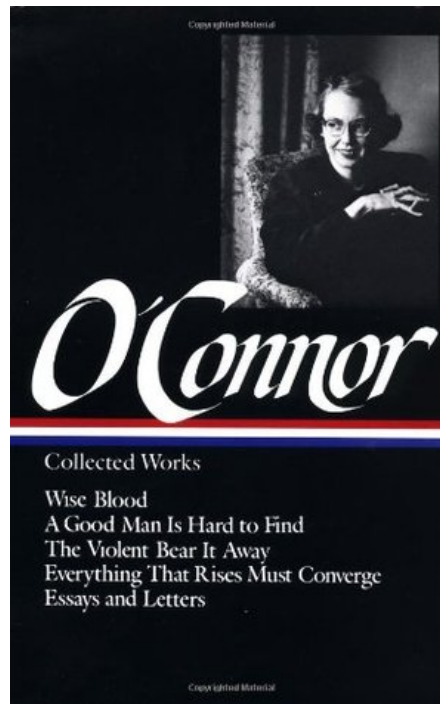




Collected Works: Wise Blood / A Good Man is Hard to Find / The Violent Bear it Away / Everything that Rises Must Converge / Essays and Letters

Flannery O'Connor , Sally Fitzgerald (Editor)

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In her short lifetime, Flannery O'Connor became one of the most distinctive American writers of the twentieth century. By birth a native of Georgia and a Roman Catholic, O'Connor depicts, in all its comic and horrendous incongruity, the limits of worldly wisdom and the mysteries of divine grace in the "Christ-haunted" Protestant South. This *Library of America* collection, the most comprehensive ever published, contains all of her novels and short-story collections, as well as nine other stories, eight of her most important essays, and a selection of 259 witty, spirited, and revealing letters, twenty-one published here for the first time.

Her fiction brilliantly explores the human obsession with seemingly banal things. It might be a new hat or clean hogs or, for Hazel Motes, hero of *Wise Blood* (1952), an automobile. "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified," Hazel assures himself while using its hood for a pulpit to preach his "Church Without Christ." As in O'Connor's subsequent work, the characters in this novel are driven to violence, even murder, and their strong vernacular endows them with the discomfiting reality of next-door neighbors. "In order to recognize a freak," she remarks in one of her essays, "you have to have a conception of the whole man."

In the title story of her first, dazzling collection of stories, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), the old grandmother discovers the comic irrelevance of good manners when she and her family meet up with the sinister Misfit, who claims there is "no pleasure but meanness." The terror of urban dislocation in "The Artificial Nigger," the bizarre baptism in "The River," or one-legged Hulga Hopewell's encounter with a Bible salesman in "Good Country People"--these startling events give readers the uneasy sense of mysteries about to be revealed.

Her second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), casts the shadow of the Old Testament across a landscape of backwoods shacks, modern towns, and empty highways. Caught between the prophetic fury of his great-uncle and the unrelenting rationalism of his uncle, fourteen-year-old Francis Tarwater undergoes a terrifying trial of faith when he is commanded to baptize his idiot cousin.

The nine stories in *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965) show O'Connor's powers at their height. The title story is a terrifying, heart-rending drama of familial and racial misunderstanding. "Revelation" and "The Enduring Chill" probe further into conflicts between parental figures and recalcitrant offspring, where as much tension is generated from quiet conversation as from the physical violence of gangsters and fanatics.

Collected Works: Wise Blood / A Good Man is Hard to Find / The Violent Bear it Away / Everything that Rises Must Converge / Essays and Letters Details

Date : Published 1988 by Library of America

ISBN : 9780940450370

Author : Flannery O'Connor , Sally Fitzgerald (Editor)

Format : Hardcover 1281 pages

Genre : Fiction, Short Stories, Classics, Literature, Writing, Essays

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Callie says

I finished Wise Blood, and I'm now reading some of her letters...For Wise Blood, it's the kind of book you admire, but it requires work and thought and wasn't pure pleasure for me. What I like about it is that it is trying to say something, something big, something existential. Haze Motes character is not as someone else pointed out to O'Connor himself believable as a full human being. She agreed with that. I agree with that too. But it seems to me this book is more of an allegory--you know as you are reading it that these are symbols, even the people are types. Most of people in the novel are not concerned with their souls, but just about making money or mundane issues. A lot of them are out to con people and have only their own interest at heart. Motes and Enoch are different, though. Motes is obsessed with religion and is trying to escape God and Jesus, even as he knows he has been redeemed and they already have a hold on him. Enoch, I thought, at first was just obsessive-compulsive. But upon further reflection and as I read some of O'Connor's commentary on the novel, I realized that he is that rare person who knows how to listen to his inner voice and obeys it. When he shows the shriveled museum man to Motes, he is showing Motes what Man would be without redemption. I am in awe of all the depth here and this is the kind of book that if you read it along with someone else, you could have endless hours of enlightening conversation. I guess that's why it's so well regarded. It pricks at you and makes you want to think about those big questions. I also admire O'Connor so much in that she was both devoted to her religion AND her art. Very difficult in this age of unbelieving. She didn't sacrifice her artistic vision and she wasn't afraid to unsettle devoted Catholics, but she didn't ever shy away from her religion in order to satisfy the intellectual crowd who are usually atheist or at least agnostic. That's why her letters and essays are very educational for a person who has faith and wants to write. She shows it can be done and done well.

I have now read all the letters and most of the essays and I have to add a few quotes I loved. I can't believe her letters were as interesting as they were as I have tried many times to read letters/journals of literary people and usually find them awfully boring. Not hers. Particularly, the ones to A. These were fabulous. I wonder who A. was?

"One of the awful things about writing when you are a Christian is that for you the ultimate reality is the Incarnation, the present reality is the Incarnation, the whole reality is the Incarnation, and nobody believes in the Incarnation; that is, nobody in your audience. My audience are the people who think God is dead. At least these are the people I am conscious of writing for."

Terence Manleigh says

The collected works of The Queen of Southern Gothic. Tiny, bespectacled, devoutly Roman Catholic Flannery O'Connor wrote some of the darkest and most violent fiction in our literature. Everyone goes on about how deeply religious her writing is, but if they're looking for grace and redemption in O'Connor they're looking under the wrong rock. If anything, she shows the ravages of religion. In her "comic" vision, fallen man is utterly ugly and unworthy; if redemption is possible, it couldn't possibly be through any agency but Divine Grace. But when is anyone ever redeemed in Flannery O'Connor?

Grotesque is the word most associated with O'Connor, who quipped, "Anything that comes out of the South

is going to be called grotesque by the northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic." Well, her two novels are just too surreal, violent and, yes, grotesque for this reader, but I'm in the minority. Her stories, however...they're astonishing. Her prose is so original, her imagery so surprising, her comedy so dark, and her stories so full of malicious little twists that they're diabolical perfection. See if you don't think so.

Katharine says

Sometimes you devour a book. Sometimes a book devours you.

I chose this book, from my local library, for several reasons. 1) Flannery O'Connor is thought to have been one of the most respected writers of faith in recent history. 2) I need to read quality books to feed my brain if I'm going to call myself a writer. 3) My personal goal is to read fifty books in 2013 and 4) I chose this and got a hundred pages into it -- which I consider pretty committed -- before I realized that this volume was over 1000 pages long.

Until I picked up this book, the only thing I had read of hers was *A Good Man Is Hard To Find* and after reading it, I was so emotionally bewildered, I wasn't sure I wanted to read anything else by O'Connor again.

But for the sake of art, I decided to try again. This was before, of course, I realized this volume was so long.

It took me about 600 pages to finally realize that I need to buy this book. I NEED TO BUY THIS BOOK AND HIGHLIGHT THE HECK OUT OF IT. O'Connor's novels and short stories have a common element of Southern backwoods faith coming against the expectations of mid-century culture, Southern gentility and various forms of post-modern enlightenment. Her characters, especially the eaters of fat back and habitual church goers who speak more than they think, could have come right out of my childhood. The smug sons and daughters who return home (or who have never left) and argue with their parents over higher thought and reason and what they learned in college could have been me between the ages of fifteen and twenty-seven. The underlying themes of salvation and justice and redemption are all themes that I love and that I would hope to be able to communicate in my stories as well as she does. I am convinced that in the culture war we are now fighting in our churches and on the local news, Flannery O'Connor is still very relevant and I am not only going to make my children read her when they are old enough, but they are also going to savor her work, not just for the artistry (oh my, there is so much artistry!) but also for the hard questions it asks and the willingness to conclude that the answers are not easy.

If that weren't enough, at the back of this volume are 400 pages of her letters to friends and colleagues. Her humor and faith comes through in such grace -- in an entirely different way than it does in her stories -- and I want to invite her over for lunch and talk to her about her peacocks, her health and why she hates talking about writing. Maybe I'm a little star struck, but I think O'Connor would have made a great mentor or big sister.

Here are some of my favorites lines of hers from her letters:

"I am mighty tired of reading reviews that call *"A Good Man"* brutal and sarcastic. The stories are hard but they are hard because there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian sentimentalism."

"My audience are the people who think God is dead. At least these are the people I am conscious of writing for."

"There is a question whether faith can or is supposed to be emotionally satisfying. I must say that the thought of everyone lolling about in an emotionally satisfying faith is repugnant to me. I believe we are ultimately directed Godward but that this journey is often impeded by emotion."

"You ask God to let you see straight and write straight. I read somewhere that the more you asked God, the more impossible what you asked, the greater glory you were giving Him. This is something I don't fail to practice, although not without the right motives."

"When you write a novel, if you have been honest about it and if your conscience is clear, then it seems to me that you have to leave the rest in God's hands. When the book leaves your hands, it belongs to God. He may use it to save a few souls or to try a few others, but I think that for the writer to worry about this is to take over God's business."

"Fiction is supposed to represent life, and the fiction writer has to use as many aspects of life as are necessary to make his total picture convincing. The fiction writer doesn't state, he shows, renders. It's the nature of fiction and it can't be helped. If you're writing about the vulgar, you have to prove that they're vulgar by showing them at it. The two worst sins of bad taste in fiction are pornography and sentimentality. One is too much s*x and the other too much sentiment. You have to have enough of either to prove your point but no more. Of course there are some fiction writers who feel they have to retire to the bathroom or the bed with every character every time he takes himself to either place. Unless such a trip is used to further the story, I feel it is in bad taste."

This was only at the halfway point. I'm sure I could collect more and more passages that I loved, not only from her letters but from all the stories and essays that were in this volume. I loved this volume so much, I came up with three or four research papers I would write on her if I were taking a college course. Fortunately for you, I won't use my review space for such things.

This post is pretty much a Flannery O'Connor gush fest. It's been said that we write what we read. I'd be happy to have my writing reflect more of her wit, her honesty and her faith anytime. Hey Goodreads! You should have more than five stars. Flannery O'Connor gets ten.

James says

The writing style of Flannery O'Connor awakens the reader with its felicity. Miss O'Connor's imagination takes over from there and the ride is a wild one. *Wise Blood*, the first work in this collection, is a nightmarish take on the world of southern itinerant preachers. *Hazel Motes' Church without Christ* is a bleakly humorous approach to the whole god/man situation and Motes' own psychology is worth studying through rereadings of this short work. The collections of short fiction underscore the ability of O'Connor to surprise and challenge the reader. I find myself returning to her work from time to time just to make sure that my previous readings were not a dream.

Alisa says

This is the ultimate collection of works (I love the letters, too) from the most captivating female writer in American history. If you don't appreciate her work, you're not reading deep enough. Flannery's writing is so thick with subtext, so much symbolism, yet so oddly relatable, it's amazing that a white woman of the south could create such characters, such realism and do so with such mastery...and at such a young age. Her untimely death at age 39 cut short the potential for more greatness and added to the mystery of the persona of Flannery. Female or male, amongst all the writers of all time, Miss O'Connor is one of the greats.

Jordan says

Flannery O'Connor is *the* master of Southern Gothic.

Her tales are full of sociopathic actions and skewed niceties, and will drag you into the darkest corners of the South with a thousand unanswered questions: What drives a man to create the Church without Christ? Why kill an entire family in cold blood? Why steal a lonely girl's wooden leg? The depths of human horror are explored in O'Connor's eloquent and visceral language; she will startle the shit out of you, and your grandmother.

Oh, and there are some letters in this volume. I skipped those, but they're probably amazing.

Buy this title from Powell's Books.

Curt Jarrell says

One of the 20th Century's most influential and fiercely original talents, O'Connor is not to be dismissed lightly. Her sharp wit and even sharper prose is on display in this collection of her work. It's a pity she was taken from us at such a young age of only 39. I prefer her shorter works, including her essays and letters and her short fiction, my favorite being "Good Country People," about a shady salesman looking to pick up something extra at a sales call in a rural area, and it isn't what you think.

Bobby Lehew says

I have so little time for thoughtful review; instead, I opt for a series of favorite passages from each book; (my apologies to authors everywhere for confounding intent by taking these out of context!) -

"There is another reason in the Southern situation that makes for a tendency toward the grotesque and this is the prevalence of good Southern writers. I think the writer is initially set going by literature more than by life. When there are many writers all employing the same idiom, all looking out on more or less the same social scene, the individual writer will have to be more than ever careful that he isn't just doing badly what has already been done to completion. The presence alone of Faulkner in our midst makes a great difference in what the writer can and cannot permit himself to do. Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down." - from "The Grotesque in Southern Fiction"

Elizabeth says

Treasures...

Christine Christman says

When I began reading this book I didn't know if I was going to make it through. But eventually I got to the point where I was picking it up every free minute I had. Why. I think it was because I began to get to know her characters. You know how when you first meet people it is easy to make all of these judgments about them...that defensive posture...but then when you get to know them the judgments fall away because you get to see what is behind the behaviors or attitudes being judged? That's how I experienced her stories. At first...agh! This is horrifying...people dismembering their faces, getting murdered because of a random wrong turn, stealing a wooden leg, drowning a disabled child. But she draws the characters so objectively that I began to get more and more curious about how they would work out the details of their lives which were so different from my own. Would I want to know these people in my life? Probably not. But human choices and motives are always interesting to me and O'Connor paints her characters in such a way that you can feel the disturbance bubbling to the surface but you never know how it's going to play out. A tension building that I found captivating.

Mostly, however, I enjoyed her essays on literature, writing, Catholicism, and the grotesque. After seeing the intelligent thought behind her writing I appreciate what O'Connor was about and her own self-consciousness about it.

Olav Nilsen says

"Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it"

Steven says

Volumes like this are the glory of the Library of America. All the Flannery O'Connor you need in one well edited, perfectly sized edition. And you do need to read Flannery O'Connor. As a devout Catholic living in the gaudy sectarian carnival of the Protestant South, O'Connor had a unique perspective on religion and its unpredictable power. Though I will always be fond of *Wise Blood* and Hazel Motes ("I preach the Church Without Christ where the blind don't see, the lame don't walk, and what's dead stays that way.") I think the real greatness is in the short stories. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is an acknowledged classic, but I often return to "The River," in which a neglected boy's baptism leads to a catastrophic accident, or the doctor's office from hell in "Revelation." O'Connor is one of the greats, and this volume is a great way to study her work.

Walter says

This certainly was a load of a book. I don't have a problem with the writing which is pretty good or the content of the stories. But I don't think any of her writing is insightful or intelligent. She knows how to hide her lack of insight. That's a talent, I guess.

Her style reminds me of that family member prone to box wine who has mastered the way to tell a story without ever having experienced life for himself; slow and meandering in their rendering of the story that usually sounds interesting the first couple of times you hear them talk but after a couple years you realize they have nothing to say.

They've seen nothing. Felt nothing.

The pose questions like, "Well, you wouldn't believe what happened today."

"Where?"

"At work..."

"When..."

"Just before the dawn..."

"What happened?"

"...wouldn't you like to know..."

"Tell me."

"I don't know if you're ready."

"I am, ready."

"Can I trust you?"

"Sure."

"Or can anyone be trusted."

"I don't know."

"Yes...No One Does!" They pause. "Can you get me some more red wine?"

"Sure." Hand them a glass.

"Well, he walked up to me, grizzled like."

"Who?"

"He had a funny way-uh-talking. Like he'd seen too much."

“What did he see?”

Long gulp of wine. “Things Man Shouldn’t See.”

“Like what?”

“Time will tell.”

“Can you tell me now?”

“I wish I could, I wish I could.”

And so on. Nothing is said. There is lots of subtext in the above dialogue. So what? And the wine was red so I suppose you could say it’s Christ’s Blood. But so what? It’s still a dumb conversation. Like her writing.

Tim says

I only read *The Violent Bear It Away*, but the website wants me to use this "collected" edition to put this on my shelf.

This is pretty obviously a Novel of Ideas, but the story drew me along nonetheless. I think I might decide I liked it better the more I think about it, so perhaps I'll amend this review in the future. For now, I'd recommend it as a relatively easy read, for a Novel of Ideas...

Elle says

I'm "taking" the Yale Open Course in *The American Novel Since 1945*

(<http://oyc.yale.edu/english/american-...>), and "Wise Blood" is one of the readings. It tells of Hazel Motes, a young man from Tennessee recently returned to the South after several years of fighting overseas. His grandfather was a preacher, and people keep believing he is one. When he does preach, it's outside of movie theaters, and is for the Church Without Christ.

My favorite part is when a man named Holy tries to join him and make it the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ.

"Now I want to give you folks a few reasons why you can trust this church," he said. ... "You don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it, it ain't true, and that's all there is to it. ...I want to tell you a second reason why you can absolutely trust this church--it's based on the Bible. Yes sir! It's based on your own personal interpretation of the Bible, friends. You can sit at home and interpret your own Bible however you feel in your heart it ought to be interpreted. That's right, " he said, 'just the way Jesus would have done it. ... That ought to be enough reasons, friends,' Ornie Jay Holy said, 'but I'm going to tell you one more, just to show I can. This church is up-to-date! When you're in this church you can know that there's nothing or nobody ahead of you, nobody knows nothing you don't know, all the cards are on the table, friends, and that's a fact!'"

The story also suggests that might be a different way to keep Sabbath, but you'll have to read it to discover that for yourself.

The story reminds me a little of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* and *The End of the Affair* in its suggestion of a kind of sainthood or Christ-likeness in the most unlikely person/people. Yet Greene had nothing on O'Connor when it came to a truly dark and twisted vision of humanity. I don't seem to read her stories, but be seared by them. It will take me much longer to digest this one, but on the surface now, after having just finished it, and seeing "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" follows, I admit that this story was not as powerful to me as "A Good Man." This story I may eventually recover from; that, never. And I can't even see the title without remembering what the professor who introduced me to "A Good Man" would quote of O'Connor on her own work--that "for the almost deaf, you shout, and for the almost blind, you draw large and startling pictures."

I gave the story two stars based on how much I enjoyed it, not on how good it is. My enjoyment is not the most important measure, just the only one you can't know unless I share it.
