

LITERATURE AND ETHICAL VALUES: 21L.450
Fall, 2002

Lecture # 26 - Flannery O'Connor, *The Displaced Person*

"The Displaced Person" is about the worst sort of "Otherness", the kind that led to "ethnic cleansing" and to the programmatic murder of millions by the Nazi government during the middle of the twentieth century. Mr Guizac, the Pole, is their symbol, an archetypal Other, but the Otherness of Mr Guizac does not alone explain what is done to him, because the characters in the story are united as a group not just by their fear and hatred of an outsider (Mr Guizac) but also by their contempt for each other.

Flannery O'Connor was a writer with a religious agenda, and her story pointedly associates the figure of Mr Guizac with the Christian figure of Jesus of Nazareth, who came to redeem mankind and was rejected. To many Christians, Mr Guizac will seem an unlikely image of a Savior, but O'Connor subscribed to an interpretation of the Jesus-story in which Jesus did not come to relieve misery out of pity or kindness for the downtrodden; rather he came to shake all relationships up, offering a radical spiritual challenge to both the weak and the powerful.