

again: “The body, lady, is like a house; it don’t go anywhere; but the spirit, lady is like an automobile: always on the move, always...” (Aristotle, who considered metaphor the highest figure of speech, would have been impressed by O’Connor’s metaphoric use of the automobile to signify modern man’s ludicrously inflated sense of his own autonomy, his capacity for outward control as well as for self-mastery and self-direction.)

Flannery O’Connor believed that her characters were either damned by the end of a story or else they were saved: no one, she felt, could be left somewhere in between. One way or the other, their fate was determined by the manner in which they responded to the action of grace extended to them at the crucial moment. Consequently, when the Divine Mercy strikes in an O’Connor story, it typically visits itself upon just such a smug, self-directed, radically autonomous figure who, if humility and grace are sufficient, is blasted like St. Paul on the road to Damascus and has the scales struck from his eyes. This is the “positive” aspect of O’Connor’s work when it manifests itself, as it certainly does not in all of the stories.

Yet the positive for O’Connor is a cold rather than an affective quality, recalling Aquinas’s definition, which she liked to quote, of art as “Reason in making.” O’Connor herself opined that Hazel Motes, at the end of *Wise Blood*, is “probably saved by the skin of his teeth”—which is not the same thing as saying that the novel has a happy ending. In her imaginative world, happy endings, even when implied, are off the page—and, quite literally, out of this world. To the extent that O’Connor was a pessimist, she was pessimistic in the only sense that befits, and indeed describes, a Christian. “You can’t be any poorer than dead,” the stranger’s voice whispers insinuatingly to Tarwater as he prepares to bury his grandfather. Flannery O’Connor, of course, believed

otherwise. She understood that the world as we know it is passing away and that justice and mercy and joy and the Beatific Vision all belong to the world to come. That was enough for her—and a good thing too for a woman who, as she once wrote, had “never been anywhere but sick,” never married, and died of what she

cheerfully described as “a dread disease”—lupus erythematosus—aged 39. ■

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Written by the Losers

Political correctness plays with the past.

By Selwyn Duke

WHILE BEING INTERVIEWED by “60 Minutes” correspondent Mike Wallace recently, movie star Morgan Freeman dismissed Black History Month as “ridiculous” and went on to say, “You’re going to relegate my history to a month? I don’t want a Black History Month. Black history is American history.” He pointed out that there are no white or Jewish history months, and the conviction with which he espoused these views seemed to leave Wallace tongue-tied.

Freeman is correct in his intimation that the proponents of this group history lunacy are treating blacks as a nation unto themselves. We may study Egyptian, Greek, or Chinese history, but we recognize these as separate and discrete civilizations. Likewise, when we shift the focus from American history to black, white, yellow, brown, and red history, the implication is that these groups constitute elements that cannot truly be viewed as part of the fabric of a whole. It is to believe that they are nascent nations within a nation or merely competing factions in a loose federation.

The danger this poses should be obvious. Language, culture, and history bind a nation together and distinguish nations

from each other. We share a continent with Mexico, but we are not one nation with them, chiefly if not solely because of those three factors. Teaching group history sends the message that we are not one people, one nation, but many peoples, currently coexisting within the same borders but always in an uneasy, tenuous union and ever gravitating toward autonomy. The balkanization of history presages the balkanization of America.

As if that weren’t bad enough, there’s another, equally troubling problem with Black History Month, one that’s shared by every other special-interest, group-history scheme. (For example, the National Education Association once voted by a two-to-one margin to make October National Gay and Lesbian History Month.) To wit, it constitutes nothing less than the compiling of history based on quota.

This is the mentality that places obscure figures such as Ida B. Wells and Zitkala-Sa on a list of American heroes, while omitting icons such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. It’s why New York City libraries have a youth-oriented biography of Al Sharpton that lauds the hustler as a man who hails from “long tradition of activist ministers like Martin