

A good man is hard to
find essay



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A Good Man is Hard to Find is one of the most successful works written by Flannery O'Connor. The short story was written in 1953 and published together with other works she had done earlier under the same title. This short story best epitomizes O'Connor's work, her themes, and her style of writing. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how A Good Man is Hard to Find best brings out themes and styles that characterize O'Connor's writings.

A Good Man is Hard to Find portrays a disparity of violent action with hilarious and carefully created characters and a philosophy that underlines her staunch Roman Catholic faith. The short story is disturbing and entertaining at the same time- a feature that characterizes most of O'Connor's writings, notably *Wise Blood*. The story begins on a naïve perspective, but instantly changes when O'Connor introduces a character known as Misfit, a convict who broke out of jail.

Through Misfit, the author examines the Christian perception of grace- that true forgiveness from God can be received just by asking. The Grandmother, a main character in the story, is a petty, bad tempered, and imperious, but receives God's grace before she dies. Despite her mainly negative traits, she treats Misfit as one of her own children. For O'Connor, God's pardon is an energy not controlled by a person, something unmerited, or a moment of revelation.

In A Good Man is Hard to Find, O'Connor explores the theme of grace through her two characters: Misfit and Grandmother. The most observable point on this theme in the story is when Misfit and the Grandmother both receive God's grace despite their many faults, sins, and limitations. Christian

theology teaches that God's gifts are given even to the person least likely to receive them, forgiveness is among these gifts.

Looking at the characters, none of them is worthy of God's grace.

Grandmother deceives her children, controls her son, and whines frequently about the inadequacy of the current and seems unaware of the world around her. She believes that she is superior and is the most appropriate person to judge others, for instance, she orders Misfit to pray yet she cannot even come up with an articulate prayer. Misfit, for his part, is a convicted murderer who escaped from prison.

Despite the two characters' flaws, God grants them forgiveness, signifying that even persons with similar traits as Misfit and Grandmother can receive God's salvation.

O'Connor's was raised in a Roman Catholic background and she has reflected this upbringing in most of her writings, frequently drawing a lot of debate due to her callous representation of religion. Although her works are frequently violent in nature, they are based on her conviction and divinity.

Besides, her characters frequently face violent or ruthless situations that force them into actions that awaken or change their faith, such as Grandmother in *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. For O'Connor, writing was a way of expressing her Christian faith on paper. We observe Misfit and Grandmother undergo a moment of grace and their sins are pardoned; this is precisely what the Roman Catholic teaches, or Christianity in general.

Many of the writings by O'Connor contain scenes of epiphany, a moment when a character receives pardon, or God's forgiveness. This style is evident in her writings such as Good Country People and A Good Man is Hard to Find. Throughout this story, O'Connor expresses how hard it can be for a non-Christian to change his/her ways. The moment of grace (epiphany) takes place when "The Grandmother's head cleared for an instant" and she "saw Misfit's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry" (O'Connor, pp. 374-375).

She was moved with Misfit's desire to be assured of actions that Jesus did and those he did not do, and realized that she was responsible for him. She tells her "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children" (O'Connor, pp. 375). Grandmother demonstrates a moment of grace, despite her earlier acts of meanness, and receives God's grace.

Symbolism is a style that O'Connor uses in most of her stories. As a writer of fiction, combined with her Catholic background, she preferred to use symbols to express her faith and beliefs through her characters. A number of works such as Good Country People make use of symbolism. In A Good Man is Hard to Find, there are a number of symbols. The Misfit's portrait of Jesus and Grandmother's epiphany are representations of her religious beliefs.

Grandmother has a hat that she frequently wears to show that she is a woman, however, this hat represents her distorted moral principles. While preparing for the journey with other family members, she wears her tie so that in case of an accident, it would be known that she was a woman. She is very indifferent to the fact that she will be dead by then and other persons,

including her three grandchildren, would possibly be dead. Her only concern is her position as a woman, an absurd reason that exposes her meanness and distorted moral codes.

Irony is a common feature in Flannery O'Connor's works, and *A Good Man is Hard to Find* is no exception. For example, Bailey's mother pictures herself as an upright woman, but her actions prove otherwise. She dresses excessively, is deceitful, uses racist terms, and resents America's positive contribution to Europe after war.

In fact, she foolishly utters that she knows Misfit. We only know her true picture when the story takes a disastrous turn. Eventually, she is killed by Misfit, whom she had claimed to know, even though she dies after redeeming herself by reaching out to her killer.

O'Connor's writings are frequently characterized by extreme use of violence and this has led critics to question her Christian background. Most instances of violent are normally carried out by narcissistic characters with depressing lives. *A Good Man is Hard to Find* portrays many scenes of extreme violence and these are committed by Misfit, the murderer who escaped from prison.

Misfit shoots Grandmother as well as Bailey's mother. However, the violence serves a role: it makes Grandmother and Bailey's mother to realize how vile their mean behavior towards others was. Ultimately, we see both women changing their behavior before their deaths, moreover, Grandmother's epiphany forms the climax of the story.

O'Connor, Flannery. *A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories*. California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.