O’Conner’s Literature Vault

Impenetrable by force, beneath lock and key, literature is a *vault*. Concealed within each work is a complex code; one intricately decrypts this code in hopes of detail - treasure. The gems may be small in size, yet vital in comprehension. It is through Thomas C. Foster’s informative novel – rather map – How to Read Literature Like a Professor, that you acquire the open-sesame of literature. By composing a collection of logical philosophies relating to all genres, Foster initiates the transition from a novice reader to a skilled decipherer. He urges readers to dissect poems, novels, and short stories more critically. A wide array of Foster’s *­codes* can be applied to Flannery O’Conner’s perplexing *vault*, “A Good Man Is Hard To Find,” in which you crack the code of a corrupt grandmother’s seemingly innocent façade.

Encrypted within Flannery O’Connor’s, “A Good Man Is Hard To Find,” is an abundance of irony. Throughout the piece, the grandmother is shelled beneath “white cotton gloves,” shaded with a “navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim,” and draped in “a navy blue dress with a small white dot on the print” (O’Connor, 2). Accompanying these white accents were her “white organdy” cuffs and collar (O’Conner, 2) . Foster stresses that the irony established here may not have been “planned,” rather “deflected from the expected meaning” (Foster, 238). It is inferable that one who wears white possesses an essence of purity and innocence; however, the grandmother’s charm is rather persuasive and corrupt. She begins by slyly proposing the idea of traveling to Florida, her desired vacation destination, so the children

will not be deprived of “see[ing] different parts of the world and be[ing] broad” (O’Conner, 1). Rather than feeling genuine concern for the children, the motive was to grant her personal wish, portraying her egotism. She is merely infatuated with herself. Following the ill-fated circumstances of a crash and equally tragic acquaintance of the fleeting felon, she uttered no fear or distress for her family members as they each endured pistol shots. The grandmother muttered solely in self-regard, “You wouldn’t shoot a lady, would you?”(O’Conner, 8) Tracing, dissecting, and comprehending the irony of the disturbed grandmother wearing white, is vital in cracking the literature vault.

Also heavily infused, and a crucial component to deciphering the code, is geography. Throughout the Wesley family’s excursion, the surrounding scenery, “Stone Mountain blue granite that in some places came up to both sides of the highway; the brilliant red clay banks slightly streaked with purple” (O’Conner, 2), and “a red depression with the dust-coated trees looking down on them” (O’Conner, 6), shared a vastly similar concept: low altitude. The towering mountain range, downward sloping banks, and soaring jungle of trees unite to signify the security and comfort that closeness to nature provides. Rather than being secluded and distant from society, Foster stresses that low elevations offer “people,” and “crowds” (Foster, 173). Following a brutal car accident and an upsurge in elevation, the Wesley family’s scenery rose to new peeks. They were now vulnerable as “the road was about ten feet above, and they could only see the tops of trees” (O’Conner, 7). Remoteness is unsafe. Thomas Foster’s philosophy on geography argues that high elevation implies “isolation,” and “death” (Foster, 173). O’Conner

strategically codes the treasure – the plot complication - in a frighteningly secluded region, merely for meaning and purpose.

Locked within the literature vault is another crucial treasure: climate.

How?

O’Conner intentionally establishes the plot complication in the midst of “the hot afternoon” (O’Conner, 5), to depict the rising tension in the atmosphere - the *heat* of the moment. This hour is meaningful as Foster’s theory on climate rings true, “It’s never just rain. This goes for snow, sun, warmth, and cold” (Foster, 75). Following the assassination of each family member, the grandmother – seemingly careless of the circumstances - was left accompanied by The Misfit. The once-intense climate then transitioned to, “not a cloud in the sky, nor any sun” (O’Conner, 12). Cloudless skies and lack of sun often signify a sense of murkiness and dreariness within the atmosphere. Rather than a sudden plot, the grandmother’s upcoming death becomes known to the reader. By intertwining this perplexing case of climate within the plot, O’Conner “provides additional richness to the literary dish” (Foster, 244).

Discovering and deciphering the codes from each piece of literature – each vault – is the sole method to cracking the code. Rather than passively skimming the lines of “A Good Man Is Hard To Find,” one must dissect purpose from within the lines. Foster’s theories commonly arise because they are applicable to all genres. By deciphering each piece of literature’s code, you achieve a level of critical thinking and analyzing. You have unbolted the vault, revealing the

innards, the gems. Foster passionately stresses the method to finding your treasure as something one acquires through the practice of dissection.