

Julie question how at
one point this



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Keith RussellEnglish 10216 January 2017 TheElement of Shock and Surprise Every great story has an element of surprise, shock, or perhaps sometimes both. It is the element of the unexpected happening that engages readers to continue reading a story or a book. If a story is predictable it can make it boring and non-engaging to its readers.

Sometimes a story begins with important background information that influences the way you react to the unexpected shocking or surprising moment in the story and other times the shocking or surprising moment is what defines the theme of the story. Both *Battle Royal* and *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* share a common theme in their elements of shock being very violent. In *Battle Royal* the violent mistreatment of fellow human beings makes the reader question how at one point this treatment was widely accepted as normal. In *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* the reader is left to wonder how a human being could become so monstrous that the violent killing of a whole family, could become medic and pleasuring.

Ultimately it how, us, as the readers, react to the surprise or shock that shapes our opinion and understanding of the story. In past times the readers response to either could have been much different than today. There is an element of surprise in which a story carries more meaning and context but an unexpected event happens in the story which changes how we receive the meaning or context. For example, in Ralph Ellison's short story, *Battle Royal*, there are two main elements of shock. Unlike in some stories the author gave the reader quite a bit of background before he added in the first

element of shock. The story begins with the grandfather's last words, "' Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight, I never told you but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's county...Live with your head in the lions mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open'" (Edison, 275).

The grandfather's words not only haunt the narrator of the story, who remains unnamed, but also the reader throughout the events of the story. Here we have a highly intelligent young man wanting nothing more than to prove himself capable and smart in a time when merely the color of his skin dictated what everyone expected of him. When the narrator of the story walked into the ballroom, where the most affluent men of the town were mingling, he was anticipating wowing them with his speech however, that would not be his first task of playing part in entertaining the men. He realized that first, they meant him to blindly fight against other young men of his color (Edison 276). Before the fight began came the first big disgusting and shocking event of the story. The author's description of the narrator's emotions towards the woman not only shocked the reader but also himself. The narrator said, in reference to the naked, sensual woman, "' I wanted at one and the same time to run from the room'" (Ellison 277). He describes a mixture of emotions which makes himself and the reader question if his intentions are the same as the monstrous men surrounding him, who leered and groped at the emotionless dancing woman.

This second major element of surprise to the reader in Ellison's *Battle Royal* is the gruesome blind battle royal that the young black men were forced to fight

each other, nearly to the death, solely for the affluent men's entertainment. Following the violent fighting matches, the narrator and the other fighters struggle for the money the drunk white men threw on the ground, only to be tricked into being electrocuted. His unbending desire to show his true self through the end was surprising.

If the author would have merely written that the narrator went to the event and presented his speech and received the scholarship, without having to endure the revolting white men's mistreatment of their fellow human beings, the story would have carried a much different weight. Sometimes an element of shock and surprise is in a story where little background information is given by the author. *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, by Flannery O'Connor is a good example of this concept. O'Connor is well known for her often chaotic, confusing way of telling a story, and as a reader you are oftentimes only guessing at what the meaning of the story was. In *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* O'Connor grants the reader some details of the family's trip leading up to the moment of the shocking and gruesome murder of the Florida-bound family in the woods. The general theme of the story is assumed to be, what defines a "good man." Can a murderer be a "good man" in a sense? One of the major characters in the story is the grandmother who ultimately wants to see the good in everyone and whom encourages her family to take a side trip to see an old plantation which unbeknownst to her would cause the gruesome murder of her family.

The first surprising element in the story was the accident caused by the grandmother's cat and the traveling family's strange reactions to it. "" We've had an ACCIDENT!" the children screamed in a frenzy of delight"

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(O'Connor 432). Not only were the children's strange reactions surprising the way the family reacted to the accident was unexpected. Although there were small hints leading up to the accident, this was the first time as a reader, that you begin to realize something is very wrong, therefore keeping you engaged in the story.

The missing background information that makes the surprising events that followed the accident somewhat confusing to story's readers, is who exactly was The Misfit? Who did he represent and did the grandmother really know him? O'Connor wrote, "The grandmother shrieked. She scrambled to her feet and stood staring. 'You're the Misfit!' she said. 'I recognized you at once!'" (O'Connor 433). The whole time the family is taken one by one into the woods to be murdered by the other men in The Misfit's posse, the grandmother and The Misfit carry on a long conversation on rather or not he was a "good man" and argued that if he was a "good man" how he would he allow and enjoy the murders.

The Misfit describes his life leading up to his time spent in jail and how it felt being in prison, "I was a gospel singer for a while...I was never a bad boy that I remember of...but somewhere along the line I did something wrong and got sent to penitentiary. I was buried alive" (O'Connor 435). As a reader after the shock passes of the violent events in the story you are still left to wonder, was The Misfit ever a "good man?" In previous times the idea of a character in a story gruesomely killing a whole family including a baby, would have been even more shocking than it is today.

In both *Battle Royal* and *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* the element of shock and surprise not only keeps the reader engaged but also shapes their opinion on the important take away elements of the story. In Ellison's *Battle Royal* the violent and shocking events that led up to the narrator presenting his speech not only began to shape his future but also shaped the reader's opinion of who he was as a person and the time in which he lived. In O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* quite a bit of important background is missing especially about *The Misfit*, so we can only assume *The Misfit* was a psychotic monster who orders his men to kill the whole family and kills the grandmother himself in the end. Throughout the dialog and some of his actions he showed some sympathy, however in the end *The Misfit* and his posse shocked with a joke about the violent murder of a whole family. As readers we have to wonder why we are less shocked at the violent events that take place in both stories than readers may have been in previous times.

Works Cited Ellison, Ralph. "Battle Royal." *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*.

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