



The Complete Stories

Flannery O'Connor

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Winner of the National Book Award

The publication of this extraordinary volume firmly established Flannery O'Connor's monumental contribution to American fiction. There are thirty-one stories here in all, including twelve that do not appear in the only two story collections O'Connor put together in her short lifetime—*Everything That Rises Must Converge* and *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*.

O'Connor published her first story, "The Geranium," in 1946, while she was working on her master's degree at the University of Iowa. Arranged chronologically, this collection shows that her last story, "Judgement Day"—sent to her publisher shortly before her death—is a brilliantly rewritten and transfigured version of "The Geranium." Taken together, these stories reveal a lively, penetrating talent that has given us some of the most powerful and disturbing fiction of the twentieth century. Also included is an introduction by O'Connor's longtime editor and friend, Robert Giroux.

The Complete Stories Details

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From Reader Review The Complete Stories for online ebook

Teresa says

Since I won't be reading this collection straight through, I figured I'd rate the first 15 stories that I have read. Except for one here or there in anthologies, this is my first time reading her short stories and I can't believe it took me this long to get to her. They are amazingly good.

April 29, 2009

*

April 3, 2016

Now I can't believe it took me seven years to get back to this volume, except for recognizing that O'Connor's unflinching worldview isn't always a lure and, of course, the main excuse of other books clamoring for attention. I find it appropriate, even though it was unintentional, that both times I read it around Easter.

This time I decided to read one per night of the last 16 stories until I finished. That worked well, giving me time to digest each, but not too much time in between that I didn't recognize similar tropes -- for example, colorful tree lines with colorless skies above them. It's impossible to miss, no matter how much time passes, the recurring themes -- Pride as the ultimate Destroyer; Saving Grace arriving from frightening, unexpected places.

Whether you agree or disagree with O'Connor's worldview, there's no denying the power of her writing. Her craft is impeccable. Her vision is inexorable.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

One of my 2014 reading goals was to read Flannery O'Connor. It got to be Christmas 2014 and I hadn't touched her, so I have binge read all of her stories in just a few days.

It might not be the best way to do it, but some of the repeated events and themes - death, guilt, resistance to chance, issues with religion - start to become comical when repeated at such rapid frequency.

And laughter is appropriate. Flannery O'Connor is not afraid of humor, evidenced by one of the only surviving recordings of her, reading *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. It is a rare treat to hear her very southern drawl too.

The complete stories compiles her two published anthologies - *A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories* and *Everything That Rises Must Converge: Stories*. The first six are from her MFA (equivalent) thesis, unpublished as a set, at Iowa. The very first story, *The Geranium*, was revamped by O'Connor and sent to her publisher as *Judgement Day*, a few days before her death (which ends with the line: "Now she rests well at night and her good looks have mostly returned.") I first read the late stories, then the earliest, and finished with those in the *Good Story* volume.

A few memorable moments from some of my favorite stories:

"'A good man is hard to find,' Red Sammy said. 'Everything is getting terrible.'" - from *A Good Man Is Hard*

to Find

"All day Joy sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks but she didn't like dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity." - from *Good Country People*

"How utterly utterly." and "People just don't die like they used to." - from *The Enduring Chill*

"The only virtue of my generation," [Walter] said, "is that it ain't ashamed to tell the truth about itself." - from *Why Do the Heathen Rage?*

This is just a small thing but one that had me giggling throughout the stories. O'Connor can swear in very creative ways!

"I don't take no crap off no wool-hat red-neck son-of-a-bitch peckerwood old bastard like you." - from *Judgement Day*

That and other parts are great fun to read out loud, as Flannery O'Connor knows the characters she is writing about and how they talk. She has a great capture of the south in her specific era, for better or worse. I have never seen so many instances of the N- word in one place, so fair warning.

•Karen• says

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

I can't imagine what it would have been like to live inside Mary Flannery O'Connor's head, obviously. But I am damned sure it can't have been agreeable. Her world is peopled with monsters. Damaged, limbs severed. Afflicted. Not whole. Children like evil spirits that descend on the sanctimonious. Parents that neglect, or beat their children. Bigots. The cruel and the feckless and the randomly murderous. Their names are monstrous too. Mr Shiftlet. A girl whose given name was Joy, but who changes it to the ugliest name in any language, Hulga. Unappealing children like poor Norton Sheppard: "He had very large round ears that leaned away from his head and seemed to pull his eyes slightly too far apart."

It's not only the humans who are aberrant, diabolical, macabre. A bull that gores Mrs Greenleaf. Stairs that turn into cliff faces, unassailable in this life or the next. A digger that seems to be eating the earth and spitting it out. Mythical beasts. Trees that leap out at you. Visions. The damned and the saved. "In the woods around her the invisible cricket choruses had struck up, but what she heard were the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah."

My strongest impression is a kind of torpor. The people are ossified, so rigidly pressed into the forms moulded by their upbringing that any change or movement is fatal to them. Those transplanted to an alien environment barely survive. A woman who is confronted with the fact that her condescending penny handed to a black child is no longer accepted does not survive the shock. The younger generation are often ineffective, weak, artistic, but unproductive, incapable, noncommittal. Walter in *Why Do The Heathen Rage?:*

"Her son. Her only son. His eyes and his skull and his smile belonged to the family face but underneath them was a different kind of man from any she had ever known. There was no innocence in him, no rectitude, no conviction either of sin or election. The man she saw courted good and evil impartially and saw so many sides of every question that he could not move, he could not work, he could not even make niggers work.

Any evil could enter that vacuum. God knows, she thought and caught her breath, God knows what he might do!

He had not done anything. He was twenty-eight now, and so far as she could see, nothing occupied him but trivia."

This betrays a view of the world that I find hard to swallow: flexibility, a plurality of attitude as an encumbrance that renders you immovable. Those who have not changed a thing, those who live and work in the culture they have always known, they are the ones who can move, who have some get.

Religion in Flannery O'Connor's world is not a comfort that solaces the distressed, but rather a challenge to the weak, a force that dismays, a rage that cannot be quiet. The battle trumpet blares from heaven and see how our General marches fully armed. Not gentle Jesus, meek and mild.

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

By the way, please note: 5 stars!! It is a cabinet of curiosities, and a wonderful one at that.

Aubrey says

*"Listen here," he hissed, "I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't **right!**"*

A Stroke of Good Fortune. The Life You Save May Be Your Own. The River. The Displaced Person. A View of the Woods. The Lame Shall Enter First. Two of these are contained within Everything That Rises Must Converge. A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories has the other four. Neither one would have done as much good in my estimation as the works in toto. Key word *my*.

Flannery O'Connor was an author whose name seeped into my bones until there was nothing left but to read her. One class assigned me the solo 'A Good Man is Hard to Find' and left me baffled. A television show favored for its artistic atrocity and psychological vivisection featured the former and more as a psychology professor, turned FBI consultant, read to a comatose girl, potential serial killer. Godwin's Law turned O'Connor's Law whenever short stories were the question, a probability instantaneously one if favorites were asked for. The final blow was the every so often descriptor of "Catholic zealot", a religion whose childhood indoctrination may have fed my enthusiasm for theology but did nothing faith-wise.

"You won't be the same again," the preacher said. "You'll count."

I acquired this book with the personal penchant of Go Big or Go Home in mind, eyed it back whenever I felt it eyeing me, and began. Now at the end, older and wiser and a few Wiki articles smarter, I say that if O'Connor's character are grotesque, I know an awful lot of grotesque people. I say that the archaic definition of awe of dread, terror, is not nearly as archaic as some would believe and far more hope. I say that if I wanted to understand O'Connor, I would have to understand the South, and to do that I would have to understand Catholicism, and to do that I would have to devote my life to literature in a much more concentrated manner than I am want to seriously consider.

"The world was made for the dead. Think of all the dead there are."

Fortunately for O'Connor, morality is an uncomfortable nitpick for and will be so for the rest of days. Unfortunately for O'Connor, I read her long after my phase of existential grasping had faded to musing embers and the chance of conversion was ripe for the rotting. Fortunately, I am all too well acquainted with the tightwire between "I am a *good* person," and "I see me when I'm sleeping, . I know when I'm awake," to the point of nauseated pain, enough to see what she seeks to show in other things beyond the scope of religion and belief. Unfortunately, I am neither in love enough with her particular disturbance to seek her out before the very far future has come my way, nor am I certain that my positive judgment of her work hinges but a little on the whiteness of my skin. Conflict, conflict. Whether good or ill for her, she will long be kept as a subject of contemplation.

She was sorry that the poor man had been chased out of Poland and run across Europe and had had to take up in a tenant shack in a strange country, but she had not been responsible for any of it...[he] had probably not had to struggle enough.

There's something ugly but true in all of her works, a vein that would do well to acquire a name deeper than the common 'hypocrisy' when realization of such often demands the death of the realizer, if not more. All for the reader's benefit, of course, the implication of 'woe to those who refuse to heed' thrown in free with sardonic glee. Not horror, but Old Testament. Not *raison d'être*, but your godforsaken soul.

"Oh, I see," the stranger said. "It ain't the Day of Judgment for him you're worried about, it's the Day of Judgment for you."

I may not be Catholic, but that is not an "anything but".

"...she might experience a painful realization and this would be the only thing of value he had to leave her.

Erik F. says

An unforgettable collection of hard-hitting, caustically humorous and unrelentingly cynical stories from perhaps the strongest female voice in Southern U.S. fiction. O'Connor turns her merciless eye on religious hypocrisy, class consciousness, racism, gender roles, familial relationships, and other fertile topics, plowing them for the ugly truths they reveal about the general nature of humankind. Spending time with her characters (all of whom are depressive, delusional, misanthropic, criminal, physically handicapped, or a combination of these) is not exactly a pleasant experience, and the Schadenfreude meter can sometimes run high, but the insight brought to their lives and behaviors is so piercing, the attention to detail so sharp, and the emotional impact so forceful that you are left without any doubt of O'Connor's mastery of the form.* The major characters experience moments of clarity, even full-blown revelations, that arrive too late to reverse whatever damage has been caused, but may prevent future failings in their lives† (and maybe even in ours). Though some form of redemption (or salvation, or "divine grace") always seems to linger just out of arm's reach, bleak ironies and fatalistic notions of poetic justice still reign in these deceptively simple, unsparingly human and – more often than not – profoundly unsettling pieces. Read them!

Personal favorites: "Greenleaf," "Good Country People," "Parker's Back," "The Enduring Chill," "The Lame Shall Enter First," "The River," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "A Circle in the Fire," "The Partridge Festival"

* This bit of praise applies to about 80% of the stories; inevitably, a few aren't quite as successful or

memorable as the others.

† if they survive the story, of course.

Duane says

This is one of O'Connor's first short stories, originally published in 1948, and used again in her acclaimed collection "The Complete Stories", published in 1971.

Hadrian says

I've written and thrown out three drafts on why Flannery O'Connor is Great. I won't bother with it again, not for a while.

She covers the Grotesque and Sin of Southern life, for some thirty-odd stories. Sin and Grace in a palatable and altering way. Excellent characterization, using the smallest of details and conversations to broaden personality.

Like all good short story collections, not to be consumed in one sitting.

Vit Babenco says

Strange may it seem but I've never read anything about **Flannery O'Connor** and I didn't know what I should expect so the book was like a lightning strike.

"She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of whitetrash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right."

The world is split in two parts...

There are those who try to use the others and there are those who are just being used...

"A body and a spirit," he repeated. "The body, lady, is like a house: it don't go anywhere; but the spirit, lady, is like a automobile: always on the move, always..."

The majority is swarming and conforming – they are the people of the crowd, the cattle of the herd.

Meanness is their weapon and ignorance is their creed.

"'Why listen, lady,' he said with a grin of delight, 'the monks of old slept in their coffins!'

'They wasn't as advanced as we are,' the old woman said."

The minority consists of dreamers – they want to change the world, they want to fight the system, they pretend that meanness is elsewhere. But they are clueless, they cut a ludicrous figure and whatever they do they fail.

"He didn't like anything. He drove twenty miles every day to the university where he taught and twenty miles back every night, but he said he hated the twenty-mile drive and he hated the second-rate university and he hated the morons who attended it. He hated the country and he hated the life he lived; he hated living

with his mother and his idiot brother and he hated hearing about the damn dairy and the damn help and the damn broken machinery. But in spite of all he said, he never made any move to leave.”
Majority is never right but majority ever wins.

Bam says

Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964) earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1947 from the University of Iowa, having attended the well-known writer's workshop at that institution. The first six stories in this volume were submitted as her thesis for her degree under the title 'The Geranium: A Collection of Short Stories.' There are thirty-one stories included here, twelve of which were appearing for the first time in book form, and this collection was published posthumously, winning the National Book Award for Fiction in 1972.

O'Connor writes in the Southern Gothic style with great insight into human frailties and prejudices. Quite often the main character in a story is an elderly farm woman trying to get the help she needs to run the farm. O'Connor skewers southern society with its perception of class hierarchy and the naive belief in 'good country people.'

Frequently the main character is a lost soul looking for meaning in life, perhaps seeking God in all the wrong places--her religious faith appears to have been quite important to O'Connor.

These stories are rich and imaginative, occasionally shocking with unexpected violence or an unique twist of fate. Excellent reading!

#2016-aty-reading-challenge-week-33: the 16th book on my tbr.

Richard says

The stories in this collection were written by an unassuming yet serious Catholic woman from Georgia who, after devoting her short life to writing, died of lupus in 1964. Besides the stories, she had written two novels and started a third; one can only speculate what other masterpieces she would have written had she lived longer.

The stories are hard-bitten, bizarre and haunting. Two that I read years ago in college have stuck with me and are just as jarring today as they were then. O'Connor's theme is the warpedness that resides deep in the human heart. Her protagonists are usually people who think quite highly of themselves. They are often nice people who are nice to everyone (within reasonable limits, of course) and think that the world would be a nicer place to live if only everyone were as nice as they are (“Good Country People”, “Everything that Rises Must Converge”). There are the people who dream nostalgically of a segregated society where inferiors knew their rank, respected their betters and did not try to move outside of their foreordained place in the pecking order (“The Geranium”, “Judgment Day”). Then there are the educated or artistic types who feel confined or bored by the life they lead, can't wait to escape, and sneer at all the inferior mortals around them (“Good Country People”, “The Enduring Chill”). And of course, there are those horrifying individuals who are evil, have surrendered themselves to it, and commit atrocities just because they can (“A Good Man is Hard to Find”, “The Lame Shall Enter First”).

O'Connor's wrath and sarcasm are reserved most of all for those people who are so immured in themselves that they are unaware of their own blindness. Often there is a cataclysmic moment of epiphany when they are

confronted at last with their own shortcomings.

O'Connor lets these people show us their true colours either by enabling us to eavesdrop on their thoughts or by allowing us to listen to their conversations; she is a master of psychology and of dialogue. In her descriptions of the background scenery, nature often serves to highlight the desire of certain characters to escape their circumstances or the feeling of being trapped in an environment from which they cannot disentangle themselves without great effort.

These stories are dark, bitter, angry and often tragic. But they are a brilliant barometer of the human heart and the depravity of which it is capable when left untouched by divine grace.

Joe Valdez says

In February 1948, Flannery O'Connor, a graduate of the MFA program at the University of Iowa, was twenty-three years old and eager to please the publishing industry with the beginning chapters of a novel-in-progress titled *Wise Blood*. A letter O'Connor received from one such publisher was not receptive. He commended her for being a straight-shooter and added that she was gifted, but with a loneliness in her work, as if she were writing simply out of her own experience.

O'Connor responded to a friend. "Please tell me what is behind this Sears Roebuck Straight Shooter approach. I presume ... either that [the publisher] will not take the novel as it will be left to my fiendish care (it will essentially be as it is) , or that [the publisher] would like to rescue it at this point and train it into a conventional novel ... The letter is addressed to a slightly dim-witted Campfire Girl, and I cannot look forward with composure to a lifetime of others like them."

Unconventional in dazzling ways, I felt that O'Connor struggled a bit to sustain *Wise Blood* around one character. Her morbid wit, fascination with God's lonely man and fearless search for truth in a society coming apart with change are perfectly suited for the short story format. *The Complete Stories*, published posthumously in 1971, contains thirty-one tales, each more powerful and haunting than the last. As a sum of its parts, it's one of my favorite books.

Four of the stories -- *The Train*, *The Peeler*, *The Heart of the Park* and *Enoch and the Gorilla* -- were revised by O'Connor and became chapters of *Wise Blood*. They're prelude to at least six stories that grabbed me and threw me across the room:

A Good Man Is Hard To Find in which a grandmother's insistence on visiting a plantation from her youth, while on a road trip with her son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren puts them on a collision course with an escaped fugitive dubbed The Misfit.

A Circle in the Fire in which a nervous farm widow is visited by a teenaged boy who once lived on her land and returns with two friends from the city. The dangerous boys love the country so much that they refuse to leave without taking some of it with them.

The Displaced Person in which a Polish refugee and his family are given the chance to start a new life in America working on a farm, but quietly plague the good country people with their work ethic, disquiet and alien ways.

Greenleaf in which a proud farm widow, with two grown sons averse to manual labor, is bedeviled by the appearance of a stray bull on her property, a beast she determines belongs to the sons of her belligerent farm

hand, Mr. Greenleaf.

Everything That Rises Must Converge in which a progressive minded man disgusted by bigoted ways of his mother agrees to accompany her on an errand, using a desegregated night bus in an attempt to prove a point to the old bat. The lesson ends up becoming his.

The Lame Shall Enter First in which a widowed recreational director who's given up hope his son will contribute anything positive to society offers room and board and a second chance to a juvenile delinquent with a 140 IQ and club foot, so full of potential the man can't resist saving him.

O'Connor's characters have holes they're struggling to fill -- with education, progressive ideals, charity, Jesus Christ -- but they end up digging themselves even deeper holes. These are haunted people and several of these tales were eerie enough to keep me awake at night. O'Connor doesn't go for ghosts or goblins, but her characters are visited by their share of demons.

The tension in O'Connor's storytelling is softened by her dark wit and powerful observation. Her character descriptions often set the table in a household Charles Addams would feel at home in:

"The doctors had told Mrs. Hopewell that with the best of care, Joy might see forty-five. She had a weak heart. Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about. And Mrs. Hopewell could very well picture her there, looking like a scarecrow and lecturing to more of the same. Here she went about all day in a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it. She thought this was funny; Mrs. Hopewell thought it was idiotic and simply showed that she was still a child. She was brilliant but she didn't have a grain of sense. It seemed to Mrs. Hopewell that every year she grew less like other people and more like herself--bloated, rude and squint-eyed."

A common element in O'Connor's fiction is the progressive grown child -- the "Meathead" whom Archie Bunker was heckling on *All In the Family* the year this collection was published -- attempting to separate himself or herself from the hypocrisy of the mother, loving, but clueless as to what she represents to her children. Part of the genius of these stories, apart from how taut they are with tension, is how O'Connor refuses to pass judgment on either side of the culture war. Liberals can believe O'Connor is attacking the good ole boy network, while the Archie Bunkers could actually view these stories as a rebuke of the Meatheads, coming from one of their own, a writer reared in Savannah, GA. I think the truth is a lot more complicated than either position and is explored beautifully in this book.

Cosimo says

La vita che salvi

Non si può fuggire alla capacità dei racconti della O'Connor di cambiarti in profondità nel corso di pochi minuti, dentro a quel labirinto eterno e ineffabile di significati implacabili e di fatti primordiali, affilati come lame di pugnali, letali come il veleno di un serpente. La O'Connor ci sospinge al di là del buio, nell'oscurità che non possiamo conoscere; come autrice si trasforma in un destino che ci guida, attraverso le sfide del vivere, le domande senza risposta, la lotta per affermare di esistere, la violenza che ha origine dalla colpa. Preparatevi a sentirvi al contempo brav'uomo e assassino, storpio e essere superiore pieno di grazia, prete e confessore, mendicante e cinico giudice. Con i suoi archetipi informali, nei luoghi capitali e esemplari dove ambienta le storie, Flannery O'Connor ci comunica che esiste un'attrazione verso il male, verso la disgrazia e

il delitto, così come sono possibili la fede, il perdono, la trascendenza; qualcosa di superiore che, forse umano forse no, muove le gesta dei personaggi e la penna della scrittrice. Magnetismo: la caratteristica che connota maggiormente queste pagine, questi racconti straordinari costruiti sulla scoperta, lo stupore, il turbamento e la follia. I racconti sono un'investigazione tragica e sublime di alcuni interrogativi: cosa scorre nel nostro corpo, di cosa sono fatte le nostre passioni, cosa significa credere che ciascun essere umano è unico. Alla fine eccovi dentro al cuore profondo del mistero, al segreto della sapienza abissale e biblica: la trasfigurazione di una realtà narrata in mitologia evocata e predestinata, tramite parole di spietata potenza.

booklady says

In The Geranium, Old Dudley is the proverbial fish-out-of-water, overwhelmed by his environment, regretting his choice to trade familiar small town for a chance to see the Big Apple. To escape the constant onslaught on his senses, he's fixated on the daily regimen of a neighbor's geranium, the closest thing to nature, i.e., 'back home' he's found. But in a twist comparable to the best of O'Henry, Dudley's prejudice is revealed by unwelcome kindness from an 'enemy' and animosity comes to him from an equally improbable source. A

What is the saying? 'A fool convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.' The Barber is the early 20th Century version of why you shouldn't bother entering into arguments on the Internet. Back then everything you ever needed or wanted to know could be learned at the Barber Shop. A frustrating but wise read. B+

In The Crop, 44 year old Miss Willerton, spinster story-writer escapes the humdrum reality of her life—as many unhappy women do—by fantasizing herself *femme fatale*, leading lady, of her own imaginary romances. In this case we're given a glimpse of her co-stars. Charming. A-

Who is The Turkey? Is it Ruller or what Ruller finds? On the cusp of emerging manhood, Ruller experiments with rebelling against his parent's (especially his mother's) rules concerning the name of the LORD and how to address the Almighty. What difference does it make if there is no one else to hear or see? A tale of two shot courage; one shot you see and one you don't. A+

In The Train, 19 year old Hazel Wickers (ne: Motes/Weaver) journeys by train to Taulkinham. We are taken along with him wandering insecure and confused—with flashes of extreme certainty—finding what? We watch the world go by as if we were the ones on a train. A runaway ride of confusing thoughts. This is the first of the four stories which O'Connor later revised into her novel *Wise Blood*. B

In The Peeler, Hazel Motes is walking the streets of Taulkinham, where he meets Enoch Emery, Asa Shrike, who is blind and a girl, Sabbath, traveling with him. Although physically blind, Asa sees more than anyone else, discerns the truth and speaks to more effect than the other three main characters. "*You can't run from Jesus. Jesus is a fact. If who you are a-looking for is Jesus, the sound of it will be in your voice.*" A

The Heart of the Park continues *The Peeler* and is the third in the series involving (at least some of) the same characters. Enoch Emery had tried to latch on to Hazel (Weaver this time) in the last story and when Hazel goes looking for him hoping to find out where the blind man lives—so he can hear more about Jesus—Enoch capitalizes on the opportunity to 'share with someone special'. The two young men are abominable to each other, yet in their near total ignorance, they are as much pitiable as they are abhorrent. A-

Enoch and the Gorilla is the perfect conclusion to the stories about the misfit Enoch who is so out of step in the world he doesn't even know how much he is despised by everyone. It seems like every once in a while

Enoch ought to accidentally meet a nice person or *someone* who likes him. They can't be all beastly... or can they? B+

In A Stroke of Good Fortune Ruby is disgusted with her brother Rufus because after two years military service he hasn't learned to be 'somebody from somewhere'. She's the only one from her family to have escaped their now defunct town of Pitman by marrying Bill Hill from Florida who sells Miracle Products. And yet after all that climbing, why can't she even go up her own stairs? B+

A Good Man is Hard to Find is probably the most perfect short story ever written and certainly O'Connor's best, and best known. Dysfunctional family on a road trip ends up stranded in the middle of nowhere; they encounter their worst nightmare. The goodness in the men *and* the women—in all of us—is hard to find. Superb dialogue at the end between The Misfit and the Grandmother. A++

In A Late Encounter with the Enemy, 62 year old Sally Poker Sash's nightly prayer is that her 104 year old grandfather, 'General' Sash will live long enough to see her graduate from college, never mind that he doesn't know what is what anymore. A battle on many fronts, this must be read up 'til the last sentence. Another one where O'Connor gives us an inside view. A-

One armed Mr. Shiftlet appears one day—full of compliments and trivia at Lucynell Crater's place. The two share much banter but little real conversation and no trust. In The Life You Save May Be Your Own, the two main characters are so focused on protecting their own interests they don't see how they are being scammed and taken in by each other. B+

In The River, Childhood is personified as little Harry/Bevel. He is the plaything of thoughtless and foolish adults who use him for their own selfish ends. In this 'day in the life' of Harry he learns that he 'counts' – although the precise meaning of this is never explained and he doesn't know what to do with the information. A heart-wrenching exposé. A+

Mrs. Cope in A Circle in the Fire had no sympathy for anyone else's troubles. There was always plenty to be thankful for, no matter what bad happens because "it doesn't all come at once" and of course it didn't happen to her. But that philosophy and her worst fear get put to the test when three juvenile delinquents show up at her farm one day and refuse to leave. B

The Displaced Person should be the displaced persons and yet it also works in the singular. It is about an entire family of Polish immigrants exiled from their homeland due to '*what was happening every day in Europe where they had not advanced as in this country.*' The Guizacs arrival at Mrs. McIntyre's farm upsets the delicate balance and pacing of work. Mr. Guizac's enthusiasm and work ethic aren't appreciated by all. How place and pace are finally found and resolved is the stuff of this, one of the longest and best, of O'Connor's short stories. Superb! A+

A Temple of the Holy Ghost refers to the definition of the person given in 1 Corinthians 6:19: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" The unnamed child in O'Connor's story relishes this understanding of herself and experiences an opportunity to apply it to one of the least in the Kingdom. A

The Artificial Nigger is an unfortunate title. How so? Well for starters it refers to a plaster lawn statue the characters happened upon in a wealthy neighborhood. So O'Connor is not using the pejorative 'N' word in any way critical of African Americans. Rather she is ridiculing the snobbish insensitive pride of wealthy whites who have too much money and no compassion or taste. So much for the title. The story itself concerns a grandfather and grandson, coming to the big city, setting an old misconception straight—well actually more than one—and in the process re-encountering the oldest sin in the world, that of our first parents. Powerful tale of forgiveness and redemption. A+

In Good Country People Joy doesn't want to be either: "Joy" or "Good Country People". Since she blames her mother for an accident which has left her with a handicap, she uses this as justification to adopt a sour attitude to life. Even more, she had her name legally changed to Hulga because it was the ugliest name she could think of. One day in a moment of poetic justice, Joy/Hulga gets a little of her own unpleasantness. B+

You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead means—of course—that you can. There is economic poverty and spiritual poverty, and not what Jesus meant when He was talking about being poor in spirit. Rather, being poor **of** spirit... Fourteen year old Francis Tarwater had one task to perform for his uncle who raised him and wanted to leave everything to him. If Francis couldn't even do that one simple assignment, who was actually the poorer man? A-

O'Connor likes to explore the themes of blind envy and a taut battle of the wills. She does this in a number of her stories including, The Life You Save May Be Your Own, A View of the Woods, and Good Country People, but she is at her best here in Greenleaf. The deluded Mrs. May sees herself as the victim of her own employee, Mr. Greenleaf, his family, her own sons, and even a bull which keeps wandering where it shouldn't. Her determination to prove her point does in fact bring it home for her. A

Old Man Fortune lives with his daughter, son-in-law, Pitts, and their children but his real joys are his one granddaughter, Mary Fortune and using her to get back at her parents especially her father. Mary is the only one in the family he respects because he sees himself in her—physically as well as temperamentally. In A View of the Woods Mr. Fortune decides on a business transaction with a view to irritate his son-in-law but doesn't figure on its wider impact. A

Asbury went to New York to 'escape the slave's atmosphere of home' and returned broken, sick, dying. Whatever his doting mother offers to do for him or suggests he do is met with his usual cold, unresponsive reaction. Indeed, The Enduring Chill, as title is also the temperature the main character, Asbury, carries with him wherever he goes. So now the question becomes, how long can this 'enduring' last? A

The Comforts of Home is neither comfortable nor homey. Thirty-five year old Thomas's home has been invaded by someone his mother feels sorry for, obliged to 'help'. Sarah Ham AKA "Star Drake", a self-proclaimed nymphomaniac, multi-failed suicide, congenital liar and parolee has taken up residence. Things go from bad to worse, until ... A

Everything that Rises Must Converge recounts an evening involving the painstaking departure and bus ride of an adult son, Julian, and mother. Julian is accompanying his mother to her Wednesday night "reducing class". It's a lifetime's worth of small talk compressed into a few tense and unforgettable hours. A+

It's the annual Azalea Festival in the small town of Partridge and everyone's caught up in the spirit of the occasion. In The Partridge Festival, Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth are two young people bucking popular opinion, 'the system' if you will. They don't believe in all this nonsense, especially not the consensus that a recent murder was committed by a madman. Surely he must have been fed up as they are with all this flower foolishness. He must have had enough and just couldn't take it anymore. So they set out to find and visit Singleton in prison. B+

In The Lame Shall Enter First, fourteen year old Rufus Johnson was being raised by an abusive grandfather in a shack without water or electricity. His father was dead and his mother was in the state penitentiary. He was mean, had a club foot, ate out of the garbage, and believed passionately in Jesus, the devil and everything in the Bible. Sheppard, atheist, widower and father of ten year old Norton, volunteered at the reformatory as a counselor on week-ends. Sheppard had 'taken on' Rufus because he believed he was the boy's savior. Rufus saw right through Sheppard but it took the man longer to realize this, and much more important things. A

Mrs. Turpin's self-satisfaction meets an angry girl, Mary Grace, in Revelation. Both are among the colorful characters inhabiting a doctor's waiting room which seems to grow smaller as the personalities emerge larger. While we grow more alert to Mary Grace's disgust with Mrs. Turpin, she is oblivious to it, until it manifests itself. Mary's Grace, or 'gift' if you prefer is an eye-opening opportunity for Mrs. Turpin. A+

Parker's Back is a play on the ambiguity created by the dual meaning of the word 'back'. Initially it seems that it refers to some return of the central character, O. E. Parker. But very quickly we realize Parker has tattooed almost every inch of his body *except* his back. His inability to break free from, or admit to, his first real love for a woman, who also happens to be his indifferent wife, combined with a profound experience set up a catharsis for Parker which bring both meanings of the word together in a poignant ending. A+

Judgement Day is a reworking or refinement of O'Connor's first piece in this collection, The Geranium. The names are different but again an elderly father has come to live with his adult daughter in New York. Although he bitterly regrets his decision, he is resigned to it until he discovers his daughter is planning to renege on her promise to have him buried back down in Georgia. We take up the story as he is planning his 'escape', learning past details through flashbacks. Excellent on its own, quite apart from The Geranium, taken together the stories form perfect book-ends to this splendid collection! A+

Although her stories were inspired and immortal from the beginning, there is no doubt O'Connor improved as she got older.

Updated for grammatical errors: October 26, 2017

Robin says

I feel like I've just been to school. (That's a good thing.) I read each of these 31 stories - a compilation of both *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and *Other Stories* and *Everything That Rises Must Converge: Stories*, as well as 12 other stories, 6 of which made up her master's thesis at the University of Iowa - *slowly*, only a few a day. I took notes as I was going and read as much analysis as I could on each story. What an experience, to immerse myself in this author's life work.

It's a dark place to be, though I've always liked dark. Flannery O'Connor's literary world is beyond bleak, to the point where if one of her characters smiles, you notice with a breath of relief, ahhhh, a tiny respite from the hard lives and harder hearts on display here. The sky and the sun and of course peacocks get all sorts of glorious description in these stories. But the PEOPLE... the people are hopeless and selfish, grappling for control of their meagre lives on a slippery surface that affords no purchase.

Flannery O'Connor's name goes hand in hand with "Southern gothic", though she used "Christian realism" to describe the toughness of her stories. In my opinion, both apply to her work. Most of her stories take place in bedraggled farms in the American South, with tough characters who often possess ironic names (Mrs. Cope can't cope, Sheppard can't lead anyone, Shiftlet is definitely shifty, Crater is a void, Pointer is a cruel phallus, etc). The lessons are told using allegory dotted with symbolism. After you've read a few of her stories, you will notice a pattern. Despite the dank darkness of the lives she adorns her characters with, there is always an opportunity for **grace**, the chance to choose right. If they do not choose correctly, woe betide them, for all sorts of terrible punishments are ahead, in the form of death and loss and isolation.

Even though I recognised this pattern like a beacon, I couldn't help but sympathise and identify with the characters who were on their road to ruin. I mean, who *wouldn't* be annoyed if someone else's bull was loose in your farm, wrecking everything? That, I believe, is where much of O'Connor's power lies. The 'villains' in

her stories are us, everyday people, who are snared in our humanity, our time, our weaknesses. It is we who struggle every day at achieving grace. And that is what pierces the heart of anyone who reads these stories.

She addresses racism many, many times over - which sadly, still remains a timely issue. And she has a hard eye for 'intellectuals' - *none* of them know nearly as much as they think they know.

The collection was a little uneven for me. *The Train*, *The Peeler* and any others featuring Hazel and Enoch did not interest me much. That probably means I should stay clear of *Wise Blood*, because these stories eventually became part of this novel. Also *You Can't Be Any Poorer than Dead* which eventually became part of *The Violent Bear It Away*, and *Why Do the Heathen Rage?* which was meant to be part of a future novel - neither worked for me as short stories.

However, there is so much gold here, it is easy to let go of what doesn't impress and stay with the sparkling jewels such as:

The Geranium - an old Southern man's inability to adjust to life in NYC (later re-written as *Judgment Day*, her last story)

The Barber - a fascinating image of "casting pearls to swine", showing the insecure need to change people's minds to match one's own, and the ineffectuality of intellectual arguments

A Good Man is Hard to Find - her most famous story, when a family trip is savaged while making a stop to visit an old plantation property. Punishment for glorifying an imperfect past is doled out, for thinking in terms of "them" and "us". Begs the question, "what makes a person good"?

A Circle in the Fire - a woman who runs a farm is visited by some boys, who torment her, instil fear and menace, and demonstrate that she is NOT in charge

The Displaced Person - a story of tremendous power about a woman who takes in a Polish DP to work on her farm. His efficiency does not sit well with the rest of the farm, and what ensues in a sick, slow build up, made me gasp.

Greenleaf - another woman on a farm (pretty much everyone in O'Connor's stories are widows or widowers, and there's almost always a red-headed person in each story) has to deal with an errant bull on her property, with deathly consequences

Everything that Rises Must Converge - brilliant tale of moral ambiguity, taking place on an integrated bus ride

Her disturbing, damning stories will linger in my mind. These stories continue to exert their power, a pointing finger, a morally all-seeing eye that cuts and exposes without mercy. Wow.

Cheryl says

You know the cliché saying, "the moral of the story is..." Flannery O'Connor's stories all seem illustrative of this saying--in a good way. She has a way of using disgruntled characters to showcase social issues of her time. Once you get past the slurs (in most cases the n-word for me) to really read the story and see that she uses such care to highlight realism in her somewhat mystical fiction, so that you get to see the ignorance and shortcomings of her characters, you get it. How she could have written with such an awareness beyond her

time is amazing.

Death is also a major underlying theme in this collection. I wouldn't have understood it had I not visited the Flannery O'Connor Home and learned about her story. O'Connor died at a young age of lupus. Her father predeceased her at a young age as well (from the same disease) and while she wrote most of her stories, while she struggled with the recurrence of her illness, she knew she would be next. O'Connor was also strong-minded at a young age, I learned (like some of her younger characters, i.e. Mary Fortune). At 6 years old, she announced to the nuns at her children's church that she would be attending the grown folks church. Her editor said this about her: "Behind her soft-spoken speech, clear-eyed gaze and shy manner, I sensed a tremendous strength. This was the rarest kind of young writer, one who was prepared to work her utmost and knew exactly what she must do with her talent."

You definitely see strength behind these words. Things that really stand out in this collection: 1) the metaphorical language (in awe), 2) the astounding dialogue (and use of dialect) 3) the way she makes you see a character's inner mind better than most writers can, 4) the mystery within each story (you end up being skeptical of each character and waiting to see what preposterousness will occur at the end).

THIS is a collection for the shelves. Beware though, it is dark.

A few of my favorites:

1. Geranium (from Flannery O'Connor's MFA thesis)
 2. A Good Man is Hard To Find
 3. A Late Encounter With The Enemy
 4. The Life You Save May Be Your Own
 5. The Displaced Person
 6. The Comforts of Home
 7. Why Do the Heathen Rage? (a novel-in-progress)
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