

Although IM sees a certain beauty in the “sculptured folds” of the matador’s red cape (358), he notices a second picture further down the wall, another representation of the bullfight; however, the red of the matador’s cape is now replaced by the black of the bull’s horns, and the matador, originally in control of the contest, is seen gored and swept into the air by the bull. At this point in the narrative, Brother Jack announces IM’s election to the position of spokesman for Harlem, and although he has only spoken before a few crowds, he is now the district’s center of attention, navigating between the horns of rival factions within the community. However, while figuratively waving the red flag by promoting the Brotherhood’s mission, IM, like the matador, soon finds himself tossed about during the violent upheaval of Harlem. Thus, the pictorial images that he observes—the boxer, bullfight, and calendar—foreshadow the political disappointments that he will experience while working for the Brotherhood.

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#### NOTES

1. In Robert Stepto’s *From Behind the Veil*, he discusses the “portrait gallery” motif in *Invisible Man*, and for the reader interested in the iconographic structure of the novel, his is a most compelling analysis.

2. The picture of the bullfight calls to mind Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, but I am unaware of any critical comparisons between Ellison and Hemingway. However, Hemingway’s work could have negatively influenced Ellison’s style, for as Robert Bone notes, “In accepting the National Book Award, Ellison states his reasons for avoiding the ‘hard-boiled’ Hemingway idiom” (198). Bone’s reference is to Ellison’s critique of the “narrow naturalism” of modernist American fiction. According to Ellison, “Except for the work of William Faulkner, something vital had gone out of American prose after Mark Twain” (“Light” 158).

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#### O’Connor’s A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came,” Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a

Snowy Evening,” Gounod’s *Faust*, Weber’s *Der Freischutz*, and Uncle Sam—according to Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, traces of all of these can be found in Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” Maybe so; however, look again and you will also find the deep shadowy presence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Lacking spiritual fulfillment, both Coleridge’s sailor and O’Connor’s grandmother journey through the desert of alienation and experience an epiphany that results in resurrection and rebirth.

The sailor in Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” brings about his own alienation when he shoots the albatross. In killing this co-part of creation, he separates himself from the divine source from which life emanated. The sailor recognizes his foul transgression: “And I had done a hellish thing” (128). With that, he enters his spiritual desert. On the sea, surrounded by water, he laments his thirst, “Water, water, everywhere / Nor any drop to drink” (121–22). Suffering not from a literal thirst, but rather from a metaphorical longing for release from his alienated condition, he seeks divine intervention and tries unsuccessfully to pray:

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;  
But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust. (278–81)

Paralleling the sailor’s condition is O’Connor’s grandmother. She, too, is alienated from other members of creation. She is surrounded by people without any sign of intimate fellowship, just as the sailor is surrounded by water without being able to quench his thirst. After one of her many speeches, her son, “Bailey didn’t [even] look up from his reading” (308), and after she addresses her daughter-in-law, we are told, “The children’s mother didn’t seem to hear her” (309). She is cut off and alone.

Just as the sailor shows his dispassion for creation in shooting the albatross, the grandmother shows her indifference for creation by selfishly manipulating and nagging to get her way on the family’s vacation. She tells lies about a “secret panel” (312) to get her grandchildren to throw fits in the car to coerce Bailey into taking a side trip to a nonexistent house from her flawed memory. Her insistence on having her own way and sneaking Pitty Sing, her cat, into the car, despite her knowledge that Bailey would not allow this, directly causes the accident. Even as her family is killed by The Misfit and his men, she parleys for her own life saying, “You wouldn’t shoot a lady, would you?” (315). Both the sailor and the grandmother lack a sense of other. The grandmother, too, longs for a divine connection and release from her “desert,” her place of discontent. She recalls a “dirt road [that] was hilly [. . . with] sudden washes in it and sharp curves on dangerous embankments.” She thinks about

a “red depression with the dust-coated trees” (313): these words create an image that is devoid of peace and contentment. When brought face to face with *The Misfit*, the grandmother knows that “[h]is face was as familiar to her as if she had known him all her life but she could not recall who he was” (314). She is trying to remember and create a bond between herself and another creature, allowing her to break out of her alienation, but her escape cannot happen quite yet.

Both the sailor and the grandmother need to recognize their bond as members of creation. This epiphany happens for the sailor when, close to death, he finally opens his eyes and his consciousness to the grandeur of creation in his glimpse of the vibrant colored snakes. With their “flash of golden fire,” he cries out in joy:

O happy living things! No tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my  
heart,  
And I blessed them unaware. (282–86)

This sudden force of love is what Flannery O’Connor calls a “constraining love for the thing despised” (qtd. in Wyatt 67). The mariner is saved and brought into the fold of creation when he recognizes the beauty of even a wretched snake. His salvation is immediate, evidenced by his ability to pray—that is to connect again with the divine:

The self-same moment I could  
pray;  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea. (287–91)

The grandmother, likewise, is brought salvation by a “wretched” creature—*The Misfit*. At the moment of her earthly death, she is awakened to their conjunction in divine creation. We see this in her recognition of *The Misfit* as one of her own children: “Why, you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children!” (318). She experiences a gush of mother love that mirrors the sailor’s cry of joy in the beauty of the snakes. She understands the wonder of and takes great joy in life itself, here envisioned in *The Misfit*. Elisabeth Piedmont-Martin refers to this as the grandmother’s “moment of clarity,” when she “recognizes his [*The Misfit*] twisted humanity as part of her own by calling him one of her children.”

At first glance, it seems as if this immediate salvation and resurrection is cut short by the gunshot that kills her. However, the grandmother’s epiphany, which leads to her rebirth and resurrection, is not one of an ongoing spiritually energized earthly life, as in the case of the sailor, but one of a Christian res-

urrection and eternal life. The Catholic Christian view teaches that grace alone saves and brings eternal reward; O'Connor herself claims that the grandmother receives this saving grace: "she [Grandmother] has been touched by the Grace that comes through him [The Misfit]" because she realizes "she is responsible for the man before her and joined to him by ties of kinship which have their roots deep in the mystery [. . .]" (qtd. in Piedmont-Martin). In fact, it is this "mystery" that the grandmother now understands.

The mystery solved, the sailor and the grandmother have achieved clarity of vision. They are able to recognize what was before them the whole time, demonstrating O'Connor's truism: "A good man is hard to find"—and sometimes a good allusion, too.

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#### Ashbery's THEY DREAM ONLY OF AMERICA and DEFINITION OF BLUE

One could hardly fault Marjorie Perloff for concluding that, for the reader facing Ashbery's "They Dream Only of America," "it is impossible to determine what the poem is 'about' [. . .] 'They Dream Only of America' is wholly hallucinatory" (187). The poem is undoubtedly one of the most resistant in an oeuvre famed for resistance to interpretation. Yet, as any seer will say, hallucinations are rarely meaningless, and thus the poem, in all its hallucinatory elusiveness, must be about something. One may find out what the poem is about by reading it alongside Ashbery's later, relatively plain-spoken "Definition of Blue." The theme that emerges is one of discontent with what Ashbery terms the "mass practices" of commercial culture in postmodern America.