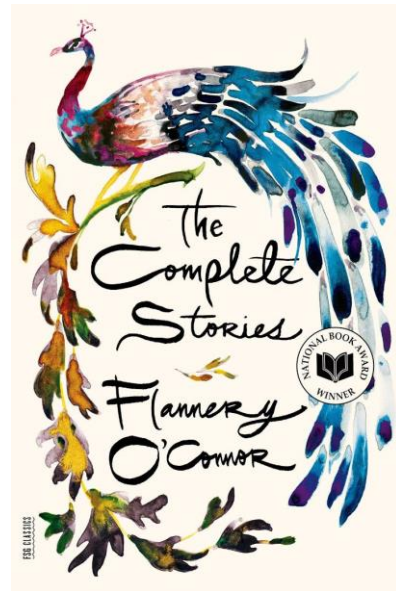


Introduction and Background Information

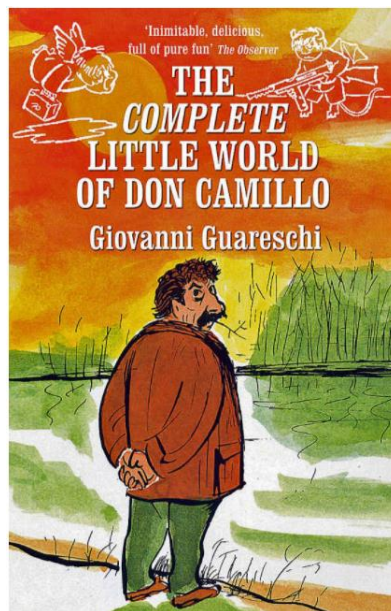
We will be discussing two short stories about baptisms. Both are written by Catholic authors – one American and one Italian – and both were published in the mid-20th century. As background I've also included a chapter from Thomas C. Foster's book *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. It is useful for its discussion of the often more metaphorical use of baptism in literature, especially in more recent fiction.

About the Readings



"The River" is a short story by the American author Flannery O'Connor. It is one of the ten stories included in her short story collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, published in 1955. A Roman Catholic, much of O'Connor's work focuses on Christian concepts of pride, sin, and redemption.

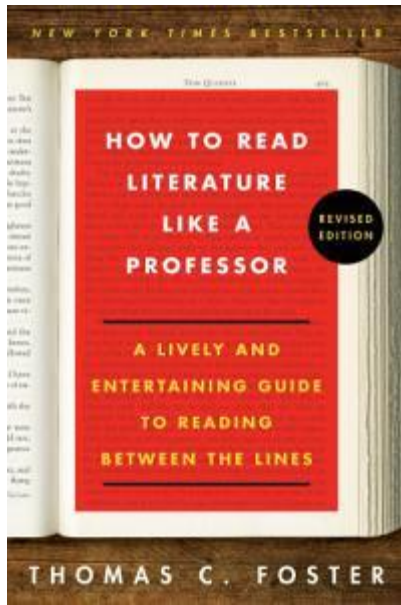
Flannery O'Connor is famous for writing in a genre known as "Southern Gothic." Common themes in Southern Gothic literature include deeply flawed, disturbing or eccentric characters, decayed or derelict settings, grotesque situations, and other sinister events relating to or stemming from poverty, alienation, crime, or violence.



"The Baptism" is chapter two of *The Complete Little World of Don Camillo* by Giovanni Guareschi. Originally published in 1948, the book is a collection of comic short stories featuring a pugnacious Italian priest named Don Camillo. The other main characters of the stories are Peppone, the communist mayor of Don Camillo's village, and *Il Cristo*, the crucified Christ statue hanging at the front of Don Camillo's church, who talks to Don Camillo and offers him advice as he deals with his parishioners.

The stories are set in a small, unnamed village in the Valley of the Po, a large floodplain in northern Italy, in 1947.

The author, Giovanni Guareschi was a political cartoonist and satirist who was often in trouble for offending the authorities for his comic depictions of them; be they Nazis, Fascists, or Communists. His work was wildly popular with the average citizen, though, and he gained international fame



How to Read Literature Like a Professor: a Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines by Thomas C. Foster.

“What does it mean when a literary hero travels along a dusty road? When he hands a drink to his companion? When he's drenched in a sudden rain shower? Ranging from major themes to literary models, narrative devices, and form, Thomas C. Foster provides us with a broad overview of literature—a world where a road leads to a quest, a shared meal may signify a communion, and rain, whether cleansing or destructive, is never just a shower—and shows us how to make our reading experience more enriching, satisfying, and fun.” – from the back cover.

Thomas C. Foster is a professor of English at the University of Michigan-Flint. He is the author of *Twenty-Five Books That Shaped America* and several books on twentieth-century British and Irish fiction and poetry.

Foster's chapter “**If She Come Up, It's Baptism**” is included here as background reading for the use of baptism as metaphor and plot device in fiction.