

**//Introduction to Southern Preaching As Seen In Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood***

//12<sup>th</sup> Grade *Literature of the South* Seminar

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//Long Term Objective:

To conduct a close reading of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and respond to it in discussion and in a formal paper.

//Short Term Objective:

To introduce students to the styles and traditions of southern preaching, using the Mississippi Delta as informing context, in preparation for reading Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1949).

//Procedures

- 1) Introduce and define terms and concepts in context, using examples from the Mississippi Delta (“the South's South”).
  - a. “The South does not create theologians, but preachers”
  - b. Qualities of Delta Protestantism:
    1. Baptist denomination is predominant.
    2. Fundamentalist/literalist “chapter and verse” belief system.
    3. Informed by both Calvinist (the sinfulness of human nature” and Wesleyan (possibility of redemption through God's grace) traditions.
    4. Highlights The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20).
    5. Focus on individual virtue (“Have you seen Jesus?); charitable, but with less concern for The Social Gospel (ridding mankind of social evils).
    6. Hope for afterworld redemption and heaven as a way to bear current suffering; faith/churches as a help during hardship.
    7. Expressive, individualistic, verbal and creative orientation; preaching closely related to storytelling; call-and-response relationship between preacher and congregation.
    8. Religious culture goes beyond the churches, finds expression in the countryside (i.e. Bible verses/religious messages posted in public).
    9. Responds quickly to forces of modernization (i.e. introduction of railroads leads to introduction of railroad symbolism in preaching); quick to adopt new versions of redemption as response to outside forces.
- 2) Introduce Reverend J.M.Gates as representative of southern preaching and gospel traditions; see [http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/music/Gospel\\_Roots/11534/p1/](http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/music/Gospel_Roots/11534/p1/)

3) Play Reverend J.M.Gates' 1926 sermons “Death's Black Train Is Coming” ( [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elzhh\\_LewJA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elzhh_LewJA) ).

4) Introduce Reverend A.W.Nix as representative of southern preaching and gospel traditions; see <http://books.google.com/books>, *Encyclopedia of American Gospel*, page 277.

5) Play Reverend J.M.Gates' 1926 sermons “Black Diamond Express to Hell part 2” ( <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQbQeGKscOE> ).

6) Watch “Black Delta Religion” see <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,82>.

7) Have students read aloud the “Grandfather's sermon” section of *Wise Blood* (in emphatic preaching style as they are willing), Chapter 1 (pages 21-22 Noonday Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1995 edition).

8) Students give reaction to “Grandfather's sermon” in open-discussion forum.

9) Question for discussion: Examples given, particularly the information from the Mississippi Delta, refer largely to African-American churches. *Wise Blood* has white preachers and churches. What differences do you expect to see?

//Materials:

Internet connection and projector/speakers.

//Culmination:

Major paper, with one secondary source requisite, to be written upon completion of novel (see attached).

//Preparation for Culmination:

- 1) Discussion of MLA formatting and proper citation.
- 2) Discussion of uses of secondary sources in formal writing.
- 3) Research time in library using on-line databases (i.e. J-STOR, EBSCO).

//Assessment:

- 1) “Exit interview” and class discussion of topic after papers have been completed.
- 2) Instructor grading and critical response to student-generated paper.

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On the surface, Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* seems to be a deeply irreligious, immoral novel, rife with blasphemy ("church without Christ), dishonesty, prurience, idolatry, greed, and plain old southern-strength human cruelty. Yet O'Connor plainly states in the prefatory note that it is precisely the opposite it is a novel written from the position of faith about the undeniable, if often misunderstood, presence of God and "the belief in Christ [as] a matter of life and death." How is this a book about the presence of God, or more precisely, the presence of God's grace (i.e. actions, miracles, forgiveness) in the individual life? In particular, how is this message portrayed in the eccentricities, interactions, and (possible) scriptural equivalencies/gospel parallels of O'Connor's colorful characters?

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**The paper must be a *minimum* of 5 full pages, double-spaced typed, Times New Roman 12 point font with proper MLA formatting.** There is no upper page limit. *At least one secondary source must be cited in this paper.*