

NCHC '19: Examples of Online Forum Posts to Enhance Learning

Abigail Ann Tempel

I really appreciate the comparisons that have been made between Kingsolver and O'Connor. I also agree that Kingsolver creates an entirely different atmosphere in her writing. I think the main part about Kingsolver that I love is not only her familiarity, but also her consistent use of style throughout her stories. The major element that stands out in her stories to me is her use of organic or ecological elements. She uses them to make comparisons to characters and hidden themes in her stories. We've talked about a lot of them in class, but I really enjoy looking for them as I read the stories on my own.

I think my favorite use of ecological references was in "Covered Bridges" with the descriptions involving fertility and relationships. I loved the quote: "Against the backdrop of harvested fields and roadside tangles of poison ivy and goldenrod, tables were piled high with local produce: handwoven baskets and corn-husk dolls, clear jars of clover honey, giant pyramids of pumpkins." I just love the intense imagery that Kingsolver uses to create almost a painting.

I love Kingsolver's consistency in her style like we talked about in class yesterday. She continues to have a familiar tone throughout her stories; she uses ecological references to make connections, and she uses intense imagery to create paintings for the reader. I love Kingsolver's stories!

John Zubizarreta

Alex, Kristine, Abigail, and Christina: all I can say is that I'm dancing among the stars after seeing the incredibly uplifting evidence of genuine collaborative learning in your exchange of ideas. Each post is a gem, adding more and more, deeper and deeper insights into the various facets of FOC's and BK's stories and how they are connected in theme, character development, tone, and other features of their craft, while recognizing that they are very different writers.

I commend how you demonstrate one of the key elements in true collaborative learning--the interdependent construction of knowledge in which each of you contributes meaningfully to our building of critical perspectives on the stories. I've repeatedly said that authentic collaborative learning is a component of honors education that makes honors a challenging and inspiring scholarly endeavor. No need to look elsewhere for evidence: our class is a heartening model.

Abigail Tempel

The one theme that has stuck out to me in all of the pieces we've read from Flannery is the idea of the 7 deadly sins. This was first brought up in our conversation about "Revelation," but it has continued through "The Lame Shall Enter First."

In "Revelation," we discussed the sin of pride that is shown throughout the story. Mrs. Turpin exemplifies the sin of pride throughout the story. She is self-righteous and believes that she is better than everyone else. She represents that type of Southern woman that is over the top, and shows obvious racism throughout the story.

In "The Lame Shall Enter First," Sheppard represents the deadly sins of selfishness and pride. He helps troubled youth, such as Rufus, to make himself feel good. He thinks that he is better than everyone else; therefore he believes he can fix the problems of others around him. This idea of selfishness is also brought out in Norton when Sheppard asks him questions about sharing and material goods. Sheppard asks Norton: "And what would you do if you had a thousand dollars?" and Norton replies, "Keep it." Sheppard asks him this specific question because he wants to point out Norton's selfishness. Another sin that is brought out in the story is pride when it comes to Rufus. Rufus feels that he has a certain advantage over Norton. Rufus uses this advantage to poke fun at Norton and to take advantage of Sheppard's kindness.

The use of these sins in Flannery's stories clearly shows her connection to her Catholic faith. Sins impact every person daily and can be pointed out in many characters. Flannery maintains this theme in her stories to develop characters and to create a religious connection.

John Zubizarreta

Wow! I'll never sip a glass of Seven Deadly Zins again (one of my favorite Zinfandel wines!) without remembering this amazing thread in our forum! Abigail launches a wonderful conversation about the ways in which FOC's Catholic imagination reveals our various sins or ways in which our human natures are vulnerable to flaws and excesses. Carlie, Christina, Kelly, and Lauren follow up with a series of additional insights and observations that provide a testament (oops, sorry for the too-clever pun!) to FOC's "anagogical" method, always using the temporal, the ordinary, the human to point us to the divine, the spiritual, the eternal (remember the book *The Eternal Crossroads?*).

Indeed, FOC's fiction is full of signs that remind us of our humanity, our vulnerabilities, our fallenness (a Garden of Eden reference). Whether you want to call these sins (a religious perspective, like FOC's) or psychological or sociological failures (but remember how Sheppard or Julian fall short), the result is that FOC wants to open our eyes to our human limitations. She wants to offer us vision, insight, revelation.

Barbara Wanderley

Hey Maryam, I believe that is no coincidence that Charles Martin would implement something from Shakespeare in the title.

Now that you have mentioned the similarity between what Lady Macbeth said and the title of the novel I am almost sure that Martin did that on purpose. Using something from Shakespeare as the title of his novel could indicate that Shakespeare is an important element of this novel, that he plays an important role in the story (as we can see from the multiple references to Shakespeare's works throughout the novel).

John Zubizarreta

Okay, Barbara, but it sure would help if you elaborate on *how* and *why* the Shakespeare references are important, revealing, symbolic. I agree with you that the references are definitely not coincidental; Martin clearly is deliberate in using them throughout the novel. Why?

Barbara Wanderley

I agree with you Kelly.

Discrimination at that time was with no doubt way worse than today. Segregation was still a very real thing because of the Jim Crow laws ("separate but equal") and although there was no more slavery, it was still very much like slavery for some African American folks. It was so bad at that time that I believe many African American were so discriminated and humiliated that they found it hard to find a reason to live.

This link leads to an article about how the lives of African Americans were in the 1940s and it is very heartbreaking.

<http://americanhistory1940-50.blogspot.com/p/daily-life-of-average-african-american.html>

The novel gives us an insight of how bad it was for African American people at the time. Being white was associated with beauty, cleanliness, and even success. Black people were separated from the white people, unless they were their employees, which emphasizes the fact that black people basically had their lives controlled by white people.

“Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, ‘Do this.’ White children said, ‘Give me that.’ White men said, ‘Lay down.’ The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other” (Morrison, *Bluest* 138). In this passage, Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines are talking and they realize how bad it is to be an African American. Morrison shows us how hard it was to be a black person at that time, and Pecola is the best example of that.

John Zubizarreta

Linh, Kelly, and Barbara: thanks for sharing new connections and ideas in relation to Morrison's novel. Works such as the films Linh and Kelly mention as well as the history research that Barbara posts help us to deepen our understanding of the huge task that Morrison undertakes in her work. Changing the long, entrenched history of racial discrimination in our world (not just U.S.) is a monumental endeavor, and Morrison takes it on in book after book.

Barbara Wanderley

Hey, Nomie, With Ellen Foster's story I believe that she possesses all the qualities that a hero has, but she also has some different characteristics (like every hero, although similar, they always have something that differentiates them from one another).

She is not a hero that saves the world; she is the hero of herself. Her childhood was marked by abuses (physical and psychological) from her family and that makes her become more independent than the average 11-year-old child.

As for having something that heroes usually don't have/possess, I would say yes. Every "hero" is different in some way. The way I think Ellen differs from other heroes we've encountered is her intelligence and wisdom at such a young age.

John Zubizarreta

All good questions, Nomi. I think Maryam's answers to some of them during our class discussion were useful in helping us remember that myth, metaphor, archetypes--all the complex concepts we are pondering--are multi-faceted, very complicated topics. Maybe there's no one perfect answer to each of your questions. The ability to tolerate ambiguity--that is, the willingness to hold multiple lines of reasoning in balance at the same time--is a mark of sophisticated, mature, critical thinking. Your questions encourage us to do that kind of thinking. Nice!

Also, as we said in class, Barbara's comments remind us of the diversity of the so-called monomythic archetypal pattern of the hero figure. If the "monomyth" were so predictably formulaic as to have only one characteristic, then wouldn't we be dealing with a stereotype instead? Hmmmm.