

# Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964)



American writer Flannery O'Connor was known for her focus on spiritual deformity and redemption. Her first novel, *Wise Blood*, was published in 1952.



## O'Connor, (Mary) Flannery

- American writer, whose novels and short stories focusing on humanity's spiritual deformity and flight from redemption earned her a unique place in 20th-century American fiction.
- Born in Savannah, Georgia, O'Connor was educated at the Georgia State College for Women and the State University of Iowa (now called the University of Iowa). Most of her life was spent in Milledgeville, Georgia, where she raised peacocks and wrote.

## Works

- O'Connor's work, essentially two novels and two volumes of short stories, has been described as an unlikely mixture of southern Gothic, prophecy, and evangelistic Roman Catholicism.
- The novels are *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960); the short-story collections are *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955) and *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (published posthumously, 1965).

# Works

- O'Connor is frequently compared to the American novelist William Faulkner for her portrayal of southern character and milieu and to the Austrian writer Franz Kafka for her preoccupation with the grotesque.
- A basic theme of her work is the individual's vain attempt to escape the grace of God, and her work is profoundly and pervasively religious. She died of lupus, a disease that crippled her for the last ten years of her life.

# Major Works

- Sally Fitzgerald selected and annotated the texts in O'Connor's *Selected Works*. Library of America, 1988. Contains the fiction, some occasional prose, and more than 250 letters written between 1948 and 1964.  
*Wise Blood* ( 1952 ). Novel
- *A Good Man is Hard to Find* ( 1955 ). [Title Story On-line](#)
- *The Violent Bear It Away* ( 1960 ). Novel.
- *Everything That Rises Must Converge* ( 1965 ). Novel.
- *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*. Edited by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1969.
- *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor*. With an introduction by Robert Giroux. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1972.
- *The Habit of Being*. Edited by Sally Fitzgerald. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1979 .

# Good Country People

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[http://www.geocities.com/su\\_englit/oconnor\\_country.html](http://www.geocities.com/su_englit/oconnor_country.html)
- In rural Georgia, Mrs. Hopewell runs her family farm with the help of tenants Mr. and Mrs. Freeman. Mrs. Hopewell's daughter, Joy, who got her leg shot off in an accident when she was a child, now lives at home with her mother. Thirty three year old Joy has earned a PhD in philosophy, but she does not seem to have much common sense. In an act of rebellion, she has changed her name to Hulga, and she lives in a state of annoyed anger at her mother and Mrs. Freeman.

# Good Country People

- A Bible salesman comes to the door, claiming his name is Manly Pointer (!), and manages to get invited to dinner. He and Hulga make a date to have a picnic together the next day. That night Hulga imagines with her superior mind and education that she's in control and that she will seduce him.
- However, the next day by the time they have climbed into a barn loft, Manly manages to persuade her to take off her glasses and then her wooden leg which he packs in a suitcase, between a "Bible" which is really a box with liquor and pornographic cards in it. As Manly leaves Hulga without her false leg, he tells her that he collects prostheses from the disabled. She is shocked to realize that he is not "good country people."

# Commentary

- In this grotesque story, O'Connor develops several themes. We see that Hulga has never really grown up. She's acting like a rebellious teenager, stomping around the house, slamming doors, accusing her mother of being stupid, wearing a grungy old skirt and a sweatshirt with a cowboy on it. We see also her pride in her own intellect and in her mastery of existentialism, which comes crashing down when she is so gullible and naive as to be easily manipulated by the young "Bible salesman."



# Commentary

- Hulga may actually be on some kind of spiritual search, in spite of her denial that God exists. She is fooled by Manly, who makes her think he is a simple religious country bumpkin way beneath her. But Manly is much more worldly wise than Hulga; he seduces her, instead of the other way around. And she is left sitting alone in a hay loft without her glasses (she was not seeing very clearly anyway) and without her wooden leg. Part of the brilliant writing in this story shows how people tend to use clichés in ways that make it easy for them to avoid thinking or seeing clearly.

## Info

- **Source** The Complete Stories
- **Publisher** Farrar, Straus & Giroux (New York)
- **Edition** 1971
- **Miscellaneous** First published in A Good Man is Hard to Find (1955).
- *The Complete Stories* won the National Book Award.

## Another Commentary from

<http://www.storybites.com/oconnorcountry.htm>

- In "Good Country People", Flannery O'Connor introduces us to Joy Hopewell, whose leg was blasted off in a childhood accident. Joy sees herself as being completely ugly, and now, as an adult, she has had her name legally changed to Hulga because it sounds ugly too. Having neither joy nor hope, she specializes in moving around noisily on her wooden leg because it sounds ugly; she wears ugly clothes, makes ugly faces and ugly, rude remarks, and in general tries to be as ugly as possible.

## Another Commentary from

<http://www.storybites.com/oconnorcountry.htm>

- The greatest achievement in Hulga's life has been the acquisition of a Ph.D. in philosophy, and her wide readings in secular philosophy confirm her intrinsic convictions, which fall somewhere between atheism, existentialism, and nihilism. "I don't have illusions," she says at one point. "I'm one of those people who see through to nothing."

## Another Commentary from

<http://www.storybites.com/oconnorcountry.htm>

- It is clear that O'Connor sees Hulga's belief system, not her missing leg, as her greatest handicap. Hulga is shut off from a proper communion with God, not because she is knowingly evil, but because she is morally smug; she thinks she has within herself everything she needs to be a functionally complete person. Essentially this boils down to an argument between Protestantism and Catholicism -- Protestantism holding that each person ultimately determines his own belief, and that salvation comes wholly from a personal relationship with God, and Catholicism maintaining that salvation comes through a right relationship to God through the traditions and sacraments of His Church.

## Another Commentary from

<http://www.storybites.com/oconnorcountry.htm>

- Throughout the story it is clear that Hulga wants to have total control over her life and belief system, and thinks she's doing very well with it, thank you very much. Manley, a traveling Bible salesman, hits on the "trigger" of Hulga's vulnerability when he asks for the leg because he is really asking her to submit herself to him body and soul. She does, which causes her to become "entirely dependent on him". His theft of the leg and betrayal of her leaves her open to the action of God's real grace in her life, thus making Manley an agent of grace himself. O'Connor leaves Hulga in the barn, but we know it will be a considerably different Hulga who emerges.

## Another Commentary from

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- Thus for O'Connor the most important thing is to shock her smug characters out of their complacency and bring them sharply into an awareness of their inadequacy in the eyes of God. Frequently this happens in a way that seems gratuitously violent, or, as in the case of "Good Country People," emotionally cruel, but to O'Connor that did not matter. Anything that knocked sense into unbelievers' heads was, to Flannery O'Connor, completely justifiable.
- Do you want to read "Good Country People?" Click here: [http://www.geocities.com/su\\_englit/oconnor\\_country.html](http://www.geocities.com/su_englit/oconnor_country.html)

