

"a good man is hard to find" by flannery o'connor essay sample

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“A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor is a short story that depicts a family road trip to Florida that ends in an abysmal tragedy when they meet the Misfit, a remorseless convict who has escaped from prison. In the beginning, the Grandmother is obsessed with everything worldly and superficial. She is completely focused on herself in relation to how others think of her. Towards the end of the story, the grandmother finds herself in ominous dialogue with The Misfit. In the story, The Misfit represents a quasi-final judgment. He does this by acting like a mirror. He lets whatever The Grandmother says bounce right off him. He never agrees nor disagrees with the grandmother, and in the end, he is the one who kills her. At the end of the story, before the Grandmother meets her fate, she has a moment of redemption.

She finally distinguishes The Misfit for who he really is, not a psychopathic killer on the loose; but a person just like herself. The Misfit, being a man who is not created from social class; he is a simple human being just like the grandmother. At this point she sees herself in relation to everyone else. She finally realizes that she is not made by her class. Society makes the class, and she just fits into it. She shows this by claiming that The Misfit could be one of her own children. This story is meant to be interpreted as a parable, whereby O’Connor made skilful use of symbolism to bring about messages such as the social-superiority and the lack of spiritual faith that exist

amongst common people; and the grace in humans is exposed, only when facing adverse and fatal circumstances.

O'Connor makes use of symbolism through her characters to represent an abstraction of social-superiority, an idea of self awareness of one's place in a system of social classes. The issues of this, class-consciousness, were brought up through the distinctive character of the grandmother, who is the protagonist of the story. On the surface, we see the characteristics of the grandmother portrayed as a "good" woman, having faith and trust in God and doing right in her life. However, sin lies within her own soul, whereby neglectfully believes she is better than others that surround her. Viewing appearance and self-image as important, which is reflected through her refinement, the grandmother wears white cotton gloves, straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim, navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print and the collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace.

Through attire, the grandmother implies that people who looked at her will know that she is a respectable and noble lady. Repetitive use of the color "white" is symbolic as it reflects the way the grandmother perceives and associates herself with flawlessness, decency, and purity. "she had pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once she was a lady." (p. 498) This quote, from the short story, also foreshadows the incident that unfold with the Misfit at the end of the story. The grandmother also predicts that she would have done well if she had married Mr.

Teagarden, " a gentleman and had bought Coca-Cola stock when it first came out and that he had died only a few years ago, a very wealthy man" (p. 500). This clearly shows the grandmother's superior self-image by associating wealth with upper class citizens.

In contrast, while June Star notices the black child who lacks " britches," the grandmother states that the blacks did not have things like the whites do, suggesting that blacks were an inferior people that lived in poverty, in the presents of her grandchildren. " He probably didn't have any," the grandmother explained. " Little niggers in the country don't have things like we do." We see how the grandmother fails to treat the blacks equally as human, entirely based on their social status, as she perceives them as a lifeless object, " a picture".

Apart from using the protagonist, O'Connor also uses June Star, the spoiled and stuck-up grand-daughter, and John Wesley, the loud, obnoxious, eight-year-old grand-son, who both symbolize class-consciousness that exist, even in the younger generation. We see June Star looking down to the lower-class whites by giving a rude commentary to the wife of Red Sammy Butts, the owner of the Tower restaurant. " No I certainly wouldn't," June-Star said. " I wouldn't live in a broken-down place like this for a million bucks." (p. 500) when gently asked if June Star would like to be her little girl. It is also interesting to note that O'Connor highlights her concerns of the fact that social discrimination is beginning to spread even from people of the same community, that is, among the whites themselves.

The little girl also depicts her social-superiority in the story when she commented on her refusal to marry a man that will only bring her a watermelon on Saturday (p. 2118). Even at a near-death situation, June Star commented that she does not want to hold hands with Hiram as he reminds her of a pig (p. 2125). Just like her grandmother, they are so concerned about status or class of people around them that they fail to examine the flaws within themselves.

Flaws such as the lack of spiritual faith is another issue that O'Connor attempts to convey to the readers, which is almost certainly intentional to signify its irony. The lack of spiritual faith is symbolised through the use of images of clouds several times in the story. O'Connor had intended to use the cloud to represent the grandmother's superficial faith. "Ain't a cloud in the sky" "Don't see no sun but don't see no cloud neither" (p. 2123). "The Misfit said looking up again at the cloudless sky" (p. 2124). "... her face smiling up at the cloudless sky" (p. 2126). The spiritual unawareness or her empty spiritual faith is symbolised by the empty sky. Apart from the images of clouds, another suggestion of the lack of spiritual faith and the straying away from believing in God by following the wrong path, is shown by the family's journey in the story; their car that strayed away from the main path to unimportant roads, which finally led to a tragedy.

O'Connor also used symbolism through the character of the grandmother to exhibit her concern of the lack of spiritual faith whereby she depicts the grandmother as one who takes great care of her appearance and dresses herself with "purple spray of flowers so that people would recognise her as a

woman just in case she dies" (p. 2117). It reflects the grandmother treating death so lightly, symbolising her lack of spiritual faith. Her superficial appearance also symbolises her superficial faith in God. This however, changed when she realises that she could not escape death. The grandmother is perceived as one who is not ready for death, offering money to the Misfit hoping he will spare her life. When she realises that it does not work, the grandmother turns to religion, attempting to be a talker, preaching to him and asking him to pray; though what she says does not make much sense after all, symbolising the shallowness of her faith. We can also imply her lack of spiritual faith as her belief in God is not as apparent throughout the story until her confrontation with the Misfit.

" A Good Man is Hard to Find" is certainly a very special story which teaches many valuable moral and religious lessons through O'Connor's explicit use of symbolism to exhibit concerns of the lack of spiritual faith and the class consciousness amongst people. We saw how O'Connor specifically used the grandmother and June Star's character to highlight the people's lack of spiritual faith and class-consciousness. O'Connor also used other symbols such as the colour white, images like clouds and objects like the purple spray of cloth violets to represent various abstractions, which is being discussed this essay, specifically issues on the lack of spiritual faith and class-consciousness that exist in human.