The Folly of Self Help

O’Connor’s *Revelation* is filled with many strong willed people. This, however, is a serious problem when it comes to educating Mrs. Turpin about her incorrect mindset.

Mrs. Turpin like so think to herself; she thinks about how great it is to be in her position and she is thankful. But no amount of her own self-assessment can break her out of her ignorance because she just makes herself more strong willed. **The key to education is both O’Connor’s *Revelation* and in Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* is other people.** Through other people, not one’s own justification, can someone truly see clearly.

Mrs. Turpin is above most everybody in the doctor’s office. The other people that she sees in it include some white-trash people, some common people, and some old people. The only person whom Mrs. Turpin shows any regards towards is the pleasant lady, who is the girl’s mother. Much of the time she spends in the doctor’s is spent ridiculing the white-trash lady and Negroes both verbally and in her head. To her, status was everything. She even spends her nights contemplating status so she can fall asleep.

Like other characters in other writings of O’Connor, Mrs. Turpin’s “perception of the world is controlled by…limited powers of sight, *(Maida, 31).*” One example of this is that she sees herself as a saint who always tries to help the less fortunate, when in reality, she is always judgmental of others. We are given reason to believe, early on in the story,
that what Mrs. Turpin perceives as worthwhile and important, really counts for nothing.

This is shown after she describes her nights trying to fall asleep and she contemplates race. “Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling in roiling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed in together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven,” (O’Connor, 196). Her notions about the importance of status are shown to be faulty because at the end we are all headed to the same ends of death, and it doesn’t matter what status you are, because that can’t save you.

Mrs. Turpin, though she likes to think of herself a lot, cannot think herself out of being judgmental and stereotypical of class. In fact, she is quite unwilling to recognize that she has a problem. In Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, people who had left the cave and had seen the sun try to go back into the cave to show the people who are still bound, the light. In *Revelation*, the person to lead Mrs. Turpin out of the cave of her ignorance is Mary Grace. Also in the allegory, when someone is brought into the light, they look back at what used to be familiar and realize that it is not quite so familiar after all. In this case, what used to be familiar is her judgment towards other classes of people, or More specifically for her, the white trash lady and her Negro servant. Since she is unable to bring herself out of her own rut of arrogance, other people are necessary to educate her.

We learn from Mary Grace’s mother that Mary Grace is being educated in the north. She has been exposed to the light, or the knowledge that racism and self-glorification due to status is pointless and detrimental. Plato has much to say about a person who sees the light and is returning back to the cave, who is Mary Grace in this case. He says that, “You must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are
unwilling to descend to human affairs,” (Plato, 4). He also questions if “there is anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself (or herself) in a ridiculous manner,” (Plato, 4). Mary Grace’s attack on Mrs. Turpin seems more understandable when looked through Plato’s eyes. It is not enough to know the truth, “we have to try to make somebody else see what we see, because then if we get a whole bunch of people realizing something is wrong and has to be changed, then we can take action,” (Miller, 1). It wasn’t just necessary for Mary Grace, it was necessary for Mrs. Turpin. Mrs. Turpin was so completely unwilling to think that she was wrong about class that it took a smack from a book to get her to even think about it.

Patricia Maida, in a publication about Flannery O’Connor, describes the scene in which Mary Grace throws the book at Mrs. Turpin superbly. Mrs. Turpin started to see the big picture after getting hit and when she looked to Mary Grace for answers, she was told that she was a wart hog from hell (Maida, 35). Mrs. Turpin was really rattled by these words; she didn’t want to think that she was a wart hog from hell. After hearing the message and not wanting to believe it, Mrs. Turpin looked up when she was on the ground and she sees the white trash lady who is now raving about Mary Grace being a lunatic. Mrs. Turpin would have been horribly annoyed by the white trash lady’s insistence to talk, but she was too numb in her head to talk back to her. And when she later goes home, she tells the Negro workers about her day at the doctor’s office. All of the workers were kind, interested, and caring of Mrs. Turpin, and because of this, Mrs. Turpin stormed off. Through the white trash lady and the Negro workers, she was able to see what her mindset was before Mary Grace brought her out of the cave and how wrong
it was. Had she only heard the message from Mary Grace but had not seen the workers and the white trash lady, she would never have changed because she wouldn’t be able to see the faults inside of herself. This is why these people were necessary for Mrs. Turpin’s education.

After Mary Grace gave her the message and the Negro workers and the white trash lady had reconfirmed the validity of that message, she was then able to finally ask questions about the truth of the matter. With out them, she would never have begun to question her view of status and whether it was incorrect. And because she began to think and question, she eventually received a vision of the people moving into heaven, in which she was the last in line. This gave her sight of the truth, but, again, it wouldn’t have been possible without other people. This is why teachers are so important; knowledge can be self-taught, but wisdom comes from others.