

Blue Book Essay (45 pts, 90-120 min.)

- Introduction (5 pts): grounded in the Bible and Path 1 & Path 2 texts *not* in the body of your argument
- Path 1 & 2 texts (40 pts): **10 pts each** for discussions of two Path 1 works and two Path 2 works.
- NOTE: you will **respond to 1 of 3 prompts**; each requires **discussion of two Path 1 texts and two Path 2 texts**. One prompt will be tailored to Path 2 topics, a second involves the Life Is Layered model.

Objective Scantron Portion (15 pts, 30-40 min.)

- T/F & Multiple Choice qstns concerning underlined works below.
- Only underlined texts will appear on the objective and essay portions of the exam.

**The Bible:** Acts 4:32 & 5:1-11 (all held in common, Ananias & Sapphira); I Corinthians 1:1-2:16 (limits of wisdom, Christ crucified); Matthew 26:47-28:10 (Passion of the Christ); Luke 22:47-53 (Passion of the Christ); John 18:1-20:31 (Passion of the Christ); 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 (vision; in weakness, strength); Matthew 5:33-46, John 10:1-21, Matthew 20:1-16, Luke 18:1-8, Matthew 18:10-14, Luke 10:25-37 (parable & metaphor); Matthew 16:24-26 (take up own cross); Philippians 4:4-9 (whatever is true . . .); Romans 14:1-23 (don't judge; love & limits to freedom); Psalms 23 (valley of the shadow); Luke 12:24-34 (fear not); Romans 5:1-8 (suffering produces . . .); Mark 10:13-16 (children, Jesus, & kingdom of God); Matthew 13:3-23 (Parable of the Sower); I Corinthians 7:1-5 (sex & marriage); Mark 12:1-12 (Parable of the Tenants); Genesis 4:1-16 (Cain & Abel); 2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:25 (David & Bathsheba); Job 23, 24, 31:1-22 (suffering, evil thrives, Job's virtue); Lamentations 3:16-40 (suffering & punishment); Song of Songs 1-8 (sex and passion); Ephesians 5:21-33 (love, submission, Christ as groom); James 3:3-10 (the tongue); I John 1:1-9 (God, light, darkness); Luke 15:11-32 (Parable of the Lost Son); Mark 8:22-25 (healing blindness); Acts 9:1-19 (Saul's conversion); Ecclesiastes 1-2 (meaninglessness, wisdom, madness); Psalms 106:24-26, Psalms 91:1-15, Revelation 3:14-22 (Acedia); Proverbs 1:1-19 (fear, wisdom, instruction); Proverbs 31:10-31 (wife of good character); I Corinthians 13:1-13 (love is . . ., mirror darkly, love the greatest); Genesis 1-3 (creation, Adam & Eve); Mark 12:28-34 (love God & neighbor); Matthew 10:32-39 (not peace but sword)

**S. Dalí:** *Woman w/ Head Full of Roses* (1935), *The Spectre of Sex Appeal* (1934), *Corpus Hypercubus* (1954), "St. Sebastian" (1927), "The Moral Position of Surrealism" (Mar. 22, 1930), *Apparatus and Hand* (1927), *The Great Masturbator* (1929), *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), "Mystical Manifesto" (1951), *My Wife, Nude, Contemplating* . . . (1945), *The Madonna of Port Lligat* (1950-51), *Christ of St. John of the Cross* (1951), *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* (1952-54), *The Endless Enigma* (1938), *Paranoia* (1935-36), *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1946)

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning:** "A Musical Instrument" (1860), "Lord Walter's Wife" (1862), "Sonnet 7" (1850), "Sonnet 30" (1850), "The Romaunt of the Page" (1839)

**Robert Browning:** "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" (1842), "Porphyria's Lover" (1842), "Meeting at Night" (1845), "Parting at Morning" (1845), "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1852; 1855), "Andrea del Sarto" (c.1853; 1855), "A Lover's Quarrel" (1855)

**C. S. Lewis:** "Transposition" (1940); *The Problem of Pain* (1940), chp. 4, chps. 8 & 10, *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), chps. 18-20, *The Magician's Nephew* (1950), *Till We Have Faces* (1956)

**Flannery O'Connor:** letter to "A" (Aug. 28, 1955), "The Teaching of Literature", "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" (1954), "The Church & the Fiction Writer" (1957), "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction" (1957; 1965), "Good Country People" (1955), *Wise Blood* (1952), "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953),

**FILM:** ~~John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary* (2014)~~, Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003)

## In-Class, Pre-Exam Synergetic Discussion (Suggestive, not Definitive)

### Degrees of Depth

1. surfaces / appearances
  - a. The grandmother dresses carefully so that “anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady” (138). What does this suggest about her priorities?
  - b. What other characters encountered this quarter appear particularly concerned with *appearances*?
2. vision
  - a. The Misfit wears spectacles that he must remove for cleaning after shooting the grandmother at close range (146, 152-53). The narrator describes his eyes as “pale and defenseless-looking” without the glasses on (153). Why might O’Connor insert this detail at the story’s close?
  - b. How reliable does eyesight prove (both our own and that of the characters) in this quarter’s readings, paintings, and films?
3. Nature
  - a. What role do the nearby woods, and the wind, play in the violent encounter that closes out O’Connor’s story?
  - b. Do trees, rivers, and the sun tend to provide inconsequential background visuals for the stories we’ve readily and viewed, or do they signal something more profound?
4. sociology & poverty
  - a. O’Connor admits that many readers find the modern fiction writer’s preoccupation with poverty rather uncomfortable, even distressing (Teaching 129-31), and notes that the subject functions as a symbolic representation of that “poverty fundamental to man . . . the experience of human limitation,” that the “actual poor only symbolize for [certain writers] *the state of all men*” (131, 132, emphasis added). She argues, further that writing about the poor only to reveal their material condition is to play the role of sociologist, not artist, that the “poverty [the fiction writer] writes about is so essential [to human experience] that it needn’t have anything at all to do with money” (132). Which of O’Connor’s characters are *not* poor in this internal, fundamental way?
  - b. What various manifestations of spiritual poverty have been unveiled in the characters and situations we have encountered this quarter?
5. psychology
  - a. The Misfit explains that a psychologist at the penitentiary said he (the Misfit) killed his father, but asserts that this is a lie—that his dad died of the flu years earlier (150). Explain the discrepancy.
  - b. How effective is psychology—is the analysis of motivation, desire, and behavior—at explaining the actions of this course’s menagerie of odd characters? Can psychology explain everything, or are spiritual explanations sometimes necessary?
6. the spiritual
  - a. The grandmother desperately encourages the Misfit to pray, presumably alluding to such verses as Matthew 7:7 (“Ask, and it will be given to you seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”) and Philippians 4:6-7 (do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.) Why does the Misfit refuse to pray (150)?
  - b. What other characters introduced this quarter *pray*, and to what end? Do they evince honest repentance, radical forgiveness, and selfless, sacrificial love (agape)?

7. the meaning of life
  - a. the Misfit recalls his father's conviction that his son would "be into everything" because he couldn't live his whole life without asking *why* (148). What conclusion has the Misfit reached about the meaning of life (152), and does this conclusion change by the end of the story?
  - b. what is the point of living, according to the various thinkers we've encountered this quarter?
  
8. mystery & "manners" (anagogic, symbolic connections between the heavenly and the material world)
  - a. in "The Teaching of Literature," O'Connor maintains that mystery—in which she firmly believes—must be linked with lived experience in fiction, must be anchored to the literal. "There is no room for abstract expressions of compassion or piety or morality in the fiction itself. *This means that the writer's moral sense must coincide with his dramatic sense,*" creating a kind of fiction which can prove difficult for the student to decipher (125, emphasis added). In an essay entitled "On Her Own Work," O'Connor elaborates that in a story that works, there is some action or gesture "unlike any other in the story, one which indicates where the real heart of the story lies. This would have to be an action or a gesture which was both totally right and totally unexpected; it would have to be one that was both in character and beyond character; it would have to suggest both the world and eternity. . . . It would be a gesture that transcended any neat allegory that might have been intended or any pat moral categories a reader could make. It would be a gesture which somehow made contact with mystery" (111). Can you identify this "action or gesture" in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"?
  - b. where in the other works read this quarter do we find such a moment where a character's words or actions connect the material with the mysterious in some surprising way?

## The Problem of Pain

9. suffering
  - a. The Misfit appears to have encountered suffering quite a bit (both his own and others') in his life, serving in the military, being married twice, organizing funerals, surviving a tornado, seeing a man burned alive, and witnessing a woman being flogged (149). Why might O'Connor include this biographical sketch? Do such experiences either explain or excuse his murderous behavior?
  - b. Consider the discomfort you have vicariously experienced this quarter, the pain and trials your imagination has touched on through the assigned readings and art we've encountered. Do you feel as though you are emerging traumatized and broken by the experience, or enlightened?
  
10. women
  - a. In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," we run into yet another tale where women suffer death at the hands of men. Are women a more vulnerable target than men in O'Connor's fiction?
  - b. Do the works discussed this quarter implicitly critique the mistreatment of female characters?
  
11. punishment
  - a. The Misfit declares that the nature of one's crime doesn't matter—sooner or later one forgets what he has done but is punished for it anyhow. He claims that he calls himself "The Misfit" because what he's done wrong doesn't *fit* the punishment he has received thus far. What of the grandmother and her family—do their deaths constitute a *deserved punishment*? Upon what moral criteria do you rely in answering these questions?
  - b. Do the various works read this quarter suggest a Dantesque hierarchy of sins with certain failings being punished more severely than others? Do some works suggest that all sins, regardless of their relative illegality or visibility, earn their creators *similar consequences*?

## Art & Artistry

### 12. artistic rendering

- a. The grandmother thinks a young black child standing in the doorway of a shack without pants on cute enough to deserve reproduction in a painting—which she would create if she had any artistic talent herself (139). Does O'Connor intend us to denounce her for her racism-laced condescension?
- b. Does O'Connor herself paint humanity, in her fiction, *as lacking pants*? Do humans tend to emerge from her stories as competent, autonomous beings, or as pitiful souls in need of divine raiment?
- c. What of Dalí? Do his paintings tend to glorify the human condition, or identify us all as fundamentally broken and in need of profound intervention?

### 13. acts of interpretation

- a. June Star and John Wesley seem unwilling to agree on what a given cloud resembles. Given what little we learn about their respective characters, does this disagreement appear to constitute a clash of *personalities, or imaginations*?
- b. How frequently do the authors and artists encountered this quarter truly leave it to the audience to choose between two equally viable interpretive possibilities, and how often do they steer us through a seemingly cryptic and murky narrative towards a clear, morally fixed endpoint?

### 14. style & tone

- a. When the grandmother tells a story, “she roll[s] her eyes and wave[s] her head and [is] very dramatic” (140). Does she retain command of these creative faculties when she is at gunpoint?
- b. Which of the creative minds encountered this quarter tells stories in spectacular, attention-getting fashion, and which deliver their ideas and tales in understated, low-key terms? What of the fictional artists who appear *within* these other works? Do their creations present a selective, biased view of reality, or a detached and objective one?

## Relationship

### 15. forgiveness

- a. Do any of the characters who injure one another in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” apologize, confessing their faults? Is forgiveness offered, either directly or indirectly, verbally or non-verbally, by anyone?
- b. Does any of our characters model the sort of forgiveness elaborated by Jesus (Matthew 18:15-35)?

### 16. love

- a. When asked, Jesus responds that the greatest of the ten commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) is to love God, and that the second is to love one another (Mark 12:28-34). His questioner agrees, adding that love is far more important than burnt offerings and blood sacrifices, a response Jesus affirms. How might one apply this distinction to modern life given that most religious adherents no longer offer burned sacrifices? What modern practices might equate to such archaic rituals?
- b. Which of our many characters attempt to prove their virtue in ways *other than* loving God and their fellow wo/man?

### 17. division

- a. Jesus, who preaches the importance of love over and over again (Mark 12:31, Matthew 5:44, John 15:13, etc.) yet claims that he came not “to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). He quotes a passage from Micah that positions family members against one another (v.35), and then asserts that love of himself must outweigh love of family (v.37-39). Can one reconcile the apparent contradiction?
- b. What sacrifices, relational or otherwise, does love of God involve in the works assigned this quarter?

## Morality

### 18. moral goodness

- a. The grandmother and Red Sammy, owner of the Tower, ruminate about how little their fellow man can be trusted, concluding that “[a] good man is hard to find” (141-42). Does O’Connor’s story contain a man, or woman, who could be rightly categorized as “good”? What do you make of the grandmother’s later, repeated assertion that the Misfit is “a good man” (147, 148)?
- b. What of the other works we’ve considered this quarter? Do numerous virtuous characters emerge, or do most prove themselves degenerate in some profound way?

### 19. pleasure

- a. According to the Misfit, the ethical dimension of human behavior matters only if Jesus did indeed raise the dead (i.e. Lazarus); that if he didn’t, then it’s best to enjoy life to its fullest. Going even further, the Misfit contends that the only real pleasure in life lies in sadistic cruelty to others: “No pleasure but meanness” (152). Unpack this last, powerful but terse claim.
- b. What kinds of pleasure do our vast array of characters place at the center of their respective lives, and what degree of happiness and/or peace do such pursuits bring them?

### 20. manipulation

- a. The grandmother carefully massages the family dynamic in the car to get what she wants, following up a lie about a non-existent secret panel in the house she wishes to revisit—knowing it will get the kids excited—with an observation about the supposed educational benefits of visiting the old plantation (143). Does this kind of manipulation set her apart from the other characters?
- b. How often do this course’s many characters covertly strategize to get what they want? Which characters instead achieve their desires by speaking or acting more *directly*?

### 21. “freaks” / the grotesque

- a. In explaining readers’ discomfort with the prevalence of *freaks* in modern fiction (130), O’Connor points to modern society’s general optimism about the future—to pervasive theories of *perfectibility*. We tend to believe we will, one day, bring about a social and technological utopia by our own efforts: the presence of the *freak* rudely reminds us of our shared limitations (Teaching 133). “The only time he [the freak] should be disturbing to us,” she writes, “is when he is held up as a whole man” (133). Is the Misfit a “freak” who considers himself a “whole man”? Does O’Connor herself configure him as a “whole man”?
- b. where in our assigned works do we find “freaks” being held up (by themselves, other characters, or the artistic him/herself) as a “whole” person? Where, by contrast, does a physically or behaviorally grotesque element instead reveal fundamental, spiritual brokenness?

### 22. children

- a. the Misfit asks the mother to seat the children down next to her since kids make him nervous (146, 147). Why might the Misfit be uncomfortable around children?
- b. recall this quarter’s assigned readings: do children tend to see matters more clearly than adults?