

Differences between northern and southern writers essay sample

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This paper is about four different American authors. Two are from the American South and two are from the American North. Their different styles of writing American literature stories are quite obvious. A goal is to point out the differences in these stories and what drove these authors to write these stories. Each region of our country has its own set of values that are unique to that section of the country. These values influence the characteristics of the life and the people of a particular region. By analyzing them, we will see certain themes and the similarities within the regions. While Southern writers focus on their proud heritage, every aspect of being "Southern" and wishing things could be the way they used to be. Northern writers tend to focus on Puritanism religion and beliefs. They looked forward to their religious freedom and moving forward from the past. They had no desire for things to remain the way they used to be. Southerners are described as family-oriented, friendly, hospitable and loyal. They are said to be more religious, secure and approachable. Southerners also are thought to be naive, culturally deprived and not as competitive.

Words like energetic and aggressive are used to characterize Northerners. They are perceived to be more sophisticated, fashionable, and more culturally aware. Northerners also are viewed as callous, skeptical and suspicious. Due to the stressful environment of the urban North people are more afraid, less friendly and less open to others. Northerners, particularly Puritans, believed that life was seen as a test; failure led to eternal damnation and hellfire, and success to heavenly bliss. This world was an arena of constant battle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan, a formidable enemy with many disguises. Many Puritans excitedly awaited the

“ millennium,” when Jesus would return to Earth, end human misery, and give them 1, 000 years of peace and prosperity. Southern writer; William Faulkner, with his American classic, “ A Rose for Emily” and Flannery O’Connor’s, “ A Good Man is Hard to Find”, compared to Northern writers Nathaniel Hawthorne and Andre Dubus. Geographic’s and life experiences are driving factors and motivators for many authors.

Southern writers use familiar elements in their stories, including; the landscape and the people, “ characters,” who live on it, their food, religion, music, politics, folkways, their sometimes bizarre behavior, and, obviously, the language, not just dialect but imaginative phrases, a sense that the writer’s love of language is the very air he or she breathes. Great writer such as; Wharton, James, Hemingway, Fitzgerald have come out of the North— New York, and the Midwest, but they did not set out to express the character and spirit of those regions. There is no Northern literature as such. There is no such thing as northerners, except in the minds of Southerners; however, southerners are considered such by both the North and the South.

William Faulkner saw the south as a nation by itself. He described the South through families who often reappear from story to story. These reappearing characters usually grow older and cannot cope with the social change: a common theme (disillusionment) of writers of that time. Faulkner writes with an uncommon method of timing sequences. He often makes the reader piece together events from a random and fragmentary series of impressions experienced by different narrators. An example would be from his story, “ A Rose for Emily”. In this story; is more rightly called “ first people” than “ first

person.” Usually referring to itself as “ we,” the narrator speaks sometimes for the men of Jefferson, sometimes for the women, and often for both. It also spans three generations of Jeffersonians, including the generation of Miss Emily’s father, Miss Emily’s generation, and the “ newer generation,” made up of the children of Miss Emily’s contemporaries. Many of Faulkner’s stories took place in an imaginable county in Mississippi called Yoknapatawpha County, which was similar to his home in Oxford Mississippi. He writes about the personal conflict of Emily Grierson and her Southern identity in “ A Rose for Emily”.

This story takes place in 1931; Faulkner begins and ends this story with death. He talks about the ruins of the South by dilapidated buildings, such as, “ It was a big squarish frame house that had once been white..... But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Emily’s house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps - an eyesore among eyesores.” (84) He mentions, “ And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.” This seems to signify how he misses the old south, also evident when he writes about Emily. The story tells of a time honored agreement between Emily and Colonel Sartoris, where Emily doesn’t have to pay property taxes. As time goes by and new people are in positions of authority for the town, the agreement gets forgotten. They keep trying try to get Emily to pay, but she is having nothing to do with that.

The story bounces back and forth in time over a span of 74 years. This story tells of stubbornness of some Southerners to conform to change. Isolation is a key theme in this story. Emily becomes a recluse during the storyline. The story also gives us a hint of someone who is deeply conflicted inside. After her overbearing father dies Emily refuses to admit it for three days. Years later, she takes on a lover, Homer. Emily's dating relationship is looked at as a blemish upon Emily's Aristocratic persona of the past. Again this shows a sign of stubbornness among people. In the end, after Emily's funeral, the townspeople find Homer's corpse in a bed upstairs with an indentation next to him with a long grey hair in it, which suggests that Emily had been lying next to his corpse. Was Emily insane? Did she murder anyone? Do we have compassion for her if she committed a crime? Faulkner allows his readers to draw their own conclusion and gives us much to ponder. Another Southern writer, Flannery O'Connor, although dying at an early age of 39, gave us two novels and several dozen short stories. She almost defined a Genre Known as Southern Gothic, a style commonly used in the American South. This style emphasizes the grotesque, the horrifying and things just plain wrong. It blatantly points out life's horrors.

Her stories are ruthless in their realistic details. Horrible things happen in her stories and for whatever reason, whether it is morbid curiosity, or the suspense of finding out the ending, readers are compelled to keep reading. Grandmothers and families get shot, criminals steal prosthetic limbs, but we still keep reading. Diagnosed with Lupus at an early age, O'Connor wrote like she didn't have time to mess around, blunt honest and straight to the point. As a Roman Catholic, she insisted that all of her stories, in one way or

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another were Christian related. She was uninterested in politics and the Civil Rights Movement. She did not like any of her fellow Southern Gothic writers. " Her stories are challenging because her characters, which initially seem radically different from people we know, turn out to be, somehow connected to us." (362). Her life and stories, like Faulkner's, were centered in the South. She uses the Southern Dialect along with the typical Southern mannerisms. She once said, " She considered herself a descendant of Nathaniel Hawthorne, a New England writer and that she felt more of a kinship with him than any other American. (365).

Her style of writing was like his in the fact that her stories had psychological and spiritual meanings and each story focuses on symbolism. Hawthorne's " The Minister's Black Veil" symbolized that we all have a secret sin and may be able to hide it from people, but we can't hide it from our creator.

O'Connor's " A Good man is Hard to Find" symbolizes Good vs. Evil. Briefly, " A Good Man is Hard to Find" is a 1953 story about a family in the South, going on a road trip with their grandmother, atypical prim and proper Southern Belle. At the time, a group of serial killers led by a man known as the Misfit are on the loose. As fate would have it, the family encounters the killers along a dirt road that the grandmother had asked her son to travel down to see an old house she had remembered from her past. Good and evil are pitted against each other as the grandmother tries to get the Misfit to see that he has good inside of him, only to fail, with the whole family being murdered in the end. There are some religious tones that are evident in this story.

Family is a key theme in this story. There are elements of comedy within a dysfunctional family. They get on each other's nerves, the two bratty kids, the hot-headed father and his wife who is all attending to the baby and the grandmother who stresses the importance of class and society in the South. O'Connor shows us, through the grandmother, the importance of being a "lady" in the South. However she says words like "nigger" and speaks of the 'good ole' days when kids were polite and there were beautiful plantations to visit. She talks about people being trustworthy. O'Connor tells us these things to make us believe that being "good" is associated with coming from a respectable family and acting appropriately according to that social class, all of which is very traditional in the South. This is evident as the grandmother seems to treat goodness mostly as a function of being decent, having good manners, and coming from a family of "the right people." The grandmother says things like; "I know you are a good man. You don't look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from nice people."(373).

The grandmother contradicts her beliefs in many ways, one way being her methods of manipulating people. She wanted to go see a house that she recalled from her memory, but knew the father wouldn't take them to see it, so she gets the kids riled up by talking about it more. She says, "There was a secret panel in the house" (370). This gets the kids even more riled up and finally the father gives in. Then she realizes she remembered wrong, the house was in another state, which she never mentions. Along the way they have an accident and encounter The Misfit. As his accomplices, Bobby Lee and Hiram are killing the family members one by one, the grandmother

pleads with The Misfit to see he has goodness in his heart and that she knows he comes from “ good blood”. She begs him and keeps saying “ Pray! Jesus”! The Grandmother reached up to touch the Misfit on the shoulder and said, “ Why you’re one of my babies, you’re one of my own children!” (377). The Misfit then shot her three times in the chest as this statement shocked him. The Misfit kills the whole family, a trademark ending to Southern Gothic. The first Northern Author is Andre Dubus, Born in Louisiana in 1936.

His early education was by the “ Christian Brothers”, a Catholic religious order in Louisiana that emphasized Literature and writing. He later went to the Marine Corps. Dubus encountered many tragedies in his life including; His daughter being raped, a horrible car accident that left him without a right leg and a useless left leg. After this he battled clinical depression. During these bad times his third wife left him, taking their two children with her. Later he found a deeper religion that he had strayed from. His stories are often tense with violence, anger, tenderness, and guilt; they are populated by characters who struggle to understand and survive their experiences..... (96) His story, “ Killings”, first published in 1979, is set in a blue-collar town in Massachusetts. The story explores the psychology and emotions of a couple, Ruth and Matt Fowler, after their son, Frank, is murdered by a man named Richard Strout. After the murder, Strout made bail and was free to go as he pleased. This really stressed Ruth and Matt, which grew day by day. This leads way to a plot of revenge.

To ease their suffering, Matt becomes a vigilante and serves his own justice for himself and his family. Comparing this murder with the murder in “ A rose

for Emily”, it’s would be easier to sympathize more with Matt than it would be with Emily. Emily’s crime is one of passion and insecurity; she thinks that her lover, Homer Barron, is going to leave her, so she poisons him. We empathize with Emily to some extent, but with matt, Dubus makes us hate Strout by giving us insight of what a bad person he is. We can really sympathize with someone who loses a child and specially a child who has been murdered. Will his actions backfire someday? Will the authorities suspect the ones who have the most motives? Dubus, like so many other authors, leaves the outcome for us to ponder. The next Northern author is Nathaniel Hawthorne. He was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on July 4, 1804. He attended Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine (1821-1824). 19th-century New England writer best known for writing “ The Scarlett Letter”. Many of his works reflect his Puritan background and have high morals. Hawthorne often holds certain moral values up as exemplary and, at the same time, points out that man is failing miserably by not exemplifying them. In fact, he’s often cited as a key player in the “ Dark Romanticism” genre, in which man’s failures and flaws are examined and criticized. He was painfully shy and rarely socialized with anyone other than his beloved wife, Sophia. His fictional stories concentrated on the idea that human nature was fundamentally flawed. The story being compared and analyzes is “ The Birthmark” written in 1843. It speaks to the readers and gives us a very important message, the familiar saying by French Philosopher, Voltaire who was born in 1694. He said, “ Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good”, which means, most of the time, good enough is good enough.

In this story, Aylmer is a late 18th-century scientist who is totally and completely committed to his work. His entire life has been about figuring out the way that nature works, to the detriment of his personal and social life. However, just recently, he has put down his test tubes long enough to marry a beautiful woman, Georgiana. Georgiana is distinctive in that she has a small red birthmark on her cheek in the shape of a tiny hand. To make a short story even shorter, Aylmer tells her that he doesn't like it and dreamed of removing it. Georgiana becomes self-conscious and wishes it to be removed. Aylmer devises a plan to remove it with an elixir which in the end kills her. At the time Hawthorne wrote this story, the scientific method was being glorified Hawthorne set this story 60 years prior to the current time which was in the middle of the Newtonian Era, which was when Science was gaining its momentum. This story suggests that Science does have its limitations. It tells us not to play God, and that people should be thankful for who they are.

Faults and imperfections make individuals who they are. It teaches us not to be obsessed with perfection. Mother Nature shouldn't be messed with. Northern Literature has a strong religious base and a desire to move forward from a time in history or an event that may not have been so popular to these authors. They are quite happy that the past is the past as they look forward to moving on in life. Puritan Ethics often show within the stories of Northern authors. In Hawthorne's, *Young Goodman Brown*, Goodman Brown states, " My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs; and shall I be the first of the name of Brown

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that ever took this path and kept..." (327). Southern authors seem to be bitter toward, not only the North, but the "new South" as well. They miss the way things were. Simply speaking, Southern literature consists of writing about all aspects of the American South.

Certain themes tend to pop up in Southern literature, such as; slavery, the American Civil War and the reconstruction of the South. The conservative culture in the South has been a main focus among many southern authors. Also very important is the significance of family, religion, the community and social life of a person. Southern Authors tend to stress a southern dialect within their stories. Southern accents are typically used. Another issue that is continuously mentioned within Southern literature is the South's troubled history with racial issues. The history of slavery is a driving factor among many Southern authors.

The American South is where slavery was considered normal. It was an everyday part of life, so, not surprising when many Southern authors write about it. Justice is another motivational issue to southern writers; although we do encounter it in Northern literature as well, evident in Dubus' story "Killings". Some southern stories tell about religion and either it's burdens or its rewards that it often brings. Often southern stories are about social class or owning property (land) and the promises it brings. In closing, we see many similarities between northern and southern writers, but there are several themes and qualities that are solely found in each. Geographic's play a huge role in what a story is about. We also see that when an author goes through

certain life experiences, it affects the way they write stories and what they consist of.