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## EVA GOURDOUX

“A very hot story”: Eroticism in  
Flannery O'Connor's “Good Country People”

In her 1 Apr. 1955 letter to Sally Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald, O'Connor presented “Good Country People” in the following terms: “I wrote a very hot story at the last minute called ‘Good Country People’” (*HB* 76). By the author's own admission, the story explores sexuality and its expression, thus challenging the enduring stereotypical image of the Catholic Church. Indeed, O'Connor's Catholicism might call to mind an array of clichés about the way Catholics envision sex: as George Weigel notes, “[t]he judgement that the Catholic Church is both prudish and sex-obsessed is deeply entrenched in the Western world today” (92). The “hotness” of “Good Country People” plays on this ambiguity. Some readers might primarily see O'Connor as a Catholic and thus prudish writer—especially when one considers the enduring image of the author as a “hermit novelist” (28 June 1957, *HB* 227)—or they may have other American Catholic writers in mind, such as Walker Percy (*Lancelot*) or Allen Tate (“Nuptials”), who are known for their depictions of desire and sensuality—Donald Davidson even said of Tate that he was a “dirty poet” (Davidson and Tate 20). Critics have long sought to deconstruct the idea of O'Connor “as a recluse, confined to her mother's house and living like a Southern Emily Dickinson” (Moran 128), in other words a woman immune to sociability and sexuality. “Good Country People” demonstrates O'Connor's interest in mind and body and counters the stereotypes surrounding her so-called isolation and her Catholicism.

In point of fact, O'Connor's faith should not overshadow the underlying eroticism that courses through her texts. Indeed, in D. G. Kehl's words, “[s]exual images, sexual tension, and a wide variety of sexual aberration are present in both of O'Connor's novels and in at least a dozen of her short stories” (256). “Good Country People” is one of those stories, and the cruelty of the main character's fate is shrouded in deceiving sensuality. Joy—who also goes by the made-up name “Hulga”—is an intellectual who believes she can see through anyone's game. However, Manley Pointer will steal much more than her heart by the end of the story. The innocent-looking Bible salesman awakens Joy-Hulga to a repressed sexuality that has been wilfully ignored in favor of intellectual matters. As D. G. Kehl remarks, the representation of sexuality in O'Connor always fulfills a precise function both from a *narrative* point of view—it increases the tension between some characters—and from a *symbolic* point of view—it leads to Grace: “In O'Connor's fiction numerous varieties of sexual experience occur, not gratuitously but for reasons significant to her meaning, demonstrating that the ersatz, often epitomized by sexuality, can never fulfill the purpose of the genuine” (268). According to Kehl, O'Connor's representation of sexuality and desire is meant to be a poor imitation of what really matters, namely Salvation. Joy-Hulga seems to be an ironic and unfortunate embodiment of this position inasmuch as she denies the power of her own desire, all the while succumbing to it. The intellectual for whom God does not exist and

for whom only knowledge counts is nevertheless trapped by the irrepressible desire that gradually invades her. O'Connor's "Good Country People" depicts the conflict between spirit and body, intellect and physicality: beneath its undeniable Catholic stance, the short story invites the reader to carefully read between the lines in order to access its erotic poetry.

Through a thematic and stylistic analysis, this article tries to demonstrate the ways in which "Good Country People" qualifies as "a very hot story." This article seeks to shed light on the depiction of eroticism in the story, first by focusing on the conflict opposing mind and body which is at play in Joy-Hulga's characterization, and then by studying the way both characters play with desire, unbeknownst to one another.

### **Joy-Hulga: Mind Against Body**

#### Love's Leftover

As Louise Westling points out, "[t]he entire length of 'Good Country People' is concerned with courtship" (150). Indeed, "Good Country People" narrates the misadventures of Joy, an educated young woman with a PhD in philosophy and a wooden leg who relishes her abnormality, both in the romantic and in the intellectual domains. Joy is an intellectual in a world filled with empty words spouted by her mother, Mrs. Hopewell, and her worker Mrs. Freeman, and is very content to keep her distance from Glynese and Carramae, Mrs. Freeman's daughters. Glynese is very successful with men, while Carramae, despite her young age, is married and pregnant (*CS* 272). In Christina Bieber Lake's words, both characters "fit the culture's definition of women as defined by male desire" (125), contrary to Joy-Hulga who appears as a grotesque, unfeminine figure unlikely to attract any male's attention.

As a form of opposition to the world she is forced to live in because of her poor health, the character calls herself Hulga: this self-naming willingly disqualifies Joy-Hulga from the marriage market, since it is composed of the adjectives "huge" and "ugly." The character claims this position, as she despises men and all matters that cannot be deemed as "intellectual." However, the symbolic overtones behind the choice of the name "Hulga" complicate this reading and foreshadow the upcoming tension between mind and body that will take hold of the character. Vulcan—the Roman god of fire who inspired Hulga for her self-naming—is a deepy incarnate god. Indeed, Vulcan is often represented at the forge and also happens to be lame, echoing Joy-Hulga's own disability. Though Joy-Hulga "had arrived at it first purely on the basis of its ugly sound" (*CS* 275), the narrator, through Joy-Hulga's point of view, conveys the image of a sweating Vulcan: this emphasis placed on corporality conjures up the conflict between mind and body that is already present in the self-naming of the character. The intellectual willingly steps away from the marriage market by choosing a name that paradoxically echoes physicality—albeit a masculine, virile one—bringing forth all the ambiguity of a seemingly unequivocal character.

Although she chooses a name of her own, Joy-Hulga is first presented from the point of view of Mrs. Hopewell: "Joy was her daughter, a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg. Mrs. Hopewell thought of her as a child though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated" (*CS* 271). Three attributes characterize Joy-Hulga: the shape of her body, the color of her hair, and her disability. In other words, Joy-Hulga is first presented as pure body. Furthermore, the term "girl" suggests that Mrs. Hopewell considers Joy-Hulga a child, which is confirmed later. The young woman is thus mainly characterized by her mother, in

other words, by an external and infantilizing gaze—a gaze which is usually directed towards single women. This gaze encapsulates Joy-Hulga's singlehood, and moves her farther away from the romantic sphere.

As a matter of fact, Joy-Hulga seems to have little interest in the opposite sex, or even in any field other than philosophy. As O'Connor wrote, "All day Joy sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks but she didn't like dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity" (CS 276). The repetition of "or" refers to the potentially infinite number of elements that are of no interest to Joy-Hulga. In addition, by connecting the verb "to smell" (referring to the senses) to the noun "stupidity" (referring to the mind), the phrase "as if she could smell their stupidity" intertwines nature with culture, instinct with sociability, and brings out all the irony of the situation: Hulga does not like dogs and sees herself essentially as an intelligent being; yet the narrator insists on her sense of smell, a typically canine trait. The narration plays with irony by lending Hulga a dislike of dogs while at the same time endowing her with a distinctly canine attribute: namely, a hypertrophied sense of smell. There is apparently no way to deceive this character who knows it all, in a kind of omniscience that concerns not only academic knowledge, but all forms of knowledge.

#### The Mystery of Seduction

It is thus from this superior point of view that the character sees Manley Pointer, the Bible salesman who shows up at her door and makes his way to her table. Joy-Hulga then imagines herself as a temptress who converts a man of God to the pleasures of the flesh:

During the night she had imagined that she seduced him. She imagined that the two of them walked on the place until they came to the storage barn beyond the two back fields and there, she imagined, that things came to such a pass that she very easily seduced him and that then, of course, she had to reckon with his remorse. (CS 284)

The passage is full of euphemisms, of circumlocutions: "she seduced him"—repeated twice—remaining the most precise description of Joy-Hulga's intentions. This lack of precision on the part of the narrator could be attributed to the character's innocence in this area, or to her possible modesty, but it is above all the subtlety in the evocation of sensuality that emerges from this passage. At times, this subtlety can turn into sheer mystery thanks to the shifts in the points of view: while they are all eating, Mrs. Hopewell observes her daughter's reactions towards the guest who desperately tries to attract Joy-Hulga's attention. The whole courtship is narrated from an external point of view, that of Mrs. Hopewell, who does not fully understand what is happening before her eyes:

Joy had been standing in the road, apparently looking at something in the distance, when he came down the steps toward her, bent to the side with his heavy valise. He stopped where she was standing and confronted her directly. Mrs. Hopewell could not hear what he said but she trembled to think what Joy would say to him. She could see that after a minute Joy said something and that then the boy began to speak again, making an excited gesture with his free hand. After a minute Joy said something else at which the boy began to speak once more. Then to her amazement, Mrs. Hopewell saw the two of them walk off together,

toward the gate. Joy had walked all the way to the gate with him and Mrs. Hopewell could not imagine what they had said to each other, and she had not yet dared to ask. (280-81)

The fact that the scene is presented from an outsider's point of view leaves out the precise nature of the exchange between Pointer and Joy-Hulga. Whether it is a confrontation, an argument, or a seduction attempt, too few clues are provided to the reader through Mrs. Hopewell's point of view to know for certain what is happening between the characters. Nevertheless, the events that directly follow this passage may shed some light on the matter: while Mrs. Hopewell watches her daughter and Pointer, Mrs. Freeman comes to meet her and tells her about her daughters and their suitors, declaring that "Glynese gone out with Harvey Hill again last night" and that "Carramae said when her and Lyman was married Lyman said it sure felt sacred to him" (281). Thus, the mysterious scene between Joy-Hulga and Pointer is coupled with a scene directly dealing with two real romantic pairs, blurring the lines a little more. Mrs. Freeman is also intrigued by Joy-Hulga's situation, and does not fail to point it out:

"I seen him walk up," Mrs. Freeman said, "and then later—I seen him walk off," and Hulga could feel the slight shift in her voice, the slight insinuation, that he had not walked off alone, had he? Her face remained expressionless but the color rose into her neck and she seemed to swallow it down with the next spoonful of egg. Mrs. Freeman was looking at her as if they had a secret together. (282)

The focus now shifts to Joy-Hulga's point of view, who understands what Mrs. Freeman is insinuating, and feels concerned. This understanding is achieved through the movement of the body: the movement of the blood underneath the skin ("the color rose into her neck"), the movement of the food down the esophagus ("she seemed to swallow it down"). The face-to-face communication with Pointer, whether or not romantic—the reader can only guess the nature of their relationship at this point, since there are no textual clues to help them—is visibly kept secret, first through Mrs. Hopewell's external point of view, and then through Mrs. Freeman's observations. The relationship is ineffable, perhaps even inconceivable, as is the grotesque and tragic outcome of the story. The mystery in which the eroticism is partly imbued builds up the tension between the characters who seem to navigate between desire and innocence.

#### Desire and Innocence

The erotic charge of the pair is finally revealed when Joy-Hulga, before seeing Pointer again, recalls their conversation of the previous day—the one observed by Mrs. Hopewell. This time the narrator delivers a physical description of Pointer from Joy-Hulga's point of view, the first of the story:

He had stopped in front of her and had simply stood there. His face was bony and sweaty and bright, with a little pointed nose in the center of it, and his look was different from what it had been at the dinner table. . . . [H]e was breathing as if he had run a great distance to reach her. (*CS* 283)

The accumulative effect created by the repetition of “and” (“bony and sweaty and bright”) illustrates the intensity of Joy-Hulga’s sensations, as she notices the shape of Pointer’s face, and thus his physicality, whereas she had so far been focusing on his mind (and especially on his religiosity). Similarly, the trochaic rhythm of the phrase “bony and sweaty and bright” embodies the increasing speed of the action and Pointer’s own breathlessness: the comparison at the end of the passage describes the acceleration of Pointer’s breath, but this physical manifestation of desire is qualified here through a comparison that obscures this erotic dimension in favor of the simple practice of sports. The confusion might illustrate Joy-Hulga’s credulity: Joy-Hulga simultaneously perceives the animality and the sexual dimension of the body—the pointed nose of Pointer is a phallic symbol—and the childish—and thus asexual—aspect of the young man. She poses on him an ambiguous glance which simultaneously tints the description with her acceptance and her refusal of the coexistence of these two dimensions.

The presence of sensuality increases as the story progresses, until it culminates in a kiss, in other words in a physical contact unequivocally evocative of a romantic relationship. As they walk together, Pointer gets physically close to Joy-Hulga by putting his hand on her lower back on two occasions. The third occurrence of physical contact is embodied by a kiss which, far from symbolizing the climax of sensuality between the characters, actually degrades into a very banal, even repulsive experience for Joy-Hulga. The narrator depicts the experience from a medical point of view by emphasizing the impact of the kiss on the body: “The kiss, which had more pressure than feeling behind it, produced that extra surge of adrenalin in the girl that enables one to carry a packed trunk out of a burning house, but in her, the power went at once to the brain” (CS 285). The hormone that is supposed to affect the functioning of the body is instantly directed towards her mind, thus separating the mind from the body—despite the mention of the brain, in other words the organ which is in charge of body functions. Moreover, the kiss in itself is never described: only the results matter, not the moment which is solely the occasion for a bathos. Therefore, the occasions of physical contact between the characters paradoxically make the mind triumph because they are seen from Joy-Hulga’s point of view, and at that point of the story she is still convinced she has the upper hand on Pointer, who perfectly plays the part of the trickster. “Good Country People” depicts the hesitation between self-awareness as an embodied subject and self-awareness as pure intellect. While Kehl posits that “. . . no eros results, for it is a non-union between a fantasist and a fetishist” (262), it should be noted that this “non-union” still carries an erotic charge which encapsulates the tension between desire and innocence, body functions and mind functions. The apparent triumph of the mind over the body is an illusion which illustrates Joy-Hulga’s narcissism and blindness.

### **Playing with Desire**

#### Denying Desire

Joy-Hulga is amused by a sensation she thinks she can control: the character plans to use Pointer, to play with his feelings and a desire that she has well perceived in him. She remains at first insensitive to the attempts of seduction of the young man: “I see you got a wooden leg,’ he said. ‘I think you’re brave. I think you’re real sweet.’ The girl stood blank and solid and silent” (CS 283). The repetition of “and” as well as the alliteration of “s” (“solid

and silent”) both demonstrate Joy-Hulga’s insensitivity by eliciting a sense of boredom: Pointer’s remarks hardly move the young woman, who is far from suspecting his intentions and ignores his advances. Even after Pointer has kissed her, Joy-Hulga keeps her composure:

Even before he released her, her mind, clear and detached and ironic anyway, was regarding him from a great distance, with amusement but with pity. She had never been kissed before and she was pleased to discover that it was an unexceptional experience and all a matter of the mind’s control. (285-86)

The adverb “anyway” emphasizes Joy-Hulga’s indifference. The character is confined to her own mind, as the phrase “her mind” is a metonymy that refers to Joy-Hulga as a whole. The latter thinks she is in control of the situation; she remains convinced that the intellect can govern anything. Joy-Hulga’s gaze is amused but also full of pity—that is, colored by a sense of hierarchy (“with amusement but with pity”).

Yet, shortly after the kiss, the narrator specifies that Joy-Hulga *smiles* at Pointer: “The girl smiled. It was the first time she had smiled at him at all” (CS 286). The physical contact did change something in her, but neither the direct speech, nor the free indirect speech, nor the omniscient narration indicates such thoughts in the protagonist. On the contrary, the narrator specifies again that the young woman remains attentive and indifferent, even as Pointer is kissing her: “Her mind, throughout this, never stopped or lost itself for a second to her feelings” (287). However, Pointer has just removed her glasses, and the character did not notice. The narrator does not deliver all the information: Hulga’s thoughts are revealed, but Pointer’s intentions are not. The narrator describes furtive gestures that Joy-Hulga does not pay attention to, words that Joy-Hulga does not interpret. The reader, on the other hand, can pick up on these clues. Without being able to anticipate the ending, the reader can still be surprised by these actions, even though Joy-Hulga cannot discern them. This blindness reflects the power of a desire that the young woman has always ignored. Even worse, Joy-Hulga is in denial of her own desire, which she keeps quiet in favor of the intellect that she listens to with great attention. “Good Country People” illustrates the failed discovery of one’s own desire. The carnal desire is in conflict with an equally powerful desire: that of keeping control over one’s body and thoughts. The denial of desire of another than oneself is articulated with a form of narcissism, which is presented here from a Freudian perspective, as the source of a potential fantasy of omnipotence. Given the religious and metaphysical dimension of the Other in O’Connor, it can be postulated that this denial of the Other as an object of desire is a distorted echo of the denial of the central presence of an Other in human existence, an Other that Joy-Hulga does not recognize due to her nihilistic philosophical position. Despite the ironic strategy that structurally and philosophically dominates the short story, O’Connor’s story nevertheless takes the measure of the power of sexual desire that appears in the female character. This sexual desire is a pathway to the character’s vulnerability, and the occasion for the trickster of the story to deceive her and turn the tables.

### Taming the Intellectual

The narrator describes a panting Pointer, and punctuates his utterances either by evoking his breathing—“Then on what seemed an insuck of breath, he whispered . . .” (CS 283); “‘You never can tell,’ he said, panting”—or by insisting on the volume of his utterances: Manley “asked softly” (283), and “murmured” (284, 286, 289). The story makes the most of hearing and of the

modulation of the voice, notably on the side of Pointer, who is very expressive: the Bible salesman whistles, and lowers his voice at the end of sentences, until Joy-Hulga understands that he has deceived her. The story thus creates an atmosphere of seduction on the side of Pointer who, in addition to hearing, uses touch to tame Joy-Hulga:

He caught hold of her elbow and shook it a little. "I don't work on Saturday," he said. "I like to walk in the woods and see what Mother Nature is wearing. O'er the hills and far away. Pic-nics and things. Couldn't we go on a pic-nic tomorrow? Say yes, Hulga," he said and gave her a dying look as if he felt his insides about to drop out of him. He had even seemed to sway slightly toward her. (284)

Pointer touches Joy-Hulga's elbow without the narrator's mentioning the latter's reaction. The young woman's point of view peeks through at the end of the passage with the phrase "[h]e had even seemed to sway slightly toward her," as if Joy-Hulga were analyzing the scene. This impression is confirmed by Joy-Hulga's reflections on seducing Pointer. The image of the Bible salesman's entrails escaping from his body shows a man in love, even in agony ("a dying look"). His emotions directly affect the functioning of the body. Eroticism in "Good Country People" is characterized by an alternation between brutality and softness. As the story progresses and the two characters touch and kiss, the text is enriched with a comic tone, and the lover seems childish:

The girl at first did not return any of the kisses but presently she began to and after she had put several on his cheek, she reached his lips and remained there, kissing him again and again as if she were trying to draw all the breath out of him. His breath was clear and sweet like a child's and the kisses were sticky like a child's. He mumbled about loving her and about knowing when he first seen her that he loved her, but the mumbling was like the sleepy fretting of a child being put to sleep by his mother. (287)

By repeating "child" every few words, the narrator shifts the text from an erotic scene to an innocent one. Joy-Hulga assumes the role of the mother, Pointer that of the child. Even his lustful voice turns into incomprehensible babbling. The narrator blurs the lines and thus conceals Pointer's cruel designs, while creating confusion and unease in the implied reader by constructing a ridiculous kissing scene oscillating between adult and childish sexuality.

Indeed, Pointer is presented as a gentle and harmless character for most of the story, especially when he asks where Joy-Hulga's wooden leg attaches, even before he has kissed her: "They crossed half the pasture without saying anything and then, putting his hand easily on the small of her back, he asked softly, 'Where does your wooden leg join on?'" (CS 285). The adverb "easily" reflects a natural and impulsive gesture which appears as seamless. The question is nevertheless poorly received by Joy-Hulga. Pointer asks a similar question again after several kisses: "He leaned over and put his lips to her ear. 'Show me where your wooden leg joins on,' he whispered" (288). Pointer uses the same words, but instead of a question, he uses the declarative form, implicitly telling Joy-Hulga to obey. The erotic charge of the scene is at its peak and contrasts with the delicacy that Pointer may have shown earlier. The touching of Pointer's lips to Joy-Hulga's ear evokes a sexual act, while the use of "show me" could have been directed at any part of Joy-Hulga's body—anything but her wooden leg. The young woman's reaction confirms the erotic color of Pointer's words:



The girl uttered a sharp little cry and her face instantly drained of color. The obscenity of the suggestion was not what shocked her. As a child she had sometimes been subject to feelings of shame but education had removed the last traces of that as a good surgeon scrapes for cancer; she would no more have felt it over what he was asking than she would have believed in his Bible. But she was as sensitive about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail. No one ever touched it but her. She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private and almost with her own eyes turned away. (288)

At first glance, the adjectives “sharp little” that describe Joy-Hulga’s scream and the mention of her pale face suggest the cliché of the innocent virgin girl confronted with sensations she does not know. The narrator makes it clear, however, that the eroticism of Pointer’s proposal is not the focus of Joy-Hulga’s reaction: the reader understands that the young woman has grasped the sauciness of Pointer’s words, but that the reasons for her reaction lie elsewhere. As Margaret Whitt remarks, “. . . Joy/Hulga’s wooden leg corresponds to her ‘maimed soul’” (76). The artificial leg is a gate towards Joy-Hulga’s interiority. The comparison with the peacock, a symbol of Christian faith, emphasizes this reading. The character’s body and deformity gradually lead the character towards Grace, one touch at a time. In addition, the pronoun “it” that replaces “the artificial leg” could well refer to something else (her genitals, her breasts, her buttocks) and the narrator plays with this referential ambiguity. The story describes the progressive effectiveness of Pointer’s sensual gestures: Joy-Hulga, at first insensitive, becomes more and more receptive to his advances and even removes her wooden leg, which is a treasure of intimacy to her. “Good Country People” follows an irregular rhythm that goes from indifference and contempt to effective seduction, only to turn this seduction into ridicule and start again from the beginning so as to deceive the young woman: the trickster comforts the Joy-Hulga in her so-called intellectual superiority so as to progressively tame her by bringing out the animal within her, namely the side of her she tries to ignore.

### The Animal Within

O’Connor is well-known for her animalistic metaphors and comparisons. As André Bleikasten notes, “[l]a rhétorique puissamment réductrice d’O’Connor dévitalise le vivant, déshumanise l’humain, tire tous les personnages vers le bas, vers l’animal, le minéral ou le mécanique, bref, n’arrête pas de produire du grotesque” (“O’Connor’s powerfully reductive rhetoric devitalizes the living, dehumanizes the human, drags all characters down to the animal, the mineral or the mechanical—in short, it never stops producing the grotesque”) (43). The author brings her characters down to earth by literally merging them with animals, plants and stones, ultimately creating what Bleikasten calls a “human animal” (*animal humain*) (11). Pointer is one of these “human animals” and is regularly connected to a water motif. He is compared to a fish as he is kissing Joy-Hulga: “The boy dropped down by her side and put one arm under her and the other over her and began methodically kissing her face, making little noises like a fish” (CS 287). The erotic moment is downplayed by the comparison which ridicules Pointer, and makes him seem utterly inexperienced. In the same fashion, his smiles are said to come “in succession like waves breaking on the surface of a little lake” (283). The repetition of the adjective “little” in both cases participates in the characterization of Pointer’s gentle, harmless persona. However, on a second reading, this

connection to water can also point out to Joy-Hulga's last vision of Pointer. Indeed, once her leg is stolen and her glasses removed, the character will see Pointer's figure "[struggle] successfully over the green speckled lake" (291). O'Connor's animalizing strategy tricks the reader into taking Pointer for "good country people," placing them on the side of Joy-Hulga, but it also announces the shocking and unexpected ending: Pointer is a shark, not a fish. The animal within him is a predator, where the one within Joy-Hulga is a prey.

Frederick Asals identifies two different poles in O'Connor's writing: "One impulse in her writing is downward, an absorption of the human to the realm of things, of animals and objects; the contrary drive is upward, a touching of the human with the grotesque luminosity of the divine . . ." (67). In "Good Country People," the "downward impulse"—which Asals calls "the hylic"—is elicited by a lens which gradually animalizes Joy-Hulga. Indeed, Pointer's gaze turns the character into an unidentified, surreal animal out of a bestiary: "He was gazing at her with open curiosity, with fascination, like a child watching a new fantastic animal at the zoo . . ." (CS 283); "Nothing seemed to destroy the boy's look of admiration. He gazed at her now as if the fantastic animal at the zoo had put its paw through the bars and given him a loving poke" (286). The periphrasis "fantastic animal at the zoo" can be found twice in the story, illustrating Joy-Hulga's abnormality as well as her future predicament: the character is a savage animal insofar as she relishes her difference and, above all, her superiority, but she is tamed because she lies inside of a metaphorical cage. The zoo comparisons in "Good Country People" foreshadow Joy-Hulga's demise, unbeknownst to the implied reader who, at that time, might view these comparisons as a simple way to highlight Joy-Hulga's singularity. In fact, the comparisons fill two inter-connected purposes: first, they do underline the main character's physical deformity as the animal is qualified as "fantastic," thus strange or at least out of the ordinary; second, they symbolically put Joy-Hulga behind bars and echo her prisons. For Joy-Hulga is confined to two types of prison: an intellectual one that is cursed by the "good country people" she abhors, and a physical one which is yet to come as she will be trapped in a barn.

The sensuality of the relationship with the Other in "Good Country People" is represented in an unforgiving fashion in which the term returns to its etymological meaning: from Latin *seducere*, "seduction" literally means "to divert from the right path." Joy-Hulga's path was clear before she met Manley Pointer, the trickster of the story. From her ivory tower, a dwelling fit for an intellectual, Joy-Hulga is transported to a barn, house to farm animals. O'Connor's "very hot story" offers a voyage from mind to body, bringing the main character back down to earth and to her own animality, but not only that. "Good Country People" presents a synthesis which intertwines mind and body in the end, reminding us that O'Connor's stories do not only focus on spirituality but rather temporarily separate mind and body to emphasize their indissociability. The kind of *eros* that is at play in "Good Country People" is an *eros* that allows these two elements to reunite, though painfully for the main character. The erotic charge of the story is a force that actually echoes God's: the unification of mind and body is eucharistic in O'Connor's work, and paves the way for Grace. ♻️

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