



A Good Man Is Hard To Find

Flannery O'Connor , Frederick Asals (Editor)

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A Good Man Is Hard to Find is Flannery O'Connor's most famous and most discussed story. O'Connor herself singled it out by making it the title piece of her first collection and the story she most often chose for readings or talks to students. It is an unforgettable tale, both riveting and comic, of the confrontation of a family with violence and sudden death. More than anything else O'Connor ever wrote, this story mixes the comedy, violence, and religious concerns that characterize her fiction.

This casebook for the story includes an introduction by the editor, a chronology of the author's life, the authoritative text of the story itself, comments and letters by O'Connor about the story, critical essays, and a bibliography. The critical essays span more than twenty years of commentary and suggest several approaches to the story--formalistic, thematic, deconstructionist-- all within the grasp of the undergraduate, while the introduction also points interested students toward still other resources. Useful for both beginning and advanced students, this casebook provides an in-depth introduction to one of America's most gifted modern writers.

A Good Man Is Hard To Find Details

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From Reader Review A Good Man Is Hard To Find for online ebook

Patrick Ross says

There is no question about the fact that Flannery O'Connor was a master storyteller. What's stunning is the way she can so successfully portray the innermost thoughts of such a wide variety of characters, many of whom are quite unpleasant and also entertainingly lacking in self-awareness. She also isn't afraid to explore the darker places of our existence, and tell stories that definitely do not boast Hollywood happy endings.

There is some un-PC use of language in her work that is a bit jarring to a 21st Century reader, but like the use of certain language in Twain (in particular the "N" word), the usage fits the characters speaking as well as the time and setting.

I suspect I'd value O'Connor's writing even more if I had grown up in the South, but this Westerner who moved to the Mid-Atlantic still loves her prose.

Pink says

Not at all what I thought it would be about! A very quick and worthwhile read.

Kandice says

This is a stark tale nestled amongst a bunch of other stark, bleak tales. No one has any redeeming qualities, I don't really sympathize with anyone and the only thing that makes these worth reading, in my opinion, is how perfectly O'Connor gets the "voice" of the time. The cadence of speech, the pronunciation and colloquialisms we are able to soak up because of her writing. I believe O'Connor gives us a perfect snapshot of poor America, circa 1950 or so. People were not what they have become and despite the rose colored glasses our parents and grandparents wear, the world was not a perfectly innocent place. O'Connor knows and shows this perfectly.

Tom Bensley says

One need not have read every short story out there to ascertain that Flannery O'Connor's 'A Good Man is Hard to Find' is the best of all of them, in any language, and will probably remain that way until the world dries up and human beings dissolve in the dirt.

The story is unmatched in its pacing, economy of language, large cast of fully-drawn characters and suffocating dread that hangs over it like the oppressive Georgian sun. Ten times reading this story has in no way diminished the pleasure I get from reading it. Every time in its final pages I am gripping the book tightly, utterly transported to that ditch on the side of the road which might as well be a cut in the earth leading straight into hell.

Reading it for the first time, the story's end seems surprising, almost out of place. It's in stark contrast to the rest of the story, as if O'Connor didn't know where she was going when she started. The first line is utterly matter of fact.

'The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida.'

It continues in this vein, commonplace though not without a tinge of strangeness, like the early-middle section of a Coen brothers' movie. A Grandmother, her son and his wife, their two children and a cat named Pitty Sing are on a road trip to Florida. Along the way they stop at a restaurant for some 'Co' Cola's'. The grandmother finds in the restaurant's owner a kindred spirit, someone who shares her disdain for the way things are today.

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

Convinced they are about to drive past a plantation she visited as a little girl, the grandmother wants to stop and look at it. She knows her son won't want to stop and so tells a little white lie that entices the grandkids into a tantrum of demands.

'There was a secret panel in this house ... and the story went that all the family silver was hidden in it when Sherman came through but it was never found...'

Taking the detour, they have an accident. Disturbed by the grandmother, Pitty Sing leaps up onto the driver's shoulder and the car rolls over once and lands in a ditch, right side up. It'd be a crime to spoil the most perfectly executed climax in literary history, but a line from the grandmother on the very first page tips the reader off, even if they don't know it.

'Now look here, Bailey ... see here, read this ... Here this fellow that calls himself the Misfit is aloose from the Federal Pen and headed toward Florida and you read here what it says he did to these people. Just you read it. I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that aloose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did.'

O'Connor's fiction, especially this story, can appear nihilistic and needlessly violent, but the Savannah Georgian did not take her readers to be fools fed literary slop. All throughout her stories, O'Connor dropped hints like breadcrumbs leading to the denouements in her stories. Characters' motivations, mundane actions and set systems of beliefs would lead them down a path which they followed blindly. The tension between the old man and Mary Fortune in 'A View of the Woods'—his belligerence vs her stubbornness—hurtles the two characters towards a showdown with no winners; 'Good Country People' plays a questionably upstanding bible salesman against an atheist PhD with a wooden leg who isn't as sure-footed as she thinks she is. O'Connor wrote her stories like a gifted child at play with a destructive streak: she built up magnificent block towers so that when she knocked them down, the crash would be spectacular.

This 'crash', though, was not to punish characters for their pigheadedness or, in the case of the grandmother, her disdainful attitude. A devout catholic, Flannery O'Connor was given to showing her characters a moment of grace before God, at which point they could be redeemed. O'Connor had such a clear vision of what she wanted for her fiction that, despite its ultimate meaning, the pleasure is in the details, in how she constructs plot and character, and how she delivers payoff.

'A Good Man is Hard to Find' is an example of what every author of short stories ought to aspire to. There's

simply none like it.

Cayleigh Stickler says

I had to read this for a Literary Criticism and Theory course, and skimming it a few times, it didn't seem like there was anything too great about the short story. Only after I took a New Criticism view on it did the text fully come alive. I wrote primarily on the roles of Pitty-Sing (the cat) and The Misfit (murderer), two characters that when looked at in context with each other become a circle that explains the story quite well. The grandmother is also mentioned, but she is only a pawn in the "circle of life" as I called it.

Rowena says

I thought this was going to be a short, cheery read before bed. Boy was I wrong.

Ella says

I found this disturbingly graphic without there even being any graphic descriptions of violence. When a writer can do that it's very impressive. This story also has a profound meaning that you have to dig a bit beneath the surface to find. It's always nice when a writer let's you work for the deeper meaning.

Michael says

My first book by her leaves me well satisfied. She has such a knack of hooking your heart for her downtrodden characters without sentimentality. Such a master of dialog and patterns of speech and of rhythm and timing in her narrative. Every word seems to be laid like bricks in a wall. Her endings always resonate and move you beyond the frame of your short sojourn with her stories.

Ashlee Draper Galyean says

What the...? Well that was unexpected. Man that grandma. I want to punch her.

Khush says

It is a wonderful story. One is immediately drawn to the characters as they are so well etched out. With a striking use of dialogues, the readers can almost visualize the nameless grandmother, around whom the story revolves, her son Bailey and his wife and their three children. Very quickly we see how this family is, and what is their life like. One important feature is that there is no genuine communication between any one of them. The parents, for instance, hardly talk to their loud-mouthed children, nor do they correct them when

they are so utterly rude. The grandmother, on the other hand, the oldest member of the family, dwells in her own nostalgias of both past and present. She manipulates others in different garbs.

At home, we see that on the surface it is just like any other family. However, a close look reveals damaging imperfections. It shows the unconcerned and manipulative adults who have nothing really to contribute to their children's lives. The mother is hardly seen talking to her loud-mouthed children or engaging with them in any way. Even the car trip makes the choppy father nervous.

Later in the car, we see the same pattern. The children, as usual, indulge in their own whims. The grandmother, as usual, plays word games with her grandmother children and remains only concerned with her things, her wishes.

In the next scene, we see them in some sort of roadside eatery. Here again, the children are being rude. The grandmother talks to the owner of the property about 'goodness.' It is just a superficial talk. In her head, she is occupied with the thoughts of 'the runaway man.' She is scared of all this and at the same time she is thrilled about it.

Furthermore, there is hardly any difference between the kids and their grandmother. Just like the grandmother, the kids pursue what fancies them with absolute disregard any hindrance. The parents, too, are absorbed in their own mundane stuff. So the adult who can, or should, positively influence the children are just not 'there.' There is a 'moral' vacuum that no one is qualified and eager to fulfill. Modernity has turned everybody into consumers. Even the old good 'religion' has just mutated into a babble of sorts.

In the last scene, we again see the lack of communication or concern, both within the family and among people in the outer world. The misfit's accomplices kill Bailey and his son. The gunshot is heard but the grandmother, and Bailey's wife too, hardly responds in any 'familiar way.' Grandmother's entire focus is on to save her life. In the second round, Bailey's wife and her remaining two children are killed. The grandmother, until now, has done her best to thaw the misfit and turn him around. She only thinks about her life. Just a few moments before when Bailey and her son are shot, we hear no cries and repentance of any kind from the still alive family members. They hardly respond. The only remaining family member—the grandmother—hardly mourns these deaths but instead, she begs for her own life.

The misfit and his helpers go about their 'task' without a shred of remorse. The story sharply suggests that the outer world is just the bigger, cruder, and much crueller version of the family.

Kathleen says

Along with the darkly humorous title story, this edition includes many critical essays that offer detailed analysis and possible meanings. For me, the best was an excerpt from Flannery O'Connor's *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (which I now have to read), where she gives her own explanation and tells what she thinks makes a good story generally.

You just have to laugh at these mockable characters. "We've had an ACCIDENT." But in the end, I found the grandmother to be a compelling if unlikely hero. At first she seems the villain, yet as an outsider in this detestable family, we maybe start to feel for her. If we look hard, we see we are a little bit like her: we want our own way, we have our prejudices and obsess about our past. Sometimes we make mistakes—big ones. If we're lucky, we don't have to go this far to experience our redemption.

Justine says

Read this for lit class. It's certainly an interesting read and the ending would surely stir a lot of discussion.

Tim says

O'Connor often writes with both religious and dark themes. This, her most popular short story, is no exception. While much has been written on the exact moral ramification of the story, what I was impressed by was one of the final lines. After the grandmother is killed, the main antagonist (The Misfit) notes "She would have been a good woman, if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life." This powerfully climaxes the story, drawing the reader's attention to why the last moments of her life were the best. As a reader, the story is dark and yet realistic. It is not easily forgettable, and when I think of it I am reminded of how I ought to live daily. I would be a better person if there was "somebody there to shoot me every minute of my life."

Jigar Brahmbhatt says

In the title story, and in the wonderfully subdued "Good Country People", O'Connor weaves her own version of purgation through violence, either direct or sub-dermal, that is unlike anything I have ever read before. Having sustained "Wise Blood", I know I am not a fan and may not visit these stories again, but it is great to have read her prose, which is close to undergoing literary catharsis. Essential for a reader of fiction, and therefore of life.

Michele says

It's difficult to rate a story 4 stars ("really liked it") when the story runs as dark and twisted as this classic Flannery O'Connor tale. Because let's face it, there is the kind of dark and twisted that it is fun to read and then there is the dark and twisted that is just downright uncomfortable to read. A Good Man is Hard to Find most assuredly falls into that latter category.

So why on earth is this shockingly uncomfortable story such a classic? An overarching theme of redemption seems to be the order of the day...if you can find it. Some do, some don't. Just a warning: this is perhaps one of the darkest, bleakest, hopeless stories you will ever read. Don't read it on a day you are feeling the sad-sads.

Read with The Short Story Society!

Victoria says

The following trigger warnings: Murder, Sexual Assault
Disgusting.

Yeah, I get the underlying theme that Southern Protestant religiosity is apparently judgmental and has double-standards and whatnot. But I'd really, REALLY like to read a pleasant book for English class. Just once. Just one time during my high school career I would LOVE to read a book that leaves an impact on me, that changes my outlook on things, that educates me. I'm tired of reading about people killing or raping or eating babies or just being disgusting filth. What I read is what I think about, and I really don't want to be forced to think about all the worthless scum in this world. I want to think about happy lives and romance that works out from beginning to end. They say a story with no conflict isn't a story...sure, but do we have to have the blackest, most depressing conflict there is in EVERY work of literature I have to read? Don't get me wrong, I appreciate a good, intense, dark story every now and then. BUT NOT ALL THE DARN TIME. I mean, really.

Leah Polcar says

I never feel there is much reason to write a review of established works of literature. Literary criticism has taken care of anything I could say, so why bother with my opinions when experts have weighed in and present their arguments much better than I could (plus I am lazy)? However, to add a few words here for those of you who are reading this, and not *The Atlantic* or the like (though I will attempt to send you there), *A Good Man is Hard to Find* is a marvel. Clearly from the reviews, O'Connor is not to everyone's taste and I see that. The stories are brutal, but the complexity demonstrated by one who is a master of the short form should not be missed even if the content is difficult to take.

As I think is nicely explained in *Touched by Evil*, *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (and I am speaking of the collection here, not just the namesake story) deals with the central theme of human failings and human redemption: "to fictionally depict humans in their peculiarly horrifying aspect is necessary in order to explore the mysteries of redemption and grace." Something O'Connor does cleverly. (see also *What Flannery O'Connor Got Right*).

This is canonical American literature reading and in my opinion deservedly so.

As a treat, O'Connor reading the title story here .

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Review of just the title story: An unnamed grandmother, a woman caught up in appearances and social standing, travels with her son's family to Florida on a vacation. The grandmother was pushing to go to

Tennessee instead, for lots of reasons--she has friends there; an escaped criminal called The Misfit is running around loose in Florida--but she gets overruled.

So she goes along, of course, but manages to make life more than difficult for her son's family. Lots of things go south, and it's more than just the family and their car.

I read this story in college for an English course, and just reread it again for my real life book club, along with *A Rose for Emily*, which is equally disturbing Southern literature from an earlier generation. Though Flannery O'Connor is somewhat sparing with her descriptions, the characterization of the grandmother and her family is excellent. O'Connor has a great eye for human foibles.

This story has a lot going on beneath the surface, and has some really intriguing things going on with symbolism and religious belief, though it's a little difficult to get a handle on the grandmother's religious discussion with another character toward the end. There's a subtle moment of grace there, but readers who are upset if they don't get a HEA ending should keep right on going. If you like bizarre southern lit, though, you need to read this one.

There's a free copy of this story online here. Sensitivity warning: violence (not graphic but quite disturbing), and the grandmother uses the N-word a couple of times and in other ways shows her unthinking prejudices.

Ken Moten says

"Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever." - John 12:25 (Common English Bible)

"The dragon is by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is necessary to pass by the dragon." - St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Quote at the beginning of the story)

This one required 2 quotes; my first Flannery O'Connor.

I will probably spoil but I won't tag this whole review; nor will I summarize the story here because she is throwing things in my face which I have to address.

So immediately as the story reached its heavily foreshadowed climax and ending (short stories rarely have the length needed to go down after the climax to reflection/in-story analyzes like a novel/novella) The first quote from above shot into my head and then the "antagonist"-macguffin plot-device quoted some of it. So I was thinking okay and then when the (in)famous last scene is reached I was very bewildered and had to read a good part of it over again and I was then able to catch some of what was happening.

The title itself is something like a subverted misnomer. A "good man" or "the good man" could be said to be hard to find but it is a subjective declaration here. The protagonist's view of a good man was based on her own (finally realized) flawed logic on what constituted "good".

Salvation by grace(view spoiler) is the big theme here in my opinion. The antagonist (called The Misfit) IN.M.O. only serves as a means to an end for the protagonist to finally discern true grace and not the false one that society had taught her to have. O'Connor makes the family realistic enough that we don't hate them

but don't become too attached. As the protagonist tries to manipulate and dominate, not in a mean sort of way, but in an old-lady sort of way, we see as her actions lead to the story climax and see (view spoiler) that she is still trying to manipulate and pose her ideal on the antagonist with him almost eerily savvy to everything she is saying. But the resolution does not occur until she herself finally realizes the error of her logic and realizes what true divine grace is. The Misfit of course realizes this almost before she does and (view spoiler) comments on the irony of this to his companions as well as his general statement about life that again invokes the biblical quotation at the beginning of the review.

I think I got the geist of this story quicker than I should have because I had read Joyce Carol Oates' "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" which had some interesting similarities to this one in the case of the protagonist vs. the antagonist and especially similar are Arnold Friend and The Misfit, the two could have been the same person from one point of view or have similar world views (they definitely share the same profession/inspiration). I recommend reading this story with that one and see how they match up.

I read this story from Literature and the Writing Process, same with the Joyce Carol Oates story.

Duane says

A short story with a punch, a knock you on your ass punch. Writing so real, I was there in that car, then on that gravel road. Unforgettable, Darkness and evil flowing from the mind and through the pen of O'Connor.
