KARL JASPERS AND FLANNERY O'CONNOR: THE HERMENEUTIC OF BEING IN "A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND"

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The recently edited anthology of letters written by Flannery O'Connor has renewed public interest in one of our most eloquent spokesmen on the human condition. Perhaps filled with ennui in a decade during which little has been bravely or well said about the metaphysics of our humanity, we gladly receive her sacramental outlook. Anguished by our collective doubts, we are better able than the 1950s society to comprehend her belief that transcendence exists and is often discovered through thaumaturigical confrontations with the boundaries of our multifaceted beings. Too easily impressed with the quantifiable aspects of life, we are jolted by her literary insistance that our central glorification is immeasurable and unapproachable by the usual empirico-rational dispassion. Anxious critics have sought her intellectual roots and have found that Kafka, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Buber, Marcel, and Mauriac were all important to her development as a thinker. This paper will argue that the thought of the German existentialist Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) is also vital for an understanding of O'Connor. Specifically, the article will demonstrate how Jasperian thought helps us to better understand O'Connor's most famous and perhaps representative short story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find." Joseph Conrad once wrote that the artist "descends within himself, and in that region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal." Both Jaspers and O'Connor agree in principle on what the terms of the appeal are, as an examination of their ideas and the story will reveal.

Karl Jaspers, one of the first architects of contemporary existentialism, views philosophy as a disciplined and methodical description of the critical fringes of human existence. His concern for "marginality" is revealed in his exegesis of impenetrable limits, freedom, and death; his phenomenology includes examinations of subjectively experienced constraints such as space, time, and consciousness. Convinced that man possesses a "trans-systemic" core that resists institutional identification, he stresses man's primal irrationality. Indeed, he claimed, the philosophic enterprise only begins when disinterested rationality has suffered radical shipwreck. In step with modern thinking, he prizes philosophy as an activity; for him, philosophy as process is more vital than philosophy as product. Correctly appreciated, philosophy is not a body of facts or a state of being. Authentic philosophic thinking begins with a specific problem faced by a unique actor in a given historical moment. Generic intellectual concerns are mere epiphenomena of specific

human problems. For Jaspers, the most pressing of human concerns is the desire to articulate the structure of existence to another. Paradoxically, we are compelled to this task even though we are ineffable, unique, and free. Influenced heavily by Imannual Kant, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Edmund Husserl, Jaspers feels that metaphysics, properly done, could in fact illumine some of the potentialities and characteristics of one's *Existenz*.

We should now study in more detail the epistemology of Jaspers. For us the only source of information about our world is our immediate experience. Hence, to know the world is to explore, describe, and analyze our first-person experiences. Although subjectivity is primary, our impressions are "verifiable" inasmuch as solitary egos may compare experiences. This method is generally skeptical and tentative, as each person is forced to depend ultimately on the intuitions, impressions, and decisions of his personal ego. Science is not a safe citadel of certitude as it is premised on the false belief that valid knowledge can exclude the observing ego. Further, our key experiences are not mere sense data or basic emotions like despair or elation but rather are the marginal states of consciousness that we find difficult, if not impossible, to express clearly. Because of this phenomenological reality, we often find ourselves in an intransigent, almost solipsistic, bell jar.

Nonetheless, the illumination of our own existences (*Existenzerhellung*) is possible for us. Many modes of cognition attempt to concentrate on the pragmatic "self-with object" or the "self-for object." However, intuition (Vernunft) does disclose a real and enduring self that Jaspers has called *Existenz*. Although *Existenz* cannot be conceptually delimited, it is clearly experienced and can be communicated. It is revealed in the experience of the freedom that defines and thus ironically limits us; it is revealed in our awareness of infinite choice. Finally, it is revealed in the intuition of ontological loneliness which we are incapable of totally dismembering. Jaspers further distinguishes *Existenz,* our eternal, authentic ground, from *Dasein,* our physical, describable, "objectively accessible" exterior. No idealist, Jaspers sees both as valuable components of our being that should complement each other.

In addition to being characterized by mystery, flux, freedom, and ambiguity, *Existenz,* is limited by impenetrable boundaries (*Grenzsituationen*). Our existence is actually constituted by the on-going experience of these limits. We are constantly confronting our finitude in the numerous "boundary situations" of daily life; the existential hero is the actor who engages these limits, pushes them back as far as possible, and then accepts them. Ultimate barriers include death, guilt, and historicity or "situationality." Less "drastic" limits are confronted every day but humans are constituted by their ontological boundaries. Death, for example, serves both as the

foundation of our anxiety and as a perspective on the things in life that matter most. Guilt, another boundary situation, demonstrates the power that our freedom has over our destiny. We are guilty because we could always have chosen another course of action; guilt cannot be avoided but can be fronted and rendered constructive. The bourne of "situationality" is the fact that we always exist in a specific time and place; living authentically means that we can largely determine this condition and be held responsible for it.

Most central to Jaspers is the existence of human freedom and its attendant moral responsibility. Indeed, ethics is the formal exploration of the experience and potential of free will. Freedom, as our being, is revealed in choice, awareness, selfhood, spontaneity and action. As an existentialist, Jaspers implores us to act, to become engaged, and to realize that we choose our values freely.

The sacred nature of freedom is also revealed in the presence of anguish and guilt. We are guilty because we could always have chosen a different course of action. Each choice carries with it the accumulated weight of previous decisions so our first choice (*Urentschluss*) overshadows subsequent choices and assumes the role of "original sin." Accountability and guilt are terms which characterize the primary choice as well as all others. Further, we are not able to avoid the impenetrable boundary of guilt by positing the superexistence of absolute standards which can inform our decisions. The inherent difficulty of choice is ineluctable, and guilt is unalleviated.

Anguish typically results when subjects realize that many of their existential possibilities will go unrealized. It also arises in the midst of critical decision-making in a universe which gives no warrant for cognitive certitude. Fortunately, anguish can lend urgency and courage to our *Existenz*; in Heideggerian terms, we can be led to implement our authentic potential. Confronted with the mystery of being, we can deny the "abyss" in a nihilistic Katabasis into meaninglessness, or we may adopt a philosophic or religious orientation. In any case, choice and action cannot be avoided.

Another key dimension of *Existenz* is communication. Although finding that true communication is ineffable, Jaspers does feel that it is intersubjective. We are made self-aware as other beings reflect us. For Jaspers, genuine communication is the feeling that persons have known each other since eternity. Indeed, much of our freedom is spent in search for authentic, often strifeful communication with another *Existenz*. Thus, the search for my *Existenz* always involves the presence of another. Moreover, authentic communication (*Existenzursprung*) is a necessary vehicle for the disclosure of being itself.

Jaspers finds that we may never escape from our ontological limits. It is in man's endless striving to defeat these limits, in finite beings striving for

infinity, that he finds our ultimate paradox. This same paradox is the foundation of our tragedy, our greatness, and our "symbol of transcendence."

Finally, Jaspers finds that as ethical concerns grow out of philosophical psychology, so religious concerns grow from phenomenological accounts of the fringes of inward and outer experiences. Traditional theology has ossified these immediate intuitions into literalized systems that can only belie the reality of mystery. For example, Jasper argues we *first* experience our freedom as a gift and accept that we are not alone in the universe. The gift of freedom points imprecisely to some "ultimate horizon" as its foundation and source. Further awareness of "transcendence" begins in the awareness of finitude; although we easily see the boundaries that define and confine us, we sense the existence of the infinite both within and without. Even our experience of the world seems to point to a world beyond. Our freedom is critically exercised when we choose to pursue or to ignore the "clues" (ciphers) of a power which sustains our existence.

The Jasperian term "Encompassing" (*das Umgreifende*) refers to the ultimate and indeterminate limits of experienced being. These limits surround, envelop, and suffuse our experienced world; the encompassing (Kant's "being-as-such") is the totality of being as it is thought, conceived, or conceptualized. He uses the term "transcedence" to denote our personal and committed effort to reach the Encompassing. An exact definition of the Encompassing is impossible since it is all of being as well as the differentiations within being. Scientific and philosophic positions such as idealism, solipsism, materialism, skepticism, positivism, and naturalism are "thought-events" within the Encompassing and hence cannot limit or define it. Unable to totally conceptualize "being-as-such," nonetheless, we may rely on our experiences in the world as efforts of being to reach us.

The Encompassing manifests itself through the analogical predication of symbols or, to use Jaspers' exact term, ciphers (*Chiffren*). Through the highly personal phenomenlogical elucidation of ciphers, we may come to awareness of, but never possession of, noumenal reality. Ciphers may emerge without warning in the presence of empirical phenomena, like an impassable desert, a severe storm, or a tall mountain. They may be manifested in religious mythology, philosophical systems, historical studies, or in art forms which experiment in different forms of limits.[1] Ciphers are perhaps best revealed during reflection on the mystery of being as well as on the ultimate phenomenal limit of death which arises all too swiftly for every human.

Finally, Jaspers's open and tolerant philosophic faith rejects the idea that man is self-determined, alone, and perfectible in an ungrounded, self-generating world. His conviction, rather, is sixfold: (1) we are capable of transcendence and will infinity, (2) there is a transcendence to the phenomenal

world, (3) personal freedom is a gift and is to be respected, (4) humans, as we now exist, are incomplete and wholly inadequate, (5) we can rely on succor from transcendence, and (6) the world has an ontic ground and support. Jaspers' thought clearly is similar to traditional Christianity but differs in two fundamental ways. First, he denies that the Bible is the final word of God and claims that it is actually a very rich and suggestive instrument for philosophic faith, especially through its ciphers of one God and its emphasis on love. Other ciphers abound in the Bible and include the story of Abraham, the story of the creation and the flood, the parables of Jesus, and the revelations in the final book. Second, Jaspers avers that the human soteriological drama is enacted against a background of doubt, not divine reassurance. The elucidation of ciphers is unguided by theological instruction, and the further acceptance of transcendence toward which the symbols only imprecisely point must be the result of a committed leap of faith.

With this brief examination of Karl Jasper's thought in mind, we can profitably review Flannery O'Connor's most characteristic story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find."[2] I wish to argue that the basic Jasperian thought in epistemology, psychology, ethics, communication, and theology will help the reader to further illuminate the story. Our examination will also suggest some important similarities in the two writers' thought.

Epistemologically, both Jasper and O'Connor stress the primary role of subjective, first-hand experiences. Both seem to feel that we often are forced to rely on the intuitions of a fallible ego. In the story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," we find the grandmother structuring reality to fit her subjective intuition. Moreover, her intuitions often are petrified by her unique view of a genteel past. On the road to Florida, the white-gloved matron seems oblivious of the rough edges in society:

> "In my time . . . children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else. People did right then. Oh, look at the cute little pickaninny!" she said and pointed to a Negro child standing in the door of a shack. "Wouldn't that make a picture, now?"

She seems to ignore June Star's observation that the child is impoverished and lacks britches. Refusing to validate her personal observations, she simply responds by saying, "He probably didn't have any—little niggers in the country don't have things like we do. If I could paint, I'd paint that picture."[3] Validation of subjective experience is only possible when egos compare experiences. Repeatedly, the grandmother refuses to seriously challenge her almost solipsistic understanding of reality.

In another place in the story, we see further witness that grandmother has allowed false gentility and unvalidated experience to prevent an honest

reaction to life. The family stops at The Tower for barbecued sandwiches and encounters the corpulent owner, Red Sammy. The grandmother instantly evaluates him as "a good man" because he has an adequate amount of material goods and manners. Playing "The Tennessee Waltz" on the jukebox, she ignores her granddaughter's (June Star) opposite evaluation of the restaurant and its owner: "No—I wouldn't live in a broken-down place like this for a million bucks!" Furthermore, O'Connor brilliantly contrasts the "non-talk" of Red Sammy and the grandmother with the natural, uncomplicated, and unmediated reactions of the restaurant's pet monkey:

> He and the grandmother discussed better times. The old lady said that in her opinion Europe was entirely to blame for the way things were now. She said the way Europe acted you would think we were made of money and Red Sam said it was no use talking about it, she was exactly right. The children ran outside into the white sunlight and looked at the monkey in the lacy chinaberry tree. He was busy catching fleas on himself and biting each one carefully between his teeth as if it were a delicacy (pp. 14, 16).

Other obvious examples of the limits of subjective perception are found in the grandmother's mistaken memory about the old mansion and her recounting of the auto accident to The Misfit. Until the very last action of the story, she remains a self-centered romantic who arranges the world to suit her intuition. As Jaspers points out, self-disclosure is only possible when true communication with another *Existenz* is taking place. In addition, this would account for the rapid and banal conversation of her son Bailey and his wife. In The Misfit, O'Connor introduces a welcome foil.

A second area of Jasper's thought which helps to illumine the story is his psychological insights. Central to his philosophical psychology is his elucidation of *Existenz*, the eternal being of man which is rich in mystery, paradox, and antinomy. Only our temporal dimension, *Dasein* is capable of categorical description and definitional reduction. To confuse mere *Dasein* with *Existenz*, for Jaspers, is crass materialism and a self-destructive denial of the multi-dimensional mystery of our being. Central to the mystery of *Existenz* is our freedom. As O'Connor has put it in her introduction to the second edition of *Wise Blood*, "Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen." With Jaspers, she feels that freedom is paradoxical in that the whole person, who is also the free person, can exist only within the limits of the necessary in himself and in the rest of existence.[4] Our freedom, then, is not the spurious freedom of simple infinite choice but a fundamental qualification of our being which is strengthened by the confinement of *ananke*. This paradox is not a problem to be analyzed and dissolved but

rather a mystery to be experienced. Many readers of "A Good Man is Hard to Find" have noted that there are few "free" people in the story. Bailey, the grandmother's son, is a one-dimensional conformist who avoids reflection on life's depth, while his wife is a caricature of mindless maternity. The grandmother shows little awareness until the end, while The Misfit prides himself on a view of freedom which entails the simple ability to take any available course of action (Eggenschuiler, 1972, p. 94).

Both Jaspers and O'Connor appear to have been concerned about contemporary, secular man avoiding the depth of *Existenz* for the measurable, material *Dasein*. Indeed, the paradoxes of being have become an embarrassment to the modern mind.[5] What the contemporary world seems to need, according to O'Connor, are writers who will reacquaint a scientific age with the eternal mystery of life. For the good writer aware of life's real depth,

> what he sees on the surface will be of interest to him only as he can go through it into an experience of mystery itself. His kind of fiction will always be pushing its own limits outward toward the limits of mystery, because for this kind of writer, the meaning of a story does not begin except at a depth where adequate motivation and adequate psychology and their various determinations have exhausted (O'Connor, 1961, p. 42).

Such a writer is close to the ontic realistics which transcend and may transfigure the scientific calculations of our empirical selves (Dasein).

The other major aspect of *Existenz* which seems to engage both thinkers is the impenetrability of the boundaries that limit us all. These important limits, as indicated above, include evil, guilt, "situationality," and death.[6] A brief examination of "A Good Man is Hard to Find" reveals that it is a story about limits and about degrees of awareness or lack of awareness about them.

Most intriguing of the limits we face is the limit of evil. Clearly, intimate knowledge of our ontological limitations is a gateway to reality, and Flannery O'Connor believes that the South has a special, historically conditioned sensitivity to the limit of evil:

> We have had our Fall. We have gone into the modern world with an inborn knowledge of human limitations and with a sense of mystery which could not have developed in our first state of innocence (1961, p. 59).

With her Southern Catholic background, O'Connor was well prepared to respect the perplexing limit of evil and suffering.[7] In the story, the reality of

these is blithely ignored by the grandmother who refuses to admit the suffering of the black child or Red Sammy's squalid, empty existence. Often the denial of this limit on the grandmother's part comes through a banal, trivialization of evil. In reply to Red Sammy's litanies of society's malfeasances, she says tritely that "people are certainly not nice like they used to be" (p. 15). Later, even in face of death, the grandmother will deny the evil in The Misfit:

> "You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?" The grandmother said and removed a clean handkerchief from her cuff and began to slap at her eyes with it.
>
> The Misfit pointed the toe of his shoe into the ground and made a little hole and then covered it up again. "I would hate to have to," he said.
>
> "Listen," the grandmother almost screamed, "I know you're a good man. You don't look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from nice people.!" (pp. 22).

She thus can continue to avoid life by an egocentric hiding behind the sham veil of gentility. "Listen," she said, "you shouldn't call yourself The Misfit because I know you're a good man at heart. I can just look at you and tell" (p. 23). Except for the children, June Star and John Wesley, her denial is largely shared by the compliant members of her family.

The Misfit, on the other hand, appears to show some recognition of his role in the world's evil. When the grandmother continues to deny the immediate threat to her world by describing him as a good man, he replies sharply, "Nome, I ain't a good man . . . but I ain't the worst in the world neither" (p. 24). O'Connor depicts The Misfit as an individual who recognizes the source of evil and has chosen consciously to reject redemption. In response to the facile religious utterances of the grandmother that he should pray for help, he says, "I don't want no hep. I'm doing all right by myself." He has chosen to reject divine aid not only because he feels self-sufficient but also because he rejects that there exists a source for such aid. His telluric eloquence on the subject indicates that he has thoughtfully weighed the mystery of evil and has failed to find an adequate theodicy:

> "Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead," The Misfit continued, "and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness," he said and his voice had

become almost a snarl (p. 28).

Presented with the bald theological choice and increasingly aware of the choice to reject Christ made by The Misfit, the grandmother becomes dizzy and admits that He may not have raised the dead. Her defenses finally begin to dissolve in the face of a genuine human limit. At the same point, the reader is made to feel that The Misfit's paradoxical glory is his conscious capacity for damnation! The author herself felt that The Misfit would thereby strike a responsive chord in the reader from the South with his "knowledge that evil is not simply a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured (O'Connor, 1961, p. 209).

Another important ontological limit, according to Jaspers, is guilt. Man not only *feels* guilty but, because of his freedom, *is* guilty. That is, he could always have chosen otherwise. Ultimate guilt cannot be removed and should not be denied; it must be accepted before it can become constructive. Used constructively, guilt demonstrates the power that our freedom has over our destiny. Although O'Connor as a Catholic would disagree over the exact amount of freedom we possess, she nonetheless says some Jasperian things about guilt and the effects of its denial.

In several places already discussed, we find characters denying responsibility for their actions. At various times, for example, we find the grandmother, Bailey, and Red Sammy blaming bad luck, World War II, the "times," and society for the conditions of their lives. The most profound denials of guilt and responsibility, however, are rendered by The Misfit. Recently escaped from prison, he has not accepted his responsibility for the patricide he has committed.

> "I never was a bad boy that I remember of," The Misfit said in an almost dreamy voice, "but somewheres along the line I done something wrong and got sent to the penitentiary. I was buried alive," and he looked up and held her attention to him by a steady stare (p. 24).

After further claiming that his father died long before he was charged with the crime, he cleverly escapes *personal* guilt for his freedom by generalizing his condition to all mankind:

> "I found that crime don't matter. You can do one thing or you can do another; kill a man or take a tire off his car, because sooner or later you're going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it (p. 26)."

He finally avoids facing his guilt by comparing himself to Christ: "I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment" (p.

28). When he indicates some remorse after he kills the grandmother, the reader is left with the hope that he will finally confront the foundational limit of guilt and eventually be able to reconstruct his life.

Jaspers found that man's freedom is both his glory and the ground of his anguish. Our freedom means that there are no fixed standards or absolutes to compel our actions. The rectitude of our choice is always problematic. Denial of anguish is a living death while acceptance of freedom and its concomitant emotion of anguish gives the individual the urgency and courage to choose with his full being in an effort to realize the authentic potential of *Existenz*. In "A Good Man is Hard to Find," we find little to give us hope that man can face the ethical reality of anguish. Typically, the emotion is either ignored (e.g., Bailey's wife and Red Sammy) or explained away by the grandmother and, to a lesser extent, by The Misfit.

Pride is also a device used by the grandmother and The Misfit to deny the anguish that could compel them to face *Existenz* honestly. Indeed, it takes the unavoidable nearness of death to overcome the grandmother's defense of pride. Only in the last seconds of her life is she able to lose her self in order to gain authentic being and its attendant freedom and moral responsibility.

> She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why, you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest (p. 29).

The realization of her moral being may have been the salvation that escaped her throughout her life as she "half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky" (p. 29). The unescapable fact, however, is that it takes an overpowering act of violence to bring the grandmother to a realization of herself as a limited human creature whose imperfections are yet redeemable.[8] Although anagnorisis is less clear in the case of The Misfit, his sententious statement to his ancillary that "it's no real pleasure in life" (p. 29) also bespeaks a breakthrough in self-awareness.

A final area in which Karl Jaspers's thought helps to illuminate the short story is his understanding of theology. Many of his theological ideas overlap with his ideas in areas we have discussed. Most vital to the conclusion of "A Good Man is Hard to Find," however, is the conviction that ciphers (symbols) reveal the fullness of being to individuals. As explained above, ciphers are highly personal and no universal exegesis is possible. Nonetheless, Jasper writes, man is grounded and supported by the Encompassing or the fullness of 'being-as-such'. O'Connor reveals several ciphers in which

being (she would call it spiritual reality or God) is manifested. We might suspect this from her own account of a sacramental writer:

> Such a writer will be interested in what we don't understand rather than in what we do. He will be interested in possibility rather than in what we do. He will be interested in possibility, rather than probability. He will be interested in characters who are forced to meet evil and grace and who act on a trust beyond themselves whether they know very clearly what it is they act upon or not. To the modern mind, this kind of character, and this creature are typical Don Quixotes, tilting at what is not there (1961, pp. 41-42).

She elsewhere indicates that grace itself is made possible through the kind of medium Jaspers called "ciphers":

> Grace—can and does use as its medium the imperfect, purely human, and hypocritical. Cutting yourself off from Grace is a very decided matter requiring a real choice, act of will, and affecting the very ground of the soul.[9]

In an era when the statement "God is dead" really refers to an ossified moral indifference, we might suspect that the ciphers will be sudden and violent. Only then can perverse obtuseness be dissolved and salvation made possible.

The grandmother and The Misfit are the two characters that are finally rendered receptive to the "ciphers of being." These intimations of a greater spiritual reality which sustains man and his world come from a recognition of the limitations of each and their moral responsibility for the sins of life. Faced by the ultimate boundary of death and the "penultimate" boundary of suffering, the grandmother receives a long awaited salvation. Unfortunately, it takes the immediate threat of violence for her to "see through" to transcendence. As The Misfit says to his recreant friend Bobby Lee, "She would of been a good woman if there had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (p. 29). Further, in confronting *Existenz* for the first time, the grandmother's love changes from the conditional love of her family to an unconditional love (Agape) for fellow humans in need because they are alienated from the Encompassing (God, for O'Connor). With her dramatic anagnorisis ("It's no real pleasure in life.") we feel that her superficial evaluations of people based on their breeding and manners have also ended.

The Misfit, who is one of the most metaphysically obsessed characters in O'Connor's writings, may also have dropped his flight from the Encompassing by the end of the story.[12] If he is not totally or permanently altered

by this encounter of an old lady who somehow serves as a cipher of ultimate being, he is at least touched by the Grace that comes through her when she recognizes him as her child.[13] Prior to his recognition ("It's no real pleasure in life") he feels badly treated because he will not accept his sinful, dependent state. He kills the old lady in part to deny the cipher she has suddenly come to represent and to demonstrate his independence and self-sufficiency. Safe in his citadel of destructive certitude, he even denies that he has stolen, because "nobody had nothing I wanted" (p. 26). The ciphers of violence and death often serve to return O'Connor's characters to reality; violence especially seems to reveal what we are. O'Connor has given an excellent short description of what she has tried to do in having the old lady reach out to The Misfit in her newly acquired compassion. The key to a good story, she has said, is actions or gestures which "have to suggest both the world and eternity. The action would have to be on the analogical level, that is, the level which has to do with the Divine life and our participation in it" (1961, p. 13). The recognition of her spiritual and moral affiliation with another being and the physical "objective correlative" of reaching out is that gesture in "A Good Man is Hard to Find."

Brief mention should be made of both authors' view of the grotesque. It is a commonplace among O'Connor's critics to say that she is gnawingly aware of the grotesque and the freakish. With Jaspers, she believed that the ultimate cause for the freakish is the alienation from full being caused by some primal *lapsus*. O'Connor specifically felt that if man is warped, it is because he is "warped away" from something; man, she felt, seems to need reconciling with that something, even if the means to reconciliation are violent. Indeed, before recognizing a freak, we have to have some conception of the whole man (Drake, 1966, pp. 43-44). The grotesque will only disappear when lapsarian man is reunited with the sustaining ground of *Existenz*. Jaspers might have said that O'Connor used the reality of ugliness and freakishness as a cipher for the perfect wholeness found in the "Encompassing." Presented suddenly with the grotesquely "unbalanced" Misfit and the apparent banality of her family's death, the grandmother is forced to "see through" to full being. In the dramatic last scene of acceptance and recognition, we have witnessed O'Connor's prototypical hermeneutic. The hermeneutic and the theme are repeated in variations in almost all of her works.[14]

Although the theology of Jaspers is not identical with O'Connor's (e.g., he finds God a cipher, she does not), they both shared a common appreciation for man's dependency and unperfectability. They both clearly felt that spiritual reality is revealed through encounters with our phenomenal and noumenal selves. Both believed that to confuse mere *Dasein* with the authentic ground of being, *Existenz*, is crass materialism and leads to nihilism. Both believed in the mystery, paradox, and antinomes of exist-

ence, and saw *Existenz* as limited by impenetrable boundaries. The library of Flannery O'Connor contained the following marked passage from Martin Buber:

> All religious reality begins with what Biblical religion calls the 'fear of God.' It comes when our existence between birth and death becomes incomprehensible and uncanny, when all security is shattered through the mystery—through this dark gate the believing man steps forth into the everyday which is henceforth hallowed as the place in which he has to live with mystery. He steps forth directed and assigned to the concrete contextual situations of his existence. That he henceforth accepts the situation as given him by the Giver is what Biblical religion calls the 'fear of God.'[15]

On these fundamental words, the two writers would profoundly agree.

Thus, although there is no direct evidence that O'Connor read Jaspers,[16] she was clearly inspired by the same reverence for "being itself" as the redemptive source of our wholeness. The student of Jaspers should constantly be enlightened by her literary inditement of his salient ideas while the student of O'Connor finds new appreciation for her persistence in the sacramental view of life. Philosophical psychology and literature are particularly well wedded in "A Good Man is Hard to Find."

NOTES

1. Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), pp. 133-48.
2. Martha Stephens, *The Question of Flannery O'Connor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1973), p. 32.
3. Flannery O'Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1955), p. 12.
4. David Eggenschuiler, *The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972), p. 94.
5. Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straws, Guoux, 1961), p. 124.
6. Margaret Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" *Colorado Quarterly* (Spring 1962), p. 384.
7. Robert Drake, *Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay* (New York: William B. Ferdmans, 1966), p. 13.
8. Leon K. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain, *The Eternal Crossroads* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1971), p. 65.
9. O'Connor, "Letter to John Hawkes, 14 April 1960, in *Habit of Being,* ed. by Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, Gioux, 1979), p. 389.
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