ery] think *adding* meant increase? / To me it was dilution" [153]) and thus engages the larger concerns of marriage and singleness, mistrust of women and, consequently, lack of independence and personality.

Normally, of course, a poem's surface meaning is grasped before any figurative one. What is exceptional about "This Be The Verse" is that it hoodwinks the reader into allowing the idiomatic to blot out the literal, thus permitting Larkin the satisfaction of parading his keenest-felt concerns while not only disguising them as a *jeu d'esprit* which everyone can parrot, but also letting them stand as his last word. Stevenson's "Requiem," from which Larkin drew his title, ends thus:

> This be the verse you grave for me:
> *Here he lies where he longed to be,*
> *Home is the sailor, home from the sea,*
> *And the hunter home from the hill.* (120)

Like Stevenson, then, Larkin is writing his own epitaph, just as he does in "Posterity" and "Symphonie en Blanc Majeur." And although "This Be The Verse" was not the last poem he published, *High Windows* was his final volume of poetry, and Larkin knew that he did not have it in him to write another. Despite its apparent slightness and jocularity, "This Be The Verse" is quintessentially Larkinian, proclaiming its author as public yet private, demotic yet literary, and contemptuous of children and marriage yet cognizant of society's pressures on the single man—and all this on the tomb, the symbol of Larkin's greatest preoccupation of all.

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O'Connor's A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

Although critics have discovered many literary allusions in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," one major source has been overlooked. Always lurking in the story's Georgia background is *The Canterbury Tales.* O'Connor inserts several specific elements from Chaucer's work into

her story; the resulting contrast between medieval characters, frames, settings, and motifs and their modern-day counterparts creates a powerful commentary on the declining role of religion in twentieth-century society.

Both works have the same central theme. They attempt to define the good man and good woman of their age within a Christian context. Whereas Chaucer's microcosmic group contains all classes of church and secular personages, O'Connor limits her "pilgrims" to one lower-class family (although the grandmother's past seems part of the aristocratic Old South). Chaucer's journey, by connecting April with religious impulses, suggests that religion is as natural a force as that which renews the earth each spring. Furthermore, Chaucer reflects the medieval belief that earthly existence is but a testing ground for one's worthiness to enter heaven. On the other hand, O'Connor's pilgrims journey not to Canterbury, a religious shrine, but to Florida, America's traditional vacation spot. Their intent is nonspiritual, and O'Connor makes a point of never giving a specific reason for the trip. Her message seems clear: Modern Americans have lost their spiritual direction.

Chaucer's and O'Connor's pilgrimages are directed by hosts named Bailly and Bailey, respectively. O'Connor's choice of her character's name alerts the reader to a possible parallel. Chaucer's Harry Bailly is a forceful, humorous, manly individual who takes charge of the pilgrims. O'Connor's Bailey Boy is Bailly's antithesis. Bailey Boy is a nondescript, dour—"he didn't have a naturally sunny disposition" (141)—submissive male in a laughable, parrot-covered shirt. He is manipulated by his mother and screaming children to take a detour he doesn't want to take. O'Connor's choice of her character's name, then, calls attention to her source and emphasizes the decline of authority in the twentieth century.

Both pilgrimages contain the storytelling motif. Chaucer's pilgrims tell their tales, trying to exhibit the "best sentence" (most useful moral) and "moost solaas" (highest entertainment value). In contrast, O'Connor's grandmother spins her tale about Mr. Teagarden to keep the uncontrollable brats "quiet" (140); its moral is highly materialistic and selfish—she married the wrong beau because Teagarden became wealthy. For O'Connor, the pursuit of mammon has replaced the seeking of things spiritual.

In both stories, the tavern functions as one of the focal points of the pilgrimage. The Tabard Inn reflects the optimism, merriment, and sense of religious community of Chaucer's pilgrims. It becomes a sort of moral center for the pilgrimage, for it is the place where the rules of the tale-telling game are formulated. In it, the characters, a cross-section of medieval society, prepare themselves for their journey by drinking wine together in a celebration of oneness. In contrast, the Tower is a "filling station and dance hall set in a clearing outside of Timothy" (140)—that is, beyond the influence of organized religion (Woodward). Inside, Bailey glares, the children whine, and the grand-

mother and Red Sam lament the passing of better times and better people. Instead of communal wine, they drink "Co'-Colas," the recurring symbol of the materialistic New South (Ellis). For O'Connor, the cynical nature of the modern world is summed up by Red Sam's wife, who says, "It isn't a soul in the green world of God that you can trust" (142).

O'Connor reveals her largest debt to Chaucer in her retelling of a specific tale. Fittingly, she chooses "The Pardoner's Tale," the story whose center perhaps deviates the most from the medieval spiritual norm. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" functions almost as a modern exemplum of the Pardoner's message, *Radix malorum est cupiditas*. Like the three revelers in Chaucer, each member of Bailey's family is driven by selfishness. Both groups set out in search of death; the grandmother even warns her son that if they go south, they'll run into the escaped convicts. Ultimately, the men in the Pardoner's story encounter death because of their greed for gold; so Bailey's family dies in part because they've gone in search of a house filled with hidden "family silver" (143) that has never been found. Fittingly, Chaucer's characters meet their death beneath the stately oak tree, O'Connor's, near "a gray naked pine" (148).

At the end of their journey, Chaucer's pilgrims find what they have gone in search of, spiritual renewal, and the best taleteller is rewarded with a free meal. In O'Connor's story, the reward for the storytelling grandmother is three bullets in the chest. The modern world is a nonspiritual place, devoid of goodness, ruled by mammonism and evil, and the reward is not a seat in heaven or even the Tabard Inn, but a puddle of blood in the Georgia dirt.

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Merrill's THE CHANGING LIGHT AT SANDOVER

In *The Changing Light at Sandover*, James Merrill's poem and trilogy, the author composes innumerable variations on the theme of the mirror maze, incorporating a wide range of reflective surfaces and lenses into the imagery