Flannery O’Connor Seminar

If you want to make a Christian work [of art], then be Christian, and simply try to make a beautiful work, into which your heart will pass; do not try to “make Christian.”

—Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism.

I have heard it said that belief in Christian dogma is a hindrance to the writer, but I myself have found nothing further from the truth. Actually, it frees the storyteller to observe. It is not a set of rules which fixes what he sees in the world. It affects his writing primarily by guaranteeing his respect for mystery.

—Flannery O’Connor, Mystery and Manners.

I am a Catholic peculiarly possessed of the modern consciousness, that thing that Jung describes as unhistorical, solitary, and guilty.

—Flannery O’Connor, The Habit of Being.

Course Description:

Flannery O’Connor is considered one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century, vividly portraying narratives of cultural conflict in a nation “haunted” by religious belief. This course will consider O’Connor’s biography, emphasizing her place as an artist in the larger American narrative of social changes that happened during and following World War II: women entering the workforce; civil rights in the south; and most especially, the 20th century Catholic literary revival in America, of which she played a pivotal part. We will read O’Connor’s fiction and nonfiction, her personal letters, as well as see clips from an upcoming documentary on her, still in postproduction.

Four aspects of her situation converge to shape and ground her art: faith, race, gender, and disability. O’Connor was a devout and intellectually formed Roman Catholic; a person of white privilege in the Jim Crow South; a woman who wrote “serious fiction” in a predominately male world of writers and publishers, and a person challenged by the autoimmune disease lupus erythematosus.

We will address ourselves to each of these aspects: her sense of the discourse on regionalism for the Southern writer in mid-century literary studies, notions of race and class in her fiction, and the philosophy and theology of Roman Catholicism as it informs her unique modernist take on artistic vision. Furthermore, we will address O’Connor’s use of the grotesque, both as a literary device and as a moral measure of her work.

Note: The course will include two “dinner and film” evenings at Wolfington Hall.
Texts/Media:

Wise Blood (WB)
Flannery O’Connor: The Complete Stories (CS)
The Violent Bear It Away (VBIA)
Mystery and Manners (MM)
The Habit of Being (HB)
Wise Blood, 1979, directed by Houston Smith
The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada, 2005, directed by Tommy Lee Jones
Flannery O’Connor: Mystery and Manners, 2018, directed by M. Bosco, and E. Coffman
Occasional essays of literary criticism

Course Format:

A series of lectures and discussion, as well as “close reading” of O’Connor’s stories. Students must be prepared each day to discuss the texts and become a league of Flannery O’Connor scholars in the making. By mid-semester, Wednesday’s class will be devoted to students presenting on various stories and leading the class in discussion.

Major Course Assignments:
1. Ten of twelve “response papers” throughout the course, each 2-3 typed pages in length, submitted on Canvas as a Word document. Taken together, they are 80% of your grade.
2. Course Project: worth 20% of course grade.

Grades:
A: 99-94  B+: 88-89  C+: 78-79
A -: 90-93  B: 84-87  C: 74-77
B -: 80-83  C -: 70-73

Attendance Expectations/Absence Policy:

This is a course in which active presence and participation is essential. Please do not be absent from class, as it can have an adverse effect on your final grade. Of course, absences due to University business (academic trips, athletic travel, etc.) or religious observance will not count—but please alert me before the absence takes place.

Late/Missed Assignments and Incompletes:

10% off for all late work, if fairness to those who get it in on time.

Writing Assignments:

All writing assignments should be typed, double-spaced with one inch margins, and prepared using a 12-point font size, as a WORD document. There is no need to do citations unless you are actively engaging other sources from without the literary text itself or the course syllabus.
For Response Papers: You must write 10 of 12 response papers in lieu of quizzes and examinations. The assignment will usually be given out on Canvas the class before the due date. You will examine one or two items about texts discussed over the previous classes. Sometimes the prompt will be more analytic, sometimes more personal reflection on a text, sometimes a comparison and contrast of two different texts. They should run at least 2-3 typed double-spaced pages (and never over 4 pages). You will be graded on the level of thought/investment put into it, the content, and how well it resonates with course lectures, discussions, and readings. It goes without saying that grammatical/spelling mistakes will diminish one’s grade on these papers. Note the following rubric for response paper grades.

- An **A response paper** follows the directions of the prompt, and will be a most convincing argument that both says something insightful about the approach to the text as well as illustrate comprehension of both the text and course discussion. There would be no grammatical, typographical, or syntactical errors.
- An **A- response paper** will be convincing, but might lack a bit of coherence or follow through. Still, the paper will illustrate comprehension of both the text and course discussion. There might be some minor grammatical, typographical, or syntactical errors as well.
- A **B+ response paper** will be somewhat convincing but still show some of the student’s comprehension of both the text and course discussion. There might be some room for improvement of overall coherence, as well as a sign of grammatical, typographical, or syntactical errors.
- A **B response paper** will be somewhat convincing but might lack some coherence or suggest a minor error or two in development of the argument. Grammatical errors, etc., are displayed.
- A **B- response paper** will show some effort but tends to be less convincing either in argument or in following through the directions of the prompt. Grammatical errors, etc., abound.

For Course Project: Note the following rubrics

A (fun) project that could be presented or posted during the last week of class, or turned in during finals week that shows thoughtful, creative, even artistic, effort. Possible ideas:

- Producing a short film of an FOC story
- Memorizing/performing a selection from an O’Connor work or two
- A blog or Facebook page that is kept for the duration of the course
- A musical composition or painting that illustrates O’Connor’s themes or her influence.

**Plagiarism:**

It is my hope that in the Spirit of Georgetown, Academic Excellence includes integrity. However, any evidence that an assignment, or a portion of an assignment, is not one’s own work and has been submitted without proper citations, will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment. A second occurrence during the semester will result in a failing grade for the course. Note that if a second occurrence of plagiarism does occur, the dean’s office will be immediately notified.
**Course Calendar:** Note that the calendar is subject to slight changes or additions. There will also be at least two dinner/film nights at Wolfington Hall on the course calendar that you are invited to attend. My hope is that you would come to both, but if you miss, it will not impact your final grade. Please get those dates on your personal calendar right away!

CS: Collect Stories  
MM: Mystery and Manners  
HB: Habit of Being

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Class Activities/Readings</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment for the next day’s class</th>
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| 1/10  | Syllabus and Introduction                                      | “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” in CS  
“Higher Mathematic” (Canvas)  
The Prayer Journal (Canvas) |
| 1/17  | Finding Flannery’s Voice  
The “Good” is Hard to Find | *Wise Blood*, Chapters 1-7 (9-127)  
“Intro” and Letters in HB (ix-50) |
| 1/22  | Guest Professor, Jessica Schnepp  
| 1/24  | Guest Professor, Jessica Schnepp  
“Some Aspects of the Grotesque” in MM (3-51)  
“The Life You Save May Be Your Own” in CS  
**Response 1 Paper due next class** |
| 1/29  | The Life You Save May Be Your Own | ”Regional Writer” in MM (52-59)  
“A Circle in the Fire” in CS |
| 1/31  | A Circle in the Fire                                           | “The Church and the Fiction Writer in MM (143-153)  
Lynch’s “The Definite” from *Christ and Apollo* (Canvas)  
“A Temple of the Holy Ghost” in CS  
**Response 2 Paper due next class** |
| 2/5   | O’Connor and the Catholic Revival  
Misfit Bodies I: Temple of the Holy Ghost | “Novelist and Believer” in MM (154-168)  
“The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South” (191-209)  
“The River” in CS |
| 2/7   | Guest Professor, Fr. Greg Schenden!  
The Deadly Plunge toward the Kingdom of God | Letters to friends and “To A” in HB (53-162)  
“Consenting to Love...” (Canvas)  
“Good Country People” in CS  
**Response 3 Paper due next class** |
| 2/11  | SUNDAY FILM EVENING: WISE BLOOD                                | Pizza/movie at Wolfington Hall!! |
| 2/12  | Hulga/Joy Hopewell and Flannery’s Danish Romance?             | “The Artificial Nigger” in CS  
“FOC and the Civil Rights Movement” (Canvas) |
| 2/14  | O’Connor and the Question of Race                             | “The Displaced Person” in CS  
**Response 4 Paper due next class** |
| 2/19  | PRESIDENTS DAY HOLIDAY                                         |                                                                                                           |
| 2/21  | “Christ is just another D.P”                                   | Letters to Friends in HB (163-314)  
**Response 5 Paper due next class** |
| 2/26  | Friends of Flannery I                                          | Letters to Friends in HB (315-415)  
**Response 6 Paper due next class** |
| 2/28  | Friends of Flannery II                                         | *The Violent Bear It Away* (read over spring break) and...  
Letters to Friends in HB (415-555)  
**Response 6 Paper due next class** |
<p>|       | <strong>SPRING BREAK</strong>                                               |                                                                                                           |</p>
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<td><em>The Violent Bear It Away: Prophecy Redux</em></td>
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<td>3/14</td>
<td><em>The Violent Bear It Away: Baptism Redux</em></td>
<td><em>Response 7 due next class</em></td>
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<td>3/19</td>
<td><em>The Violent Bear It Away: Eucharistic Redux</em></td>
<td>“Greenleaf”</td>
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<td>“Sacred” Violence I</td>
<td>“A View to the Woods”</td>
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<td>3/26</td>
<td>“Sacred” Violence II</td>
<td>O’Connor on the Craft of Fiction in MM (63-140)</td>
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<td>Jacques Maritain’s “Christian Art” (canvas)</td>
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<td>3/28</td>
<td>O’Connor’s Lectures</td>
<td>“The Enduring Chill” in CS</td>
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<td><strong>Easter Monday Holiday</strong></td>
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<td>The (modern?) Artist as Poseur?</td>
<td>“Everything That Rises Must Converge” in CS</td>
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<td>4/9</td>
<td>O’Connor’s homage to Pierre Teilhard’s Theological Imagination</td>
<td>“The Lame Shall Enter First”</td>
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<td>4/11</td>
<td>The Lame: A Tarwater Redux?</td>
<td>“Parker’s Back” in CS</td>
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<td>4/16</td>
<td>Misfit Bodies II: Inscribing the Holy</td>
<td>“Intro to Portrait of Mary Ann” in MM (213-228)</td>
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<td>Last Year, Last Letters in HB (559-596)</td>
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<td>4/18</td>
<td>Misfit Bodies III: Mary Ann’s Face</td>
<td>“Revelation” in CS</td>
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<td>4/22</td>
<td><strong>SUNDAY FILM AND PIZZA AT JESUIT HOUSE</strong></td>
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<td>Ruby Turpin’s Spiritual Ascent</td>
<td>“Judgment Day” in CS</td>
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<td>4/25</td>
<td>The Final Story: Judgement Day</td>
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<td><em>Response 12 due next class</em></td>
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<td>4/30</td>
<td>Student Projects?</td>
<td>Documentary Film Showing?</td>
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