

THE MANNER OF MYSTERY: FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE AND EPIPHANY IN  
THE STORIES OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of English

by  
Denise Hopkins  
B.A., Spring Hill College, 2004  
May 2006

## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Abbreviations.....  | iii |
| Abstract.....   | iv  |
| Chapter   |     |
| 1 Introduction.....   | 1   |
| 2 Distinctive Features of the Short Story: Time, Mystery, Epiphany..... | 6   |
| 3 Free Indirect Discourse.....  | 12  |
| 4 Free Indirect Discourse in O’Connor’s Stories.....                    | 17  |
| 4.1 The Issue of the Reader.....  | 20  |
| 4.2 The Issue of the Community: Realism and Race.....                   | 35  |
| 5 Conclusion.....   | 57  |
| Works Cited.....  | 61  |
| Vita.....   | 65  |

## **Abbreviations**

HB Flannery O'Connor. *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*

MM Flannery O'Connor. *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*

## **Abstract**

This project addresses the narrative voice(s) in Flannery O'Connor's short stories, particularly in relation to her conception of art. O'Connor critics often polarize the cultural and religious worth of her stories. As a Catholic, O'Connor was convinced that the "the ultimate reality is the Incarnation" (HB 92). As an artist, O'Connor believed that fiction should begin with a writer's attention to the natural world as she comprehends it through the senses. It is no wonder, then, that her fiction lends itself well to critics interested in both her theology and her presentation of issues of race, class, and gender.

My project describes how O'Connor's use of free indirect discourse, a narrative mode that blends third and first person narrative elements, positions her theology within her culture especially in the short story form. While many O'Connor critics address issues of narrative voice, few have explored O'Connor's use of free indirect discourse, a characteristic feature of her stories. Through free indirect discourse, O'Connor presents third person stories through a single character's perspective, a perspective that proves insufficient by the story's epiphanic end. That character's perspective, rooted in O'Connor's observations of a racially charged Southern climate in the mid-twentieth century, speaks to his cultural situation. Because O'Connor positions the perspectives of her characters within a larger framework that questions their validity, she draws on her character's cultural situations to reveal human limitation and disconnectedness, both important elements of her theology. My project shifts its focus to race to emphasize the extent to which O'Connor is drawing on her culture.

Ultimately, O'Connor's stories, when analyzed through their use of free indirect discourse, answer how manners reveal mystery, how culture informs theology, and finally, how we might investigate O'Connor's stories, mindful of both their religious and cultural impact.

## 1. Introduction

“The fiction writer presents mystery through manners, grace through nature, but when he finishes there always has to be left over that sense of Mystery which cannot be accounted for by any human formula.”

--Flannery O'Connor, “The Church and the Fiction Writer”

“There is more to it...than whether he has brown eyes or blue. You might find your theories enriched by the sight of him. And I don't mean by finding out the color of his eyes. I mean your existential encounter with his personality. The mystery of personality...is what interests the artist. Life does not abide in abstractions.”

--Calhoun to Mary Elizabeth in “The Partridge Festival”

Many students are introduced to Flannery O'Connor when they come across one of her most anthologized stories, “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” in an introduction to fiction class. Although her short stories are convenient for classes that cannot devote themselves to several lengthy novels, their literary importance is based more on her accomplishment in the form than on convenience. A writer whose quantity of published work pales in comparison to the amount of criticism surrounding it, Flannery O'Connor has gained a heightened literary status by means of her ability to work within the constraints of short fiction. In light of the abundance of O'Connor's own statements about her work that position it as theological, critics are often divided on how to approach her stories: should we read them according to the standards O'Connor has set out for herself? Should we reject O'Connor's standards completely? While some critics read O'Connor's stories with her theology in mind, others focus instead on issues of race, class, and gender. Although critical climates and theoretical trends can account for opposition among critics in assessing any work of art, O'Connor's own estimation of fiction speaks to the critical divide in evaluating her stories. O'Connor was adamant that

fiction, effective fiction, would use manners (the way people in given cultural situations interact with one another) to reveal mystery (that greater reality which manners suggest). O'Connor believed "the fiction writer begins where human perception begins" (MM 67), linking good writers to keen observers of their world, and thus their culture. If her works match her profile of a fiction grounded in careful observation of communities to suggest broader depictions of human existence, criticisms focusing mostly on cultural or religious implications are appropriate but incomplete evaluations. Ultimately, the religious and cultural contexts of O'Connor's stories are inextricably intertwined. If we concur or at least accept as a possibility O'Connor's understanding of fiction, we are led to the following question: How exactly do manners reveal mystery?

It is this question that guides my own evaluation of O'Connor's stories, the answer to which I have found in O'Connor's narrative voices and her manipulation of perspective. I have chosen to focus on the short stories because not only is O'Connor acknowledged foremost as a short story writer rather than a novelist, but also past and present investigations of the short story form, positioning it as invested in single events, mystery, and epiphany, seem most closely aligned with her artistic ambitions.

If the short story is a form well-suited for O'Connor's literary ambitions and theory of art, her success in the form can be, at least in part, attributed to the way she plays artfully with voice and perspective. Her works exhibit what Mikhail Bakhtin has deemed heteroglossia, or the multiplicity of languages within a text, leading Robert Brinkmeyer to locate her success in her ability to present multi-voiced worlds.

Brinkmeyer asserts, "It is my contention that much of O'Connor's greatness as a writer

results from her ability to embrace the voices and viewpoints of those about and within her” (12). Important to assessing the voices and viewpoints in her stories is O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse<sup>1</sup>, a mode characteristic of her stories and a means by which she engages in the manners of culture to reveal mysteries of existence latent in cultural interactions. With the notable exception of linguist Donald Hardy<sup>2</sup>, few critics have explored O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse. By bringing free indirect discourse to the forefront of O’Connor’s stories, I hope to highlight this mode as a means by which we might better understand O’Connor’s presentation of mystery through manners as well as the frequent critical divide in assessing her works.

Theorists have observed free indirect discourse, a mode associated with both the novel and modernism, as a tool in the service of empathy and/or irony particularly in the novel where characterization is generally thought to be more complex than in the short story. Because it blends first and third person narrative elements, free indirect discourse allows a first person limited viewpoint to function within a third person omniscient narration. In O’Connor’s stories the first person, in fact, often imitates the third person in

---

<sup>1</sup> I have opted to use the term “free indirect discourse” because it is the term most commonly used in current discussion on the narrative mode I will be discussing. Pascal in *The Dual Voice* uses “free indirect speech.” Vaheed Ramazani in *The Free Indirect Mode: Flaubert and the Poetics of Irony* appreciates but rejects Pascal’s term because speech might “be construed to signify exclusively vocalized words.” Ramazani, and many others, use “free indirect discourse,” “understanding discourse to mean either spoken or silent verbalization” (Ramazani 139).

<sup>2</sup> Hardy has analyzed O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse in “Revelation” as well as used “The Turkey” to explain repetition as a frequent characteristic of free indirect discourse representations. While Hardy’s work has drawn attention to O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse as an important tool in understanding her narratives, my project looks at O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse as both a way to locate her theory of fiction in the works themselves as well as to reconcile critical responses focused mostly on religion or culture. Although O’Connor makes use of free indirect discourse in her two novels, my project emphasizes the importance of O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse as it occurs in the short story form.

terms of authority and omniscience. O'Connor highlights both a character's limited perspective and divorce from his community and his subsequent unity within that community despite his perspective. As individual characters take over and succumb to narration, O'Connor establishes a view of humanity as fallen and yet mystically united one to another as a body. While this may sound as if it is religious in tone, ideas of unity or division in O'Connor stories are presented, and can only be presented, through the real world in which O'Connor lived, namely, the American South in the mid-twentieth century. Thus, division is often dramatized through a presentation of race, gender, or class relations, and epiphany often involves a character's (or reader's) recognition of himself in a person his society has excluded. Because free indirect discourse intimately involves the reader, requiring us to see not through the eyes of a distant narrator, but through the eyes of a character, the narratives build toward epiphany directed not only at character but at the reader as well.

This project briefly looks at characteristics of the short story to describe how free indirect discourse works in that form. Because I am working from O'Connor's premise that fiction reveals mystery through manners, I will analyze O'Connor's narrative voice(s) as they work to present a complex tension between perspectives as demonstrated through the cultural lenses through which her characters see. My project then focuses on O'Connor's presentation of race to emphasize the notion that O'Connor's use of free indirect discourse is often grounded in the manners of the South. Although her stories have proved valuable to studies focused on class and gender as well as race, I've limited the focus of my study to race because, given the racial climate of the 1950s, O'Connor's

presentation of race relationships most emphatically demonstrates the human tendency to divorce oneself from one's community—a tendency reflecting O'Connor's theological understanding of human limitation and the subsequent need for grace.

## 2. Distinctive Features of the Short Story: Time, Mystery, Epiphany

“In the long run, a people is known, not by its statements or its statistics, but by the stories it tells.”  
--Flannery O’Connor, “The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South”

O’Connor’s stories have distinct patterns that might account for the abundance of studies that involve comparisons between her stories. She claimed, “*All* my stories are about the action of grace on a character who is not very willing to support it [emphasis mine]” (HB 275). O’Connor’s “action of grace” involves a narrative action that questions the perspective through which we have been reading the story. Free indirect discourse works to encourage ironic or empathic responses in the reader to one major event or circumstance. The short story form focuses O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse on the representation of one character’s perception as it contrasts the reality of that character’s world concerning a particular circumstance or event.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding reoccurring themes emerging in discussions of short fiction will make it easier to locate precisely the effect of O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse. Although many contemporary critics echo C.S. Lewis’s claim that “it is astonishing how little attention critics have paid to Story considered in itself” (3), many critics have

---

<sup>3</sup> Although both *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear it Away* involve free indirect discourse representations that might follow similar patterns, the novels do not have the same narrative impact as the short stories. When we look at time, epiphany, and mystery not as isolated features but as features that inform each other in the short story form, O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse focuses our attention on an immediate and specific clash of perspectives usually regarding one character, while the novels develop perspective more thoroughly in secondary characters as well as involve multiple events that shape readers’ judgments. Although studies of free indirect discourse with regards to O’Connor’s novels would prove valid and important studies, they are not within the scope of this project, which focuses on O’Connor as a short story writer.

recently begun to analyze the short story form in its own right.<sup>4</sup> As with most attempts to define a genre, critics disagree about the qualities of the short story form inasmuch as most postulations are weakened by counterexample; however, three characteristics common to the discourse strike me as most relevant to O'Connor's stories: time, mystery, and epiphany.

Short stories often focus on single events or circumstances. Charles May claims that the short story's "frequent focus on a frozen moment in time" makes it seem atemporal whereas a long narrative "seems primarily just a matter of one thing after another" (15). This "frozen moment" idea has led many short fiction theorists to compare the short story genre with painting.<sup>5</sup> Mary Rohrberger, the first to produce a dissertation on the short story in the early 60s, explains, "Readers desire novels to continue even through successive generations. In the short story readers move in time in such a way that it catapults them from beginning to end and back again, so strong is their desire to reread what is already there" (7). Although readers' desires are undoubtedly too subjective to describe, Rohrberger's comment draws our attention to what the short story form might encourage in readers. Stories whose endings catapult readers back to the beginning seem to leave the reader with an impression of an event rather than a linear succession of events.

---

<sup>4</sup> Formal theorizing on the short story form dates back to the 1960s. For a brief outline on the development of short fiction theory, see the Introduction to Per Winther, Jakob Lothe, and Hans H. Skei's *The Art of Brevity*, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Edgar Allen Poe first suggests a correlation in the two genres in his review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (1842). H.E. Bates in *The Modern Short Story* (1965), Rohrberger (1982), and Dominic Head in *The Modernist Short Story* (1992) continue discussion on the analogy.

If we look at one of O'Connor's most famous stories, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," Rohrberger's idea that short stories move not through successive generations but in a more circular motion applies. After the grandmother, a proper Southern lady by her own estimation, finds herself face to face with an escaped murderer with whom she pleads for her life, assuring the killer Misfit that he is a good man, her final words, to borrow from Rohrberger, "scramble the characters and the roles they play" (7). The grandmother's words at the story's conclusion represent, to many critics, an epiphany as she looks up at her killer and claims, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children" (132).<sup>6</sup> Prior to her encounter with the Misfit, the grandmother is convinced of her own goodness; during their encounter she tries to convince the Misfit that he is "good" and came from good folks. Her declaration of their kinship disrupts and recasts earlier notions of her own propriety in light of her acceptance of the murderous Misfit. The grandmother and her family are dead at the story's end, so their futures are excluded from contemplation, and although the story might tempt curious readers to question the Misfit's future, we are more aware of the way the encounter with the Misfit reshapes our understandings of the characters and their roles in the story and in the final, climatic encounter.

Because short stories seem to freeze rather than project time, often holding up images for the viewer rather than explaining them, critics have noted that mystery is of central importance to the short story. C.S. Lewis claims, and May notes, "To be stories at all they must be series of events: but it must be understood that this series—the plot, as

---

<sup>6</sup> All references to O'Connor's stories are taken from *Flannery O'Connor: The Complete Stories*.

we call it—is only really a net whereby to catch something else” (“On Stories” 17). Lewis explains that this “something else” might be a state or quality; it might be “giantship, otherness, the desolation of space” (17). May posits this plot “net” as “short story mystery and intensity” versus “novelistic elaboration” (17). But mystery and intensity, the ability to suggest the timeless in the net of the real, is not achieved by describing any everyday events; stories, as O’Connor says of grotesque fiction, make “alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life” (MM 40). May asserts that commentary on the twentieth century short story usually follows the lead of nineteenth century short story criticism in that it discusses the ideas of “strangeness, the unusual, the unexpected” as connected to the form (16).

Georg Lukacs describes the short story’s reliance on events much as Lewis speaks of a story’s plot as a “net.” Lukacs writes: “In the short story, the narrative form which pin-points the strangeness and ambiguity of life, such lyricism must entirely conceal itself behind the hard outlines of the event.” Lukacs even goes so far as to conclude that the short story is “the most purely artistic form” (51). Perhaps this idea of mystery is what prompted Walter Benjamin in “The Storyteller” to claim, “It is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it” (89).

Mystery and the element of the strange have indeed come to be O’Connor’s platform as she describes what fiction is and what it should do. O’Connor lamented those writers who would place social positions above their sense of mystery and deal only in abstractions without rooting them in concrete observations of the world about them. She

writes: “They are conscious of problems, not of people, of questions and issues, not of the texture of existence, of case histories and of everything that has a sociological smack, instead of with those concrete details of life that make actual the mystery of our position on earth” (MM 68). Committed to realism and a fiction rooted in the artist’s observation of the world through the senses, O’Connor’s work is still noted for its freaks or the “strange.” O’Connor insists on a kind of realism that allows for distortion, not a distortion of the truth but rather “a certain distortion...used to get at the truth” (MM 98).

O’Connor’s understanding of mystery and reality in fiction are not relegated to any particular genre. Although she asserts that by fiction she means “story-writing,” she qualifies the term, claiming, “I’ll call any length of fiction a story, whether it be a novel or a shorter piece, and I’ll call anything a story in which specific characters and events influence each other to form a meaningful narrative” (MM 66). With exception to the essay in *Mystery and Manners* entitled “Writing Short Stories,” O’Connor often speaks of the writer as a novelist and of fiction in terms of novels, but her claims about the nature and aim of fiction are important especially for the short story, the form she most often used. Perhaps O’Connor thought she would become more of a novelist as we can only speculate as to what direction, or genre, her fiction would have taken had she lived longer.

Readers and O’Connor herself often note the importance of epiphany to her stories, and many critics agree that epiphany is often characteristic of the short story form itself. Terry Eagleton contrasts realistic novels with short stories, suggesting, “The short story turns on a moment or revolt or revelation which it is hard to totalize or sustain”

(150). Most discussions of short stories at least mention this moment of revolt or revelation. Thomas M. Leitch claims epiphanic stories “adumbrate...a fictional world... by unfolding particular sensations or emotions and proceeding to a climatic revelation that does not necessarily take the form of a complete overt action” (131). Here we have only to think of O’Connor’s story, actually entitled “Revelation,” and Ms. Turpin’s dreamlike vision brought about after a young girl’s indictment of her. O’Connor’s stories are often recognized for their surprise or twisted endings which cause us to reevaluate the linear events of the story, leave us with a sense of mystery in light of the strange and, perhaps most of all, build to epiphanies in the life of a character whose future we do not get to see.

### 3. Free Indirect Discourse

Building on the assumption that the important features of the short story are its obvious limited length as well as a unique handling of time, an inclination toward mystery rather than explanation, and often a reliance on epiphany, I will discuss how free indirect discourse functions within these parameters, especially in O'Connor's stories. It is first necessary, however, to explore free indirect discourse itself as a narrative mode.

In his historical evaluation, Roy Pascal writes that Charles Bally, a former student of Saussure, was the first to describe free indirect discourse in 1912. Although Bally was not the first to note the blend of direct and indirect speech, he was the first to "recognize it as an independent and significant stylistic form and give it a distinctive name" (Pascal 8). Bally called it "le style indirect libre" and his essay by the same name outlined three basic ways of rendering the thoughts or words of a character in a text: direct speech, indirect speech, and free indirect speech. Bally does not limit speech to mean vocalized thoughts but uses the term to mean interior speech as well. Most discussions of free indirect discourse involve examples that contrast it with direct and indirect discourse. I will use the examples Hardy gives because they are based on O'Connor's story "The Turkey". Example (3) is the sentence actually found in O'Connor's story:

- (1) He thought to himself, "I'm going to get it. I'm going to get it if I have to chase it out of the country." (DD)
- (2) He thought to himself (that) he was going to get it. He thought to himself (that) he was going to get it if he had to chase it out of the country. (ID)
- (3) He was going to get it. He was going to get it if he had to chase it out of the country (FID). ("The Dialogic Repetition" 90)

The most obvious differences between the first and last two example sentences are the presence of quotation marks in direct discourse and the use of the present tense. Both indirect and free indirect discourse are free of quotation marks and shift the tense into the past. One of the most distinguishing features between indirect and free indirect discourse is the potential presence of the subordinator “that” in example (2) which (3) does not have. The subordinator, while not marking the third person narrator’s presence as overtly as quotation marks in direct discourse, which clearly separate the narrator’s prose from a character’s speech, does serve to separate the narrator from the character through a means not present in free indirect discourse. In free indirect discourse, the separation between narrator and character is diminished as narration keeps third person pronouns but represents the first person discourse of a character. Pascal explains that in free indirect discourse “the narrator, though preserving the authorial mode throughout and evading the ‘dramatic’ form of speech and dialogue, yet places himself, when reporting the words or thoughts of a character, directly into the experiential field of the character, and adopts the latter’s perspective in regard to both time and place” (9). In terms of the examples above, we know (3) is the boy’s thought because the language itself represents both the boy’s position and his language. In Pascal’s words, the narrator is entering into the boy’s “experiential field” of watching the turkey and entertaining ambitions to capture it. The narrator does not simply have access to the content of the boy’s thoughts as he would in a third person limited narration; he re-presents those thoughts as they might occur in the boy’s mind.

The “experiential world” of a character becomes particularly important in discerning free indirect discourse in texts because it brings up the issue of speech patterns. A character’s speech is important to her experience in and interaction with the social world she inhabits. In texts like O’Connor’s where speech patterns of characters (Southern idiom) might be notably different than that of the narrator, the characters’ positions and attitudes can pronounce more forcefully the story’s tension between narrator and character. This is not to say that O’Connor herself does not participate in the Southern idiom of her characters; we have only to read her letters in *The Habit of Being* to note otherwise. Rather, the narrator of a given story usually guides the story along in a language that can be distinguished from the language of a character’s interior thoughts. A helpful comparison is the case of Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston uses Southern black dialect in a way similar to that of O’Connor’s use of white Southern dialect.<sup>7</sup> In his foundational work on Hurston, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. outlines the relationships between the voice of the narrator of *Their Eyes* and the voice of the protagonist, Janie. Like Hurston, O’Connor in many ways speaks the dialect she represents, but in her texts uses the dialect to mark the involvement of an individual character’s perspective into a third person narration.

Even though categorizations of each type of discourse prove helpful in our understanding of free indirect discourse, factors such as speech patterns and social positions limit our ability simply to chart what is and is not free indirect discourse in

---

<sup>7</sup> O’Connor also represents black dialect in many of her stories, but her protagonists are generally white characters and it is their thoughts which are represented through free indirect discourse.

terms of individual utterances. When we analyze the free indirect discourse present in specific texts, we run into the problem of being unable to place three similar utterances together in order to evaluate each on the basis of its difference from the others. For instance, in the previous examples based on “The Turkey,” Hardy explains that a difference in (1) and (2) is that the tense in (2) has been shifted to the past (90). He also claims that in the free indirect discourse example (3) the “matrix reporting clause [he thought] has been completely suppressed” (90). In a narrative, we cannot discern tense shifts or clause suppressions because a sentence with a former tense or suppressed clause usually does not precede the utterance in question. Thus, Hardy had to invent examples (1) and (2) in order to have something with which to contrast the “real” example, (3). Instances of free indirect discourse occurring within literary texts, therefore, are not as easily identifiable as many postulations on the nature of free indirect discourse would lead us to believe. Context undoubtedly plays a larger role in the significance and identification of free indirect discourse than schemas for and descriptions of free indirect discourse allow. Hardy draws out this principle indirectly when he brings up the importance of context in his reflections on how free indirect discourse can work to signal both empathy and irony: “Most theorists writing of free indirect discourse have either ignored or been confused by its various, and frequently opposing, meanings because they have missed the social significance of the context in which it occurs” (“Free Indirect Discourse, Irony, and Empathy” 49).

Free indirect discourse is a type of discourse Mikhail Bakhtin would label double-voiced; it is dependent not only on grammatical markers, but on the social, emotional,

intellectual, etc., positions of a character that influence his language. Bakhtin describes a double-voiced discourse as having “a twofold direction—it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another’s discourse*, toward *someone else’s speech*” (*Problems* 185). In terms of free indirect discourse, it is language referring to both the author and the character. Bakhtin calls what we know as free indirect discourse “quasi-direct discourse” because its “syntactic markers” point to it as authorial speech, while its “emotional structure” belongs to a character. In other words, we know the narration is from the author because it is not direct speech, yet the language itself takes in the interior position of character. Bakhtin marks “quasi-direct discourse” as “most convenient for transmitting the inner speech of characters” based on the following reasoning:

Such a form permits another’s inner speech to merge, in an organic and structured way, with a context belonging to the other. But at the same time it is precisely this form that permits us to preserve the expressive structure of the character’s speech, its inability to exhaust itself in words, its flexibility, which would be absolutely impossible within the dry and logical form of indirect discourse. (“Discourse” 319)

Free indirect discourse invites us to look at the interior state of a character in a language linked with the character in a way indirect discourse is not capable of. O’Connor makes use of free indirect discourse’s proclivity toward interiority so that her readers understand her character’s interior state within her own presentation of that character, giving rise to the possibility of sympathy or empathy depending on how well we feel a character’s exterior world matches his interior consciousness.

#### 4. Free Indirect Discourse in O'Connor's Stories

Context, both the context of the scene in relation to the story as a whole as well as the social world in which the story participates, is fundamental to analyzing the role of free indirect discourse in O'Connor's texts. From her earliest stories, written for her thesis, to her final story collection, O'Connor's fictions rely on the "double-voiced discourse" present in free indirect discourse. I will give brief examples of free indirect discourse from "The Geranium," a story that is a part of O'Connor's master's thesis and "Judgement Day," a revision of "The Geranium" published in O'Connor's last collection, *Everything that Rises Must Converge*.

"The Geranium" opens with Old Dudley waiting for his neighbors to put the flower in the window. As O'Connor describes Old Dudley's thoughts, she moves into free indirect discourse, bringing Dudley's thoughts into the narrator's prose; Dudley's thoughts are implicated in the third person narration most poignantly by his character's position and language implicit in the utterance. The story reads: "They had no business with it [the geranium], no business with it" (3). Within the context of the story, the position of the thought belongs to Dudley who remembers the geranium "back home" when looking at one across the alley of his New York City apartment. The repetition of the thought "no business with it" also suggests the phrase is free indirect discourse. Hardy explains that although repetition is not required for an utterance to be labeled free indirect discourse, "repetition *in* a character's reported thought or speech is a frequent optional constituent of free indirect discourse" ("The Dialogic Repetition" 91). Later

O'Connor blends more of Dudley's language into the narration: "There wasn't much he could think of to think about that didn't do his throat that way" (3). As Pierre Guirard explains, "one of the most frequent forms of free indirect style... consists in reporting the words of a secondary speaker [in this case Dudley] in an indirect style but in adopting his vocabulary—scholarly, dialectic, slangy, etc" (85). In the example above, we have the "cracker" Dudley language, "didn't do his throat that way."

"Judgement Day" opens in a third person narration that takes in the protagonist's thoughts and perspective. Settled in his daughter's New York City apartment, Tanner thinks about how he will escape back to the country. The narrative explains, "Today he was ready. All he had to do was push one foot in front of the other until he got to the door and down the steps...the next morning dead or alive, he would be home. Dead or alive. It was being there that mattered; the dead or alive did not" (532). We read Tanner's plan to escape as he is thinking it, but his thoughts are represented in the third person.

I will deal more fully with examples like these, but for now I want briefly to establish what free indirect discourse is and its frequency in O'Connor stories. As a kind of speech diversity, free indirect discourse represents the diverse positions of narrator and character. O'Connor's use of free indirect discourse in the short story focuses works to pull the reader into a specific situation, governing our reactions by raising questions of authority in terms of perspective.

The reader, by O'Connor's use of free indirect discourse, is encouraged to adapt or critique the perspective of the character whose voice seeps into the narration, and as

the events of the story move to epiphany, in the freeze frame of single events, the reader is left to discern the validity of her reliance on or critique of the perspectives that found their way into third person narration. If at the end of O'Connor's stories roles are scrambled, so are perspectives, giving the stories themselves a particularly epiphanic quality inasmuch as not only individuals in the story but also discerning readers are encouraged to reevaluate the way they have positioned themselves.

O'Connor's stories work to tangle and untangle perspective so that we are left with mystery. But blending perspectives is not at all particular to short stories. Janet McKay argues that realist novelists (namely James, Howells, and Twain) wrote fiction that elevated perspectives of characters and lowered the omniscience and authority of the narrator, suggesting "realism involves limitations on the author/narrator's role and representation of a character's perspective" (31). McKay examines these three novelists degree of success "in backgrounding...the author/narrator and...foregrounding the nonauthoritative/ nonomniscient voices" (31). While O'Connor often brings the perspective of a nonauthoritative character like Old Dudley or Tanner to the foreground, the events of the stories generally lead to a questioning of the character's position and a reemerging of the background third person, the omniscient and authoritative narrator. O'Connor's view of reality, grounded in her Roman Catholic faith, necessarily involves an omniscient presence reemerging, even if only to question and not replace the limited perspectives that position themselves as omniscient.

As I have suggested before, free indirect discourse unites voices even as it highlights their division. In O'Connor's stories this division/unity of discourse works at

the level of the character and the reader and the character and her community. Although issues of character, character's community, and the reader work together in one narrative, I will first explore how free indirect discourse implicates the reader and then how it implicates the character in relationship to his community, particularly in terms of race relations.

#### **4.1. The Issue of the Reader**

"I conduct the action peacefully and quietly, but at the end I punch the reader in the nose."  
-- Anton Chekhov

Several critics, Brinkmeyer in particular, have described thoroughly O'Connor's somewhat precarious relationship to her reading audience. Although she was a Catholic writer in the Protestant South, the greatest divide she perceived existing between herself and her community was the divide between believer and non-believer. In a letter to "A," O'Connor explains:

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, 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. (HB 92)

O'Connor assumed her audience did not hold the same beliefs as she and thus pronounced that she would present her vision through shock, claiming, "To the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures" (MM 34). Of this reader/author tension, Brinkmeyer observes, "Trying to bridge this gap

between believing artist and unbelieving audience was a terrible burden for O'Connor, and one that haunted her throughout her career" (168).

Free indirect discourse necessarily brings into question and speaks to the issue of narrative voice, a topic that has long plagued many of the readers from whom O'Connor felt so divided. Students and critics often have the most trouble negotiating what they perceive as the harshness of O'Connor's vision. Sarah Gordon describes the critical divides in assessing O'Connor's narrative voice with thorough and insightful attention. She claims, "O'Connor's fiction is often accepted or rejected on the basis of a reader's response to the harshness of her presentation" (33). Gordon rejects Brinkmeyer's assertion that O'Connor's texts are rooted in dialogism, insisting that the Catholicism and fundamentalism Brinkmeyer sees in competition with one another in the texts cannot be considered mutually exclusive visions but rather each participates in the same monologism. Gordon emphasizes that O'Connor, who herself asserted, "I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy" (MM 32), wrote "out of a closed system, a closed worldview" (45). The implication in Gordon's statement is that Christian orthodoxy is a closed system, even though O'Connor claimed it actually freed her observations: "I have heard it said that belief in Christian dogma is 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" (MM 31).

Whether O'Connor's orthodoxy is limiting or freeing is a question unlikely to be resolved. Perhaps a reconciliation between Brinkmeyer's notions of dialogism and

Gordon's emphasis on monologism can be achieved. Free indirect discourse necessitates a dialogism in that it allows different languages and viewpoints to interact with one another. The real question is whether and how those viewpoints are ultimately subsumed by one controlling viewpoint. To answer this we must look at how the narratives incorporate and present the language of their characters. If O'Connor's stories rely in some way on a mingling of voices and perspectives and we judge their worlds to be harsh, we must then ask who exactly imposes the harsh vision and how such visions work in the narrative whole. Gordon claims O'Connor's writing presents a challenge to secular and Christian readers alike, namely, the problem of "how to reconcile... [O'Connor's] stark narration with Christian love and forgiveness" (45). Christianity, of course, addresses many more concepts than simply love and forgiveness; thus, readers who bring to the texts simplistic notions of Christianity might indeed feel O'Connor's texts to be incompatible with it. Regardless of whether stark narration is compatible with Christianity (and O'Connor believed it was), attention to whose vision is stark and how the narrative invites particular judgments from its reader must be examined, for it is not a narrative voice but narrative voices that reign in O'Connor's fictions.

O'Connor's struggle with her audience, and indeed her audience's struggle with her vision, might explain in part the way her stories interact with the reader. Studies of free indirect discourse usually mark it as a device in the service of empathy and/or irony: empathy because the reader is brought into the character's thoughts as those thoughts blend into third person narration, and irony because the character's limited thoughts, when stated in the third person, can emphasize a character's absurdity. As some critics

have noted and Hardy outlines in terms of “Revelation,” O’Connor often moves, making use of free indirect discourse, from a narrative structure that encourages irony to one that encourages empathy.

In “Greenleaf,” the character with whose thoughts the reader becomes most involved is Mrs. May. The story opens positioning the reader to view Mrs. May as isolated and pompous. As the story progresses, often representing Mrs. May’s thoughts in free indirect discourse, the reader might distance herself even more as Mrs. May’s judgments are revealed to be more and more self-centered.

“Greenleaf” opens in Mrs. May’s bedroom and in her closed-off outlook. Although the narrator does not begin by specifying that Mrs. May is looking out her window, after a few paragraphs we see her “standing bent forward behind the blind” (311). The narrator describes a bull standing outside her bedroom, “silvered in the moonlight, . . . his head raised as if he listened—like some patient god come down to woo her” (311). In a typical O’Connor simile, the section following the “like” or “as if” becomes the reality of the protagonist’s skewed perception. Immediately we recognize that in Mrs. May’s world gods acknowledge and esteem her; in the narrator’s world, a bull stands outside Mrs. May’s window. As Mrs. May thinks about her resentment toward Mr. Greenleaf for not penning up the stray bull, the narrator moves from phrases marked with “she thought” into free indirect discourse. During Mrs. May’s lament of Mr. Greenleaf, she remembers that his wife is worse than he: “And of the wife, she didn’t even like to think. Beside the wife, Mr. Greenleaf was an aristocrat” (313). In this example, we move directly from an utterance marked as Mrs. May’s thoughts into a

thought free of markers. Because the subjective, positioned thoughts come to us in the third person, they take on an air of authority, an air we might come to resent Mrs. May for having.

As Mrs. May's thoughts display a condescending view of the Greenleafs, she raises her estimation of herself in light of their lowering. Again, the narrator moves from indirect discourse to free indirect discourse, which helps establish the free indirect discourse utterances as Mrs. May's thoughts, though they are free of specific markers: "She returned to bed thinking that if the Greenleaf boys had risen in the world it was because she had given their father employment when no one else would have him. She had had Mr. Greenleaf fifteen years but no one else would have had him fifteen minutes" (313). Establishing herself above the Greenleafs as she credits their few successes with her own charity, her biggest fear is that they will take over the prominent position she has given herself. She dreams that the bull is eating everything in sight until the only thing left is "the Greenleafs on a little island all their own in the middle of what had been her place" (312). Edward Kessler describes Mrs. May's self-centeredness in terms of the way she sees herself in the world around her: "She... finds comfort in her own image, which, like Narcissus, she finds reflected from the natural world" (117). Kessler highlights the following passage in "Greenleaf": "The pastures were enough to calm her. When she looked out any window in her house she saw the reflection of her own character" (321).

From the story's onset, the reader understands that Mrs. May esteems herself above others, her greatest anxiety being others exceeding her or just believing themselves

superior. Because she pompously observes the world as a third person narrator through free indirect discourse, readers are often led into a critique of Mrs. May. Hardy points out that often the reader's negative judgment of a character is less about that character's judgments and more about the nature of the character herself. Hardy writes that in "Revelation," "I think most of us would be willing to share in Mrs. Turpin's evaluation if it just weren't Mrs. Turpin who was making it." (41). This, of course, is true in "Greenleaf" as well. O'Connor's readers may not be exempt from the self-centered and class-biased views of Mrs. May, but many of us resent Mrs. May for having them.

The story continues, dramatizing the conflict between Mrs. May and the Greenleafs and her inability to control them, and ends with a change of perspective brought about by a violence typical of O'Connor's epiphanic stories. Whereas the story opened with the bull linked to a god ready to woo Mrs. May, when the story ends, the bull "like a wild tormented lover," wants not to woo her from a distance but penetrate her with his horns (333). As the bull penetrates Mrs. May's isolation (including the way she mentally distances herself from others), the narrative voice moves out of free indirect discourse, and instead of focusing on interior thoughts, turns to the actual events, moving from inside Mrs. May's thoughts (and her bedroom) to the events taking place on an open pasture; here we have a sexual irony in that in her bedroom Mrs. May is closed off from the world, and when outside in an open pasture she is penetrated by the bull. This narrative move from interior to exterior mimics a shift in Mrs. May, whose thoughts just a moment before were focused on herself and her unnoticed achievements (332), become so outside herself that the narration no longer represents them, but rather represents what

Mrs. May sees in the distance: “She continued to stare straight ahead but the entire scene in front of her had changed—the tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky—and she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable” (333). Instead of looking inward, she looks straight ahead with restored sight, no longer perceiving the world as a reflection of herself, but herself as a part of the world.

The reader, too, is invited to change her perspective. Where once Mrs. May was pompous and thus contemptible, she is now helpless, her situation lamentable. Though the story opens with a free indirect discourse representation of Mrs. May thinking that Mr. Greenleaf “walked on the perimeter of some invisible circle and if you wanted to look him in the face, you had to move and get in front of him” (313), the story closes with her watching him “approaching on the outside of some invisible circle, the tree line gaping behind him and nothing under his feet” (334). As Mrs. May no longer needs to stand in front of Mr. Greenleaf to perceive him, readers are asked to see Mrs. May without positioning themselves above her.

This shifting of perspectives can be seen in most of O’Connor’s stories. Some, however, play upon the situation doubly, bringing in a character who works to critique the “Mrs. May” figure. If we look at these critical figures as stand-in readers, the ironic play through free indirect discourse becomes even more heightened, as is the case in “Everything That Rises Must Converge.” Although we receive the story by way of Julian’s perspective, Julian’s mother is similar to Mrs. May in her shallow judgments of the world. Similar to “Greenleaf,” which positions Mrs. May in her room and later

outside, seeing herself in her surroundings, “Everything That Rises Must Converge” opens with Julian’s mother in front of the mirror and ends with her outside, being struck and knocked to the ground. One of the few women who shows up at the Y reducing class in hat and gloves, Julian’s mother affects high-class living, frequently reciting pleasant platitudes to Julian and reminding him of his plantation-owning ancestors (408).

When a black woman, wearing the same hat and carrying the same bag as Julian’s mother, enters the bus Julian and his mother are riding, most readers laugh with Julian because the story is structured such that the reader is encouraged to “read” Julian’s mother the way Julian does. The story begins aligning the reader with Julian. Even if we do not like Julian, the narrative encourages us to agree with his evaluations of his mother. In the opening interaction between Julian and his mother, Julian reassures her that she should have indeed bought the ridiculous hat she is thinking of returning. The narrative reads: “It was a hideous hat. A purple velvet flap came down on one side of it and stood up on the other; the rest of it was green and looked like a cushion with the stuffing out. He decided it was less comical than jaunty and pathetic” (405). This description is in the third person, lending to it a kind of authority, although it is obviously Julian’s evaluation. After Julian, in direct discourse, encourages his mother to wear the hat, he, in free indirect discourse, evaluates it negatively. As he makes judgments about his mother, and in this case her hat, the reader sees the mother through Julian’s eyes. The reader’s judgments are thus guided by Julian’s bias.

When Julian’s mother, much like Mrs. May, suffers a violent blow to her self-righteousness, the reader, with Julian, suffers his own. From the beginning Julian, in his

self-absorption, is comically identified with a martyr, both in his own thoughts and in the narrator's descriptions. When he waits for his mother to get ready so that he can take her to the Y, the narrative reads: "She was almost ready to go, standing before the hall mirror, putting on her hat, while he appeared pinned to the door frame, waiting like Saint Sebastian for the arrows to begin piercing him" (405). We see a simile here much like the one that occurs in the beginning of "Greenleaf" in that it links the actual events with a character's interpretation of those events. The reality of the situation is that Julian is waiting for his mother to get ready, but Julian likens it to his being a martyr waiting for his holy death. A few pages later, another simile occurs: "He walked along, saturated in depression, as if in the midst of his martyrdom he had lost his faith" (407). Here again we see Julian positioned as martyr. Julian not only thinks himself heroic but acts out this perception. When he responds to what he considers his mother's foolery over the hat, he raises "his eyes to heaven" (405). Later, in free indirect discourse, Julian thinks of the time he must spend with his mother as a time in which he will be "sacrificed to her pleasure" (406).

If O'Connor's use of free indirect discourse encourages the reader to participate in Julian's estimation of his mother, she might easily be lead to participate in Julian's martyr-complex as well, "putting up" with Julian's mother the way he does. Because readers of "Everything That Rises Must Converge" are lead to be just as alienated from Julian's mother as he is, at the end readers are also asked to look at the distorted mother as Julian does, not through a lens of self-superiority, but in sympathy. Julian goes from being described as "withdrawing into the inner compartment of his mind where he spent

most of his time...a kind of mental bubble in which he established himself when he could not bear to be a part of what was going on around him” (411) to being swept away by a “tide of darkness” (420) as he cries out to his mother in anguish. Although Julian’s mother suffers the actual violence, she reverts even further back into the familiar, calling for Grandpa and her old “darky” nurse, Caroline, while Julian breaks out of the familiar and, like Mrs. May, sees the world differently than he had before.

Julian’s calling out “Mamma, Mamma!” in this final scene becomes an important issue in this discussion. Someone not familiar with “Everything That Rises Must Converge” might wonder why critics constantly discuss Julian’s mother instead of simply calling her by her name; she, in fact, is not given a name in the story. Joanne McMullen, in a precise grammar study of O’Connor’s work, claims that this repeated choice to avoid naming characters or referring to them by their names, along with other grammatical devices, actually de-humanizes the characters. McMullen asserts, “Because of her [O’Connor’s] language choices, readers are often compelled into a non-Catholic, and yes, sometimes even anti-Catholic reading of her fiction” (8). McMullen positions Julian’s mother as the “focal point of the story,” claiming she “joins the long succession of O’Connor characters who have had their personal identities expunged” (18) even though McMullen believes Julian’s mother deserves “her own uniqueness, her own name” (19). McMullen further argues that “this stylistic technique seems to defeat...[O’Connor’s] desire to deliver an audience antagonistic to a loving, caring, Catholic God into the religious society she feels they have rejected” (17).

While McMullen's observations are astute, they do not take into consideration what I am suggesting pushes O'Connor stories along towards their final epiphanic and mysterious endings: narrative voice and the play of free indirect discourse. If we read "Everything That Rises Must Converge" with attention to Julian's perspective and the way it merges with the third person narration, we understand that the narrative itself imitates Julian's thoughts as Julian imitates divinity. If Julian is the center of his world, as he has been shown to be, his mother would be seen as secondary to him; in fact, her existence is discerned only in relation to his own, all-important one. It is not O'Connor who de-humanizes Julian's mother, but rather Julian himself, and us, if we follow his lead. Rather than presenting an anti-Catholic message, O'Connor's strategy works to present an anti-Catholic (especially when we read Catholic as universal) perspective that necessarily crumbles by the story's end. Julian's bubble of self-superiority, like Mrs. May's, is broken as he calls out in recognition of his likeness to the mother he previously scorned.

Even O'Connor's less anthologized stories, such as "The Partridge Festival" which has received far less critical attention than "Everything That Rises Must Converge," play out episodes similar in their construction of perspective to that of "Everything That Rises Must Converge." In "The Partridge Festival" the reader goes through the story from Calhoun's position. The story begins with Calhoun parking his car at his aunts' house. The reader sees what Calhoun would see upon his arriving, but along with Calhoun's vision receives his judgments. The story opens:

Calhoun parked his small pod-shaped car in the driveway to his great aunts' house and got out cautiously, looking to the right and left as if he expected the profusion

of azalea blossoms to have a lethal effect upon him. Instead of a decent lawn, the old ladies had three terraces crammed with red and white azaleas, beginning at the sidewalk and running backwards to the very edge of their imposing unpainted house. The two of them were on the front porch, one sitting, the other standing. (421)

Calhoun (and the reader) does not see the lawn adorned with flowers but “crammed” with them up to the aunts’ “imposing house.” When Aunt Bessie calls out, “Here’s our baby!” to Calhoun, we are predisposed to view her negatively. After their initial meeting, Calhoun reasons, in free indirect discourse, that “[his aunts] would take his voluntary presence in Partridge at Azalea Festival time to be a sign that his character was improving” (421).

Although Calhoun works as a salesman part of the year, he longs to claim his identity as an artist who sees beyond the commercial values of Partridge. The narrative reads: “For the three summer months of the year, he lived with his parents and sold air-conditioners, boats, and refrigerators so that the other nine months he could afford to meet life naturally and bring his real self—the rebel-artist-mystic—to birth” (424). This passage begins as a simple third person description, but Calhoun’s language seeps into the end as we identify the “rebel-artist-mystic” with the way Calhoun speaks and positions himself. Although there are no direct indicators that this is Calhoun’s thought, it is clearly a judgment of Calhoun’s. For example, Irving Malin reasons, “He [Calhoun] sees himself as ‘rebel-artist-mystic,’” (181) easily interpreting the vision as Calhoun’s, even though it is written in the third person. This passage also reminds us of Calhoun’s quest for individuality, as he himself will bring about his own birth. This becomes more

important as the narrative reveals Calhoun's attempts to reject his kinship with others in favor of identification with *Singleton*.

Repeatedly in Calhoun's conversation with his aunts, they remind him of his kinship to them in much the same way that Julian's mother reminds him of his grandparents and their legacy. Aunt Mattie shouts, "Your great-grandfather would have been delighted to see you taking an interest in the festival, Calhoun" (421). Later Aunt Bessie claims, "You look very like Father" as she hands him a box with a picture of his father. Calhoun opens the box "without enthusiasm" (422); when Aunt Mattie pronounces that Calhoun will eventually "look more and more like Father," Calhoun, emphatically denying it, claims, "I'm a different type entirely" (423). The disdain Calhoun has for his aunts and his kinship to them is linked closely with his distaste for the town of Partridge itself and the events that delight its residents. Because we are not asked to focus on one particular object of the protagonist's scorn, as we were in the case of Julian's contempt for his mother in "Everything That Rises Must Converge," we can see more clearly Calhoun's own shortcomings, perhaps not aligning ourselves as closely to Calhoun as we did to Julian.

In "The Partridge Festival," readers are asked simultaneously to critique the shallowness of a town and its inhabitants by means of Calhoun's judgments presented through free indirect discourse and Calhoun for his single-minded aspiration to greatness and sense of self-importance. Calhoun repeatedly positions himself outside of Partridge, a person incomprehensible to Partridge residents. When he tells his aunts of the exposition he plans to write on Singleton, the narrative reads: "He stopped and put the

pipe in his mouth and sat back. It would be ridiculous to tell *them*” (424). Here and elsewhere, the italicized text emphasizes not only that it is Calhoun’s thoughts which have entered the third person narrative but also Calhoun’s separation of himself from *them*. Calhoun privileges himself even above Mary Elizabeth, whose sympathies for Singleton and scorn for Partridge would seem to merit Calhoun’s respect. Rather, Calhoun thinks of Mary Elizabeth and reasons: “As for the girl he doubted if the sight of Singleton would do anything for her. She had that particular repulsive fanaticism peculiar to smart children—all brain and no emotion” (437).

Malin suggests that Mary Elizabeth has another function in the story: she reads/judges Calhoun as Calhoun reads and judges the world. Malin claims that through Mary Elizabeth “O’Connor suggests...that there is always *an unseen presence*—a mysterious force looking through events, words, and objects” (181). Readers, like Mary Elizabeth, become one such unseen presence looking at and critiquing Calhoun, but by the story’s end, we, again like Mary Elizabeth, are asked to recognize our kinship with Calhoun.

The story ends not with the violence of “Everything That Rises Must Converge” but still with a “punch in the nose” to the reader. After Mary Elizabeth has been sexually threatened by Singleton and her (as well as Calhoun’s) naïve evaluation of Singleton as misunderstood unravels, Calhoun must face his kinship with those he most scorns. As Julian calls out “Mama!” in recognition of his kinship with his mother, Calhoun looks at Mary Elizabeth, whom he previously only wanted to raise himself above, and sees that in their desperate attempt to link their identities with Singleton’s, they must now embrace a

likeness not to Singleton's noble rebellion but to his undeniable depravity. Their kinship with Singleton necessarily includes their kinship with each other and with the town of Partridge. The close of the story reads:

In despair he leaned closer until he was topped by a miniature visage which rose incorrigibly in... [Mary Elizabeth's] spectacles and fixed him where he was. Round, innocent, undistinguished as an iron link, it was the face whose gift of life had pushed straight forward to the future to raise festival after festival. Like a master salesman, it seemed to have been waiting there from all time to claim him. (444)

This passage reveals that Calhoun recognizes that it is his own nature that produces the festivals he hates. He is as much like the other residents as an "iron link" on a chain that marks the unity even between those who wish to see themselves as single (Singleton) rather than connected. The master salesman, the personal identity Calhoun disdains throughout the story and the position that marks the town's shallowness and commercialism, is revealed to be Calhoun's true identity as Calhoun is left in despair.

The narrator of this ending is more difficult to discern. We obviously have a third person narrator describing the action of Calhoun leaning over and seeing his reflection in Mary Elizabeth's glasses, but the language, while still reflective of Calhoun's thoughts, does not necessarily reflect his language. The passage describes Calhoun's epiphany, that he is what he scorns, but doesn't outline precisely if the prose is a representation of his thoughts or the narrator's description of the image Calhoun seems to see. Again, if we share in Calhoun's judgments of Partridge and Mary Elizabeth as well as critique Calhoun's evaluation of himself, we might also question our own guilt in positioning ourselves above both Partridge and Calhoun. As Harold Bloom explains, O'Connor is "a visionary writer... determined to take us by force, to bear us away so that we may be

opened to the possibility of grace” (3). By aligning our visions with that of a character through free indirect discourse, O’Connor makes a space for epiphany to include us as it involves her characters.

#### **4.2. The Issue of the Community: Realism and Race**

O’Connor’s stories play upon tensions between the readers and characters as they play upon tensions between characters and those in their communities. Free indirect discourse encourages readers to judge in relation to how a character whose perspective guides the narrative judges. Even if we dislike someone like Calhoun, we cannot escape seeing his aunts’ landscape as he does. Ruthann Knechel Johansen suggests O’Connor’s stories work through trickery, claiming, “The artist [O’Connor] as trickster informs people of their common origins and of the mutual dependence among human beings and between the human and the divine” (9). In other words, if a reader distances herself from Calhoun as Calhoun distances himself from his aunts, the revelatory end of “The Partridge Festival” should implicate the reader precisely because it implicates Calhoun’s inability to see himself in those he despises. Mrs. May, Julian, and Calhoun all position themselves outside their communities; Mrs. May sets herself apart from the Greenleafs and Julian and Calhoun want to deny their familial ties. The narratives suggest each of these characters’ likeness to the others they have scorned by the stories’ ends. The theme of isolation from one’s community runs throughout O’Connor stories and, because of her devotion to realism, often presents itself in racial terms. In a 1955 interview, O’Connor

claimed, “I think it’s easier for a Southerner to begin writing than for anyone from almost any other section of the country, because we have so many conventions and so much tension in the South. We have a content to begin on” (*Conversations* 7). We can look at race relations as an example of the way O’Connor is drawing on the manners of her time to depict human disconnectedness.

Although O’Connor’s presentation of race has much to do with her faithfulness to realism, there is, however, one caveat: because O’Connor’s stories rely heavily on the involvement of a white character’s perspective in the third person discourse, her realism with regards to race is often more about a faithfulness in portraying the racist perspectives of her protagonists than demonstrating the humanity of black characters.

Melvin G. Williams criticizes O’Connor because her stories are not about black characters in the same way they are about whites. He claims that even in the stories in which blacks are more than just a passing reference, they still have “separate-yet-unequal status” (132). Black characters, Williams asserts, are tools that at best disrupt whites’ perceptions and at worst add southern flavor with a word or two of dialect. Williams writes in regards to “Revelation,” “Aside from their value as ironic flatterers—an irony, we should emphasize, that they seem wholly unaware of—they are as unimportant to the story as they are to Mrs. Turpin” (132).

Williams’ comments and the critical responses to them have, in part, brought our focus away from O’Connor’s depiction of race and instead to the question of her own racism. Critics like Ralph C. Wood admit that some of O’Connor’s comments concerning race in her letters are problematic but defend her character by looking at her

fiction. Wood believes O'Connor's fiction offers a "real antidote to racism" in the "way of the cross" (92). According to Wood, the racism that emerges in her letters is often, in large part, connected to her "cultural conservatism that made her rightly skeptical of self-righteous social reformers and ...thus...deeply unsympathetic with the Civil Rights Movement" (92). Wood's discussion is particularly useful because he draws our attention to O'Connor's white characters who purport liberalism, but are themselves motivated by selfish and even racist ambitions. If we look at the stories' presentations of a character's interior voice through free indirect discourse against that character's actions and speech, we understand that so often O'Connor uses racist attitudes as the manifestation of inward pride, an attempt to set oneself apart from the world.

When looked at through free indirect discourse, O'Connor's stories reveal that although Williams' comments are relevant and helpful, they in many ways miss the point. O'Connor's narratives are largely constructed from the perspective of a white protagonist whose pride is represented by his manners, quite often his racism. The stories ask that we look at individual characters and the ways they construct worlds that position themselves outside their communities. We have seen how Mrs. May disassociates herself from the Greenleafs and how Calhoun denies his kinship to his aunts and his hometown. O'Connor's stories build to epiphany (in the characters and perhaps the reader as well) through a crumbling of perspective as initial self-important perspectives of characters are often dramatized in terms of race, an important aspect of the social world O'Connor observed. As I have already noted, O'Connor privileged realism in fiction, believing that writers should concern themselves foremost with observation rather than abstract ideas.

In “The Nature and Aim of Fiction,” she admires the writing of Flaubert. I quote this passage in length because it demonstrates so readily her commitment to realism:

All the sentences in *Madame Bovary* could be examined with wonder, but there is one in particular that always stops me in admiration. Flaubert has just shown us Emma at the piano with Charles watching her. He says, “She struck the notes with aplomb and ran from top to bottom of the keyboard without a break. Thus shaken up, the old instrument, whose strings buzzed, could be heard at the other end of the village when the window was open, and often the bailiff’s clerk, passing along the highroad, bareheaded and in list slippers, stopped to listen, his sheet of paper in his hand.”

The more you look at a sentence like that, the more you can learn from it. At one end of it, we are with Emma and this very solid instrument “whose strings buzzed” and at the other end of it we are across the town village with this very concrete clerk in his list slippers. With regard to the rest of the novel, we may think that it makes no difference that the instrument has buzzing strings or that the clerk wears list slippers and has a piece of paper in his hand, but Flaubert had to create a believable village to put Emma in. It’s always necessary to remember that the fiction writer is much less immediately concerned with grand ideas and bristling emotions than he is with putting list slippers on clerks. (MM 69-70)

In addition to being indebted to Flaubert’s realism and attention to detail, O’Connor’s use of free indirect discourse might be a result of her admiration of Flaubert, as he is considered a master of its use. O’Connor constructs not only villages in which to place her characters, but, through free indirect discourse, she also reveals the perception/construction of those villages by the characters whose sense of self-importance often demonstrates itself in racial terms.

O’Connor’s adherence to realism, and in effect to the manners of her society, might indeed account for the way in which some critics have latched onto elements of her fiction that speak directly to Southern manners and have avoided notions of religious mystery. Patricia Yaeger proposes new means of assessing Southern women writers in general, and suggests we stop reading O’Connor by her own theological standards and

look at what O'Connor's grotesque bodies reveal about the social/political spaces they inhabit. She argues, "Southern literary bodies are grotesque because their authors know that bodies cannot be thought of separate from the racist and sexist institutions that surround them" (186). Yaeger reads O'Connor's morphed characters as representing "a society that is incapable of supporting its bodies" (204).

Although interpretations like Yaeger's do much in the way of helping us read the society present in O'Connor's stories, they do not see social issues as a means by which O'Connor demonstrates the mystery of human interaction with one another and the divine. Within the short story form, the character's interior perspective and evaluation of the world builds to an epiphanic end that asks the reader to question racial assumptions as well as notions of control, authority, and divinity.

"The Artificial Nigger" has received so much attention perhaps partly due to both O'Connor's claim that it was her favorite, "and probably the best thing...[she'd] ever write (HB 209)" as well as its controversial presentation of race. This story follows many of the same patterns as the stories previously discussed but uses race to establish the authority of the main character, Mr. Head.

Much as "Greenleaf" opens in Mrs. May's bedroom and "Everything That Rises Must Converge" begins with Julian's mother looking at her own reflection, settling each in a fixed place and perspective, "The Artificial Nigger" begins in Mr. Head's room, and we are immediately invited to see the room as he sees it upon awakening in the middle of the night. The narrative describes a straight chair as looking "stiff and attentive as if it were awaiting an order" and Mr. Head's trousers, which hang on the back of the

chair, as having “almost a noble air, like the garment some great man had just flung to his servant” (249). Because Mr. Head has just awakened and the narrator positions him as surveying his surroundings, the following narration reads as a reflection of his thoughts. Like the simile in the beginning of “Greenleaf,” which I suggested compared an animal (the bull) with Mrs. May’s perception of it (a god come to woo her), the simile in the first paragraph of “The Artificial Nigger” imbues Mr. Head’s surroundings with his self-importance as the chair waits to be given orders and the trousers appear to be that of a great man with servants. The narrator, however, does draw attention to the potential uneasiness about Mr. Head’s understanding of the world with the grave face of the moon, sitting outside Mr. Head’s room, outside his thoughts. The grave moon that “contemplates itself with the look of a young man who sees his old age before him” as though perhaps death and decay were before him suggests the underlying instability of Mr. Head’s identity, which will make it necessary for him to re-affirm his position specifically against blackness by going to the city.

The narrative then moves from Mr. Head observing his room to a description of Mr. Head’s features after he turns his gaze to the alarm clock that does not work but is not needed to awaken him. The story reads, “His physical reactions, like his moral ones, were guided by his will and strong character, and these could be seen plainly in his features” (249). This passage, like many of those that make use of free indirect discourse, might not seem to be steeped in the subjective position of Mr. Head quite yet. As the story progresses, however, readers discover Mr. Head’s lack of strong character and will. A second reading might reveal how entrenched the opening of the story

actually is in Mr. Head's perspective; passages like the one cited above are not simply objective commentary but are rather Mr. Head's thoughts working their way into the third person narration.

After Mr. Head's initial judgment of his strong character and will, the narrative comments on Mr. Head's facial features:

He had a long tube-like face with a long rounded open jaw and a long depressed nose. His eyes were alert but quiet, and in the miraculous moonlight they had a look of composure and of ancient wisdom as if they belonged to one of the great guides of men. He might have been Vergil summoned in the middle of the night to go to Dante, or better, Raphael, awakened by a blast of God's light to fly to the side of Tobias. The only dark spot in the room was Nelson's pallet, underneath the shadow of the window. (250)

This passage is problematic because it begins as simple third person descriptions by an objective narrator. Hardy indicates that auxiliary modals (and in this passage "might") are often used in free indirect discourse constructions, but what follows the modals in this passage are references to Dante, Virgil, and Raphael, stories with which Mr. Head could likely be unfamiliar. The narrator here might not use Mr. Head's language, but she certainly positions the language as Mr. Head's. We have already gotten the sense the Mr. Head views himself as important, thus this likening of him to Virgil or Raphael becomes comic, especially as the events of his trip to the city with his grandson, Nelson, prove chaotic.

The narrative itself moves in the direction of Mr. Head's thoughts; immediately after we hear that "the only dark spot in the room was Nelson's pallet, underneath the shadow of the window," the narrative moves to a description of Nelson as though Mr. Head's attention has now been moved to his grandson who is sleeping nearby. Upon

gazing at Nelson, “Mr. Head lay back down, feeling entirely confident that he could carry out the moral mission of the coming day”: a trip to the city with Nelson (250). Mr. Head understands this trip as an opportunity for Nelson to recognize himself against the dark city and the black faces that inhabit it. The action of the story soon reveals the ways Mr. Head performs outwardly his inward sense of self-importance. Because, as many critics have pointed out, Nelson is an extension of Mr. Head, his desire to show Nelson who Nelson is can be read as Mr. Head’s need to affirm who he is in Nelson’s rejection of the city. Mr. Head reasons in free indirect discourse: “He [Nelson] was to find out...that he had no cause for pride merely because he had been born in a city. He was to find out that the city is not a great place. Mr. Head meant him to see everything there is to see in a city so that he would be content to stay at home for the rest of his life” (251). This passage illustrates Mr. Head’s desire for Nelson to understand himself against the city and what it represents but also reveals that even though Mr. Head has presumably seen everything in the city there is to see, he is not content staying at home for the rest of his life and must again go the city perhaps to affirm the self that is being threatened by the prospect of mortality.

Mr. Head’s understanding of self is marked clearly in racial terms as Nelson’s ignorance is first demonstrated in his inability to understand blackness. Mr. Head engages in conversation with another white man, but upon seeing a “huge, coffee-colored man” his “serene expression changed. His mouth almost closed, and a light, fierce and cautious both, came into his eyes” (254). Mr. Head is enlivened by this black presence and the opportunity to teach Nelson a lesson. Referring to the “coffee-colored” man, Mr.

Head asks Nelson, “What was that?” Nelson answers with several “wrong” answers that mark his ignorance in Mr. Head’s mind. Nelson says “A man,” then “A fat man,” then “An old man,” to which Mr. Head proudly asserts, “That was a nigger,” seemingly negating all of Nelson’s answers. Mr. Head and Nelson both recognize the exchange as Mr. Head’s victory. Nelson becomes angry insisting that Mr. Head “said they were black” and never mentioned that they might be tan (255), alerting the reader to the fact that blackness to Mr. Head is certainly more than simply a color. Roland Vegso claims this passage reveals “the ‘Nigger’ of the title is always ‘artificial’; it is a discursive cultural construct that functions as the most powerful signifier of a racist discourse” (67). Nelson’s inability to identify the man as “black” shows not a lack of “real” knowledge but of cultural knowledge rooted in racist sentiments.

Later Mr. Head sees the same man in a segregated diner and explains to Nelson, “They rope them off” (256). Nelson is beginning to understand as he “suddenly felt a keen pride in him [Mr. Head]. He realized the old man would be his only support in the strange place they were approaching. He would be entirely alone in the world if he were ever lost from his grandfather” (257). Nelson (for the moment) understands that he needs his grandfather, and consequently Mr. Head’s racist attitudes if he is to have a place in the world and not wander about helplessly and formlessly like the transparent ghost-like reflection he saw in the train window. Nelson’s dependence on his grandfather is not resolved, however, and the story is built upon an incessant tension between Nelson’s affirmation of the city and his need to align himself with his grandfather in rejection of it. After Nelson’s initial display of reliance on Mr. Head on the train, once in the city Nelson

remarks with enthusiasm, “This is where I come from!” Mr. Head’s reaction is described in the following manner: “Mr. Head was appalled. He saw the moment had come for drastic action” (259). Again, Mr. Head must bring Nelson to realize his position in the world and the vulgarity of the city, so he shows Nelson the city’s sewer system and explains its functions:

Then Mr. Head explained the sewer system, how the entire city was underlined with it, how it contained all the drainage and was full of rats and how a man could slide into it and be sucked along down endless pitchblack tunnels. He described it so well that Nelson was for some seconds shaken. He connected the sewer passages with the entrance to hell and understood for the first time how the world was put together in its lower parts. He drew away from the curb. (259)

Here again, the narrator shows Mr. Head acting out his previous interior sentiments in which his self-importance and wisdom likened him to Virgil. Even if Mr. Head does not know who Virgil is, the narrator positions him in mock-Virgil situations. Mr. Head has shaken Nelson, but Nelson soon recovers, again insisting, to Mr. Head’s dismay, “Yes, but you can stay away from the holes...This is where I come from!” (259). The stubbornness of both Mr. Head and Nelson and the tension continually surfacing in one’s assertion of superiority over the other eventually results in Mr. Head’s abandoning and disowning of Nelson, which in turn results in Nelson’s disowning of Mr. Head, showing each their sense of loss and dependency. Mr. Head’s and Nelson’s brewing hostility directed at one another represents a divided self— one whose identity depends on separation from a city marked by blackness and yet still longs to belong to that from which it has divided itself.

After Nelson encounters a large black woman<sup>8</sup> to whom he is instantly drawn but from whom Mr. Head abruptly pulls him away, the narrative finally brings the two divided halves of white identity to meet another black presence that gives the story its title. While most read the statue as the agent of grace in the story, the “action of mercy” actually begins before the two even encounter it. After Mr. Head has denied Nelson and Nelson has responded with coldness, Mr. Head “felt he knew now what time would be like without seasons and what heat would be like without light and what man would be like without salvation. He didn’t care if he never made the train and if it had not been for what suddenly caught his attention [the statue] like a cry out of the gathering dusk, he might have forgotten there was a station to go to” (268). Nelson’s denial, not the statue, *first* alerts Mr. Head to his alienation and helplessness. The statue actually seems to bring him back to his former dignified self, without which he might not remember there is a place (and a self) that is not the city. Although the statue might very well represent “the redemptive quality of the Negro’s suffering for us all,”<sup>9</sup> it still provides Mr. Head the ability to teach Nelson yet another lesson that he has been teaching all along; Nelson is superior to the lowly Negro. The statue is also notably male and frail, an image of blackness that the woman they encounter could not possibly fit into, again suggesting blackness itself is artificial. The statue is described in the following manner:

---

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that this black woman exhibits typical “mammy” features, discernable not only from her appearance but because Nelson, a small white child, seeks to be nurtured by her. The woman’s response, however, is nearly “anti-mammy” as she makes fun of his pleas for assistance. The reference to the stereotype is appropriate when we consider the fact that we encounter this woman through Nelson’s eyes. The woman, in the third person narration, acts contrary to the expectations of Nelson and, by extension, cultural stereotypes. A similar mammy-reversal can be seen in “Everything That Rises Must Converge” when the black woman strikes instead of nurture’s Julian’s child-like, self-absorbed mother.

<sup>9</sup> Flannery O’Connor wrote in a letter to Ben Griffith, “What I had in mind to suggest with the artificial nigger was the redemptive quality of the Negro’s suffering for us all” (HB 78).

The plaster figure of a Negro sitting bent over on a low yellow brick fence...The Negro was about Nelson's size and he was pitched forward at an unsteady angle because the putty that held him to the wall had cracked. One of his eyes was entirely white and he held a piece of brown watermelon...It was not possible to tell if the artificial Negro were meant to be young or old; he looked too miserable to be either (268).

In looking at the statue, Nelson and Mr. Head mimic each other and the statue: "The two of them stood there with their necks forward at almost the same angle and their shoulders curved in almost exactly the same way and their hands trembling identically in their pockets. Mr. Head looked like an ancient child and Nelson like a miniature old man" (268). In the description of Mr. Head and Nelson, O'Connor's voice moves away from free indirect discourse into a kind of authorial intrusion marked by the use of Negro as opposed to Mr. Head's only word to describe blacks, "nigger." Nelson, who previously could not identify the "nigger" on the train, has indeed come a long way as he exclaims, "An artificial nigger!" This statement made "in Mr. Head's exact tone" is ironic because at the same time that Nelson acknowledges a cultural stereotype previously prevented by his innocence, he marks it as "artificial," a word he uses to mean a statue of something real, while the reader potentially sees his expression to reveal the artificiality of the word "nigger" itself (268). Mr. Head and Nelson's differences begin to dissolve "like an action of mercy" (269). The statue, then, seems to remind the reader that Mr. Head and Nelson are as lost and alienated and miserable as the statue and the people it is supposed to represent, but Mr. Head and Nelson seem to recognize their privileged white selves in the static, stereotyped, decaying statue and are newly invigorated to make their trip home, or back into the self.

This reading, however, does nothing with the authorial voice that tells us of Mr.

Head's inner state:

Mr. Head stood very still and felt the action of mercy touch him again but this time he knew there were no words in the world that could name it. He understood that it grew out of agony, which is not denied to any man and which is given in strange ways to children. He understood it was all a man could carry into death to give his Maker and he suddenly burned with shame that he had so little of it to take with him. He stood appalled, judging himself with the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed it. He had never thought himself a great sinner before but he saw now that his true depravity had been hidden from him lest it cause him despair. He realized that he was forgiven sins from the beginning of time, when he had conceived in his own heart the sin of Adam, until the present, when he denied poor Nelson. He saw no sin was too monstrous for him to claim as his own, and since God loved in proportion as He forgave, he felt ready at that instant to enter Paradise. (270)

Quite different from the Mr. Head presented to us in the beginning of the story, this Mr. Head cannot articulate the change; the previous Mr. Head could articulate precisely his position in the world as the narrative was guided by his perspective. The language of the passage is also quite different from the language that opened the story, as O'Connor opts mostly for indirect discourse marked by subordinators and "he understood, he realized, he saw, etc." suggesting these are Mr. Head's thoughts though he himself might not have articulated (or been able to articulate) them in such a way. The narration is no longer dependant on free indirect discourse but rather infuses the *character's* thoughts with the *narrator's* words as she describes his interior state rather than allowing his voice to describe the world, as had been done previously in the narration. This "action of mercy" contradicts Mr. Head's previous understanding of himself, but he links his sin to denying Nelson and not to his racism. We are left with a retreat back into the secure place of the self that is represented by the country, but the story ends before Nelson and Mr. Head

ever arrive back in their home and with Nelson's final words: "I'm glad I've went once but I'll never go back again!" which contradicts his previous insistence that it is not his first time in the city. The white self, then, remains divided but in a different way—a recognition, albeit perhaps an unintelligible one, of depravity and the desire to run from the source that insisted upon such a recognition. Despite the trip's many lessons, Nelson retreats back into a past in which whiteness was easily established by black figures as static and artificial as the Negro statuary. The change, then, is not in Mr. Head's actions but in his understanding, no longer positioning himself as the center of his world. Instead of influencing the narrator's speech with his thoughts, the narrator's speech influences his thoughts.

In the beginning of the story, when the narrative links Mr. Head to Dante and Raphael, we see the narrator's speech influencing the presentation of Mr. Head's thoughts. The difference, however, is that at the beginning of the story, we might say the narrator aids Mr. Head in the illusion of grandeur, while at the end she articulates what he cannot.

Mary Neff Shaw reads the ending of "The Artificial Nigger" not as the narrator's triumph but as Mr. Head's triumph over the narrator, an accomplishment she links to Mr. Head's redemption (141). Shaw reads the story as a conflict between the represented thoughts of Mr. Head and the narrator's sentences in which O'Connor ultimately "suspend[s] her narrator's authority" to "deny her narrator's omniscience" (150). She asserts that the narrator mocks Mr. Head's deifying of himself when the narrative explains that Mr. Head judges himself with the thoroughness of God; Mr. Head

subsequently “silences the accusations” of the narrator by “confessing that he ‘saw’ his pride, recognized himself as a ‘great sinner,’ ‘realized that he was forgiven,’ etc.” (148). The passage, however, begins with the narrator’s assertion that Mr. Head has no words to describe the action of mercy. Thus, everything that follows could easily be attributed to the narrator describing Mr. Head’s interior state precisely because Mr. Head himself is unable. If we read his vision of pride and recognition of his sin as examples of his judging himself with the thoroughness of God, we see a narrator in control of articulating Mr. Head’s thoughts and not Mr. Head’s response to an accusatory narrator.

We can see some of the same elements of race come into play in “Everything That Rises Must Converge” as in “The Artificial Nigger.” Although we have already seen how free indirect discourse has encouraged us to see Julian’s mother through his eyes, and thus the epiphany implicates us as well as Julian, if we look at race relations in the story, again we see how O’Connor draws on the manners of her time to investigate human depravity. Because free indirect discourse allows us access to Julian’s thoughts in his language, the narrator can then highlight the inconsistency of Julian’s perception and the reality of his world. Although Julian’s mother’s racism is more overt than Julian’s, Julian’s perspective, which governs the narrative, is hardly free from racist assumptions. This inconsistency between his thoughts and judgments towards his mother given to us via free indirect discourse versus his actions and some of his own ideas about race work again to implicate Julian by the end of the story. Like the divided self we see in Mr. Head/Nelson looking to both deny and embrace a racial other, Julian, even as he critiques his mother’s insistence that they remember a plantation past, longs for that past himself.

The narrative reveals that even Julian might not be immune to the racial foundations upon which his mother's sense of self is built and may suffer similar anxieties over a changing Southern landscape marked by the newly integrated bus. For example, while Julian's mother overtly laments the social changes that allow the integrated bus (410), O'Connor subtly reveals Julian's laments over the decayed mansion once a plantation:

He never spoke of it [the lost mansion] without contempt or thought of it without longing. He had seen it once when he was a child before it had been sold. The double stairways had rotted and been torn down. Negroes were living in it. But it remained in his mind as his mother had known it. It appeared in his dreams regularly. He would stand on the wide porch, listening to the rustle of oak leaves, then wander through the high-ceilinged hall into the parlor that opened onto it and gaze at the worn rugs and faded draperies. It occurred to him that it was he, not she, who could have appreciated it. He preferred its threadbare elegance to anything he could name and it was because of it that all the neighborhoods they had lived in had been a torment to him—whereas she had hardly known the difference. (408-409)

This passage makes use of free indirect discourse as we understand Julian's positions not as the narrator describes them but as Julian thinks them. We clearly see the statements as Julian's, and they follow Julian's mother's claim that blacks were better off as slaves and her invocation of her ancestry to support her claims to nobility. Julian is haunted by the elegance of a former time and part of his anger seems to stem from his mother's uncomplicated reconciliation to the present and her inability to recognize what is to him profound loss. On the bus when he is particularly annoyed with his mother, he "retired again into the high-ceilinged room sparsely settled with large pieces of antique furniture. His soul expanded momentarily but then he became aware of his mother across from him and the vision shriveled" (414). He blames his mother for his unhappiness claiming he

turned out well “in spite of her” (412), perhaps because she reminds him of an inadequacy not present in the days of old.

Julian’s attempts to befriend the other black men on the bus to offend his mother are not free of taint, encouraging us to question Julian’s superiority to his mother. We have already seen how the narrative, guided by Julian’s perspective through the use of free indirect discourse, has presented him as a martyr; Julian’s actions reveal his own limitations and question the privileged position presented to us in the passages of free indirect discourse. Besides the obvious problematic nature of using individuals as instruments of instruction, the acts themselves reveal less obvious biases. When “a large Negro” gets on the bus, Julian finds the perfect opportunity to insult his mother by speaking with him. He is presumptuous in thinking conversation will be easy and that they will talk about “art or politics or any subject that would be above the comprehension of those around them” (412). Later we discover he has tried before, unsuccessfully, to engage blacks in conversation: “He had tried to strike up an acquaintance on the bus with some of the better types [of blacks], with ones that looked like professors or ministers or lawyers. One morning he had sat down next to a distinguished-looking dark brown man who had answered his questions with sonorous solemnity but who had turned out to be an undertaker” (414). The narrator describes another attempt Julian once made to talk with a different black man, “with a diamond ring on his finger,” but, “after a few stilted pleasantries, the Negro had rung the buzzer and risen, slipping two lottery tickets into Julian’s hand as he climbed over him to leave” (414). Julian adheres to principles of

class, wanting to engage with the “better types” only to discover that each individual fails to conduct himself according to Julian’s standards.

Julian’s actions continually conflict with the judgments we have been privileged to through free indirect discourse. Julian criticizes his mother, but his sense of his own racial openness applies to black men but not to black women. When he imagines schemes that would enrage his mother, among them providing her with a “Negro doctor” when she is ill or “participating as a sympathizer in a sit-in demonstration,” the worst he imagines is bringing home a “beautiful *suspiciously* Negroid [emphasis mine]” to his mother and telling her he is in love and there is nothing she can do about it (414). Even in his imagining possible threats to his mother, Julian can fathom only a “suspiciously Negroid” woman with whom he would be associated whereas the men can be, and presumably should be if they are to have the right effect on his mother, as dark and obviously “Negroid” as can be. In addition, Julian’s reaction to the black man who gets on the bus is quite different from his reaction to the black woman. Whereas he wants desperately to speak with the man, and even moves so as to be within a speaking distance, his proximity to the black woman is described in the following manner: “Meanwhile the woman was bearing down upon the empty seat beside Julian. To his annoyance, she squeezed herself into it” (415). Julian does not even think to engage this woman in conversation, but when he discovers that seating arrangements have made it such that his mother and the black woman have switched seats, he hopes his mother will see the “symbolic significance” (415).

The black woman, dressed in the same hat as Julian's mother, becomes Julian's mother's double and "other," a projection that will eventually cause her to crumble under the impact. Of course, the association between the two is given to us via Julian and the free indirect discourse that has let us see most of the story through Julian's eyes: it is *Julian's* observation, one he hopes will teach his mother a lesson. Frederick Asals proposes the following question: "'That was your black double' the son of 'Everything That Rises Must Converge' archly confides to his dying mother, without considering the implications for himself; for if the large Negro woman of this story embodies a side of life his mother has refused to see, then to whom does her dependant boy [Carver]<sup>10</sup> correspond?" (94). Many readers see the semblance between Julian's mother and the black woman and perhaps even, as Asals does, the then implicit correspondence of Julian to Carver, but the text suggests, in an ironic twist, that the black woman could actually be *Julian's* double making his own mother correspond to Carver.

Because the narrative has been based in Julian's perspective and speech, his own positioning of his mother as a child links Julian to the black woman. Julian reprimands his mother the way the black woman reprimands her child, physically pulling him back into the seat while Julian tries to pull his mother into "reality." After the black woman strikes Julian's mother, he tells her, "Don't think that was just an uppity Negro woman...that was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies...That was your black double...The old manners are obsolete and your

---

<sup>10</sup> Both Carver and Julian are named while their mothers are not. This provides another link between the two, especially since we have already seen how O'Connor's narrative decision to name Julian and not his mother works to ground the story even more in Julian's perspective—a perspective in which he fails to truly recognize his mother until the story's end.

graciousness isn't worth a damn." Julian immediately thinks "bitterly of the house that had been lost for him" (419). While trying to instruct his mother, he produces his own stereotype, that the one woman represents all blacks and he notably found her less than pleasant. He also feels the pain of loss in the form of the old mansion (plantation) that seems continually to haunt him as a reminder of a time when he could have been more certain of his own place in the world. He remarks that his mother is "just like a child" (420) again linking her to Carver and him to the violent, reprimanding mother.

If the black woman is seen as a reflection of Julian's self, it is his self inflated, demanding, and crushing, and her physical blow to his mother represents the smaller mental ones that Julian has been handing her throughout the narrative. O'Connor presents Julian's double as everything toward which he sets his identity in opposition; Julian is hostile towards his mother (the woman is a massive mother), towards black women (the woman demands space and her presence is nearly overpowering) and towards the pretensions of wealth seen in his mother's dress and conviction and repeated in the black woman's mimetic hat and "mammoth red pocketbook" (415). As Julian hopes his mother learns a lesson from the presence of the black woman, O'Connor thrusts her, and everything she represents, in Julian's way, asking the reader (since Julian is too oblivious) to see him in her.

When at the story's end the black woman has vanished from the scene, the reader is left with Julian and his mother after the black woman has knocked Julian's mother to the ground. Julian's mother seems to be hallucinating and does not respond to Julian's lesson in racial civility. The narrator explains of Julian, "He was looking into a face that

he had never seen before”; his mother then replies, “Tell Grandpa to come get me” and then, “Tell Caroline to come get me.” What is peculiar here is that after the apparent action of grace, the mother actually retreats further into a past that is marked even more overtly by racial oppression, just as Mr. Head and Nelson retreat back to the country, denouncing any desires to every return to the racially marked city. Although many assume Julian’s mother will shortly die, a sort of reconciliation occurs when Julian cries, “Mother!...Darling, sweetheart, wait!” to the woman he has ridiculed and prided himself on not being blinded with love for, able to see her with “complete objectivity” (412). This ending, like most of O’Connor’s endings, distorts the vision with which the narrative has been built. No longer are Julian’s judgments of the world appropriate for the circumstance in which he finds himself. The narrator takes over; perhaps Julian is a martyr in that his perspective has been sacrificed within the narrative. He is no longer a martyr in his own superior sense but instead a martyr in terms of his lowliness and the inconsistency of his vision with the reality of the world.

One of the problems several critics have with stories like “Everything That Rises Must Converge” and “The Artificial Nigger” is that a character’s epiphany or redemption does not necessitate social change. Julia Armstrong acknowledges the reading that “The Artificial Nigger” demonstrates “that racism has no place within God’s loving unifying plan—even if Mr. Head and Nelson remain too entrenched in their own racism to realize it,” but she also validates alternative readings. Armstrong writes, “Mr. Head and Nelson’s differences are dissolved...[but] those between black and white remain, except on the levels of appearance or metaphor” (79). Jeanne Perreault similarly argues that,

“for the Heads, the ‘action of mercy’ may well affirm their undivided connection with each other in their white male world, but that is no salvation” (410). The reconciliation that occurs between Mr. Head and Nelson as well as Julian and his mother appears to do nothing to alter the racist attitudes each of the characters hold.

If O’Connor’s fictions stop short of effectively endorsing social change, they do so precisely to avoid the kind of moralistic fiction O’Connor found disruptive to art. O’Connor writes, “Those who believe that art proceeds from a healthy, and not from a diseased, faculty of the mind will take what he [the artist] gives them as revelation, not of what we ought to be but of what we are at a given time and under given circumstances; that is, as a limited revelation but revelation nevertheless” (MM 34). While her stories tackle issues of mercy and grace as well as class, gender, and particularly race, readers rarely find them to prescribe a certain behavior whether it is based in religious or social terms. Armstrong explains that so many readers are bothered by stories like “The Artificial Nigger” because of the story’s paradox, one Armstrong calls unintentional. She explains, “At the same time that it questions existing racial dynamics, it also reinscribes them” (80). If we think about the stories in terms of perspective, this simultaneous questioning and reinscribing works not to undermine the stories but to enhance them. At the same time that the narratives, through free indirect discourse, inscribe Mrs. May’s, Calhoun’s, Julian’s, and Mr. Head’s perspectives into the third person narration, they also work to undermine them: the stories, then, present limited worldviews within a larger framework that rather than completely opening or freeing them, questions their validity.

## 5. Conclusion

What we have seen thus far is a narrative voice that stands outside the world of its characters but allows itself to be dictated by a character's voice, only for that voice to eventually succumb to narration. O'Connor's stories are always about perception and reality, a conflict dramatized by a character's thoughts narrating a story that ultimately questions the validity of the way that character comprehends the world and his place in it. The stories work, then, not necessarily to provide new visions, but to reveal the limitations present in our old visions. Epiphany involves a shift in perspective evidenced in a narrative voice that can no longer be so thoroughly guided by the free indirect representations of a character's thoughts and prejudices. O'Connor believed that one could come to understand the divine through the natural, but her stories explore what happens when we distort the natural world, and position ourselves as the center. Within the short story form, O'Connor's question of perspective centers on a single character, often set apart in the story's opening. This character's perspective is shaken or proved to be in need of shaking as the story moves towards some epiphanic event. This event or circumstance brings back to the forefront an outsider narrator. Whether the character in judgment is sufficiently changed is a matter frequently debated in O'Connor criticism. What we do know is that the narrative has presented us with a change that necessitates a new perspective. Mrs. Turpin, at the end of "Revelation," must reevaluate herself in relation to her class and race biased assumptions as the reader, too, is invited to reevaluate himself in relation to his (perhaps also class-biased) judgments of Mrs. Turpin.

Calhoun and Julian must reevaluate and accept their kinship to their families as the reader, again, is invited to reevaluate his kinship to people like Calhoun and Julian because the narrative has led us to judge their family members as they do.

We can call Mr. Head's narcissism pride or we can call it racism; we can call his revelation salvation or we can call it social enlightenment; we might even deny the presence of both Christian salvation and social enlightenment. But if we ask how manners reveal mystery, we might better speak of the condition of O'Connor's characters in both religious and cultural terms as each informs the other. Peter S. Hawkins explains in 1983 that O'Connor tries "to show the divine image at the heart of things, not face to face, but reflected in our broken condition" (21). Although more recent criticism has shifted a focus away from O'Connor's religious intentions, Hawkins' comment informs the notion that O'Connor's religious intentions were directly linked to the broken condition she observed, quite often in the form of race relationships.

In the world of O'Connor's stories, the narrator adapts a particular perspective, the particular manners of a given person observing and participating in his culture. This perspective occurs in a larger context, one that highlights a single event and the mystery of its revelation. In "Greenleaf" we move from witnessing a small section of the world through the eyes of Mrs. May to seeing Mrs. May in the world as likewise, in other stories, an event disturbs the way a character perceives himself in the world. We don't see overt change and the best we can do is speculate, as the stories stop short of pursuing characters like Mr. Head back to the country from which he came. Because O'Connor believed the "sense of Mystery" could not "be accounted for by any human formula" her

narratives end with a mystery brought about not by new standards by which to judge the world, but the revelation that our old standards are, at best, lacking and severely flawed.

It is no wonder that a writer, committed to an art that took root in observing the natural world, produced fictions that have become the site of rich investigations based on the social climate of the American South in the mid-twentieth century. It is also no wonder that a writer, convinced that the reality of her southern landscape spoke to the nature of how humans engage in and with their worlds, would posit the manners of her countryside in a larger context, holding those manners up to be investigated and questioned. O'Connor writes, "I find it hard to believe that what is observable behavior in one [geographical] section can be entirely without parallel in another" (MM 32). In the short story, O'Connor suggests that the way a character sees and understands the events of a particular moment is quite often parallel to the way we, readers, see and understand the events, the particular moment, of the very text we are reading. We are lead to scorn Mrs. May and Mr. Head as they scorn their worlds. O'Connor then suggests that we ourselves and what we see belong to a larger context. For O'Connor that context was Christian theology, but whether or not we adhere to her way of seeing, she undeniably suggests a world that is more complex and mysterious than the one we readily perceive. As she penetrates "the mystery of personality," she questions who we are in relation to one another and in relation to a larger scheme into which all our notions about the nature of the world must eventually succumb. When we look at O'Connor's stories through their presentations of perspective by means of free indirect discourse, the

stories open themselves to different kinds of readings, including both religious and cultural, and reveal the way O'Connor as artist presents the mystery latent in manners.

## Works Cited

- Armstrong, Julie. "Blinded by Whiteness: Revisiting Flannery O'Connor and Race." *Flannery O'Connor Review* 1 (2001-2002): 77-86.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Discourse on the Novel." Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 259-422.
- . *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Ed. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984.
- Bates, H.E. *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey*. Boston: The Writer Inc., 1965.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 83-110.
- Bloom, Harold. "Introduction." *Flannery O'Connor: Modern Critical Views*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986. 1-8.
- Brinkmeyer, Robert. *The Art & Vision of Flannery O'Connor*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.
- Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*. Ed. Rosemary M. Magee. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1987.
- Eagleton, Terry. "The Anglo-Irish Novel." *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*. London: Verso, 1995.
- Gates, Henry Louis. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Speakerly Text." *Southern Literature and Literary Theory*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990. 142-169.
- Gordon, Sarah. *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2000.

- Guiraud, Pierre. "Modern Linguistics Looks at Rhetoric: Free Indirect Style." *Patterns of Literary Style*. Ed. Joseph Strelka. London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971.
- Hardy, David. "The Dialogic Repetition of Free Indirect Discourse in Oral and Literary Narrative." *Repetition in Dialogue*. Ed. Carla Bazzanella. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1996. 90-103.
- , "Free Indirect Discourse, Irony, and Empathy in Flannery O'Connor's 'Revelation'." *Language and Literature* 16 (1991): 37-53.
- Hawkins, Peter S. *The Language of Grace: Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, & Iris Murdoch*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1983.
- Head, Dominic. *The Modernist Short Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Johansen, Ruthann. *The Narrative Secret of Flannery O'Connor: Trickster as Interpreter*. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1994.
- Kessler, Edward. *Flannery O'Connor and the Language of Apocalypse*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Leitch, Thomas M. "The Debunking Rhythm of the American Short Story." *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Ed. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989. 130-47.
- Lewis, C.S. "On Stories." *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*. Ed. Walter Hooper. First Harvest Edition ed. San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1982. 3-28.
- Lukacs, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel*. Trans. Anna Bostock. First MIT Press Edition ed. Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1971.
- Malin, Irving. "Singular Visions: 'The Partridge Festival'." *Critical Essays on Flannery O'Connor*. Ed. Melvin J. Friedman and Beverly Lyon Clark. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985.

- May, Charles E. "Why Short Stories Are Essential and Why They Are Seldom Read." *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*. Ed. Jakob Lothe, Per Winter, and Hans H. Skei. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. 14-25.
- McKay, Janet. *Narration and Discourse in American Realistic Fiction*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.
- McMullen, Joanne Halleran. *Writing against God: Language as Message in the Literature of Flannery O'Connor*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996.
- O'Connor, Flannery. *Flannery O'Connor: The Complete Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971.
- , *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*. Ed. Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.
- , *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*. Ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1957.
- Pascal, Roy. *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977.
- Perreault, Jeanne. "The Body, the Critics, and 'The Artificial Nigger'." *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures* 56.3 (2003): 389-410.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "Review of Twice-Told Tales by Nathaniel Hawthorne." *Great Short Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Poems, Tales, Criticism*. Ed. G.R. Thompson. First Perennial Classics ed. New York: HarperCollins Pub. Co., 1970. 519-28.
- Ramazani, Vaheed. *The Free Indirect Mode: Flaubert and the Poetics of Irony*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988.
- Rohrberger, Mary. "Origins, Development, Substance, and Design of the Short Story: How I Got Hooked on the Short Story and Where It Led Me." *The Art of Brevity:*

- Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*. Ed. Jakob Lothe, Per Winter, and Hans H. Skei. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. 1-13.
- Shaw, Mary Neff. "'The Artificial Nigger': A Dialogical Narrative." *Flannery O'Connor: New Perspectives*. Ed. Sura Prasad Rath. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 139-51.
- Vegso, Roland. "Flannery O'Connor and the Politics of Realism: Reading 'The Artificial Nigger'." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 6.2 (2000): 59-76.
- Yaeger, Patricia. "Flannery O'Connor and the Aesthetics of Torture." *Flannery O'Connor: New Perspectives*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996. 183-206.
- Williams, Melvin G. "Black and White: A Study in Flannery O'Connor's Characters." *Black American Literature Forum* 10.4 (1976): 130-32.
- Wood, Ralph C. "Where Is the Voice Coming From? Flannery O'Connor on Race." *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin* 22 (1993-1994): 90-118.

## **Vita**

Denise Hopkins is originally from Mandeville, Louisiana. She attended Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, and graduated in 2004 with a bachelor of arts degree in both English and studio art. After college Denise attended graduate school at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and will graduate in 2006 with a master of arts degree in English. Although she decided to pursue English at the graduate level, Denise has continued to create art and has exhibited paintings in Mobile, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans.