

Biblical Allusions to the Garden of Eden in Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*

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Biblical allusions are sprinkled throughout the stories of Flannery O'Connor. Of particular interest to this short note are the allusions to the Garden of Eden. In *Parker's Back*, Parker meets Sarah as he sells apples—which is often portrayed as the forbidden fruit in Eden. Toward the end of the story he “felt the light pouring through him turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, *a garden of trees and birds and beasts*” (my emphasis, 528). Could there be other allusions to the Garden of Eden?

Early in *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, the grandmother says: “ ‘There was a secret panel in the house,’ ” she said *craftily*, not telling the truth but wishing that she were, ‘and the story went that all the family silver was hidden in it’ ” (123, my emphasis). Notable is the author's use of the word *craftily*. The serpent in Eden is generally depicted as a crafty creature. This being so, it is worth examining the manner in which the grandmother displays the following snakelike characteristics: she “hissed” at her granddaughter June Star (121), “was *curled up* under the dashboard (144-5, my emphasis), and “sank down in the ditch with her legs *twisted* under her” (125, my emphasis).

Also, relevant here is the name of her old suitor Edgar Atkins Teagarden (my emphasis) who used to give her watermelons. His name along with his initials—E.A.T.—may recall the tragic action that took place in the garden. Eden is also hinted at in the words of Red Sammy's wife: “It isn't a soul in this *green world of God's* that you can trust” (142, my emphasis).

There is a further point to be considered: at the opening the grandmother wants Bailey to take the children to *east* Tennessee. It will be recalled that God planted the garden in the *east* in Eden. When the grandmother reaches out to touch the Misfit he “sprang

back as if a *snake* had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest” (132, my emphasis).

Despite her snakelike description earlier in the story, however, her death is viewed from a different light. It will be noticed that she “half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs *crossed* under her like a child’s and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky” (132, my emphasis). This word, in conjunction with the phrase “a puddle of blood,” evokes the image of the cross in Calvary— leaving a visible reminder of the mystery of God’s grace.

Regarding the grace of God, O’Connor writes in a letter: “There is a moment of grace in most of the stories, or a moment where it is offered, and is usually rejected. Like when the Grandmother recognizes the Misfit as one of her own children and reaches out to touch him. It’s the moment of grace for her anyway— a silly old woman— but leads him to shoot her. This moment of grace excites the devil to frenzy” (95). To be sure, much more biblical allusions remain unstudied. Exploring these allusions will help us gain a wider appreciation of O’Connor’s stories.

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Works Cited

O’Connor, Flannery. *Good Things Out of Nazareth: The Uncollected Letters of Flannery O’Connor*. Edited by Benjamin B. Alexander. New York: Convergent Books, 2019.

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