Fools for Christ's Sake: The Intent to Edify found in the Writing of Leontius and Flannery O'Connor

The Life of Symeon is classified as Christian hagiography, capturing a saint's journey of practicing ascetism in both the desert and city. Leontius of Neapolis wrote this text with the main intent to edify his audience. By portraying Symeon as a holy fool, Leontius shows characters who interact with Symeon in this text undergoing edification, while also prompting the process of edification for those reading it. While reading *The Life of Symeon*, individuals can gain clarity on how Leontius edifies through employing notions of liminality, comedy, and apocalyptic rhetoric. Although modern literature does not have a common purpose of edifying readers, hagiographic themes are found in the modern stories of Flannery O'Connor. When compared to Leontius, O'Connor uses more violence and less folly to edify individuals. The resemblances between Leontius and O'Connor point to the significance of edification in the Christian tradition and the similar strategies that they use to catalyze this process in both Late Antiquity and modernity. The differences among these two writers highlight the varying contexts in which they both wrote. If we dismiss grappling with these texts because of the absurd or dark themes embedded within them, we risk missing the point of edification, which is to provoke serious thought and change.

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"The desert kills. But it also gives life- robust and insistent life. Nothing is more beautiful than the red splash of desert sky after a late-afternoon storm, no flower more lovely than the cactus bloom that opens but once a year. In the desert a landscape of terror becomes also a land of allure and love."[1]

[1] Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 195.

Introduction

The process of edification holds importance in the Christian tradition, prompting individuals to adhere to moral instruction and cultivate virtues to live by. Early Christian desert fathers and mothers would venture to the desert to seek personal edification through the practice of ascetism.[2] Other than pilgrimaging to the desert, individuals can experience edification through reading literature. Some authors write with the intent to edify their audience, such as hagiographers of Late Antiquity who capture the lives of saints. Edification emerges through absurdities and harshness, such as the grotesque character of the holy fool or intense depictions of violence. Today, many writers are less inclined to edify their audiences as modern readers often desire pieces of literature that function primarily to entertain, not challenge them to think seriously and respond.[3] While it is expected that many readers today would be inclined to dismiss stories that are shockingly disturbing and seriously thought-provoking to read, if we allow illustrations of folly and violence to cloud our view of edifying literature, we risk missing the writer's intention. Through studying the hagiographic text, *The Life and Conduct of Abba Symeon Called the Fool for the Sake of Christ* by Leontius of Neapolis and short stories by Flannery O'Connor, we discover the significance of moral instruction in the Christian tradition, while realizing the striking similarities, and notable differences, of the techniques used in the process of edification that are found in Late Antiquity and modernity.

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[2] Thomas Merton, "The Wisdom of the Desert," in *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century,* trans. Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1960), 5-7.
[3] David Foster Wallace, "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace," interview by Larry McCaffery, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13/2 (Summer 1993): 1.

Chapter 1

A Background of Hagiography: Exploring Genre, Historical Context, and Authorship

Over the centuries, people have written about the lives of saints, creating the genre of hagiography. In their writing, some hagiographers chose to capture Christian monks who ventured into the desert in pursuit of honing ascetic virtues and attaining a "supernatural unity with Christ in this world and the next."[4] If we neglect to take into consideration the complex genre of Christian hagiography as we read it today, including the hagiographer's motivations and techniques, we risk questioning the historical accuracy of the genre only, instead of grappling with the hagiographer's purpose of writing: to edify an audience. Hagiography edifies its audience through a powerful fusion of religious, literary, and historical themes.

In this chapter, I introduce hagiography as a genre, focusing on its various themes of religion, literature, and history. While examining this genre, I bring into conversation two scholars of hagiography: Hippolyte Delehaye and Alison Goddard Elliot. I then focus on the historical considerations of the holy man in Late Antiquity, specifically through the scholarship of Peter Brown and Derek Krueger, emphasizing the portrayal of the holy man as both an outsider and revered figure in city life. Finally, I demonstrate the importance of considering the role of hagiographers when reading about the lives of saints, including their own intentions and goals of writing this kind of text. Throughout this chapter, I refer to Leontius of Neapolis and his work, *The Life and Conduct of Abba Symeon Called the Fool for the Sake of Christ,* with the purpose of using Leontius and his hagiographic text as examples supporting this paper's claims.[5]

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[4] Alison Goddard Elliot, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), 133.

[5] *The Life and Conduct of Abba Symeon Called the Fool for the Sake of Christ,* from here on out referred to as *The Life of Symeon,* was written sometime between 642-649 CE about Saint Simeon Salus (522-588 CE). Krueger suggests that Leontius' two hagiographic works, one being *The Life and Conduct of Abba Symeon Called the Fool for the Sake of Christ,* are among the most prominent literary contributions of Early Byzantium. See Derek Krueger,

I further use Leontius and his portrayal of Symeon to familiarize readers with this specific hagiographer and text as the following chapters will analyze them in greater depth.

The Complex Genre of Hagiography: Religious, Literary, and Historical Themes

Hagiography contains a fusion of literary and religious elements that make the genre both engaging, like literature, and instructive, like many religious texts. Yet, the historical context of hagiography can sometimes be a point of contention when reading these narratives. To address the misconceptions and realize the purpose of hagiography, we need to engage in a comprehensive overview of this genre.

In simplest terms, hagiography means "holy writings."[6] The term 'hagiography' was adopted to describe the writings of saints' lives in the 19th century, although this genre existed since antiquity.[7] Hagiographic writings vary from one text to another, yet there are some common themes that define the genre. In his book, *Writing and Holiness,* Derek Krueger explains that "what unifies these [hagiographic] trends are the efforts to make literary composition a vehicle for piety."[8] Further, in *The Legend of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, Hippolyte Delehaye describes hagiography as having elements of "biography, panegyric, and moral instruction." [9] The biographical themes in hagiography point to the historical aspects of detailing the lives of real people who were thought to be saints, and the

Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 5. Some scholars debate as to whether Leontius used other, earlier sources for this text, but Krueger argues that he did not. See Krueger, 20.

[6] Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 5.

[7] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 5.

[8] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 14.

[9] Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography,* trans. V.M. Crawford (London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 68.

panegyric and moral instructive components have religious connotations that are central to hagiography, especially considering its intent to edify an audience.

Hagiographic texts contain numerous religious connotations embedded throughout them. Hagiographers that were diligent in their writing practiced self-discipline like that often associated with ascetism, as writing was often looked at as a practice of piety in Late Antiquity.[10] Although writing could be viewed as a religious practice in itself during this time, Krueger explains that hagiography can be viewed as a Christian genre because of its interwoven use of Biblical text.[11] Hagiography also contains a multitude of embedded Biblical allusions that connect saints' lives to those of figures in the Bible.[12] For instance, in *The Life of Symeon,* Leontius includes a plethora of Bible verses throughout the text to illustrate his purpose of writing or to qualify Symeon's actions. In the prologue alone, Leontius incorporates thirteen Bible verses.[13] He begins his hagiographic text with the following words:

> Those who are eager to pursue the worthy status which can be taught to others are obliged to demonstrate in their own life the teaching of still others and present themselves to all as a model of a way of living which is a virtue inspired by God, according to the divine word which says, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" [Mt 5:16].[14]

By beginning his narrative this way, Leontius invites the reader to abide by the divine call of both learning and teaching others the virtuous ways of life. He then refers to Matthew 5:16 to qualify his statements concerning the way to conduct oneself and bring glory to God. Further, in *The Life of Symeon,* Leontius uses Biblical allusions to portray various moments in Symeon's life, such as Symeon being tempted by the Devil in the desert like Jesus is shown to have been in

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[10] Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 8.
[11] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 15.
[12] Krueger, *Writing and* Holiness, 10.
[13] Twelve of these thirteen Bible verses are from the New Testament.
[14] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 148.

the New Testament centuries before.[15] Leontius further draws upon other figures in the Bible to portray Symeon's dual identity, being seen as unholy by most people during his life, while being seen as holy by the Divine:

> Who knew, friends of Christ, that Judas who lived with the disciples in his body was with the Jews in his heart? Who in Jericho supposed that Rahab who was in a brothel in body was in the Lord in spirit [Jos 2:1]? Who had hoped that that beggar Lazarus who lived suffering such sores would be in such health in Abraham's bosom [Lk 16:20]?[16]

Leontius refers to several different people of the Bible to suggest that what meets the eye is not always reality.

Even without reference to the Bible directly or the use of allusions, Christian hagiography has a main religious motive: edification. Delehaye describes two central themes of hagiography: "[it] should be of a religious character and should aim at edification." [17] He explains further that hagiographies are like parables, inciting and clarifying moral thoughts and truths, prompting readers to lead more virtuous lives.[18] Krueger highlights this pursuit to edify by stating, "Saints' lives, in their combined ability to entertain and edify, contributed broadly to the formation of Christian practice and self-understanding."[19] Hagiography contributes to the practice of Christianity by highlighting saint's ascetic virtues, and at times comical moments, in literary form, helping others understand their own lives and religious practices, not through preached sermons, but through the stories of saints.

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[15] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 148.
[16] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," 170-171.
[17] Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography,* trans. V.M. Crawford (London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 68.
[18] Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints,* 62.
[19] Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 2.

The entertaining aspects of hagiography contribute to the process of edification as they help create a narrative that draws readers into the text.[20] Hagiography has several similarities to other entertaining literary works such as legends and epics that help the reader to understand the themes and effects of hagiography better. Similar to characters created in these stories, saints are elevated to mirror the qualities and role of heroes who fight supernatural beings.[21] For instance, Leontius refers to Symeon's deeds as both "strange" and "marvelous."[22] Symeon is being praised for both his uniqueness and virtue. Besides seeing hagiography as emulating legends, another scholar, Alison Goddard Elliot, introduces us to romantic themes in these texts.[23] In her book, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints*, Elliot distinguishes between hagiography that focuses on the death of saints through martyrdom, known as *passiones* and hagiography that focuses on the lives of saints, known as *vitae*.[24] While *passiones* align more with Delehaye's description of hagiographies as epics or legends, Elliot invites us to think about the themes of romanticism in *vitae*. Elliot explains what she means by the notion romantic: "the hagiographic romance is predicated upon the paradox of Christianity: Blessed are the meek for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."[25] This hagiographic romance revels in the idea that beauty stems from pain. Understanding saints' lives involves grappling with these paradoxical notions, such as the desert hermit enduring extreme suffering, while drawing nearer to the Divine through this suffering.[26] Yet, unlike *passiones* where there is clear suffering involved through martyrdom

[20] Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 2.
[21] Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography,* trans. V.M. Crawford (London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 68.
[22] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 134.
[23] Alison Goddard Elliot, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), 13.
[24] Elliot, *Roads to Paradise,* 9.
[25] Elliot, *Roads to Paradise,* 14.
[26] Elliot, *Roads to Paradise,* 14.

that is usually inflicted by someone other than the saint, *vitae* portray saints inflicting pain upon themselves. Elliot describes the saint as a hero who feels the weight of suffering depicted through acts like weeping to God in the desert, yet who also ultimately overcomes the hardships of the desert.[27] This romantic theme of hagiography can capture the audience's attention by emphasizing stories of suffering and triumph.

Considering the literary and religious elements of hagiography can help us reconcile the historical aspects of this genre to the whole of it. Delehaye explains that thousands of years ago, people were generally less concerned with accurate history, meaning that they willingly believed information which was passed along, whether written or orally.[28] Now, today this type of acceptance of information could potentially cause alarm to scholars and readers alike, but Delehaye cautions us that when reading hagiography, we must "recall the original intention of the story."[29] When we read hagiography written with the intent to edify, then, we are entering into a new world where the impossible can occur, similar to when we read a fiction novel. Being exposed to the literary elements of hagiography offers insight as to how to read documents about the lives of saints. Yet, the biographical components have at least some validity as well, and readers will vary in their beliefs about these texts. After all, hagiographers often are writing about real people who lived in ancient society.

Beyond biographical elements, hagiography also contains autobiographical tendencies that flow into the creation of the text. Krueger explains this notion: "The authors of Christian hagiography often struck autobiographical poses, bringing their portraits of themselves as artists

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[27] Alison Goddard Elliot, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), 14.
[28] Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography,* trans. V.M. Crawford (London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 66.
[29] Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints,* 64.

into conformity with religious ideals."[30] Hagiographers could muddle the history of the saint, while adding historical facts about their own lives to the text. It is evident that hagiographers' own life experiences and motivations bleed into their work, usually with the purpose of edification in mind, which are most readily seen in the introductory and concluding sections of hagiography. In these parts of the text, hagiographers speak to their readers in a nonnarrative form, stepping outside of the anecdotal pattern.[31] The hagiographer's intentions and choice of literary devices ought to be examined in the context of when they were writing.

The Saint as Portrayed in the Historical Context of Late Antiquity

Before 4th century CE, martyrdom was more commonly pursued than desert ascetism among monks. As monks engaged less in martyrdom, they started to pursue self-persecution in the desert as a way to draw closer to God.[32] Most people in Late Antiquity did not pursue this way of life. However, in Jerusalem during the 5th and 6th centuries, hermits were found in the city and surrounding area. Apart from saints who left society and did not return, people in the Late Antique city were very involved in community life.[33] When a holy man infiltrated a community, he was seen by society as an anomaly whom hagiographers later capture in their writing.[34]

Hagiographers utilize the context in which a saint lived, drawing on the supernatural aspects believed to have abounded during Late Antiquity. Although the Christian tradition did

[30] Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 9.
[31] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 9.
[32] Alison Goddard Elliot, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), 42.
[33] Elliot, *Roads to Paradise*, 90.
[34] Peter Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 143.

not believe in the existence or relevance of holy places between the 1st and 3rd centuries, by the close of the 4th century, holy places were largely accepted in Christianity.[35] Peter Brown, historian of Late Antiquity, argues that acceptance of saints helped Christians start dismantling barriers, such as that between life and death.[36] Brown further states that there was thought to be a collision of Heaven and Earth in the Late Antique city. The belief in saints passing into another world to live after death, gave a new perspective on living life on earth to people still there.[37] With saints and holy places being more widely accepted, the Late Antique city became persuaded by a supernatural worldview. For instance, both religious and nonreligious people held beliefs in the influential and widespread existence of demons.[38] Brown further explains that in the context of Late Antiquity, "we are touching on a world where many of the human relations basic to the working of society are made subject to sacred law."[39] Within this worldview, saints were perceived to have immense holy power.

To understand the influence that holy men had, we must also understand the community context in which holy men interacted with others. Holy men tended to populate cities where leadership was unstable. [40] Brown describes the formation of the holy man's role where there was strained instability in "legal and social" forms.[41] Syria is one such place that saw an increase in monks practicing ascetic values.[42] Here, the reputations of holy men were formed and passed

[35] R.A. Markus, "How on earth could places become holy?: Origins of the Christian Idea of holy places," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 258-259, accessed October 18, 2019, 10.1353/earl.0.0110.
[36] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 21.
[37] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 4.
[38] Dayna S. Kalleres, *City of Demons: Violence, Ritual, and Christian Power in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 3.
[39] Peter Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 192.
[40] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 115.
[41] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 193.
[42] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 109.

along by peasants in the society.[43] Yet, Brown qualifies this statement by showing that "the rise of ascetism in Syria is a sign not of a brutal 'democratization' of the upper classes, so much as of a 'fragmentation' of what had liked to consider itself a homogeneous urban aristocracy."[44] The holy men did not serve to abruptly affect or destroy the politics and authority of the region, but instead aimed to fragment the status quo of a society by making people question norms and hierarchies. The holy man had a reputation for both healing the people he interacted with through actions like exorcism and for disrupting the communities he dwelled in through behaviors that went against the norms of society. Hagiographers wrote about the holy man as having these two paradoxical reputations.

Through exercising power that was believed to be unique to them, holy men were able to disrupt normal societal life and prompt change.[45] When a holy man died, power was believed to be manifested in the saint's relics or gravesites to which people could then undertake pilgrimage to. Yet, even before death, hagiographic works demonstrate saints' supernatural power during their lives. In hagiographies, saints are shown performing a multitude of miracles that demonstrate "proof of this power."[46] Power was often shown through curses and exorcism, which were commonly practiced in Late Antiquity. Performing actions like exorcism symbolize the holy man's power and role, such as being "a figure who would resolve tension and explosions of violence in their community."[47] Brown describe the saint's role further as "an authoritative healing agent, on which the sufferers and his companions could focus their

[43] Peter Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 112-113.
[44] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 119.
[45] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 121.
[46] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 121.
[47] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 126.

hopes."[48] Hagiography captures the role of the saint being able to heal and provide hope, serving a crucial purpose in individuals' lives that were affected by the presence of demons and other ailments. People believed that the blessing of the holy man would heal them.[49] Besides healing on earth, people also trusted the holy man to be a channel through which they could reach heaven.[50] This belief in the holy man's connection to heaven sometimes surpassed belief in priests or other religious figures holding authoritative positions in society.[51] To help us understand how the historical context of Late Antiquity influences hagiographic texts, it is important to realize that the saint's healing was centered in the hope it gave people, especially in places where there was immense instability.

The role that the holy man was able to uphold, then, was a type of third party, or outsider, that acted as a "holy object." [52] He is depicted as the stranger who could help without being defined by the society in which he dwelled. In this way, it is his position, and lack of a position, in society that allowed him to have an interactive and edifying relationship with people.[53] Considering the impact and power that holy men were believed to have, Brown relays the question that has been asked before of desert monks: "are you human?"[54] Holy men are depicted as supernatural beings, especially in works like hagiography. Holy men's perceived extra-human qualities create a mystical reputation around them. By the holy man not being definable by society as a 'regular' human, he occupies a unique position where his strangeness can become

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[48] Peter Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 142.
[49] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity,* 142.
[50] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity,* 136.
[51] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity,* 141.
[52] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity,* 143.
[53] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity,* 144.
[54] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity,* 130. A layman asked this question to Symeon Stylites in *Historia Religiosa,* 1481.

more apparent to others. Unlike seeking guidance from this outcast holy man, one can imagine the negative consequences of seeking advice from leaders or priests who were ingrained in society during this time, such as confidentiality issues, being both known citizens of the same city. In fact, Brown explains that the holy man "wielded his idealized power in society by adopting stances that were exact inverse of those connected with the exercise of real power."[55] "Real power" describes typical authority that forms and sustains the status quo of a society. Unlike other leaders in these societies, holy men had three main roles: aiding people's connection to God, establishing this connection more effectively than others, and decreasing anxiety felt by people in the community.[56] During Late Antiquity especially, people tended to feel pressures from two major authoritative entities: the Roman government and the Divine.[57] The holy man had the reputation of being an authoritative, supernatural, and objective presence; therefore, he was able to influence society from his distinct position.

Brown depicts the holy man harnessing his reputation as an outsider and object, as his role was that of an "unattached stranger on the edge of the village."[58] He further explains that the holy man was a social outcast because he left the city for the desert. Following this choice to leave the city, the holy man was also known to not adopt norms of society if he returned.[59] The presence of this type of being sparks the beginning of change as Brown claims that the holy man is shown to be the "moral catalyst in a community."[60] Through enacting exorcisms and curses,

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[55] Peter Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 182.
[56] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 143-144.
[57] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 145.
[58] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 114.
[59] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 182.
[60] Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 9.

the holy man was often portrayed as the "arbitrator and mediator" of a community.[61] By having this multifaceted role of healer and disrupter, saints were often able to contribute to creating community identity.[62] Hagiographers utilize these common traits and roles of holy men in their writing, often depicting them as catalysts, especially through edifying others.

The Unique Role of Hagiographers in their Pursuit to Edify

In his book, *Writing and Holiness,* Krueger makes a bold statement claiming that the hagiographer "marked an evolution in the concept of the author."[63] What was so compelling about a hagiographer that distinguished him from other authors? Considering that hagiographers' intentions influenced their hagiographic works, they portray saints ultimately in the way that they desire to, which tends to align with their motive to edify the audience.

Hagiographers tended to be a part of an educated group, having the ability to write a narrative that was intelligently designed and captivating. They were also known to be highly religious and portray their writings as truth.[64] In the prologue and conclusion sections of hagiographic texts, hagiographers often address their readers in a straightforward manner that clarifies their motivations for writing.[65] For instance, in the prologue of *The Life of Symeon,* Leontius writes: "I ask all who hear or read the narrative of his [Symeon's] angelic conduct, which I have set down, to regard these writings with fear of the Lord and with the faith without

[61] Peter Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 122.
[62] Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity*, 127-129.
[63] Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 197.
[64] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 4. Hagiographers were also typically wealthy.
[65] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 108.

doubt which is fitting to true Christians."[66] In these sentences, Leontius invites readers to continue to the body of his text with willing ears, while also using praising language to describe Symeon's behavior. He goes further to suggest that "true" Christians would not doubt what he writes about this holy man, suggesting that his work ought to be believed by Christians. Although calling attention to "true" Christians can seem controversial or bold, Delehaye reminds us not to attack the hagiographer.[67] In this case, the use of "true" could prompt people who already view themselves as Christian to wonder what a "true" Christian might look like, asking themselves if they fit this description. Krueger also explains Leontius' target audience as being both Cyprus and the world at large, but with an emphasis on influencing the elite, while amusing those in less privileged positions.[68]

In the pursuit of writing a hagiographic work with the main purpose of edifying people in society, hagiographers manipulated the world and characters they were creating, reflecting the literary aspects of the text. Hagiographers employed stylistic and descriptive techniques that would draw readers in.[69] Using certain types of elevated and exaggerated language is more acceptable in a work that is not solely historical. There are tensions between the historical and literary themes found in hagiography, but to see the main intent of hagiography- namely, to edify- people must not become lost in questioning validity. The text pushes beyond notions of what is true or not. Andrew Louth explains this idea further, stating: "[We] don't have to read saints lives as historical, but 'rather as a mirror in which we can see reflected the mind and

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[66] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 133.
[67] Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography,* trans. V.M. Crawford (London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 72.
[68] Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 17-18.
[69] Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints,* 65.

values of the society in which they belong.'"[70] This mirror highlights truth about society collectively, but I contend that reading the saints' lives also prompts individuals to reflect on their own lives. This dual reflection is meant to edify individuals, while also speaking to larger societal issues.

An Introduction of Leontius and "The Life of Symeon"

A variety of social and personal influences seep into Leontius' hagiographic text. Krueger explains that Leontius was "motivated by literary, pedagogical, and ultimately theological concerns."[71] By considering Leontius' social, personal, and religious motives for writing, we can see his desire to craft a narrative with the hopes of instructing his readers on the moral conditions of their lives.

Krueger explains that Leontius wrote about the setting in which he knew, Cyprus, an island close to Emesa, Syria, which was prosperous during this time.[72] While living in the wealthy community of Cyprus, Leontius strived to call attention to people's responsibility to marginalized members of society, evoking a sense of duty in the Church to provide for the poor.[73] It is easy to see, then, why Leontius would show Symeon breaking down social barriers in Emesa. If Brown is right to suggest that holy men were often sought after by poorer folk for

[70] Andrew Louth, "Hagiography," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth and assisted Augustine Casiday (2004): 361, accessed October 16, 2019, 10.1017/CHOL9780521460835.033.
[71] Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 6.
[72] Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool,* 9.
[73] Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool,* 11.

advice and that holy men's reputations were propelled by the peasants in society, then Leontius is also commenting on actual interactions between wealthy and poor citizens.[74]

Besides writing about a geographic and social context he knew, Leontius also invokes his own personal traits, expressing his humility as a hagiographer, perhaps giving his text more credibility to those reading it. His humility also highlights the influence that hagiography has on the hagiographer. Leontius shares:

> Since therefore I am unable to present instruction and the image and model of virtuous deeds from my own life, carrying with myself everywhere the mark of sin, come, and from the work of others and their sweaty toils, I shall today unveil for you a nourishment which does not perish but which leads our souls to life everlasting [Jn 6:27].[75]

This excerpt found in the prologue of *The Life of Symeon*, points to Leontius' humility as he claims that his religious deeds cannot act as an example for people to learn from, yet Symeon's deeds can. Leontius' intentions seep into the character of Symeon as he uses him to "unveil" a message to the audience.

The revelations that occur in *The Life of Symeon* are provoked by Symeon who Leontius casts as a holy fool. Leontius qualifies Symeon's behavior by using Paul's language of 1 Corinthians 4:10: "we are fools for Christ's sake."[76] He also portrays Symeon balancing two worlds, one being that of a revered monk returning from the desert after spending twenty-nine years there in the pursuit of refining ascetic virtues and the other being that of an infamous fool in the city of Emesa. Symeon's behaviors are substantiated on the grounds that he acts as a fool to edify others. Yet, Leontius also acknowledges the tensions that a character like Symeon holds:

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[74] Peter Brown, *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 112-113.
[75] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 132.
[76] Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 65-66.

> One of these [all men who throughout the ages have been pleasing to God] was the very wise Symeon, who, indeed, is much more venerable than most because he rose to the most pure and impassible height, although to those more impassioned and more fleshly he seemed to be a defilement, a sort of poison, and an impediment to the virtuous life on account of his appearance.[77]

Symeon resembles a paradox, being "the most pure" and "a defilement." Using this paradox, Leontius is able to construct a dynamic character that invites readers into his text for the purpose of edification. In the prologue of *The Life of Symeon*, Leontius speaks about the symbolic nature of the holy fool:

> For we know that to the most senseless and disdainful we seem to be relating something incredible and worthy of laughter. But if they had listened to the words, "If one wishes to be wise in this age, let him be a fool, that he may become wise" [1 Cor 3:18], and again, "We are fools for Christ's sake" [1 Cor 4:10], and again, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men" [1 Cor 1:25], they would not consider the achievements of this true athlete to be laughable; rather they would marvel again at those seeking the alternate ways to virtue.[78]

Leontius suggests that what he writes could be viewed as comical or ridiculous, yet he qualifies his narrative by claiming that Symeon is a holy fool, quoting three Bible verses concerning the foolishness of man and the wisdom of God. He further effectively establishes the human in a humbling, almost ignorant position, while portraying the Divine in an all-knowing and powerful light, wiser than any man on earth could ever be. Leontius calls people to "marvel," instead of laugh at the saint's actions. The following passage demonstrates Leontius' portrayal of Symeon as a holy fool:

> The blessed one had advanced to such a level of purity and impassivity that often he skipped and danced, holding hands with one dancing-girl on this side and another on that, and he associated with them and played with them in the middle of the whole circus, so that the disreputable women threw their hands into his lap, fondled him, poked him, and pinched him. But the monk, like pure gold, was not defiled by them at all.[79]

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[77] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 132.
[78] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," 133.
[79] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," 159.

In this anecdote, Leontius highlights the absurd acts of Symeon that appear to be tempting, namely dancing with women as they touch him, but concludes the anecdote by telling of Symeon's purity throughout the interaction. Leontius compares Symeon to "pure gold." The praising language Leontius uses in a seemingly tempting interaction, captures the act of Symeon balancing two worlds. Although Symeon acts as a fool, he is undefiled, allowing him to have significant interactions with city dwellers, while maintaining his holiness. Leontius chooses to portray Symeon's actions in a way that he hopes will cause those reading this hagiographic text to pause, question, and respond.

Hagiography contains religious, literary, and historical elements that generate the complexity of the genre. Understanding the role of both the holy man and the hagiographer in Late Antiquity better equip us to examine Leontius' intent to edify through the character of Symeon. He has the creative liberty to portray Symeon's passage from desert to city life in the manner that he would like to, in which he includes religious, literary, and historical themes. Through reading this hagiographic text, we can gain insight into the following questions: how does a hagiographer portray a desert monk reentering society and why?

Ch. 2

Techniques found in Edification: The Holy Fool, Liminality, Humor, and Apocalyptic Rhetoric

In *The Life of Symeon,* Leontius pulls from Late Antique culture, Christianity, and literary techniques to construct the character of the holy fool for the purpose of edifying his audience. Considering that the holy fool is an unusual character, how can this figure be used to successfully edify individuals? In studying notions of liminality, comedy, and apocalyptic rhetoric in the context of the holy fool, I contend that we see Leontius' intent and methods of edification with greater coherence and clarity.

In this chapter, I first use the scholarship of Victor Turner to define the notion of liminality that is found in *The Life of Symeon*. I contend that Leontius, through his portrayal of Symeon, does not only create a liminal space for characters in the text, but also generates one for his audience. I next investigate how Leontius portrays Symeon as a holy fool in this liminal space, examining how elements of comedy and distortion demonstrate the edification process. Finally, taking into consideration the themes discussed above, I propose that notions of apocalyptic rhetoric assist us in seeing Leontius' pursuit to edify.

Notions of Liminality Impacting Characters and Readers

Allison Goddard Elliot claims that desert monks endure suffering and experience sanctification in liminal space.[80] She describes liminal space in the context of the desert, but she

[80] Alison Goddard Elliot, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), 14.

does not account for the possibility of a desert monk returning to the city. I question what happens when a monk, who spends twenty-nine years in the desert, ultimately transitions back to city life. I contend that when Symeon emerges from the desert, Leontius shows him creating a liminal space back in the city, causing Emesan citizens to be thrown into liminality. Leontius also writes so that his audience is thrown into their own liminal space when reading *The Life of Symeon.*

There are two distinct notions of liminality found in *The Life of Symeon* that point to processes of change, and ultimately edification: one being Symeon's journeys to and from the desert and the other being the space that emerges for the reader through Leontius' use of the holy fool. To understand notions of liminality, I turn to *Ritual Process,* where Victor Turner explains that rites of passage have three phases: separation, limen, and aggregation.[81] Separation occurs when one becomes detached from a pre-existing structure.[82] Symeon enters the separation phase as he leaves Emesa and travels to the desert. By leaving the comforting confines of the city and breaking away from known structures, Symeon has the potential to experience the next phase, which Turner calls limen. In the liminal phase, the passenger in transition experiences being in a state of limbo, not possessing characteristics of either the past or coming future.[83] When in the desert, Symeon occupies a liminal space as he is in uncharted territory where he cannot depend on his past city life or be certain of future experiences he will have. The liminal space that arises during a transition has the potential to evoke change, and for twenty-nine years, Symeon is in

[81] These rites of passage are used to refer to initiation rituals. In a later book, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspective,* Turner refers to these rites of passage in terms of pilgrimage. Another point to consider: Victor Turner is an anthropologist whose methods of study, particularly on primitive religions, are not as precise as methods today, but the core ideas of his theory on liminality prove informative for this paper's aims. Turner was influenced by Arnold van Gennep.
[82] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, forward to Cornell Paperbacks ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 94.
[83] Turner, *The Ritual Process,* 94.

this space, honing ascetic virtues. Symeon experiences the aggregation phase when he returns to Emesa, reintegrating himself into society, albeit as an outsider.[84]

Not only does Symeon experience liminal space in the desert, he also does as he pilgrimages back to Emesa. Leontius does not portray the desert as Symeon's endpoint, but rather, as a preparation for his life back in Emesa, where liminal space emerges for city dwellers upon his return. Leontius portrays key transitional moments in Symeon's journey to and from the desert that highlight the function of liminal spaces. For instance, Leontius presents Symeon and John, his companion in the desert, praying at the start of their pilgrimage into the desert: "Lord God, let us find open the door to the monastery where you command us to renounce the world".[85] Both men wanted to voluntarily enter a space that would enable them to leave the familiar world and undergo desired change.[86] After twenty-nine years, Symeon decides to leave the desert, and John accompanies him for part of his journey back to the city until Symeon invokes a physical separation through his words: "Turn back, brother."[87] I contend that Leontius' narration of the journey back to the city is of greater relevance than the journey to the desert because it not only involves Symeon traveling through liminal space, but it also results in him creating liminal space back in the city. Emesa becomes a liminal space in Leontius' text, stemming from Symeon's absurd character as he interacts daily with city folk. For instance, Leontius recounts Symeon's startling entrance into the city:

> When the famous Symeon found a dead dog on a dunghill outside the city, he loosened the rope belt he was wearing, and tied it to the dog's foot. He dragged the dog as he ran

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[84] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, forward to Cornell Paperbacks ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 94-95.
[85] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 136.
[86] Turner claims that monastic orders are often used as examples of liminal spaces. See Turner, *The Ritual Process,* 107.
[87] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," 150.

> and entered the gate, where there was a children's school nearby. When the children saw him, they began to cry, "Hey, a crazy abba!" And they set about to run after him and box him on the ears.[88]

This account depicts Symeon leaving the desert by entering the city. Leontius describes him making this grand entrance into Emesa by dragging a carcass of a dog. The children respond to his entrance with shock and violence as they desire to beat him. Symeon is clearly portrayed as an unwelcomed outsider.

Leontius further describes Symeon as not capable of being characterized by societal classifications, which is characteristic of someone occupying liminal space.[89] Throughout his text, Leontius shows Symeon interacting with marginalized members of Emesa like prostitutes and the poor, not caring about societal hierarchies. He also describes him practicing sanctity in private throughout his time in Emesa. To further depict Symeon's extreme self-marginalization that helps him to conceal his true identity from other characters in the text, Leontius shares multiple anecdotes of Symeon breaking conventional rules, such as the following instance:

> Deacon John cried out to him, "Where are you going, Fool? Wait, that's the women's!" The wonderful one turned and said to him, "Go away, you idiot, there's hot and cold water here, and there's hot and cold water there, and it doesn't matter at all whether (I use) this one or that." And he ran and entered into the midst of the women, as in the presence of the Lord of glory. The women rushed against him, beat him, and threw him out. The God-loving deacon (John) asked him, when he told him his whole life, "For God's sake, father, how did you feel when you entered into the women's bath?" He said, "Believe me, child, just as a piece of wood goes with other pieces of wood, thus was I there. For I felt neither that I had a body nor that I had entered among bodies, but the whole of my mind was on God's work, and I did not part from Him."[90]

Most people would perceive a man entering a women's bath as disruptive and inappropriate, yet Leontius suggests that Symeon defies normal gender boundaries without remorse. He also shows

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[88] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 151.
[89] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, forward to Cornell Paperbacks ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 95.
[90] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," 154.

the other characters in the story revolting against Symeon's actions. Leontius indicates that Symeon acts this way in accordance with doing the work of God, as Symeon does not waver in devotion to God in the presence of these women; he even compares men and women to pieces of wood. Behavior like this could easily be seen as absurd as it is by others in this anecdote, highlighting the contentious space that Leontius creates in his narrative through a character like Symeon. When characters in *The Life of Symeon* are thrown into liminal space, typically through interactions with Symeon, they sometimes respond by inflicting violence towards him:

> One day a snake came in, drank from one of the jars of wine, vomited his venom in it and left. Abba Symeon was not inside; instead he was dancing outside with the members of a circus faction. When the saint came into the tavern, he saw the wine jar, upon which "Death" had been written invisibly. Immediately he understood what had happened to it, and lifting up a piece of wood, he broke the jar in pieces, since it was full. His master took the wood out of his hand, beat him with it until he was exhausted, and chased him away.[91]

In this passage, Leontius illustrates an eruption of violence towards Symeon. A character like Symeon can be viewed as dangerous because he threatens to break the thread that binds community together: structure.[92] Turner describes structure as "a model for thinking about culture and nature and ordering one's public life."[93] I contend that writers can use characters in liminal spaces to catalyze edification in other characters through their ability to disrupt the status quo of society. Since Symeon sits in Leontius' worldview, Leontius indicates his target audience to edify by explaining Symeon's goal: "he truly sought to show a weakness in the virtuous life to the slothful and pretentious and the power granted by God to those who truly serve against the

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[91] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 152.
[92] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, forward to Cornell Paperbacks ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 109.
[93] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 127.

spirits of evil with all their souls."[94] Leontius portrays Symeon having the desire to elicit a response in people who are "slothful" and "pretentious." Recall that Leontius writes primarily to edify those who are of wealthy status.[95] He usually portrays Symeon prompting change through seemingly harsh actions that reverberate throughout the community of Emesa, suggesting that individual edification has societal consequences.

Not only do the characters and city that Leontius write about experience edification through Symeon, but so can the audience reading this hagiographic text. By witnessing Symeon edify other people through primarily vivid anecdotes, Leontius' narrative also has the potential to impact his readers as he invites them into a liminal space. In this space, they might be startled enough to imagine implications of the texts on their own lives. If readers apply what they read about in *The Life of Symeon* to themselves, they too might be left questioning their own lives and position in society, perhaps prompting an internal change towards leading a more virtuous life from a Christian perspective.

Holy Folly in its Grotesqueness, Comedy, and Disruption

Holy folly has the ability to reveal, often shockingly, at times comically, divine truth. Leontius casts Symeon as a holy fool with support from Biblical texts as he cites 1 Corinthians

[94] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 133.
[95] Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 17-18.

4:10: "we are fools for Christ's sake."[96] This short, but powerful verse, along with others highlighting the contrast between folly and wisdom, are found in the prologue of this text.[97] Leontius frames Symeon's actions through the lens of being a fool for Christ's sake, but what other notions are associated with this character?

In his book, *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment,* Georg Feuerstein defines holy madmen as those who disrupt norms of society by being "masters of inversion, proficient breakers of taboos, lovers of surprise, contradiction, and ambiguity."[98] The variety of terms that Feuerstein uses to describe the holy madman are found in a common thread of acting in unconventional ways. Feuerstein further states three reasons as to why a person would play the role of a holy fool: "to simply 'drop out' of conventional society in order to be able to focus attention on spiritual matters, to instigate social opprobrium for the sake of cultivating humility, to instruct others in spiritual values."[99] I propose that Leontius portrays all three of these reasons of playing the role of the holy fool in Symeon's life, with the third reason of edification being most important. To address the first two reasons that Feuerstein mentions as a holy fool's role, consider how Leontius writes about Symeon performing the work of God in two settings: refining ascetic virtues in the desert and concealing his sanctity in the city. Leontius describes Symeon as praying to God before he goes into the city: "his every prayer was that his

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[96] In his book, *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment,* Georg Feuerstein explains that 1 Corinthians 4:10 gave Paul comfort in his ministry as it refers to Jesus looking foolish to the world as well, culminating with the Roman soldiers mocking him to save himself on the cross, if he really is the Son of God. See Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment,* revised and expanded ed. (Prescott: Hohm Press, 2006), 13. Note: This book comparatively studies holy madmen in various religions, including Christianity, but is of particular interest to this paper for the comprehensive information it provides on the holy fool tradition.

[97] "But if they had listened to the words, "If one wishes to be wise in this age, let him be a fool, that he may become wise" [1 Cor 3:18], and again, "We are fools for Christ's sake" [1 Cor 4:10], and again, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men" [1 Cor 1:25], they would not consider the achievements of this true athlete to be laughable; rather they would marvel again at those seeking the alternate ways to virtue." See Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," 133.

[98] Feuerstein, *Holy Madness,* 3.

[99] Feuerstein, *Holy Madness,* 341.

works might be hidden until his departure from life, so that he might escape human glory, through which human arrogance and conceit arises, and which also made the angels fall from heaven."[100] Through showing Symeon's concealed sanctity, Leontius emphasizes the importance of giving glory to God and remaining humble. The notion of concealed sanctity also demonstrates how, in the process of edification, sometimes that which was hidden becomes revealed. To capture Symeon's desire to conceal his sanctity, Leontius often depicts him fleeing the scene of his miracles or acting absurdly immediately after performing a miracle. Besides refining personal spiritual values or practicing humility, the final reason Feuerstein suggests for playing the role of the holy fool is to edify others. Earlier in his narrative, Leontius describes Symeon leaving the desert in pursuit of saving others.[101] I contend that Leontius employs folly to startle and provoke his audience as he depicts Symeon startling and provoking characters through anecdotes in *The Life of Symeon*. Feuerstein explains that "folly involved at times offensive acts that were designed to shock and provoke a reaction."[102] The holy fool character becomes the medium for edification as this fool rejects normal society to purposefully swim upstream, prompting people to question their own lives and morals.[103]

Holy fools do not typically build a new structure in society, but instead just disrupt the current one they find themselves in.[104] They do not hold prized solutions to hand over to others, yet they create space for a "radical questioning" of society as people know it.[105] To understand the function of the holy fool further, I draw on Turner's *Intro to Pilgrimage as a Liminoid*

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[100] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 150.
[101] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," 148.
[102] Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment,* revised and expanded ed. (Prescott: Hohm Press, 2006), 20.
[103] Feuerstein, *Holy Madness,* 338.
[104] Feuerstein, *Holy Madness,* 354.
[105] Feuerstein, *Holy Madness,* 354.

Phenomenon, where he describes liminality being "not only transition but also potentiality, not only 'going to be' but also 'what may be.'"[106] Liminal space holds the potentiality that creates room for the possibility of change, which the holy fool is able to cultivate through interactions with others. In Emesa, Leontius portrays Symeon engendering tension within individuals that provokes personal edification, while also pointing to larger societal change. For instance, Leontius speaks of Symeon having multiple interactions with people that have city-wide implications:

> Symeon had extraordinary compassion for those possessed by demons, so that from time to time he went off to make himself like one of them, and passed his time with them, healing many of them through his own prayer, and therefore some daimoniacs cried out and said, "O violence, Fool, you jeer at the whole world. Have you also come by us to give us trouble? Retreat from here; you are not one of us. Why do you torture us all night long and burn us?" While the saint was there (in Emesa), he cried out against many because of the Holy Spirit and reproached thieves and fornicators. Some he faulted, crying that they had not taken communion often, and others he reproached for perjury, so that through his inventiveness he nearly put an end to sinning in the whole city.[107]

Leontius makes the bold claim that Symeon almost halts sinning in the city, suggesting how successful Symeon is in edifying the people he comes into contact with in Emesa. Because of his bizarre interactions with others, Symeon could be viewed by other characters within the story and readers as a "less successful citizen," which Turner describes Christians in the world to be.[108] Having the role of the atypical citizen, holy fools are also often shown in a comedic light.

Writers can employ the humorous character of the holy fool to expose truths about humanity in potentially edifying ways. To unpack the comedic elements of the holy fool further, I use the scholarship of Peter Berger. In *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human*

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[106] Victor Turner and Edith Turner, "Introduction: Pilgrimage as a Limonoid Phenomenon," in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 3.
[107] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 165.
[108] Turner and Turner, "Introduction: Pilgrimage as a Limonoid Phenomenon," 15.

Experience, Berger explains the parallelism between fools and saints, helping us to see clearer the reconcilable nature of being both a fool and saint: "Social order is always vulnerable to disruptions. These disruptions are caused, among other things, by the intrusions of other realities. Sacred and comic are similar disruptions. Saints and fools have an uncomfortable similarity."[109] People who are both familiar and unfamiliar with stories about Christian saints might feel unsettled when reading about Symeon's actions, especially when knowing that he is portrayed as a saint. However, Leontius qualifies Symeon's actions through casting him as a holy fool, allowing this character to come to life in his writing in a manner that reveals truth about individuals, edifying them, both in the text and potentially outside of it.[110] The potential to edify an audience through the character of the holy fool is founded in helping people see a new perspective, however shocking it might be at first, especially for the "high cultural tradition" Leontius is seen to be primarily aiming to edify.[111]

One way that Leontius employs humor through the holy fool in *The Life of Symeon* is with satire, which can also be quite shocking for some readers in Late Antiquity and modernity. Feuerstein states that holy fools not only "satirize the common individual, but also and above all negate the popular dichotomy between worldliness and spirituality by deliberately crossing the conventional boundary between purity and impurity."[112] Leontius continuously shows Symeon as a character who crosses these boundaries of purity and impurity, becoming foolish to worldly standards, and at times, even foolish to certain religious perspectives. Yet, Berger describes

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[109] Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1997), 65.
[110] Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 66.
[111] Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 18.
[112] Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment*, revised and expanded ed. (Prescott: Hohm Press, 2006), 375.

satirical folly as having "near-prophetic power when it is motivated by moral passion," as Leontius shows it to be in Symeon's case.[113] The potential for the strange combination of morality and folly to exist through instruments like satire, helps to reveal truth about society. Leontius is able to use satire effectively, partly because of the unique position of Symeon, being a character who creates liminal space as the "perpetual stranger, wanderer," ready to perform a variety of antics in Emesa.[114] Berger further highlights the power of the holy fool as the stranger when he describes that "holy folly, in its grotesqueness, makes explicit the otherness breaking into ordinary reality, but also the impossibility of containing this otherness in the categories of ordinary reality."[115] The holy fool is a figure who disrupts "ordinary reality," shocking people who do not have a pre-existing grasp of the truth that revels in grotesqueness.[116] Leontius does not merely show grotesqueness through Symeon's interactions with others in his hagiographic text, he also uses it, along with satire and the character of the holy fool, for the purpose of edification, pointing towards developing virtues in the Christian tradition. Folly, therefore, serves a greater purpose than just comedy as Berger refers to folly "as shadow play of divine reality," implying cosmic implications of it.[117] Leontius also portrays ordinary and divine reality colliding through Symeon's folly in city life.

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[113] Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1997), 171.
[114] Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 193.
[115] Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 188.
[116] Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 193.
[117] Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 194.

The Influence of Apocalyptic Rhetoric on Edification

The holy fool as a character can flip one's world upside down, including pre-conceived notions that a person might hold. Berger further explains that "the comic at its most intense, as in folly, presents a counterworld, an upside-down world … one must reflect about the epistemological status of this counterworld. The presence or absence or religious faith will determine the outcome of this reflection."[118] Holy folly invites readers into a counterworld, asking them to reckon with it. When viewed with a religious lens, folly surpasses any notions of being viewed only as madness and points towards edification, but how can folly be used to effectively do this? If we read *The Life of Symeon* as exhibiting apocalyptic rhetoric, it becomes clearer how folly can be used in the process of edification. I contend that Leontius uses apocalyptic rhetoric in this hagiographic text to reveal divine truth to others through Symeon the holy fool.

The word apocalypse, apokalypsis/ apokalypto in Greek, translates into "unveiling"/ "unveil" or "revelation."[119] There are various notions of apocalypse that have infiltrated the world throughout the ages. A prevalent definition of apocalyptic literature stands as following: "Revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."[120] Apocalyptic literature contains unique rhetoric as a defining

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[118] Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1997) p. 171.
[119] To read more about notions of apocalypse see Alexandra R. Brown, "Paul as Apocalyptic Preacher," in *The Cross and Human Transformation: Paul's Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
[120] Mitchell G. Reddish, "Introduction," in *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 20. Note: This definition of apocalyptic literature is prevalent among apocalyptic scholars, although contentions still exist around it. For further discussion on defining apocalyptic themes, see John J. Collins, "What is Apocalyptic Literature?," in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature.*

characteristic. Although I am not claiming that *The Life of Symeon* is apocalyptic literature, I contend that it has apocalyptic rhetoric embedded throughout the text.[121] Nelson Goodman refers to rhetoric as "a way of worldmaking."[122] Leontius employs apocalyptic rhetoric in *The Life of Symeon* through creating a narrative focused on revealing the holy fool in his ludicrous, yet edifying behavior. Biblical scholar, Carol Newsom further explains that the "seer" of the apocalypse is to be a mirror for an audience, helping them see from this perspective, in an effort to evoke a specific response. Even though she is referring specifically to more traditionally viewed apocalyptic texts like 1 Enoch and Daniel, I suggest that this tactic is also evident in *The Life of Symeon*.[123] Leontius shares his true view of Symeon and inspiration from his Christian faith to elevate the character of the holy fool in ways that amplify Symeon's edifying abilities.

To decompose apocalyptic rhetoric further, I turn to another Biblical scholar, J. Louis Martyn, who explains the device of bifocal vision found in apocalyptic literature, which gives humans new perception of the world that is clearer than before as it sees both human and divine realms simultaneously.[124] In this literature, an abrupt invasion usually catalyzes new

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[121] Consider the following thoughts on not defining a work as apocalyptic literature but it still having apocalyptic themes within it: "Jacques Derrida allows that 'a text cannot belong to no genre,' but would prefer to 'speak of a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set.'" Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in David Duff, ed Modern Genre Theory (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 2000), 230, quoted in John, J. Collins, "What is Apocalyptic Literature?," in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature,* ed. John J. Collins, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2-3.

[122] Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), quoted in Carol A. Newsom, "The Rhetoric of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature,* ed. John J. Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 202.

[123] Newsom, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 206.

[124] J. Louis Martyn, "From Paul to Flannery O'Connor with the Power of Grace," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 285. For more discussion on apocalyptic notions of Paul, see Alexandra R. Brown, "Paul as Apocalyptic Preacher," in *The Cross and Human Transformation: Paul's Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

perception.[125] Martyn defines bifocal vision in relation to his use of it for studying the Epistles of Paul:

> The dictionary defines bi-focal, as regards eyeglasses, as a lens having two portions, one for near vision, one for far vision. In order to find a metaphor helpful to our interpretation of Paul, we will have to imagine looking simultaneously through both of these lenses. Looking in that manner would cause us to see everything in a new perspective. To see bi-focally in Paul's terms is to see both the enslaving Old Age and God's invading and liberating new creation. It is an understatement to say that a crucial difference lies before us here: the difference between uni-focal vision, in which one sees on a single level, and bi-focal vision, in which one is given the grace, the power, to see simultaneously, two levels.[126]

Martyn sees Paul as an apocalyptic visionary who uses bifocal vision to describe the new creation in humanity arising from Jesus Christ. Bifocal vision is seen in *The Life of Symeon* as Leontius depicts Symeon as a holy person receiving divine intervention in the human realm, thereby seeing the present world around him, while also seeing a larger, divine plan. For instance, Symeon warns Emesan schoolteachers that God showed him which children would die of sickness. He tells the teachers this information because he does not want them to punish the students who are approaching death.[127] Leontius describes Symeon receiving knowledge from God that he then brings to everyday life, although in this situation, the teachers do not believe him. However, many people who interact with Symeon are edified though his power to see both divine and human realms, prompting their perception to change as well.

We can also find notions of bifocal vision in the final revelation that Leontius illustrates in *The Life of Symeon*, revealing to all Symeon's true nature. Although Leontius shows some

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[125] J. Louis Martyn, "From Paul to Flannery O'Connor with the Power of Grace," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 282.
[126] Martyn, "From Paul to Flannery O'Connor with the Power of Grace," 284.
[127] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 155.

people throughout the text changing their lives after interacting with Symeon, he depicts the truth being revealed to Emesa's citizens after Symeon's death:

> Then when those who were bearing him and going out to bury him passed the house of the formerly Jewish glassblower, whom Symeon had made a Christian, as I said before, the aforementioned former Jew heard psalm singing, music such as human lips could not sing, and a crowd such as all humanity could not gather. This man was astounded by the verse and the crowd. He glanced out and saw the saint carried out by the two men and them alone bearing his precious body. Then the one who heard the invisible music said, "Blessed are you, Fool, that while you do not have humans singing psalms for you, you *have the heavenly powers honoring you with hymns."* And immediately he went down and buried him with his own hands. And then he told everyone what he had heard in the angel's songs. John the deacon heard this and went running, with many others, to the place where he was buried, wishing to take up his precious remains in order to bury him honorably. But when they opened the grave, they did not find him. For the Lord had glorified him and translated him. Then all came to their senses, as if from sleep, and told each other what miracles he had performed for each of them and that he had played the fool for God's sake.[128]

The notion of bifocal vision helps us see the apocalyptic rhetoric embedded in this final revelation, as the "heavenly powers" are heard on earth. Leontius also portrays the characters' perception shift: "then all came to their senses, as if from sleep." Although there are many moments in this hagiographic text that capture revelation, Symeon's death is the key revelatory moment for both people in the story and potentially for Leontius' audience as it uncovers all that was previously hidden. Unlike most characters in the story, however, Leontius' readers get to experience the dramatic irony of always knowing about Symeon's holiness. Yet, in reading this text from start to finish, the audience is also invited into a liminal space where edification is possible.

By viewing the holy fool in combination with apocalyptic rhetoric, we see more clearly the fool's ability to catalyze a perception shift by holding a mirror up to society. In their book,

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[128] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 169-170. Symeon's death is also portrayed very similarly to Jesus' death.

Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly, Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers describe the fool's three main undertakings: "the fool's role in instigating and sustaining liminality, the fool's goal of changing perspective, and the fool's call for discernment."[129] The holy fool disrupts, distorts, and finally reveals. Campbell and Cilliers further highlight the way in which holy fools thrive in liminal spaces: "They [fools] instigate and sustain liminality because liminal spaces, while potentially spaces of reactionary fear and violence, are also spaces of creative change and transformation."[130] Throughout *The Life of Symeon,* Leontius describes Symeon's absurd, sometimes violent actions that have the power to provoke change as they create liminal space. After disrupting the status quo usually with violence or comedy, fools foster the potential for a perception change. Campbell and Cilliers explain: "They [Fools] seek to change the world by first changing our perception of the world," resembling the counterworld that emerges especially with the use of apocalyptic rhetoric.[131] Holy fools create distortion, changing people's perceptions, which Campbell and Cilliers parallel with showing an audience their society through a "shattered" or "murky" mirror, where "God can be perceived in this world, through indirect and often shocking ways."[132] This mirror metaphor points to distortion's ability to show humans our grotesque nature, but not for the mere sake of it, but rather to prompt change. After experiencing disruption and distortion, individuals then have the opportunity to discern what to do with the shocking truth that has been revealed to them, and consequently, make a decision about how to conduct their lives moving forward.[133] In the various anecdotes

[129] Charles L. Campbell and Johan Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 70.
[130] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools,* 80.
[131] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools,* 80.
[132] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools,* 169.
[133] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools,* 23.

found in *The Life of Symeon,* Leontius shows Symeon continuously disrupting people's daily life, holding the "shattered" mirror up to them, and ultimately, making them discern their lives.

As Leontius holds a mirror to society with the intent to edify through his narration of Symeon's life, he can be seen as a preaching fool.[134] Campbell and Cilliers reference Paul as a preaching fool who "leaves hearers 'perpetually unbalanced.' He leaves them in a liminal space where they might move from one perspective to the other."[135] In the Christian context, preaching fools like Leontius and Paul, tend to focus on speaking to the promise of eternal life and urgency of redeeming people's souls.[136]

Leontius presents Symeon as an otherworldly being who emerges from the desert to violently invade Emesa, disrupting life as people know it, distorting reality, and ultimately "saving souls."[137] By studying notions of liminal space and apocalyptic rhetoric found in this text, we discover how Leontius uses the character of the holy fool to edify his audience. Are these techniques of edification from Late Antiquity found in literature today? Although there are several significant differences, Flannery O'Connor's stories function in a similar way to Leontius' *The Life of Symeon,* suggesting that hagiographic themes of edification are still being used to impact individuals and societies today.

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[134] Charles L. Campbell and Johan Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 96.
[135] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools,* 33.
[136] Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools,* 169.
[137] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 161.

Ch. 3

A Modern Writer's Intent to Edify: Flannery O'Connor & Hagiographic Themes

Modern fiction is not written with the primary intent to edify an audience. Today, writers tend to amplify the entertaining aspects of literature in the pursuit of bringing pleasure to their audiences. Modern novelist, David Foster Wallace, addresses this tendency of contemporary fiction and compares it to the purpose of what he calls "serious art" in an interview with Larry McCaffery:

> "Serious" art . . . is more apt to make you uncomfortable, or to force you to work hard to access its pleasures, the same way that in real life true pleasure is usually a by-product of hard work and discomfort. So it's hard for an art audience, especially a young one that's been raised to expect art to be 100 percent pleasurable and to make that pleasure effortless, to read and appreciate serious fiction.[138]

Wallace suggests that most people are looking for pleasure in reading and have little interest in literature that does not readily produce these feelings for them. Fiction that provokes this type of "serious" thought or even edification, is rare to come by today. Wallace further acknowledges that some readers view fiction written without the objective of creating pleasure as extremely dark. They do not see the writer's commentary on hope and meaning that is discovered in the darkness.[139] The type of fiction that contains both darkness and hope is written with a greater purpose than merely showing darkness, or violence, for the sake of it. Wallace explains his belief of the purpose of fiction: "It seems like one of the things really great fiction-writers do–from Carver to Chekhov to Flannery O'Connor, or like the Tolstoy of 'The Death of Ivan Ilych' or the Pynchon of 'Gravity's Rainbow'–is 'give' the reader something. The reader walks away from the

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[138] David Foster Wallace, "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace," interview by Larry McCaffery, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13/2 (Summer 1993): 1.
[139] Wallace, "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace," 4.

real art heavier than she came into it. Fuller."[140] The fiction that Wallace mentions is not bounded by the text, but leaps beyond it to influence readers in their own life. This influence often leaves the reader "heavier," similar to the burden an individual carries during the process of edification. Flannery O'Connor wrote fiction to "give" her audience something, making her a part of the minority of writers who venture to evoke a response, other than pleasure, from her audience.

Although several writers could be compared to Leontius and his intent to edify, I have chosen to study O'Connor because she uses methods of edification that are uniquely akin to hagiographic themes, while also highlighting key differences that speak to the time periods in which their respective works were written. Further, her use of the holy fool character is more similar to Leontius' than other writers' use of this character, as O'Connor's fool does not always have a physical or intellectual disability that is common among "holy fools" today.[141] O'Connor and Leontius were able to craft literature that works on two levels: revealing the edification of characters within their stories by using the character of the holy fool, while also prompting a reaction and response in their audiences. Studying Leontius and O'Connor together highlights the enduring techniques used in the process of edification, while also illuminating differences stemming from varying audiences and time periods. Overall, both writers and their works suggest the significance of moral instruction in the Christian tradition.

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[140] David Foster Wallace, "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace," interview by Larry McCaffery, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13/2 (Summer 1993): 16.

[141] Other writers who could be viewed as using the character of the holy fool include John Steinbeck, who wrote *Of Mice and Men* and Winston Groom who wrote *Forrest Gump,* but their characters are shown having disabilities. For more examples of holy fools used in modern literature see Dana Heller and Elena Volkova, "The Holy Fool in Russian and American Culture: A Dialogue," *American Studies International* 41, no.1/2 (2003):152-178. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41279962

In this chapter, I compare the ways in which Flannery O'Connor manifests her intent to edify in her fiction to how Leontius aims to edify in *The Life of Symeon.* To do this, I first introduce O'Connor in her religious beliefs and motivations for writing. I then examine the techniques she uses in her short stories, specifically grotesqueness and distortion, while proposing that viewing her writing as exhibiting apocalyptic rhetoric enables us to understand her process of edification more clearly. Finally, I conduct a close study of O'Connor's short story, "Revelation," highlighting the themes discussed above. Finding similarities through this comparison, equips us to understand O'Connor's techniques of edification with regards to hagiographic themes, while discovering differences highlighting the varying contexts in which both Leontius and O'Connor write.

Flannery O'Connor's Motivations for Writing

As both strive to edify the individual, Leontius and O'Connor also consider society at large in their writing. O'Connor writes with racist Southern culture as the backdrop, while Leontius writes with underprivileged members of a Late Antique city in mind. The differing time and geographic contexts result in two varying types of literature, yet both having a common thread in the Christian emphasis on edification. O'Connor uses fiction as a tool to reveal the truth about humanity and the Divine as she sees it through her Christian faith.[142] By writing to reveal this truth, O'Connor leaps beyond the role of a gothic Southern writer, becoming a source of potential edification for her readers.

[142] John D. Sykes, *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy and the Aesthetic of Revelation* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 2-3.

The central themes in O'Connor's writing hover around her Southern experiences and Christian, more specifically Catholic, faith.[143] In *Mystery and Manners,* O'Connor shares about how her faith influences her life and seeps into her writing: "For me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world, I see in its relation to that."[144] O'Connor's personal faith is rooted in the redemption of humankind. Her characters usually experience abrupt, violent encounters that serve as catalysts for their internal change.

Besides her commitment to the Catholic tradition, O'Connor also expresses in a personal letter to a friend, a fascination with Early Christian Desert Fathers.[145] In his book, *Flannery O'Connor: Hermit Novelist,* Richard Giannone compares O'Connor and her fiction to desert fathers and their sayings: "O'Connor's letters stand alongside *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* in their wisdom, and her fiction rivals the remarkable stories in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* in their edification."[146] I contend that her stories, like hagiographic texts, were written primarily with the intent to edify. Giannone even paints O'Connor as a monk herself, considering her situation of being rather isolated on a Georgia farm for several years and being hospitalized later because of lupus.[147] He further contends that O'Connor identified with desert asceticism because of her interest in desert fathers, the disease breaking down her body, and ultimately her turning towards God during this suffering.[148] Her fiction reveals her familiarity with desert ascetism as many of her characters journey through their own deserts, ultimately being met with edification

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[143] Robert H. Brinkmeyer, "Asceticism and the Imaginative Vision of Flannery O'Connor," in *Flannery O'Connor: New Perspectives,* ed. Sura P. Rath and Mary Neff Shaw (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 179.
[144] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners,* sel. and ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 32.
[145] Richard Giannone, *Flannery O'Connor: Hermit Novelist* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 1.
[146] Giannone, *Hermit Novelist,*169.
[147] Giannone, *Hermit Novelist,*10.
[148] Giannone, *Hermit Novelist,*13. For more on O'Connor's life, see Carol Shloss*, Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Press, 1980), 4-5.

that emerges from these experiences. With knowledge about desert monks and the hagiographic texts written about them, such as *The Life of Symeon*, we are better equipped to see similar motives for and strategies of edification in O'Connor's stories.

O'Connor expresses that she wrote for people who did not believe in God.[149] In her writing, she often exposes the flaws of seemingly righteous people, while also evoking the mystery of the Divine. Giannone suggests that writing for this audience of "lost souls" became her hermitage.[150] I contend that Leontius' intent to edify by writing the hagiography, *The Life of Symeon*, also became his own hermitage. However, recall that although Leontius wrote for a variety of readers, he wrote primarily to edify the elite, while providing solace to the underprivileged.[151] Further, Leontius wrote for individuals to become "true" Christians, while O'Connor wrote for people without belief.[152] The differences in intended audiences perhaps point to the varying degrees of violence and comedy employed by both writers. Yet, both Leontius and O'Connor clearly wanted to elicit a reaction in and response from their readers, and hagiography and short stories were the outlets to do this.

In O'Connor's stories we see people's worlds being turned upside down. Recall how Leontius also demonstrates Symeon inverting other characters' worlds in his hagiographic text: "As I already said before, the all-wise Symeon's whole goal was this: first, to save souls, whether through afflictions which he sent them in ludicrous or methodical ways, or through miracles which he performed while seeming not to understand, or through maxims which he said

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[149] Carol Shloss, *Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Press, 1980), 3.
[150] Richard Giannone, *Flannery O'Connor: Hermit Novelist* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 25. "Lost souls" refers to Shloss, 70.
[151] Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 17-18.
[152] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 133.

to them while playing the fool."[153] In order to save others, Leontius depicts Symeon acting in absurd and miraculous ways that often shake city dwellers' lives. O'Connor uses a similar technique in her stories by having other characters shake the worldview of her main character. For instance, in the "The Displaced Person," the main character, Mrs. Shortley, is repeatedly asked by her family, "Where we goin?"[154] This phrase that cuts to the core of Mrs. Shortley, catalyzes her realization that she has become the displaced person she had ridiculed before.

The Instrumental Tool of Violence in Edification

O'Connor's stories tend to use more violence than Leontius' hagiography. A possible reason for this disparity might be found in what O'Connor shares in *Mystery and Manners*: "I don't believe that we shall have great religious fiction until we have again that happy combination of believing artist and believing society. Until that time, the novelist will have to do the best he can in travail with the world he has."[155] As mentioned earlier, O'Connor is writing for people who do not hold belief in God; therefore, she might use more violence to evoke stronger reactions from her readers than if she was writing in Late Antiquity for Leontius' audience.[156]

In *Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference,* Carol Shloss points us to a summary of O'Connor's stories, highlighting her use of violence: "Of the nineteen stories… nine end in the violent death of one or more persons. Three others end in, or present near the end,

[153] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 161.
[154] Flannery O'Connor, "The Displaced Person." *The Sewanee Review* 62, no. 4 (1952): 653-654, accessed April 1, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27538394.
[155] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners,* sel. and ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 168.
[156] Carol Shloss*, Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Press, 1980), 3.

physical assaults that result in bodily injury. Of the remaining seven, one ends in arson, another in the theft of a wooden leg, another in car theft and wife abandonment."[157] It is no secret that O'Connor's work is disturbingly violent. In *Mystery and Manners,* O'Connor explains her motives for writing such shocking stories:

> The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problems will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock- to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures.[158]

O'Connor had the goal of creating stories that would prompt readers, especially those who do not believe in God, to pause and think about the odd characters and often horrific events of the story. In this liminal space that O'Connor creates for her readers, she shines a bright light onto their reality, exposing sometimes ugly truth about their own internal nature. Yet, she does not stop at just showing the ugly truth; with revelation comes hope for change. To get this message across, O'Connor has to "shout" through her works. O'Connor further explains that violence is a method of transmitting a message:

> In my stories I have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace . . . This idea, that reality is something to which we must be returned at considerable cost, is one which is seldom understood by the casual reader, but it is one which is implicit in the Christian view of the world.[159]

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[157] Walter Sullivan, *Death by Melancholy: Essays on Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 33, quoted in Carol Shloss*, Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Press, 1980), 34.
[158] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners,* sel. and ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 33-34.
[159] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners,* 112.

O'Connor explains that using violence in her stories captures readers attention, while also creating space for her characters to receive divine grace, albeit at "considerable cost." In his book, *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy and the Aesthetic of Revelation,* John Sykes explains the use of violence further by stating, "for O'Connor, the violence of sin requires a divine counterviolence that receives violence and turns it against itself in the interest of peace."[160] Violence collides with violence to bring forth the hope for change.

In most of her stories, O'Connor includes physical violence, although the assaults on her characters are also spiritual in nature as the physical violence often catalyzes internal change. Sykes explores the notion of violence in O'Connor's fiction further by suggesting that "the mystery of violence is the startling recognition that by violence we are saved- not by committing it, but by receiving it."[161] With the statement, Sykes is referencing the Christian tradition, in which salvation is possible through the very violent death, and resurrection, of Jesus Christ. O'Connor often uses violence before redemption occurs in the story. For instance, in "The Displaced Person," Mrs. Shortley lashes out physically against her husband and daughters, "clutching at everything she could get her hands on," immediately preceding her internal realization that she has become the displaced person.[162] Leontius uses violence as well in his intent to edify, but to a lesser degree than O'Connor, as he employs the use of folly to a greater extent. An encounter of violence in *The Life of Symeon* is as follows: "the saint rushed headlong toward the possessed boy and overtook him. When no one was looking, he punched him in the

[160] John D. Sykes, *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy and the Aesthetic of Revelation* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 41.
[161] Sykes, *Aesthetic of Revelation,* 42.
[162] Flannery O'Connor, "The Displaced Person." *The Sewanee Review* 62, no. 4 (1952): 654, accessed April 1, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27538394.

jaw, and said, 'Commit adultery no more, wretch, and the Devil won't draw near you.'"[163] In this anecdote, the boy becomes edified after this experience of violence. Besides O'Connor portraying the edification of her characters in her fiction, she also prompts her audience to question themselves and their positions in society. Giannone explains O'Connor's motivations well: "O'Connor's fictions fling us into the ditch to stare into the dark of our insufficiency and dependence wherein lies the injunction calling us out of darkness into God's wonderful light."[164] Her audience, like her characters, are shaken and torn down to be built back up, realizing both their shortcomings and the grace they receive.

Transforming Vision through Apocalyptic Rhetoric and the Holy Fool

Despite the connections O'Connor has to the Christian tradition, Joanne Halleran McMullen does not see O'Connor fulfilling what she has set out to do in her writing.[165] In her book, *Writing against God: Language as Message in the Literature of Flannery O'Connor,* McMullen highlights O'Connor's use of passive voice, claiming that her characters "seem unable to accept or reject their moments of grace or share in any heavenly rewards due to the linguistic determinations imposed upon them."[166] Although I agree with McMullen pointing out O'Conner's use of passive voice as these "linguistic determinations," I contend that she neglects to see the importance of viewing O'Connor's work in light of apocalyptic rhetoric when studying

[163] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 154.
[164] Richard Giannone, "Dark Night, Dark Faith: Hazel Motes, The Misfit, and Francis Marion Tarwater," in *Dark Faith: New Essays on Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away,* ed. Susan Srigley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 33.
[165] Joanne Halleran McMullen, *Writing against God: Language as Message in the Literature of Flannery O'Connor* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 141.
[166] McMullen, *Writing against God,* 141-142.

her religious intentions to edify. McMullen argues that O'Connor's characters do not actively receive their grace, however, I suggest that O'Connor's prose does not show them actively receiving this grace in a way that emphasizes their human agency because she points to a divine *invasion* of grace, almost paralyzing in its effect.[167] It seems as if O'Connor's characters see with bifocal vision during their revelations, combining the divine and human realms simultaneously. Perhaps, O'Connor uses passive voice to imply divine intervention in her characters' lives. Studying the apocalyptic rhetoric found in O'Connor's work allows us to look beyond the psychological functions of her characters and towards cosmic themes of divine mystery at play in her work.

Notions of apocalyptic rhetoric aid in our understanding of O'Connor's pursuit to edify her audience. Bifocal vision can be found in O'Connor's work as described by Martyn:

> [O'Connor] notes that the prophetic vision - a vision that is for her conveyed in the actions of grotesque characters - is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meanings, and thus of seeing far things close up. The real world emerges, she believed, in this kind of exaggerated, distorted, but also and fundamentally bi-focal vision.[168]

By distorting her characters' perception, there is a chance for them to experience illumination and the "invading power of grace," as her characters often receive revelation about themselves from what seems like a divine source.[169] In *The Life of Symeon*, Leontius shares anecdotes of characters receiving a similar "invasion of grace," such as when Symeon interacts with the following man:

> Wherefore also a certain rustic, who had leucoma in his two eyes, came to make fun of him. Symeon anointed his eyes with mustard. The man was nearly burned to death, and Symeon said to him, "Go wash, idiot, with vinegar and garlic, and you will be healed immediately." As it seemed a better thing to do, he ran immediately to a doctor instead

[167] Referring to Martyn's use of invasion of grace found in J. Louis Martyn, "From Paul to Flannery O'Connor with the Power of Grace," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 291.
[168] Martyn, "From Paul to Flannery O'Connor with the Power of Grace," 291.
[169] Martyn, "From Paul to Flannery O'Connor with the Power of Grace," 291.

> and was completely blinded. Finally, in a mad rage he swore in Syriac, "By the God of Heaven, even if my two eyes should suddenly leap (from their sockets), I will do whatever the Fool told me." And he washed himself as Symeon told him. Immediately his eyes were healed, clear as when he was born, so that he honored God. Then the Fool came upon him and said to him, "Behold, you are healed, idiot! Never again steal your neighbor's goats.[170]

This interaction between Symeon and the man results in a few important outcomes. Most readily, the man learns not to be a thief anymore. Yet, he also receives healing through a violent invasion of grace, both physically by the full restoration of his eyesight and spiritually by his turn towards God. The man's perception both literally and metaphorically changes; he now can see the world around him and its relation to the Divine. Similarly, O'Connor's characters are shown to be "waiting (whether they know it or not) for God to break into a world that is otherwise petty and feckless."[171] This perception change becomes apparent with bifocal vision, enabling both O'Connor's and Leontius' characters to see divine and human realms in their revelations.

O'Connor and Leontius often demonstrate a perceptual shift through violent or comedic means, respectively. To "manipulate" her audience, O'Connor uses techniques of grotesqueness and distortion.[172] Grotesqueness can be understood as a "hyperbole, the heightening of perversity and concentrated emphasis in violence."[173] It turns our world upside down in a terrifying and ironic way that is somehow relatable because it tugs at our true conditions.[174] O'Connor shows grotesqueness through her characters who distort the worldview of others, much like the holy

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[170] Leontius, "The Life of Symeon the Fool," in *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City,* trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 164.
[171] John D. Sykes, *Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy and the Aesthetic of Revelation* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 2.
[172] Carol Shloss*, Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Press, 1980), 34.
[173] Shloss, *Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies*, 34.
[174] Shloss, *Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies*, 39.

fool. The type of distortion O'Connor uses through her characters is "the kind that reveals, or should reveal," which I suggest is in tandem with her aim of edification.[175]

To explore the notions of vision O'Connor employs further, I turn to Edward Kessler, who, in his book *Flannery O'Connor and the Language of Apocalypse,* calls attention to O'Conner's use of vision. Kessler states that "many of O'Connor's characters can be characterized by their limited vision. Some see only what meets the eye, and their inability to see metaphorically tells us that the author will very shortly devise some violent means of opening their eyes."[176] O'Connor's use of grotesqueness and distortion in conjunction with violence creates a liminal space in which the characters in her stories and the audience who reads her work have the potential to change. As we see in *The Life of Symeon,* liminality is often manifested through the holy fool character who introduces both instability and potential in the space they occupy, whether within a text or outside of it through real implications. In *The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor*, Robert Brinkmeyer highlights O'Connor's use of "the threshold," which I argue is the use of liminal space:

> Her characters… live on what Bakhtin calls the 'threshold'- they ultimately face the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold). Typically this turning point in a character's life comes in a blinding moment of violent confrontation with a force outside the character's self; with his or her old self shattered by the experience, the character must then make the choice, with eyes opened to an entirely new perspective, on how to proceed with life.[177]

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[175] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners,* sel. and ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 162.
[176] Edward Kessler, *Flannery O'Connor and the Language of Apocalypse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 100.
[177] Robert H. Brinkmeyer, *The Art and Vision of Flannery O'Connor* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Press, 1989), 139. Brinkmeyer refers to Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), 248. Note: Although Victor Tuner references rites of passage of voluntary acts, such as initiation rituals and pilgrimages, liminal space can also be created forcefully, as portrayed by Leontius in Symeon's interactions with city folk and by O'Connor in her forced crises on her characters.

When O'Connor's characters experience liminality, they often are in the process of edification where a violent act yields an invasion of grace that ultimately allows them to discern their lives. Through this process, O'Connor describes her characters moving from blurry to clear vision. Giannone describes this phenomenon:

> One enters interiorly by the heart into a movement of revelation. What this dark uncovers is not a new area of knowledge so much as something disturbing about ourselves. A light shines in the unbeliever's dark. This light is beyond the light we are used to. By blinks and dazed glances, eyes are averted and riveted, the stunned unbeliever, like an owl blinded by the sun, catches a gleam. This ray signals the entrance into the dark of a faith.[178]

The change that O'Connor's depicts occurring in her characters and also the type that she hopes to provoke in her readers, occurs through violent and shocking means, but serves to reveal what once was hidden.

"Revelation:" A Close Study of the Process of Edification

"Revelation" is a short story of O'Connor's that was written in 1964, which is also the year that O'Connor passed away.[179] In "Revelation," the main character, Mrs. Rubin Turpin has a life-altering revelation because of a crisis forced upon her, highlighting the edifying truth that is revealed to her. Notions of the holy fool, distortion, and apocalyptic rhetoric help us engage with this story's process of edification.

In "Revelation," O'Connor portrays Mrs. Turpin undergoing an abrupt, powerful shift from start to finish. The story begins in a doctor's waiting room in a Southern town. O'Connor

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[178] Richard Giannone, "Dark Night, Dark Faith: Hazel Motes, The Misfit, and Francis Marion Tarwater," in *Dark Faith: New Essays on Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away,* ed. Susan Srigley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 10-11.
[179] Carol Shloss*, Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Press, 1980), 131.

portrays Mrs. Turpin as a self-righteous, judgmental person who sees with limited vision as her "little bright black eyes took in all the patients," seeing their flaws, but not her own.[180] Mrs. Turpin is seen judging other characters harshly, whether by their clothes, shoes, way of talking, or color of their skin. O'Connor also depicts Mrs. Turpin believing in a rigid social hierarchy, pointing to what keeps her up at night: making a class order consisting of African Americans at the bottom, then white-trash, home owners, home owners and land owners like her and her husband, and finally those who are the wealthiest.[181] Mrs. Turpin is further shown making racist comments about African Americans to others in the waiting room highlighting her ignorance of societal issues, lack of care for others different from her, and all around self-righteous demeanor. For instance, when characters in the waiting room wonder if America should send all African Americans back to Africa, Mrs. Turpin states: "It wouldn't be practical to send them back to Africa . . . They wouldn't want to go. They got it too good here."[182] The atmosphere of the waiting room is shown to be full of laughter at racist jokes and conversations containing extremely derogatory comments. O'Connor also shows her audience how Mrs. Turpin does not see her own flaws, as she only sees: "a respectable, hardworking, church-going woman."[183] The dramatic irony that O'Connor employs mirrors the kind that Leontius uses in *The Life of Symeon;* the audience knows the true disposition of the main characters throughout the story. O'Connor further allows us to see Mrs. Turpin's private thoughts, revealing her true character:

> She never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black, trash or decent. And of all she had to be thankful for, she was most thankful that this was so. If Jesus had said, "You call be high society and have all the money you want and be thin and svelte-like, but you can't be a good woman with it," she would have had to say, "Well don't make me that then. Make me a good woman and it don't matter what

[180] Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," *Philosophy of Human Experience* (2004-05): 1, accessed March 31, 2020, https://www.ohio.k12.ky.us/userfiles/1153/Classes/7791/OConner%20Revelation.pdf.
[181] O'Connor, "Revelation," 6.
[182] O'Connor, "Revelation," 13.
[183] O'Connor, "Revelation," 24.

> else, how fat or how ugly or how poor!" Her heart rose. He had not made her a n. or white-trash or ugly! He had made her herself and given her a little of everything. Jesus, thank you! she said. Thank you thank you![184]

Mrs. Turpin is thankful to not be the 'other,' implying that she believes being anyone other than herself is inferior. Further, although Mrs. Turpin is shown to observe mostly superficial attributes of other people, O'Connor emphasizes Mrs. Turpin's worry about being "a good woman," claiming that is all that matters to her. However, O'Connor reveals Mrs. Turpin's true disposition when she vocalizes her interior thoughts to the waiting room: "I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is!' It could have been different!"[185]

As these words leave Mrs. Turpin's mouth, she is met by a holy fool, Mary Grace, who physically assaults her. In "Revelation," Mary Grace is described as a grotesque character. From the first time Mrs. Turpin lays eyes on her, she is called "ugly."[186] O'Connor further focuses on Mary Grace's eyes, as they continue to stare at Mrs. Turpin throughout the story, making her uncomfortable and suggesting that this girl *sees* her in a way that others cannot.[187] O'Connor allows us to see Mrs. Turpin's worry growing about Mary Grace's mysterious stare: "She was looking at her as if she had known and disliked her all her life-all of Mrs. Turpin's life, it seemed too, not just all the girl's life."[188] Besides being off-putting and mysterious, O'Connor also casts Mary Grace as the outsider of the waiting room as she does not join the conversation, laugh at the racist jokes, or respond warmly to Mrs. Turpin like the other characters do. Instead, Mary

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[184] Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," *Philosophy of Human Experience* (2004-05): 15, accessed March 31, 2020, https://www.ohio.k12.ky.us/userfiles/1153/Classes/7791/OConner%20Revelation.pdf. Note: N. refers to an extremely derogatory term. In O'Connor's stories, she uses this term for the purpose of depicting the realities of Southern life during the time she wrote, 1940's-1960's. She further uses this term to expose the horrid nature of racist society, with the hopes that her readers will change their beliefs regarding race. There are opposing viewpoints on O'Connor's treatment of race in her stories, however. For more on issues of O'Connor and race, see Angela Alaimo O'Donnell's book *Radical Ambivalence: Race in Flannery O'Connor*.
[185] O'Connor, "Revelation," 19.
[186] O'Connor, "Revelation," 4.
[187] O'Connor, "Revelation," 8.
[188] O'Connor, "Revelation," 13.

Grace just stares with intensity at Mrs. Turpin. Additionally, O'Connor shows that Mary Grace attends college in the Northeast, differing significantly from Southern culture. O'Connor chooses this strange, outcast character to deliver a violent blow to Mrs. Turpin:

> The book struck her directly, over her left eye. It struck almost at the same instant that she realized the girl was about to hurl it. Before she could utter a sound, the raw face came crashing across the table toward her, howling. The girl's fingers sank like clamps the soft flesh of her neck. She heard the mother cry out and Claud shout, "Whoa!" There was an instant when she was certain that she was about to be in an earthquake.[189]

In this climatic moment, Mary Grace is shown to be a wild, raving creature by O'Connor's description of her as having a "raw face," "howling," and whose "fingers sank like clamps." Mary Grace clearly shakes Mrs. Turpin's world. O'Connor even shows the doctor injecting her with a tranquilizing drug in order to control her.[190] After the physical attack, Mary Grace also verbally attacks Mrs. Turpin:

> Then she leaned forward until she was looking directly into the fierce brilliant eyes. There was no doubt in her mind that the girl did know her, know her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition. "What you got to say to me?" she asked hoarsely and held her breath, waiting, as for a revelation. The girl raised her head. Her gaze locked with Mrs. Turpin's. "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog," she whispered.[191]

The "fierce brilliant eyes" contrast with Mrs. Turpin's "little bright black eyes" from the beginning of the story that seem to take in little light, while Mary Grace's eyes are described by O'Connor as containing beaming light.[192] O'Connor also implies that Mary Grace knows Mrs. Turpin in a way that she cannot fathom, adding more mystery to the situation. Mary Grace's words are then shown to cut into Mrs. Turpin, illuminating her sinful nature that was hidden behind her self-righteousness. Besides O'Connor's description of Mary Grace as seen through

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[189] Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," *Philosophy of Human Experience* (2004-05): 19, accessed March 31, 2020, https://www.ohio.k12.ky.us/userfiles/1153/Classes/7791/OConner%20Revelation.pdf.
[190] O'Connor, "Revelation," 20.
[191] O'Connor, "Revelation," 21.
[192] O'Connor, "Revelation," 1.

Mrs. Turpin's thoughts, other characters in the story also call her "lunatic," casting her in the light of the holy fool.[193]

Immediately after the physical assault, O'Connor explains that Mrs. Turpin's "vision was narrowed," but soon after, her vision becomes expanded.[194] O'Connor depicts Mrs. Turpin's rage towards the end of the story where she questions God, asking why the event in the waiting room happened to her. How could she, the righteous woman she is, also be a dirty hog, and consequently, how could the social hierarchy she so fervently believes in be inverted in an instant like that?[195] She finally shrieks: "Who do you think you are?"[196] After this tirade, O'Connor shows Mrs. Turpin being overwhelmed by a divine presence that seems to grasp her:

> She raised her hands from the side of the pen in a gesture hieratic and profound. A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were tumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black n. in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They, alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces even their virtues were being burned away. She lowered hands and gripped the rail of the hog pen, her eyes small but fixed unblinkingly on what lay ahead. In a moment the vision faded but she remained where she was.[197]

The vision that O'Connor presents Mrs. Turpin with is an example of bifocal vision as Mrs. Turpin is simultaneously in the human realm and being illuminated by the Divine through the vision she receives. This vision is the result of the violent invasion of grace that occurred earlier

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[193] Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," *Philosophy of Human Experience* (2004-05): 23, accessed March 31, 2020, https://www.ohio.k12.ky.us/userfiles/1153/Classes/7791/OConner%20Revelation.pdf.
[194] O'Connor, "Revelation," 20.
[195] O'Connor, "Revelation," 33.
[196] O'Connor, "Revelation," 33.
[197] O'Connor, "Revelation," 34-35.

in the waiting room. Further, O'Connor calls attention to the eyes once again, claiming that "a visionary light settled in her eyes." They are no longer dark but are filled with a light that implies that she can now see more clearly. O'Connor creates a vision that dismantles Mrs. Turpin's obsession with hierarchy and replaces it with the idea that all- African Americans, white-trash, lunatics, her- are children of God climbing to the heavens. They are not free from sin and neither is she- all are humbled before God. Yet the vision seen here extends beyond the revelation of Mrs. Turpin's true disposition as a sinner. The radical vision lies in the idea that despite all being sinners, all are also children of God who receive divine grace, a bold statement that binds humanity together. In realizing this truth, Mrs. Turpin is edified beyond realizing her own flaws; she is also exposed to the radical, cosmic significance of redemption being meant for all humankind. O'Connor ends the piece soon after, potentially leaving readers with a sense of startlement and wonder, inviting them to ponder about the story's bearing on their own lives.

Influenced by her Christian faith, O'Connor wrote stories for the purpose of edifying her readers, especially those who lived in the South during the Civil Rights Movement and who did not have faith in God. Through employing the character of the holy fool, especially through using techniques of grotesqueness and distortion, she challenges her audience much like Leontius does in *The Life of Symeon*. O'Connor's writing reveals that the process of edification, holding importance in the Christian tradition, is still found in literature today. Yet, it is rare to come by, and she amplifies it through violence being used, especially more so than comedy. It takes bold writers to provoke questions in us that startle and expose, urging us to think critically about the ways in which we live.

Concluding Thoughts

We have seen the harshness found in literature that intends to edify. O'Connor's short stories and Leontius' hagiographic text use techniques that can be perceived as too foolish, dark, or violent. Yet, through reading these texts, we are asked to grapple with the strange notions of fools being holy and violence preceding grace. As readers, sometimes we need to engage more intently with absurdity and violence, even if we are less inclined to do so.

Then, we might still be left pondering, why would the monk leave the comfort and safety of society to suffer in the desert? Or, why would a hagiographer and modern writer create literature that does not function to please readers, but rather to radically challenge them? There is a common thread running through the aspiration to be edified like a desert monk or to edify as a hagiographer, and that is love. A kind of desert love that cultivates beauty from pain, that challenges us to become more thoughtful human beings, and that ultimately meets us with grace, often an unexpected or violent invasion of it. David Foster Wallace points to the love of writers that echoes this kind of desert love: "It seems like the big distinction between good art and so-so art lies somewhere in the art's heart's purpose, the agenda of the consciousness behind the text. It's got something to do with love. With having the discipline to talk out of the part of yourself that can love instead of the part that just wants to be loved."[198] Perhaps, to edify someone, is to burden them out of love.

[198] David Foster Wallace, "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace," interview by Larry McCaffery, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13/2 (Summer 1993): 16.

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