

The analysis of life  
and soul in "a good  
man is hard to find"



Flannery O'Connor's short story appears to be greatly influenced by the time and place in which she grew up, and thus, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" lends itself easily in examination through biographical criticism.

Psychoanalytic criticism can be used in combination with biographical criticism to more competently interpret and explain characters within the short story and their thoughts, actions, dialogues, and traits. "A Good Man is Hard to Find" by O'Connor can be analyzed using biographical criticism and psychoanalytic criticism in order to gain a more valuable understanding of the characters within the work and the connections between O'Connor's real life and the work.

The setting of "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is a place that is very familiar to O'Connor: The great state of Georgia. O'Connor was a Georgia native, and her work greatly reflects the fondness she felt for the South. O'Connor vividly describes keystone characteristics of driving through South Georgia: She pointed out interesting details of the scenery: Stone Mountain; the blue granite that in some places came up to both sides of the highway; the brilliant red clay banks slightly streaked with purple; and the various crops that made rows of green lace-work on the ground. The trees were full of silver-white sunlight and the meanest of them sparkled. O'Connor is revealing the beauty of Georgia as she sees it. It is implied that the grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is the voice of O'Connor's passion for the South, particularly Georgia and Tennessee. While the grandmother as a whole does not directly represent O'Connor, she speaks to the state of Georgia in such a personal and endearing manner that cannot help but to be attributed to O'Connor's own feelings.

O'Connor's great pride for the state of Georgia continues to be apparent through the grandmother's argument against her grandson John Wesley's want to " go through Georgia fast so [they] won't have to look at it much." The grandmother boastfully told John Wesley that " Tennessee has the mountains and Georgia has the hills." She also told him that him that he should have more pride in his native state. A strong sense of O'Connor's ties to her own native state can be perceived to affect this work as a whole. The grandmother's attitudes toward the South may reflect O'Connor's own, but the grandmother herself does not represent O'Connor or her actual life. The character of the grandmother, however, may be based on or drawn from a person that O'Connor knew in her real life.

Being that the grandmother's character is a somewhat stereotypical woman from the 1950s era South, it can be assumed that there is some sort of real life influence to her character's nature. The grandmother's loyalty toward ladylikeness, her demanding personality, and her racist comments are to be expected for a woman of her time and place. The grandmother's attitude toward African Americans was the common sentiment among white people of that time period in the rural South. A major controversy in the 1950s was that of racial segregation and civil rights for African Americans. The grandmother in " A Good Man is Hard to Find" illustrates an outlook on African Americans that offers an honest look at how the society around O'Connor viewed issues of race or class. The grandmother refers to the African American boy in degrading terms that immediately undermine his credibility as a human by her standards: " Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!" she said and pointed to a Negro child standing in the door of a

shack. "Wouldn't that make a picture, now?" [...] "He probably didn't have any [britches]," the grandmother explained. "Little riggers in the country don't have things like we do. If I could paint, I'd paint that picture," she said. The grandmother acts as though she is observing an animal at a zoo when she is looking at this boy in his doorway. She places herself so high above the boy that it makes looking at the boy on his steps similar to looking at a picture. This is a significant moment in that it reveals some of the ever-so-moral grandmother's realistically feeble morality. The narrator's reference to the boy as a "negro" is also reflective of the time period and state of segregation in which O'Connor wrote this story in. The term "negro" would have been socially acceptable and politically correct. The racial language and descriptions used by the narrator and the grandmother are useful in understanding the moment of the work.

Being perceived as ladylike is very important to the grandmother. When preparing to go to Florida with her son and his family, she made sure to dress in very nice clothing and was judgmental of Bailey's wife's more casual clothing choices. The narrator says, The children's mother still had on slacks and still had her head tied up in a green kerchief, but the grandmother had on a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print. Her collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline 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 that she was a lady. The way others perceive her is of top priority to the grandmother. Her need to conform to her own ladylike standards concurs with thoughts of the

time. Being that the grandmother is described as being an old woman in the 1950s, it can be assumed that she was raised in a time period that placed particular emphasis on women's appearance and dress. Her attentiveness to being ladylike is also of importance because it shows readers how the grandmother wishes to present herself. The readers see that grandmother wants to be viewed as a good woman.

Through the use of Freud's Tripartite Psyche, readers may gain a more thorough understanding the grandmother's character. The id, ego, and superego aid in rationalizing the actions, thoughts, and dialogue of the grandmother's character. The grandmother's id is most apparent when she lies to her grandchildren, John Wesley and June star, about a made up secret panel in an old house she used to live in. The id is also dominant when the grandmother decides not to speak up when she realizes the house that she is leading everyone to is in Tennessee and not Georgia. The grandmother shows no sign of care for consequences or morality when it comes to lying to the children or keeping her mouth shut about the house. The ego of the grandmother is evident in the moment that she realizes the house is in fact not in Georgia. This realization causes her to jump and scare the cat, Pitty Sing, which subsequently causes Bailey to wreck the car. This slight slip up was her ego's way of trying to clear her of the lies that she told. Her ego wants her to stay honest. The superego of the grandmother is not apparent until she is in her final moments. Her conscience comes to life when she is on the business-end of The Misfit's gun. The grandmother says, " Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" She reaches out and touches The Misfit, and he shoot her three times. The grandmother's

superego is releasing itself in the form of an epiphany. She realizes that error of her judgmental and hypocritical ways, but it is too late.

In conclusion, “ A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor is a superior work to analyze using both the biographical and psychoanalytic schools of criticism. Both schools of criticism aid in the expansion of the text and leave room for explanation of the author’s relation to the text, characters within the work, and social and economic classes of the time and place. By using Freud’s Tripartite Psyche, readers may expand on characters like the grandmother and gain a deeper understanding of why characters have certain attitudes or do certain things.