

SOAR Assignment 4: “Misfits in American Fiction” – Bruce Weiner

Ernest Hemingway,

“The Battler” - <http://garretvoorhees.com/uploads/htmlreader/thebattler.html>

“Big Two-Hearted River” - <http://www.olearyweb.com/classes/english10012/readings/twohearted.html>

Flannery O’Connor,

“A Good Man is Hard to Find” - <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~surette/goodman.html>

(NOTE: *If you did not receive hard-copy handouts of the stories and would like them, contact Bruce at 854-2097.*)

Some things to consider:

1. In “The Battler” the young Nick Adams is identified in some respects with the boxer he meets. In what ways do they appear similar and different (as misfits or otherwise)? The reasons why the boxer (and perhaps his negro handler) are misfits seem obvious, but how are their situations and experiences relevant to the young protagonist?
2. In “Big Two-Hearted River,” Nick Adams (now an adult) appears to be retreating from life and seeking some kind of relief (like Rip Van Winkle?) in fishing. What can we infer from his actions and thoughts about his reasons for escaping? What is he seeking (or seeking to accomplish) , if anything, in going fishing? Does he succeed?
3. Do you see any significance in the 2-part structuring of “Big Two-Hearted River”?
4. In rebelling against or violating the norms of American society, the misfit character often verges on criminality (Bartleby is jailed for vagrancy, Wakefield might be tried for desertion, and the Man of the Crowd appears “the type and genius of deep crime’). O’Connor’s “Misfit” is the most blatant example of this anti-social behavior. What makes him a misfit?—that is, what accounts for his attitudes and actions? What are we to make of his account of why he is a criminal?
5. What does O’Connor suggest about the norms that the Misfit violates, represented in large measure by the ordinary, “innocent” family he kills?