

# Teaching Flannery O'Connor

## An Online Professional Development Seminar

---



## Lucinda MacKethan

Professor of English, Emerita,  
North Carolina State University

National Humanities Center Fellow  
1984-85

**AMERICA *in* CLASS<sup>®</sup>**

*from the* National Humanities Center

## GOALS

- To define the “grotesque” both as a literary device and a way to emphasize a spiritual vision; to recognize how the grotesque relates to realism, simple humor, and “Southern Gothic.”
- To identify parallels and oppositions that O’Connor sets up with her characters and situations in order to develop the symbolic or allegorical level of her stories.
- To explore the historical and social contexts at play in O’Connor's South, such issues as the “Old” vs. the “New” South, religious beliefs, racial assumptions, and manners.

## FROM THE FORUM

### Challenges, Issues, Questions

- For obvious reasons O'Connor has been characterized as a Southern writer and a Catholic or Christian writer. To what extent can she be described as “woman” or “feminist” writer?
- Does O'Connor critique or interrogate Christianity in her stories?
- What stories do teachers pair “Good Man” or “Revelation”?
- How does O'Connor define “grace”?



## Lucinda MacKethan

Professor of English, Emerita,  
North Carolina State University

National Humanities Center Fellow  
1984-85

*Daughters of Time: Creating Women's Voice  
in Southern Story*  
1992



Flannery O'Connor

March 25, 1925- August 3, 1964

- “Misfit” in the South? Growing up southern and Catholic in Savannah and Milledgeville, Georgia
- Father dies of lupus, 1938
- Georgia State College for Women and the Iowa Writers Workshop
- Moves to New York (Yaddo) and Connecticut (the Fitzgeralds) to develop her life as a writer
- Diagnosed with lupus, 1951 at age 26; returns to her mother's farm in Milledgeville, where she completed all her literary works in the next 13 years
- Literary mentors: Vanderbilt poets and New Critics such as Robert Penn Warren; literary models: Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Faulkner, Joseph Conrad, Gerard Manly Hopkins
- Stricken with renewed onset of lupus in early 1964, dies on August 3.

In her lifetime, O'Connor published two novels and three story collections; a collection of letters, *The Habit of Being*, and a collection of essays, *Mystery and Manners*, also posthumously.

In 1972 she won the National Book Award for her posthumous collection *The Complete Stories*.

Consistency of intention, progression in characterization, and a growing complexity of plot characterize her development as a writer, which can be seen in the trajectory from “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (1953) to “Revelation” (1964).

- “The action of grace in territory held largely by the devil.” Human beings are flawed and incomplete, and modern people in particular have traded the spiritual dimension of their lives (Grace) for material comfort (Self-satisfaction).
- Violence and Redemption: The shock of violent encounters serves to revive a recognition of spiritual urgency.
- Racism: racists, who are suffering from false pride, use “difference” to claim superiority.
- Alienation: those who feel cut off, hungry, angry, “freakish,” are often seekers who “see” more clearly than those who “belong”.

# Questions to Consider When Reviewing “Mystery and Manners”

- O’Connor believed that people in her “modern” time saw “distortions” as “natural” and were thus uninterested in a moral viewpoint. Can you give examples from our own “modern” media, or from current events, that might support her perspective?
- O’Connor was a deeply committed Catholic who wrote from an avowedly Christian perspective. Does she run the risk of being too “preachy” (making stories into sermons)?
- When O’Connor says that southerners are afraid that they were “formed in the image and likeness of God,” what do you think she is saying about why and how southerners are different from people of other regions?
- Some readers find the violence of O’Connor's stories especially “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” too horrifying. Do her own statements about violence as a necessary element in her plots provide an acceptable rationale for the violence?
- O’Connor says that her stories contain “slips” and “gaps” that move the reader away from the “typical” and into the “unexpected.” Think of places in the two stories where she achieves this effect.



## O'Connor's Definition of the Grotesque

The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as **distortions** to an audience which is used to seeing them as **natural**; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience.

In these grotesque works [by Southern writers], we find that the writer has made alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life. We find that connections which we would expect in the customary kind of realism have been ignored, that there are **strange skips and gaps** which anyone trying to describe manners and customs would certainly not have left. Ye the characters have an inner coherence, if not always a coherence to their social framework. Their fictional qualities **lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected.**

## O'Connor's Definition of the Grotesque

Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one. To be able to recognize a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the **general conception of man is still, in the main, theological**. That is a large statement, and it is dangerous to make it, for almost anything you say about Southern belief can be denied in the next breath with equal propriety. But approaching the subject from the standpoint of the writer, **I think it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner, who isn't convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God**. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows, particularly in our literature. In any case, it is when the freak can be sensed as a figure for our essential displacement that he attains some depth in literature.

With the serious writer, **violence is never an end in itself**. It is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially, and I believe these are times when writers are more interested in what we are essentially than in the tenor of our daily lives”.

The old lady settled herself comfortably, removing her white cotton gloves and putting them up with her purse on the shelf in front of the back window. The children's mother still had on slacks and still had her head tied up in a green kerchief, but the grandmother had on a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print. Her collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline she had pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, **anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady.**

She said she thought it was going to be a good day for driving, neither too hot nor too cold, and she cautioned Bailey that the speed limit was fifty-five miles an hour and that the **patrolmen hid themselves behind billboards and small clumps of trees** and sped out after you before you had a chance to slow down. She pointed out interesting details of the scenery: Stone Mountain; the **blue** granite that in some places came up to both sides of the highway; the brilliant **red clay** banks slightly streaked with **purple**; and the various crops that made rows of **green** lace-work on the ground. The trees were full of **silver-white** sunlight and **the meanest of them sparkled**. The children were reading comic magazines and their mother had gone back to sleep.

## Discussion Questions

- What is the effect of the reader on O'Connor's prolific use of details (dress, colors, etc.)?
- What does she mean by the word “mean” when she says of the trees that “the meanest of them sparkled?” The word “mean” will appear again, so this is a kind of foreshadowing. Does the passage contain any other foreshadowing elements?

“In my time,” said the grandmother, folding her thin veined fingers, “children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else. People did right then. Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!” she said and pointed to a Negro child standing in the door of a shack. “Wouldn’t that make a picture, now?” she asked and they all turned and looked at the little Negro out of the back window. He waved.

“He didn’t have any britches on,” June Star said.

“He probably didn’t have any,” the grandmother explained. “Little riggers in the country don’t have things like we do. If I could paint, I’d paint that picture,” she said.

## Discussion Questions

- The grandmother uses the word “respectful” to show her disapproval of her grandchildren's behavior. What examples of disrespect does the rest of the passage contain?
- Identify the three different words for African American that are used in this passage and think about the effect of using all three in the same passage.

# “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

“Two fellers come in here last week,” Red Sammy said, “driving a Chrysler. It was a old beat-up car but **it was a good one** and these boys looked all right to me. Said they worked at the mill and you know I let them fellers charge the gas they bought? Now why did I do that?”

“**Because you’re a good man!**” the grandmother said at once.

“Yes’m, I suppose so,” Red Sam said as if he were struck with this answer.

His wife brought the orders, carrying the five plates all at once without a tray, two in each hand and one balanced on her arm. “It isn’t a soul in this green world of God’s that you can trust,” she said. “And I don’t count nobody out of that, not nobody,” she repeated, looking at Red Sammy.

“Did you read about that criminal, The Misfit, that’s escaped?” asked the grandmother.

...

# “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

*Cont'd*

“I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if he didn’t attack this place right here,” said the woman. “If he hears about it being here, I wouldn’t be none surprised to see him. If he hears it’s two cent in the cash register, I wouldn’t be a tall surprised if he . . .”

“That’ll do,” Red Sam said. “Go bring these people their Co’-Colas,” and the woman went off to get the rest of the order.

“A good man is hard to find,” Red Sammy said. “Everything is getting terrible. I remember the day you could go off and leave your screen door unlatched. Not no more.”

## Discussion Questions

- What is the effect that Red Sammy has on the developing plot? With this section, the word “good” begins to be used frequently. What does it mean to be “good” in these contexts?
- What characters in the story offer a comparison or a contrast to Red Sammy? What clues do you get about the kind of person he is?

# “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?” the grandmother said and removed a clean handkerchief from her cuff and began to slap at her eyes with it.

The Misfit pointed the toe of his shoe into the ground and made a little hole and then covered it up again. “I would hate to have to,” he said.

“Listen,” the grandmother almost screamed, “I know you’re a good man. You don’t look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from nice people!”

“Yes mam,” he said, “finest people in the world.” When he smiled he showed a row of strong white teeth. “God never made a finer woman than my mother and my daddy's heart was pure gold,” he said. The boy with the red sweat shirt had come around behind them and was standing with his gun at his hip. The Misfit squatted down on the ground. “Watch them children, Bobby Lee,” he said. “You know they make me nervous.” He looked at the six of them huddled together in front of him and he seemed to be embarrassed as if he couldn't think of anything to say. “Ain’t a cloud in the sky,” he remarked, looking up at it. “Don’t see no sun but don’t see no cloud neither.”

“Yes, it’s a beautiful day,” said the grandmother. “Listen,” she said, “you shouldn’t call yourself The Misfit because I know you’re a good man at heart. I can just look at you and tell.”

## Discussion Questions

- What does the grandmother mean when she calls the Misfit a “good man” in this passage?
- What does she mean by “lady” and “common.”
- Speculate on why the Misfit might be struck by the fact that there is no sun but also no cloud in the sky. Compare this to the grandmother's own later recognition of this detail.



# “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

Alone with The Misfit, the grandmother found that she had lost her voice. There was not a cloud in the sky nor any sun. There was nothing around her but woods. She wanted to tell him that he must pray. She opened and closed her mouth several times before anything came out. Finally she found herself saying, “Jesus. Jesus,” meaning, Jesus will help you, but the way she was saying it, **it sounded as if she might be cursing.**

“Yes’m, The Misfit said as if he agreed. “Jesus shown everything off balance. It was the same case with Him as with me except He hadn’t committed any crime and they could prove I had committed one because they had the papers on me. Of course,” he said, “they never shown me my papers. That’s why I sign myself now. I said long ago, you get you a signature and sign everything you do and keep a copy of it. Then you’ll know what you done and you can hold up the crime to the punishment and see do they match and in the end you’ll have something to prove you ain’t been treated right. I call myself The Misfit,” he said, “because I can’t make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment.”

There was a piercing scream from the woods, followed closely by a pistol report. “Does it seem right to you, lady, that one is punished a heap and another ain’t punished at all?”

...

*Cont'd*

“Jesus!” the old lady cried. “You’ve got good blood! I know you wouldn’t shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! 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.”

There were two more pistol reports and the grandmother raised her head like a parched old turkey hen crying for water and called, “Bailey Boy, Bailey Boy!” as if her heart would break.

“Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead,” The Misfit continued, “and He shouldn’t have done it. He shown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it’s nothing for you to do but thow away everything and follow Him, and if He didn’t, then it’s nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. **No pleasure but meanness,**” he said and his voice had become almost a snarl.

...

*Cont'd*

“Maybe He didn’t raise the dead,” the old lady mumbled, not knowing what she was saying and feeling so dizzy that she sank down in the ditch with her legs twisted under her.

“I wasn’t there so I can’t say He didn’t,” The Misfit said. “I wisht I had of been there,” he said, hitting the ground with his fist. “It ain’t right I wasn’t there because if I had of been there I would of known. Listen lady,” he said in a high voice, “if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn’t be like I am now.” His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother’s head cleared for an instant. She saw the man’s face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, “**Why you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children!**” She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. Then he put his gun down on the ground and took off his glasses and began to clean them.

**From *Mystery and Manners*:**

***“[I]n my own stories I have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace”.***

## Discussion Questions

- Comment on the two different interpretations we are given of the grandmother’s saying, “Jesus, Jesus.”
- What do you think of the Misfit’s explanation of his name, in relation to his comment that Jesus threw everything off balance?
- The grandmother reaches a point where she says that perhaps Jesus did not raise the dead. What has the Misfit said that might lead her to this doubt?
- Comment on the grandmother’s reaching out to the Misfit and his response. Does it seem believable that she might make this gesture? Can you offer any examples of how people change their behavior when they are faced with extreme situations?
- How does the grandmother’s gesture relate to the Misfit’s comment that she might have been a good woman if she had someone “to shoot her every minute of her life?”

# “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

Hiram and Bobby Lee returned from the woods and stood over the ditch, looking down at the grandmother who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky.

Without his glasses, The Misfit's eyes were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking. “Take her off and thow her where you thown the others,” he said, picking up the cat that was rubbing itself against his leg.

“She was a talker, wasn't she?” Bobby Lee said, sliding down the ditch with a yodel.

“She would of been a good woman,” The Misfit said, “if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life.”

“Some fun!” Bobby Lee said.

“Shut up, Bobby Lee,” The Misfit said. “It's no real pleasure in life.”

# Questions to Consider When Reviewing “Revelation”

- Comment on the title of the story. What are some of its possible contexts?
- What might be the symbolic value of the story's setting in a doctor's office?

“Well, as long as you have such a good disposition,” the stylish lady said, “I don’t think it makes a bit of difference what size you are. You just can’t beat a good disposition.” Next to her was a fat girl of eighteen or nineteen, scowling into a thick blue book which Mrs. Turpin saw was entitled *Human Development*. The girl raised her head and directed her scowl at Mrs. Turpin as if she did not like her looks. She appeared annoyed that anyone should speak while she tried to read. The poor girl’s face was blue with acne and Mrs. Turpin thought how pitiful it was to have a face like that at that age. She gave the girl a friendly smile but the girl only scowled the harder. Mrs. Turpin herself was fat but she had always had good skin, and, though she was forty-seven years old, there was not a wrinkle in her face except around her eyes from laughing too much.

## Discussion Questions

- Compare and contrast Ruby with the girl who has the “pitiful face.”
- What might be the significance of the title of the book that the girl is reading?
- How might O’Connor’s comment about “freaks” relate to the girl, as her character is developed?

**From *Mystery and Manners*:**

***“[I]t is when the freak can be sensed as a figure for our essential displacement that he attains some depth in literature.”***

Sometimes at night when she couldn't go to sleep, Mrs. Turpin would occupy herself with the question of who she would have chosen to be if she couldn't have been herself. If Jesus had said to her before he made her, “There's only two places available for you. You can either be a nigger or white trash,” what would she have said? “Please, Jesus, please,” she would have said, “Just let me wait until there's another place available,” and he would have said, “No, you have to go right now”, and I have only those two places so make up your mind.” She would have wiggled and squirmed and begged and pleaded but it would have been no use and finally she would have said, “All right, make me a nigger then-but that don't mean a trashy one.” And he would have made her a near clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black. . . . Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling and roiling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed in together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven.

## Discussion Questions

- Think about Ruby's “rankings”; how does she decide how is superior?
- What do you make of the reference to the Holocaust that O'Connor injects at the end of Ruby's nighttime ranking dream?



Directly across the table, the ugly girl’s eyes were fixed on Mrs. Turpin as if she had some very special reason for disliking her.

“This is wonderful weather, isn’t it?” the girl’s mother said.

“It’s good weather for cotton if you can get the niggers to pick it,” Mrs. Turpin said, “but niggers don’t want to pick cotton any more. You can’t get the white folks to pick it and now you can’t get the niggers because they got to be right up there with the white folks.”

“They gonna try anyways,” the white-trash woman said, leaning forward.

“Do you have one of those cotton-picking machines?” the pleasant lady asked.

“No,” Mrs. Turpin said, “they leave half the cotton in the field. We don’t have much cotton anyway. If you want to make it farming now, you have to have a little of everything. We got a couple of acres of cotton and a few hogs and chickens and just enough white-face that Claud can look after them himself.

...

*Cont'd*

“One thing 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.”

Mrs. Turpin gave her the merest edge of her attention. “Our hogs are not dirty and they don’t stink,” she said. “They’re cleaner than some children I’ve seen. **Their feet never touch the ground.** We have a pig-parlor- that’s where you raise them on concrete,” she explained to the pleasant lady, “and Claud scoots them down with the hose every afternoon and washes off the floor.”

## Discussion Questions

- Ruby has taken care to distinguish herself from the “white trash” woman. How might they compare in this exchange? Can they be paired ironically with the girl and her mother?
- What is the symbolism of Ruby and Claud’s “pig parlor”?

“There’s a heap of things worse than a nigger,” Mrs. Turpin agreed. “It’s all kinds of them just like it’s all kinds of us.”

“Yes, and it takes all kinds to make the world go round,” the lady said in her musical voice. As she said it, the raw-complexioned girl snapped her teeth together. Her lower lip turned downwards and inside out, revealing the pale pink inside of her mouth. After a second it rolled back up. It was the ugliest face Mrs. Turpin had ever seen anyone make and for a moment she was certain that the girl had made it at her. She was looking at her as if she had known and disliked her all her life—all of Mrs. Turpin’s life, it seemed too, not just all the girl’s life. Why, girl, I don’t even know you, Mrs. Turpin said silently.

## Discussion Question

- Contrast the details of Ruby’s and the mother’s conversation to the hideous face the girl makes. What might be making the girl so angry?

“If it’s one thing I am,” Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, “It’s grateful. When I think who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, ‘Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is!’ It could have been different!” For one thing, somebody else could have got Claud. At the thought of this, she was flooded with gratitude and a terrible pang of joy ran through her. “Oh thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!” she cried aloud.

The book struck her directly, over her left eye. It struck almost at the same instant that she realized the girl was about to hurl it. Before she could utter a sound, the raw face came crashing across the table toward her, howling. The girl’s fingers sank like clamps the soft flesh of her neck. She heard the mother cry out and Claud shout, “Whoa!” There was an instant when she was certain that she was about to be in an earthquake.

...

*Cont'd*

Mrs. Turpin’s head cleared and her power of motion returned. She leaned forward until she was looking directly into the fierce brilliant eyes. There was no doubt in her mind that the girl did know her, know her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition. “What you got to say to me?” she asked hoarsely and held her breath, waiting, as for a revelation.

The girl raised her head. Her gaze locked with Mrs. Turpin’s. “Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog,” she whispered. Her voice was low but clear. Her eyes burned for a moment as if she saw with pleasure that her message had struck its target.

## Discussion Questions

- Ruby’s gratitude results in her having the book thrown at her. Why? Do you have sympathy for Ruby at this point, or for the girl?
- Note that Ruby asks the girl pointedly what she has to say to her. What does this tell us about Ruby? How does it set up the later scene at the hog pen? Comment on the girl’s “warthog” insult.

Neither of them felt like eating so they put on their house clothes and lowered the shade in the bedroom and lay down, Claud with his leg on a pillow and herself with a damp washcloth over her eye. The instant she was flat on her back, the image of a razor-backed hog with warts on its face and horns coming out behind its ears snorted into her head. She moaned, a low quiet moan.

“I am not,” she said tearfully, “a wart hog. From hell.” But the denial had no force. The girl’s eyes and her words, even the tone of her voice, low but clear, directed only to her, brooked no repudiation. She had been singled out for the message, though there was trash in the room to whom it might justly have been applied. The full force of this fact struck her only now. There was a woman there who was neglecting her own child but she had been overlooked. The message had been given to Ruby Turpin, a respectable, hardworking, church-going woman. The tears dried. Her eyes began to burn instead with wrath.

“What do you send me a message like that for?” she said in a low fierce voice, barely above a whisper but with the force of a shout in its concentrated fury. “How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?” Her free fist was knotted and with the other she gripped the hose, blindly pointing the stream of water in and out of the eye of the old sow whose outraged squeal she did not hear.

The pig parlor commanded a view of the back pasture where their twenty beef cows were gathered around the hay-bales Claud and the boy had put out. The freshly cut pasture sloped down to the highway. Across it was their cotton field and beyond that a dark green dusty wood which they owned as well. The sun was behind the wood, very red, looking over the paling of trees like a farmer inspecting his own hogs.

“Why me?” she rumbled. “It’s no trash around here, black or white, that I haven’t given to. And break my back to the bone every day working. And do for the church.”

...

*Cont'd*

She appeared to be the right size woman to command the arena before her. “How am I a hog?” she demanded. “Exactly how am I like them?” and she jabbed the stream of water at the shoats. “There was plenty of trash there. It didn’t have to be me.

“If you like trash better, go get yourself some trash then,” she railed. “You could have made me trash. Or a nigger. If trash is what you wanted, why didn’t you make me trash?” She shook her fist with the hose in it and a watery snake appeared momentarily in the air. “I could quit working and take it easy and be filthy,” she growled. “Lounge about the sidewalks all day drinking root beer. Dip snuff and spit in every puddle and have it all over my face. I could be nasty.

“Or you could have made me a nigger. It's too late for me to be a nigger,” she said with deep sarcasm, “but I could act like one. Lay down in the middle of the road and stop traffic. Roll on the ground.”

...



*Cont'd*

In the deepening light everything was taking on a mysterious hue. The pasture was growing a peculiar glassy green and the streak of the highway had turned lavender. She braced herself for a final assault and this time her voice rolled out over the pasture. “Go on,” she yelled, “call me a hog! Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell. Put that bottom rail on top. There’ll still be a top and bottom!”

A garbled echo returned to her.

A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, “Who do you think you are?”

The color of everything, field and crimson sky, burned for a moment with a transparent intensity. The question carried over the pasture and across the highway and the cotton field and returned to her clearly, like an answer from beyond the wood.

She opened her mouth but no sound came out of it.

...

*Cont'd*

A tiny truck, Claud's, appeared on the highway, heading rapidly out of sight. Its gears scraped thinly. It looked like a child's toy. At any moment a bigger truck might smash into it and scatter Claud's and the niggers' brains all over the road.

Mrs. Turpin stood there, her gaze fixed on the highway, all her muscles rigid, until in five or six minutes the truck reappeared, returning. She waited until it had had time to turn into their own road. Then like a monumental statue coming to life, she bent her head slowly and gazed, as if through the very heart of mystery, down into the pig parlor at the hogs. They had settled all in one corner around the old sow who was grunting softly. A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant with a secret life.

...

*Cont'd*

Until the sun slipped finally behind the tree line, Mrs. Turpin remained there with her gaze bent to them as if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge. At last she lifted her head. There was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting through a field of crimson and leading, like an extension of the highway, into the descending dusk. She raised her hands from the side of the pen in a gesture hieratic and profound. A visionary light settled in her eyes. 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 tumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. 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. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They, alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces even their virtues were being burned away. She lowered her hands and gripped the rail of the hog pen, her eyes small but fixed unblinkingly on what lay ahead. In a moment the vision faded but she remained where she was, immobile.

...

*Cont'd*

At length she got down and turned off the faucet and made her slow way on the darkening path to the house. 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.**

## Discussion Questions

- With an awareness of O'Connor's Christian vision, how do you think God might respond to Ruby's questions?
- What is the point of Ruby's comment: "Put the bottom rail on top? There'll still be a top and a bottom." What does she mean, and what other meaning might there be to her statement?
- Trace the trajectory of Ruby's final vision. Has she changed?

Final slide.

Thank you