mother living with her adult son. O'Connor takes the reader into the thoughts of any of her characters with grace and carefully executed progression to the point that the reader is never conscious of being guided by her accurate transcription. Her mother and son characters are as real as actual living persons, and we know them intimately.

# "The Partridge Festival"

## "The Partridge Festival" Summary

Calhoun, twenty-three-years-old, arrives to visit his two great-aunts and finds them seated on the front porch of their unpainted house, looking out over terraces crowded with red and white azaleas. Aunt Bessie calls him their baby and Aunt Mattie, who is deaf, shouts her delight at his interest in the Partridge Festival, particularly since his great-grandfather had started the custom. A Kangaroo court is held to accuse a man named Singleton of not buying an Azalea Festival Badge.

For punishment, he is locked in an outdoor privy as a joke and ten days later, he storms into the courthouse with a gun and shoots six people, missing the mayor. The great-aunts talk about the incident and Calhoun is shown the miniature of his great-grandfather as usual, and gives it a preemptory glance. He almost discloses he is writing an expose of the false condemnation of Singleton but covers up his impulse. He wants to write something to vindicate the madman. Calhoun remembers how he had told his parents, with whom he lived every summer, that he despised their values and he tried to assert his budding independence.

Calhoun's great-aunts try to fix him up with a young woman named Mary Elizabeth from town, who also wishes to vindicate the poor man the town has treated so cruelly, and they join together to get into Quincy State Hospital where the man is being held to interview him. When they do get admitted into a room with the elderly man, who is attired in a hospital gown, his eyes disclose his degree of madness and he raises his gown to show the girl his privates. Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth abandon their crusade to expose the prejudice of the townspeople and run from the state hospital, heavy with the reality of their having barked up the wrong tree.

## "The Partridge Festival" Analysis

The soft and comfortable beginning of the story on the front porch of two aged southern ladies in this vignette lulls the reader into a complacency that doesn't last very long. The attempts of the visiting great-nephew, Calhoun, to gather incriminating evidence against the unfairness of the town's judgment against a man named Singleton, are consistently avoided.

The "victim" lost his temper and killed six people after he was convicted by a "pretend" trial and sentenced to "jail" in a privy for not supporting the local festival. Calhoun is adamant about the man's innocence and joins up with a young woman of the same belief. Much to their shocked chagrin, they discover Singleton, locked in the local asylum, is truly deranged and their campaign dissipates into hollow echoes. O'Connor is perhaps suggesting that is we should be sure of our details and sources before we brandish our righteousness.

# "The Lame Shall Enter First"

## "The Lame Shall Enter First" Summary

Sheppard is eating his cold cereal out of the small box it came in and mentally appraises his ten-year-old son, Norton, whose mother, Sheppard's wife, has been dead over a year. Sheppard is City Recreational Director and works as a counselor at the reformatory on Saturdays. This is where he meets Rufus Johnson, a fourteen-year-old with a clubfoot, who has been abused all his life and has become a rebellious, resentful juvenile. Sheppard regards his own son with distaste, concluding the boy has every advantage and the pitiful boy at the reformatory has none. He tries to point out the differences to Norton who is still grieving for his mother and who is very fragile, needing his father's support and love.

As the days and weeks go by, Rufus is discharged from the reformatory and Sheppard becomes obsessed with giving him a good, loving home and at the same time, teaching Norton how to be more appreciative. He notices the older boy needs a new shoe for his clubfoot and goes to a considerable amount of trouble to get him one, but the boy doesn't show any gratitude and won't wear the new boot. He keeps talking to Norton about Rufus's less fortunate lot in life, but Norton becomes even more withdrawn. Rufus begins to exert his devious charm on the boy and eventually moves into the house with Sheppard and Norton, with Sheppard convinced that he can win him over with new clothes, kindness, and a room of his own, which was his wife's.

The scoundrel boy and the shy Norton are both interested in astronomy so Sheppard buys a telescope at a pawn shop and installs it in the attic, protruding up into space. Rufus begins a series of crimes against neighbors, to the extent that the police finally convince Sheppard the boy is completely evil and has a criminal mind. Sheppard realizes his painful mistake in comparing his grieving son with a thug-child, and runs upstairs to make amends with him and tell him he loves him. He ends up calling the boy's name and finds his body hanging in the attic. The tripod has fallen and the telescope has crashed to the floor, as the boy's lifeless form dangles just below the beam in the ceiling.

## "The Lame Shall Enter First" Analysis

A subtitle to this novella could easily be "The Grass Looks Greener on the Other Side." The widower father in the story overlooks the responsibility he has for helping his young son get over the death of his mother. He tries to pump up his own ego needs by attempting to give a juvenile delinquent a second chance with him and his son. He buys him clothing and a new boot for his clubfoot, caters to him constantly and shames his own son, refusing to see the truth of the rebellious boy's evil. He is convinced his goodness and altruistic intentions can win the boy over and at the same time, illustrate

the shortcomings of his younger son's inability to share things with the poorer boy, who has had fewer advantages.

Eventually, Sheppard sees the fallacy of his choice and when the police arrest the delinquent for neighborhood vandalism, the father hurries to make amends with his son and to tell him he loves him. It is too late: the boy is dead. O'Connor does not tell us whether the boy commits suicide or if his death is accidental. Either way, it's a tragedy, painfully and excruciatingly written, as if to tell the reader to appreciate what one has, rather than go looking for something that seems better.

# "Why Do the Heathen Rage?"

## "Why Do the Heathen Rage?" Summary

A man named Tilman has a massive stroke in the state capitol and spends two weeks in the hospital, arriving home by ambulance. His only son, Walter, twenty-eight-years-old, greets him and stares into his twisted paralyzed face. Tilman's wife is fraught with fear concerning how the inept Walter is going to take over running the place, and how he will tell the Negroes what to do; he admits that is one thing he cannot possibly do. His mother is worried about Walter having enough backbone to do anything right, remembering the types of books he likes to read. One in particular disturbs her because the book was written in the year 370, about a man who became the bishop of Altinum. It occurs to the mother the general in the book her son is reading, the man planning to be violent, is a metaphor for Jesus.

## "Why Do the Heathen Rage?" Analysis

This very brief vignette is almost an afterthought. Once again, an older southern lady who is almost a widow is faced with having an immature and inept young son who must take over the leading role in running the household and directing the Negroes. She knows he cannot do it as well as she could. This is a glimpse into O'Connor's impatience with the unfairness of the preference for men over women in any professional capacity.

# "Revelation"

## "Revelation" Summary

Mr. and Mrs. Turpin are in the doctor's waiting room, which is crowded with waiting patients. Claud has a wounded leg where one of the cows kicked him in the shin. Mrs. Turpin tries to converse with any and all, drawing disapproving looks and comments from others, especially an overweight college girl of about eighteen, who scowls unpleasantly most of the time. Mrs. Turpin prattles on and on, boring everyone, until the young girl explodes in a fit, throwing her book at Mrs. Turpin.

It takes the doctor and several others to control the girl; she is having a seizure and an ambulance takes her away. Mrs. Turpin has stirred up everyone waiting with her derogatory comments about Negroes and their problems on the farm trying to work the blacks. When the turbulence settles and the Turpins get back home, Mrs. Turpin enjoys telling the Negroes about the strange incident and the crazy girl that attacked her.

The Negro women are vocally sympathetic, obviously to appease their employer. Mrs. Turpin tells them the girl called her a warthog from hell, which traumatizes the older woman. She tells the Negroes about this insult, and then walks down to the pigpen and stares at the animals as the sun sets and the sky is vividly colored, as she shouts defiantly at the hogs and runs water into their troughs. The silence of the oncoming night is the only answer she receives.

## "Revelation" Analysis

"Revelation" is a cross-section of ordinary conversation between an upper-middle class landowner with a working farm and Negro workers, and other people waiting in a doctor's waiting room. One woman is considered "white trash," another is the college girl's mother, another is a mother of a young boy with an ulcer, and an older man pretends to be asleep but is listening to the chatter. The college girl is choking with resentment as Mrs. Turpin's poisonous racist commentary reaches untenable heights. The girl explodes into a seizure, which emphasizes how deeply angry she is, and her rebellion against the prejudices of her era.

# "Parker's Back"

## "Parker's Back" Summary

Parker sits on the front porch of his peeling house, staring at his young pregnant wife, wondering why he married her. He reminisces about first meeting her and how she spurned his usually accepted advances, which had intrigued him even more. She forced him to disclose his strange name, and what the initials O and E stand for, which he had always kept a secret. She eventually agrees to marry him, even though he does not think she is suitably impressed with the myriad of tattoos all over the front of his body. He has nothing tattooed on his back, because he can't see his own back readily and thinks that it is a waste of money.

Eventually, trying to get his religious wife's attention, and some kind of acknowledgment for being himself, he has a tattoo artist copy a rendition of the head of Jesus Christ covering his whole back. His buddies in the bar ridicule him for it and his wife beats him with the broom, telling him he is committing idolatry and she doesn't want him in the house anymore. Parker creeps outside and leans against a tree trunk, weeping.

## "Parker's Back" Analysis

With this story, O'Connor demonstrates the belief that anytime we try to be something we are not, nothing is going to work. The reader is caught up with Parker's vain attempts to "be something" in the eyes of his hypercritical, hyper-religious wife, which renders him sobbing with shame and hurt feelings, and no alternative left to try to gain her approval and love. Parker, however, has been hypercritical himself in the beginning and at the end of the story, but he finds himself on the receiving end, which is a painful lesson to learn.

# "Judgment Day"

## "Judgment Day" Summary

Tanner, an elderly man uprooted from the Deep South, lives with his daughter and her husband in a walk-up apartment in New York City. He hates living there. Tanner is planning to go back to his hometown in the Deep South where he had been living as a squatter on a wealthy Negro doctor's land, with his companion of thirty years, an old Negro named Coleman. He secretly pins his name and address under his coat lapel and includes a note to Coleman with burial instructions in case he dies before he gets home.

Through the use of flashbacks, O'Connor shows the reader how the old man's transfer to New York City evolved and how pitiful his existence had been in the South in a crumbling shack. He never takes his black hat off and wants to be ready for the chance to sneak away from his daughter to use his welfare check to catch a cab and then the sneak on a freight train to get back down to the South, but the chance never comes. He has a stroke and his daughter has to use half of his check for medical expenses.

When Tanner is barely able to sit up, he drags himself to the door of the apartment and starts to go downstairs, when he falls down half of the first flight of stairs. The Negro tenant and his light-skinned wife who live next to his daughter try to help him along, the old man calls him "Preacher," a name he uses for all Negroes.

The black man is insulted by the name and when Tanner has a massive stroke and dies, he shoves the old man's hat down over his face and pushes his arms and legs through the spokes of the banister. The daughter has him buried in New York City, but cannot sleep at night until she has his body dug up and shipped south to Corinth for internment, in his home town. She sleeps soundly after that.

## "Judgment Day" Analysis

This story, the last of this collection, is another version of the first one, *The Geranium.* This version is fleshed out more than the first, but is equally as poignant. O'Connor reflects on the fear in all of us about growing old and helpless, becoming dependent upon someone who doesn't want to be bothered with the process of growing old. O'Connor knew she would not have that anguish and is perhaps suggesting that we should be less impatient with ourselves in our own brief lifetimes.

# Characters

## Old Dudley

Dudley is the aged father of a woman living in New York City who has moved him up from the South to live his last days with her in an apartment. He is homesick and has trouble adjusting to his new environment.

## Rayber

Rayber is a white, middle-aged man in a small town who tries to argue against racism in the local barbershop to no avail.

## Old Gabriel

Gabriel is a blind Negro who is terrified when left alone in his small shack and thinks he hears a wildcat scratching at the wall, trying to get in to attack him.

## Miss Willerton

Miss Willerton is a single lady living with two other spinsters and a gentleman, who fancies herself as a writer and escapes into the world of her imagination with her own created characters.

## Ruller

Ruller is a young man, desperate to have the admiration of his peers, who accidentally stumbles upon a wounded turkey and tries to take it home, only to have it stolen from him by a group of tough men.

## Hazel Motes

Motes is man who becomes interested in a couple he meets while watching a hawker demonstrate a potato peeler. He and a younger man named Enoch Emery go off together and meet up with several eccentric characters.

## Enoch Emery

Emery is an employee of the city park in one story, and is obsessed with voyeurism as he spies on the sunbathing females around the pool.

## Ruby

Ruby, at thirty-four, is several months pregnant and doesn't know it. She fears motherhood more than anything because her mother had lost four babies who had died.

## The Misfit

The Misfit is a cold-blooded killer who has escaped federal prison and who has no qualms about killing children and adults to get their car and continue his escape.

## General Sash

Sash is a colorful veteran of one hundred and four, whose granddaughter shows him off at every celebration she can, including her graduation from college.

## Mr. Shiflet

Shiflet is a one-armed conman, who scams a widow named Lucynell Carter and her retarded daughter of the same name.

## Reverend Bevel Summers

Summers is an evangelist preacher who supervises baptisms in the river, which leads to the drowning of a neglected child.

## Mrs. Cope

Mrs. Cope is a naive widow who owns a large farm and tries to be nice to manipulative delinquents, with dire results.

## Mrs. McIntyre

Mrs. McIntyre is the naive widow operating a dairy farm alone with Negro workmen and Mr. and Mrs. Shortley, the inept handyman and his wife.

## Mr. Head

Head is the grandfather of Nelson and they live together on the outskirts of Atlanta, where no blacks live. Nelson has never seen a Negro until they visit the city and get lost.

## Mrs. Hopewell

Mrs. Hopewell is a naive widow managing a farm alone. She is manipulated by three scoundrel boys, who burn down her farmstead.

## Francis Marion Tarwater

Tarwater is a young man who lives alone with his grandfather and when the older man dies while eating breakfast, his grandson has difficulty coping.

## Mrs. May

Mrs. May is a widow living alone with scant help on a farm. When a stray bull frightens her, and she tries to have it killed, it eventually kills her.

## Mr. Fortune

Fortune is a querulous, demanding grandfather who adores his granddaughter, Mary Fortune Pitts. He discovers he cannot control everything when she defies him and he ends up killing her. He then has a stroke and dies.

## Asbury

Ashbury is a morbidly dependent young man convinced that he is dying, but he is not. He moves back home to die and has to face his own convalescence from undulant fever.

## Thomas

Thomas is a young man still living at home with his mother, resentful of her habit of rescuing the needy of the world.

## Calhoun

Calhoun is a bachelor of marriageable age visiting his great-aunts' home and becomes incensed about the unfair accusations against an innocent man named Singleton. He discovers Singleton is guilty as charged and belongs in the county asylum where he has been confined.

## Sheppard

Sheppard is a father of misguided goals, heralding the virtues of a club-footed delinquent over the shy, withdrawn fears of his own little boy.

## Mary Maud

Mary Maud is the mother of an only son who has to take over when his father has a massive stroke and he is still at home, without a job.

## Mrs. Turpin

Mrs. Turpin takes her husband to the doctor and in the waiting room watches as a young woman goes berserk after the people there discuss their racial prejudices with self-righteous overtones.

## O.E. Parker

Parker is a man covered in tattoos on the front of his body. To try and get his religious wife to love him, he has the face of Jesus tattooed on his back.

## Tanner

Tanner is an elderly man living with his daughter in New York City, longing to go home to the South to die, who plans to escape when his next check arrives. He has a stroke before he can get away and dies.

# Objects/Places

## Red Geranium

Old Dudley sits for hours staring at a potted red geranium on a windowsill across the alleyway, and worries that the sun is too hot and thinks it needs water.

## Wooden Shelf

Old Gabriel pulls himself up on the shelf to get away from the wildcat he thinks is trying to get in the cabin to attack him.

## Crumb Catcher

The crumb catcher is the device Miss Willerton uses to clean the crumbs off the tablecloth after a meal.

## Pink Wrapper

Mrs. Hosen wears a pink wrapper on the sleeper train when Hazel rides on the train.

## Potato Peeler

The potato peeler is a utensil the hawker was demonstrating in front of Lerner's Dress Shop when Hazel Motes walked by.

## Chocolate Malted Milkshake

Enoch Emery has this milkshake every day at the Frosty Bottle ice cream parlor.

## Barbecued Sandwich

Red Sammy Butts' specialty is a barbequed sandwich at the Tower dance hall and filling station.

## Plaid Coat

The little boy named Harry/Bevel wore a plaid coat down to the river to find the Kingdom of Heaven

## New York City

New York City is where Old Dudley's daughter took him to live with her.

## Tattoo Artist's Rooms

The rooms are where Parker went to get tattooed, above the chiropodist's office.

## Doctor's Waiting Room

The waiting room is where Mr. and Mrs. Turpin talked with others and where the college girl went berserk.

## Sheppard's Attic

The attic is where Norton died, when the propped up telescope fell.

## Quincy State Hospital

Quincy State Hospital is where the mentally ill Singleton was admitted after shooting six people.

# Social Concerns/Themes/Characters

In O'Connor's short stories, the classic plot line involves some un-Christian person who undergoes a terrible and shattering experience that may even kill him, and at the same moment has an insight into his own selfishness or vanity or deludedness or greed that has warped his soul all along, but has never been acknowledged. As the Misfit says of the Grandmother in one of O'Connor's best-known stories "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "She would of been a good woman if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."

It is usually clear to the reader what the failing of the character is, and uncomfortably so, for these are not really evil figures; most of the people she depicts are, like the grandmother, more blind and self-centered than diabolical, more unconsciously racist than crazed with a Hitlerian lust for genocide, more smug than vicious. Some even think they are atheistic humanists, although to O'Connor this is supreme irony, since no humanist could really lead someone to the loss of his immortal soul.

O'Connor is different, and she is so because of what she herself called her peculiar "vision," that held the same priorities always uppermost and saw that insofar as others did not do so, insofar as they had things other than Christ central in their lives, they were, in her word, "grotesque." The difficulty for her as a Catholic writer was to communicate that vision to an audience that saw the same sort of person as perfectly normal. For this reason she ran to the extreme situation or character, to the shattering and violent climaxes that would strike a person as Saul was struck on the road to Damascus. As she put it in an essay, ". . . 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." One can see why Alice Walker was moved to comment, "Not one of her stories...

could have been written by anyone else."

O'Connor's social concerns overlap with theme and character extensively.

Her idea was to hold up a mirror to society, especially white Southern society, and reveal it to itself as grotesque in all the ways she thought it was. Her intent, in the short run, could be called social justice, but in the long run she felt even more than that was at stake.

In 1960, she read Teilhard de Chardin's book The Phenomenon of Man and became thereafter more involved in the social rather than purely personal effects of one's creed. Chardin was a Jesuit priest and paleontologist who combined his two disciplines to arrive at a theory about God's plan for the universe. Chardin believed that at the end of time all creation will have returned to its creator through Christ, the Omega point. It would not be merely the spirits of men that would blend with God's as with an Oversoul,

but all the created world would somehow move, or revert, back to God in an upward and outward direction, complete with a united human race.

It follows, then, that mankind must first be united if this plan is to be effective, and that anything that divides people must be wrong, as are any erroneously held ideas that prevent large segments of humanity from understanding and therefore cooperating in God's plan. Without acceptance and understanding of both end and means, progress is impossible; the leadership must come from the most educated part of the race.

O'Connor sees a world of grotesquely "out of whack" people who, as "intellectuals," are secularized and devoted to the relativistic values of social science; as common people, they are materialistic, arrogant, smug, selfcongratulatory, condescending to the poor and racist. They offer only impediments to God's purpose. All of them ought to be stunned into seeing themselves as they are, and for those few who read, O'Connor's stories are designed as therapy. For this reason, many complain that her stories are not "religious" and lack a depiction of Christianity in people's lives. What impressed O'Connor was precisely its absence.

A case in point is "The Displaced Person," a long story that concerns a Pole and his family who arrive on a Georgia dairy farm as D.P.'s (displaced persons) after World War II. The owner of the farm, Mrs. Mclntyre, is one of a group of widows who appear throughout O'Connor's fiction who run dairy farms and who complain constantly, and she is one of the best drawn. Her sidekick and employee, Mrs. Shortley, is a false prophet who represents the extreme of warped fundamentalism; she believes the Pole, who is clearly linked with Christ, has "come to destroy," which in a sense he has, although all unwittingly. Because he does not understand Southern racism, he contracts with the one young single male on the place, who is black, to marry his cousin in the concentration camp in Poland, so that she will be allowed to come to the United States ("She no care black. She in camp three year.") Suddenly he falls from being Mrs. Mclntyre's "salvation" (since he saves her so much money) to being her cross to bear; he "upsets the balance" on the farm, disturbs the status quo, and he will have to leave. Thus, Mrs. Mclntyre rejects her salvation because He required her to drop her racism and regard the black hand as just another person.

In the post-World War II South, this would have been no less than a revolutionary act, and neither Mrs. Mclntyre nor, in fact, the black hand, is up to it.

But she hesitates to reject her salvation out of hand; she says she feels an obligation to the priest who brought the family. When the opportunity to get rid of Mr. Guizac presents itself, she and the hand and Mr. Shortley join in collusion to permit his death by their inaction. Thus he dies, as it were, for the sins of others. Mr. Guizac is not exactly a Christ-figure, which is a greatly abused term, but more of an analogue for Christ, since while he is a good man, he does not voluntarily sacrifice himself for others and in fact does not even realize he is going to die. Neither is his death redemptive, necessarily, since it puts Mrs. Mclntyre into a stroke and causes all the help to find other places to work, which does not necessarily mean that they reject the society that the farm represents altogether, but only that they have collectively ruined themselves. The farm,

then, is a microcosm of America: racism and greed, false religion and xenophobia, characterize the people and keep them from true Christianity.

When justice exists, everything will rise and converge upon the Omega point; indeed, everything that rises must converge, as Julian and his conservative mother discover in the story by that name.

# Themes

## Impending Tragedy

Impending tragedy as depicted with the depressing inevitability of death and the results of negligence, with regard to children, is a prevalent theme in this collection of short stories. An undercurrent of overpowering sadness runs through many of O'Connor's stories, perhaps because of the own fatal disease of lupus, which interrupts her life abruptly at an early age. In "The River" the reader is anticipating the horror of the ending but even knowing the inevitable does not forestall the sadness of the drowning of the young child, whose parents have neglected him so terribly. In "The Lame Shall Enter First," the righteous father is oblivious to the emotional needs of his own grieving son and considers the needs of a scoundrel delinquent more important until he finds his son dead by hanging in the attic. The reader hopes for a happy ending but O'Connor does not sacrifice cruel reality for the false hypocritical solution.

## Southern Lifestyle

The Southern lifestyle is another prevalent theme in the short stories of Flannery O'Connor. The writer's wry sense of humor regarding her own environment peeks out occasionally, as in "The Crop." The author paints true pictures of the daily life of the era and pulls the reader into her world with ease. She seems to focus on naive widows left to run large places alone, with difficulties managing the Negro help, and always hampered by the inept white handyman and his wife. This is exemplified by in, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "A Circle in the Fire," "The Displaced Person," "Good Country People," "Greenleaf," and "The Enduring Chill." What really causes these widows to loose everything, however, is their ineptness to understand the true equality between human beings, rather than blindly following the moral injustices they have been taught.

## Morbid Dependency

Many characters demonstrate a morbid dependency on another character or belief. An example of this is bachelor sons who are dependent on their mothers at an age when they should be leading their own, self-supporting lives. Examples of this theme are prevalent in the stories, "The Enduring Chill," "The Partridge Festival," "The Comforts of Home," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge." In the last story is one of O'Connor's most successful depictions of an eccentric personality rendered even more aberrant by the fears instilled after years of prejudicial racism.

# Racism

Racism is present in every story in this collection, which is not surprising since they all take place in the South in the 1940s and 1950s. Prejudice toward any person or culture that is "different" was a common occurrence in the era in which O'Connor wrote, and she unabashedly reveals the irrational motivation behind and dire consequences of such behavior. Examples of racism are obvious in the stories, "The Artificial Nigger," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "Judgment Day," "The Geranium," "The Barber," "The Displaced Person," and others. Possessive manipulation by an older and/or more unscrupulous character is also evident in many of these tales, typical of dysfunctional families of any era and any age in any country. This manipulation of younger children by malicious adults is exemplified in "The River," "The Train," "The Lame Shall Enter First," and others.

# Style

## Point of View

Flannery O'Connor writes predominantly in the third person, and can take the reader into the mind of the characters with ease, using their internal dialogue to further the plot progress and give the reader the sights, sounds, and smells of the world she is writing about. Flashbacks are often used to catch the reader up to the present, where the character first appears in the story; she does this with finesse and ease, exposing the reader to her exceptional ability to vanish as a conscious presence and let the stories take on a life of their own.

O'Connor writes from the point of view of each character she develops, so the reader comes to understand the thought patterns of the character and believes in the validity of the person. For example, in "Good Country People," the story opens in the third person and carefully eases into Mrs. Hopewell's thoughts about her thirty-two-year-old daughter that she still thinks of as a child. In "Revelation," Mrs. Turpin has enjoys sizing up all the people in the doctor's waiting room, and her opinions are vividly recorded in the third person. In "Judgment Day," when Tanner reminisces about meeting the wealthy Negro doctor who owns the land Tanner's cabin is built on, the reader is treated like a confidante as Tanner's thoughts are revealed.

## Setting

All the stories are concerned with southern lifestyles, even "The Geranium" and "Judgment Day," which are set in New York City, where the older man has been moved to spend his last years. The small southern town is O'Connor's favorite setting, appearing and reappearing over and over, with the citizens of her towns always connected to the basics of country living and life on a small farm, with livestock and beautiful sunsets and landscapes present on many pages. "The Partridge Festival" is constructed around the history of prejudice in the little town of Partridge, and the unification of its citizens in condemning the man named Singleton. The setting of "Parker's Back" is an isolated farmhouse, in which a widowed mother and her retarded daughter scrape out an existence. In "The Displaced Person," another widow running a farm hires refugees from Europe to work for her and the reader infers her strong opinions of outsiders as the author discloses her thoughts, fears, and hopes for her future.

## Language and Meaning

Flannery O'Connor's ability to realistically interpret the world around her is incomparable. She writes the Negro dialect as if she spoke it herself, and portrays southern speech patterns easily and fluidly with such flair there is never a misunderstanding of the meanings. In some instances, the author writes phonetically

(i.e., "sommo powder," meaning some more powder in "The Barber"), but her meaning is always natural and clear.

It is obvious that O'Connor not only has an uncanny talent, but also a deep love and understanding for the personalities of her characters. Outstanding examples writing in dialect can be seen in the story "Wildcat": "'Ef you waitin' on Mose an' Luke,' he said, 'you better git goin. They started over to yawl's place an hour ago'"; "'You be tractin' that cat right in this room, settin' out there'"; or "'I could er gone wit 'em,' he said sullenly. I could er smelled it out. I ain't afraid.' Shut up wit these women like he one, too."

In "A Stroke of Good Fortune," Ruby's deluge of thoughts carries the reader on the crest of her dawning realization that the worst of her fears, getting pregnant, is undoubtedly a reality. This also holds true for her disgust with her lazy brother Rufus and her bewilderment as she struggles with strange physical symptoms. Sometimes the meanings planted in by O'Connor are so subtle, the reader has to reread an earlier passage to clarify the plot progression when it takes an unexpected turn.

## Structure

O'Connor commonly uses flashbacks in the structure of her stories. She begins in the present, introducing one or two main characters, and then shifts to internal dialogue as one character ponders the recent past or muses about his more distant past, and we begin to see a pattern in that character's life. For example, in "The Heart of the Park," Enoch Emery's internal dialogue busily describes the customs he has adapted in his routine of going first to the hotdog stand for a milk shake, then to visit the animals in cages, and finally, he to where he hides under bushes on the hillside, spying on women around a pool. He remembers past occurrences in the same way as we all do, and the reader is lulled into taking for granted that it is written by the author. In "The Train," Hazel remembers his mother's mannerisms when she often rode the train with him when he was a young boy, and with this flashback, the reader discovers more about the personality of Hazel himself. The transition from present to past is never awkward, and often it is only through reflection that the reader realizes he or she has been deftly led into the past, which explains the present situation.

# Quotes

"The geranium they would put in the window reminded him of the Grisby boy at home who had polio and had to be wheeled out every morning and left in the sun to blink." Page 3.

"Old Dudley started back up the stairs. He had to take it more slowly. It tired him going up. Everything tired him, seemed like." Page 11.

"He shuffled to the chair by the window and sank down in it. His throat was going to pop. His throat was going to pop on account of a nigger - a damn nigger that patted him on the back and called him 'old-timer.' Him that had come from a good place. A good place where such as that couldn't be. His eyes felt strange in their sockets. They were swelling in them and in a minute there wouldn't be any room left for them there." Page 13.

"Why, lemme tell you this - ain't nothin' gonna be good again until we get rid of them Mother Hubbards and get us a man can put these niggers in their places. Shuh." Page 16.

"Rayber felt as if he were fighting his way out of a net. They were over him with their red faces grinning. He heard the words drag out - 'Well, the way I see it, men elect ... ' He felt them pull out of his mouth like freight cars, jangling, backing up on each other, grating to a halt, sliding, clinching back, jarring, and then suddenly stopping as roughly as they had begun. Rayber was jarred it was over so soon. For a second - as if they were expecting him to go on - no one said anything." Page 24.

"'When I was a boy, there was a cat once,' Gabriel started. 'It come 'round here huntin' blood. Come in through the winder of a cabin one night an' sprung in bed with a nigger an' tore that nigger's throat open befo' he could holler good.'" Page 26.

"The darkness was hollow around him and through its depth, animal cries wailed and mingled with the beats pounding in his throat." Page 32.

"It was a relief to crumb the table. Crumbing the table gave one time to think, and if Miss Willerton were going to write a story, she had to think about it first. She could usually think best sitting in front of her typewriter, but this would do for the time being. First, she had to think of a subject to write a story about. There were so many subjects to write stories about that Miss Willerton never could think of one." Page 33.

"Miss Willerton sat staring through her typewriter. A S D F G - her eyes wandered over the keys." Page 34.

"Miss Willerton settled back. That was a good beginning. Now she would plan her action. There had to be a woman, of course. Perhaps Lot could kill her? That type of

woman always started trouble. She might even goad him on to kill her because of her wantonness and then he would be pursued by his conscience maybe." Page 36.

"Lord, send me a beggar, he prayed suddenly. Send me one before I get home. He had never thought of praying on his own, but it was a good idea. God had put the turkey there. He'd send him a beggar." Page 51.

"He walked four blocks and then suddenly noticing that it was dark, he began to run. He ran faster and faster, and as he turned up the road to his house, his heart was running as fast as his legs and he was certain that Something Awful was tearing behind him with its arms rigid and its fingers ready to clutch." Page 53.

"Now the train was greyflying past instants of trees and quick spaces of field and a motionless sky that sped darkening away in the opposite direction. Haze leaned his head back on the seat and looked out the window, the yellow light of the train lukewarm on him ... Hazel had turned and stared after [the porter] as he had done the time before. Even his walk was like. All them gulch niggers resembled. They looked like their own kind of nigger - heavy and bald, rock all through." Page 54.

"His mother had always started up a conversation with the other people on the train. She was like an old bird dog just unpenned that raced, sniffing up every rock and stick and sucking in the air around everything she stopped at." Page 55.

" ... from inside he saw it closing, coming closer, closer down and cutting off the light and the room and the trees seen through the window through the crack faster and darker closing down." Page 62.

"The laugh sounded as if it came from something tied up in a croker sack. It was evident he was a blind man. He had his hand on the shoulder of a big-boned child with a black knitted cap pulled down low on her forehead and a fringe of orange hair sticking out from it on either side." Page 64.

"Her mouth was open and her eyes glittered on him like two chips of green bottle glass." Page 66.

"He looked as if he were trying to move backward and forward at the same time." Page 67.

" ... two bright flea eyes." Page 75.

"The crowd was moving fast. It was like a big spread raveling and the separate threads disappeared down the dark streets until there was nothing left of it and he was standing on the porch of the auditorium by himself." Page 75.

"Hazel Weaver sat back down. There was no expression on his face but inside his sour wet eyes, something moved." Page 87.

"She was shouting at Enoch, but Enoch watched Hazel Weaver. It was like something inside Hazel Weaver was winding up, although he didn't move on the outside, not even his hands." Page 88.

"She was too tired to take her arms from around [the sack] or to straighten up and she hung there, collapsed from the hips, her head balanced like a big florid vegetable at the top of the sack." Page 95.

"His face looked as if it had mildew on it." Page 99.

"Then she recognized the feeling again, a little roll. It was as if it were not in her stomach. It was as if it were out somewhere in nothing, out nowhere, resting and waiting, with plenty of time." Page 107.

"He tightened his grip on the chain and jangled it at them to show he was holding it securely. After a minute, a little girl separated herself from the group. She had long wood-shaving curls and a fierce triangular face." Page 110.

"'Lemme just have a piece of theter cake yonder,' he said, pointing to a half of pink and yellow cake on a round glass stand. 'I think I got something to do. I got to be going. Set it up there next to him,' he said, indicating the customer reading the newspaper." Page 112.

"Bailey didn't look up from his reading so she wheeled around then and faced the children's mother, a young woman in slacks, whose face was as broad and innocent as a cabbage and was tied around with a green head-kerchief that had two points on the top like a rabbit's ears." Page 117.

"Bailey remained in the driver's seat with the cat - gray-striped with a broad white face and an orange nose - clinging to his neck like a caterpillar." Page 124.

"'Jesus, you ought not to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got.'

'Lady,' The Misfit said, looking beyond her far into the woods, 'there never was a body that give the undertaker a tip.'" Page 132.

"His left coat sleeve was folded up to show there was only half an arm in it and his gaunt figure listed slightly to the side as if the breeze were pushing him." Page 145.

"She was about the size of a cedar fence post and she had a man's gray hat pulled down low over her head." Page 146.

"A fat yellow moon appeared in the branches of the fig tree as if it were going to roost there with the chickens." Page 148.

"On the porch there were three little boys of different sizes with identical speckled faces and one tall girl who had her hair up in so many aluminum rollers it glared like the roof." Page 160.

"They [walking in a group to the river] looked like the skeleton of an old boat with two pointed ends, sailing slowly on the edge of the highway." Page 162.

"His coat floated to the surface and surrounded him like a strange gay lily pad and he stood grinning in the sun." Page 173.

"She was a large woman with a small pointed face and steady ferreting eyes." Page 175.

"He had on a sweat shirt with a faded destroyer printed on it but his chest was so hollow that the destroyer was broken in the middle and seemed on the point of going under." Page 179.

"The child turned her head quickly, and past the Negroes' ambling figures she could see the column of smoke rising and widening unchecked inside the granite line of trees ... in the distance a few wild high shrieks of joy as if the prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace, in the circle the angel had cleared for them." Page 193.

"[The peacock's tail] flowed out on either side like a floating train and his head on the long blue reed-like neck was drawn back as if his attention were fixed in the distance on something no one else could see." Page 194.

" ... a woman in brown, shaped like a peanut." Page 195.

"She had a little doll's mouth and eyes that were a soft blue when she opened them wide but more like steel or granite when she narrowed them to inspect a milk can." Page 197.

"Her look first grazed the tops of the displaced people's heads and then revolved downwards slowly, the way a buzzard glides and drops in the air until it alights on the carcass." Page 197.

"Neither one of them could say an intelligent thing and all their sentences began, 'You know this boy I know well one time he ... '" Page 236.

"She could hear the distant sound of the calliope and she saw in her head all the tents raised up in a kind of gold sawdust light and the diamond ring of the ferris wheel going around and around up in the air and down again and the screeking merry-go-round going around and around on the ground." Page 242.

"They were grandfather and grandson but they looked enough alike to be brothers and brothers not too far apart in age, for Mr. Head had a youthful expression by daylight, while the boy's look was ancient, as if he knew everything already and would be pleased to forget it." Page 251.

"Her forward expression was steady and driving like the advance of a heavy truck. Her eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it." Page 271.

"During the night she imagined she seduced him ... True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind." Page 284.

"She saw him grab the leg and then she saw it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible on either side of its opposite ends." Page 290.

"The corn was planted up to two feet from the porch step, and as the nephew came out of it, the old man appeared in the door with his shotgun and said that he would shoot any foot that touched his step, and the two stood facing each other while the welfare woman bristled out of the corn like a peahen upset on the nest." Page 293.

"He was a bull-like old man with a short head set directly into his shoulders and silver protruding eyes that looked like two fish straining to get out of a net of red threads." Page 294.

"A line of fog, hump-shaped, was creeping toward [the fence], ready like a white hound dog to crouch under and crawl across the yard." Page 295.

"[Mr. Greenleaf] walked with a high-shouldered creep and he never appeared to come directly forward." Page 313.

" ... she leaned out the kitchen door, a small woman with pale near-sighted eyes and gray hair that rose on top like the crest of some disturbed bird." Page 313.

"The cows were grazing on two pale green pastures across the road and behind them, fencing them in was a black wall of trees with a sharp sawtooth edge that held off the indifferent sky." Page 321.

"She had a head of thick, very find, sand-colored hair - the exact kind he had had when he had had any - that grew straight and was cut just above her eyes and down the sides of her cheeks to the tips of her ears so that it formed a kind of door opening to the central part of her face." Page 339.

"His heart, whenever he knew the child had been beaten, felt as if it were slightly too large for the space that was supposed to hold it. But now he was more determined than ever to see the filling station go up in front of the house ... " Page 344.

"[A little opening] grew as he ran toward it until suddenly the whole lake opened up before him, riding majestically in little corrugated folds toward his feet." Page 356.

"Mrs. Fox had pointed out that he was only twenty-five years old and Mary George had said that the age most people published something at was twenty-one, which made him exactly four years overdue." Page 363.

"[His mother's] way had simply been the air he breathed and when at last he had found other air, he couldn't survive in it." Page 365.

"Descending from the top molding, long icicle shapes had been etched by leaks and, directly over his bed on the ceiling, another leak had made a fierce bird with spread wings." Page 365.

"The back door slammed and the girl's laugh shot up from the kitchen, through the back hall, up the stairwell and into his room, making for him like a bolt of electricity." Page 383.

"The face was like a comedienne's in a musical comedy - a pointed chin, wide apple cheeks and feline empty eyes." Page 384.

"She proceeded always from the tritest of considerations - it was the *nice thing to do* - into the most fool-hardy engagements with the devil, whom, of course, she never recognized." Page 385.

"It was a hideous hat. A purple velvet flap came down on one side of it and stood up on the other; the rest of it was green and looked like a cushion with the stuffing out." Page 405.

"The frustration of having to wait on the bus as well as ride on it began to creep up his neck like a hot hand." Page 409.

"The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow." Page 420.

"[Calhoun's two great-aunts] were box-jawed old ladies who looked like George Washington with his wooden teeth in." Page 421.

"A cluster of low buildings, hardly noticeable, rose like a rich growth of warts on the hill to their right." Page 439.

"They entered a stained linoleum-covered hall, where a peculiar odor met them at once like an invisible official." Page 441.

"Sheppard was a young man whose hair was already white. It stood up like a narrow brush halo over his pink sensitive face." Page 445.

"A knot of flesh appeared below the boy's suddenly distorted mouth. His face became a mass of lumps with slits for eyes." Page 447.

"Instinctively he concentrated on the stars. He wanted to give the boy something to reach for besides his neighbor's goods." Page 451.

"Just then the inner door opened and a nurse with the highest stack of yellow hair Mrs. Turpin had ever seen put her face in the crack and called for the next patient." Page 489.

"'One thang I don't want,' the white-trash woman said, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. 'Hogs. Nasty stinking things, a-gruntin and a-rootin all over the place.'" Page 493.

"The girl looked as if she would like to hurl them all through the plate glass window." Page 498.

"The skin on her face was thin and drawn as tight as the skin on an onion and her eyes were gray and sharp like the points of two ice picks." Page 510.

"He visualized having a tattoo put there that Sarah Ruth would not be able to resist - a religious subject." Page 519.

"The window looked out on a brick wall and down into an alley full of New York air, the kind fit for cats and garbage." Page 531.

"She had gray hair that hung to her shoulders and a round face, beginning to wear." Page 533.

"If that nigger had owned the whole world except for one runty rutted peafield and he acquired it, he would walk across it that way, beating the weeds aside, his thick neck swelled, his stomach a throne for his gold watch and chain." Page 535.

# Adaptations

Several of O'Connor's stories have been made into short films. "A Circle in the Fire" from her first collection, was made into a film by Victor Nunez of Tallahasee, Florida in 1976. "The Comforts of Home" was made into a film by Leonard Lipson for Sholip Productions and directed by Jerome Shore, in 1974. "Good Country People" was made into a film by Jeff Jackson of Agoura, California, probably in the 1970s. Each of these is available at the Georgia College Library in Milledgeville, Georgia 31061.

"The Life You Save May be Your Own" was presented by the Schlitz Playhouse in February of 1956. Flannery O'Connor reportedly disliked the version they created. "The Displaced Person," starring Irene Worth as Mrs. Mclntyre and John Houseman as the Catholic priest, Father Flynn, was presented by the PBS American Playhouse in 1977, to resounding praise. The World of Ftannery O'Connor was created by WDCN-TV in Nashville in 1974, with Jim Spitler as producer and director. It was filmed in Milledgeville, and it relates scenes to stories and to episodes in O'Connor's life. It is available free to any educational television station from WDCN-TV.

# Topics for Discussion

In how many stories in this collection does the author use a widow and an unmarried son as her main characters? What do they represent?

What do the detailed descriptions of skies, sunsets, top lines of trees, and clouds indicate about the author? How many sunsets are depicted with exceptional clarity?

How many stories have similarly neglected small children that die at the end? What does this represent?

How does the author write Negro and southern dialect with such accuracy? Can you write the sound of a dialect with which you are familiar?

Discuss your idea of Flannery O'Connor's beliefs about racism.

Do you think Flannery O'Connor paints a realistic picture of life in a small town and on a farm? What about small-town southern people?

How does Flannery O'Connor use the physically grotesque to illustrate the beautiful? Discuss the meaning she might have implied with the use of the one-armed man, the club-footed delinquent, the retarded young woman, and the neglected boy who seeks heaven in the river.

Discuss the word picture Flannery O'Connor paints of the racism so prevalent in her era, and whether or not you think her portrayal is a truthful one.

# Literary Precedents

Since O'Connor read so widely, one can find without real effort evidence that she was influenced by Henry James, James Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, and any of the long list of modern short story writers. She owned many collections by a number of fiction writers, in addition to six titles by William Faulkner, nine titles by Joseph Conrad, and fifteen by the French Catholic author, Francois Mauriac. She owned and read works by a number of different contemporary theologians and philosophers as well as literary critics.

Everything that enlarged her thought was grist for her mill, along with any number of examples from popular culture that created the raw material of the society on which she could work, transmuting it into a testimony to Christ or better, to His absence from the scene.

# Copyright Information

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