

Good vs evil and finding grace in spontaneous situation



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In her short story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," Flannery O'Connor narrates the journey of a complex family and the encounters they face while traveling. While there are many aspects of the story that make it notorious in literature, one concept that stands out among the rest is the many symbolic elements within the characters which help contribute to the overall theme. As a result of O'Connor's writing style, each character serves a purpose to represent a larger thematic element which displays structure and composition within the story. Therefore, each character and scene serves a specific purpose that allow for a deeper underlying mean than the title conveys. Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find," elaborates on the battle between good and evil in order to display the struggle of finding grace in spontaneous situations.

To begin with, a character that can not go unrecognized due to her manipulateness and high maintenance persona is the central character of the plot, the unnamed grandmother. Serving as the protagonist, the grandmother is a dynamic character that largely contributes to the internal battle between distinguishing the line between good and evil. From the first pages of the novel, it is evidential the grandmother is cunning and very much stuck in her own ways. However, she is deceptive in an non confrontational and indirect matter. Her style of stating her mind is delicately complex similar enough to how she carries herself. In the eyes of the grandmother, politeness is a significant aspect in how one should exemplify goodness within confrontational situations (Thuan, 220). In example, in the very first pages of the novel, the grandmother attempts to convince her son, Bailey, to take her and their family to Tennessee opposed to Florida due to

the fact that has relatives there. However, instead of stating she wants to travel there for that specific reason, she explains to her son there is a criminal on the loose in that specific area so they should travel to a safer destination (O'Connor, 1). This quote displays the struggle between finding the distinct line between good and evil because while the grandmother appears to have good intentions, the audience is fully aware it is for the grandmother's personal benefit. Continuously, in regards to asserting grace in spontaneous situations, the moments that defines the grandmother's ability to accomplish this can be viewed in her encounter with the misfit. When the grandmother's life is threatened, she refers back to the importance of religion and the impact it has on man. While discussing religion with the misfit, she states "... if you would pray, Jesus would help you" (O'Connor, 118). While a good effort on her part, it does not influence the misfit in the way she hopes. However, the issue at hand is that this is the only part of the story where religion is mentioned by the grandmother which is a surprise due to her southern tendencies and lady like persona. According to Glenn Brooke, a critical aspect of finding grace in a spontaneous situation is trusting in the wisdom of God rather than the wisdom of a man (Brooke, How You Can Face Difficult Situations with Grace). That being stated, the grandmother is putting her trust into the reference of God rather than the misfit because she wants to appeal to his religious senses, which is a heart felt subject for most people, yet, not the misfit.

On the other hand, when referring to the battle between good and evil, the misfit is more straightforward about his evil tendencies in which he believes are good from his own perspective. Dissimilar to the grandmother, he

presents himself in an evil way and his intentions as well as motivations are very clear. First off, from the moment the misfit is introduced, it is evident that his background results in the way the character and audience evaluate him. In example, the Misfit claims he refers to himself as "The Misfit" because he can not seem to comprehend the reasons he has undergone so much punishment for what he has done (O' Connor, 129). In regards to what has been done, the Misfit is said to have been responsible for murdering of his father. Shortly afterward, he was placed in a federal penitentiary and eventually escaped. His escaping is what leads him to meet the family on their journey to Georgia. His background seems to play a significant part in his overall demeanor. As a result of his ability to not feel guilt in his actions, he does not feel remorse when he commits wrong-doings which may have been the direct result in killing the entire family. Furthermore, his background and inability to recall if he murdered his father and when he was sent to the penitentiary display that he is unstable in some sense. His instability gives him to appear calm in certain instances but with a trigger point, he can turn agitated and violent in an instant. Ultimately, as a result of his background and actions, it can be assumed the Misfit has a troubled time finding the line between correct and incorrect. It can be argued that the misfit is transparently evil and lacks the ability to make incorrect decisions. However, towards the end of the story, it is revealed the misfit does not believe in Jesus. That being said, there are no guidelines nor commandments for him to follow in order to make ethical decisions. This shows that he is strictly set in his own ways and does what he believes to be correct even if they are not in other people's standards. This element helps drive him towards the actions he takes on and how he handles certain matters.

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According to William Bonney, " Although he is a murderer, the Misfit is the only character in " A Good Man Is Hard to Find" with any sense of what it means to ask morally serious questions about human experience, and this quality makes him remotely connotative of the eternal misfit, Christ, as the ambiguously punctuated text cautiously indicates when the grandmother unwittingly calls her killer " Jesus" just before her death..." (Bonney, 2). This quote by Bonney displays that because the Misfit is not religious he turns to real human experience to find grace and answers in spontaneous situations.

Furthermore, the specific actions by other characters help to represent the larger theme at hand. In terms of good and evil, there is an existential eternal battle with the grandmother's son Bailey. Out of all the main character's, Bailey is one that can be assumed is generally good as he wants what is best for everyone and genuinely aspires to make his family happy. However, the grandmother and misfit, in particular, bring out a more assertive side that shows the audience the closest aspect of his so called evil side. His direct struggle between good and evil can be noted when he yells at his family when saying " Hush!" Bailey yelled. " Hush! Everybody shut up and let me handle this" (O' Connor, 91)! This statements represents the concept in which Bailey wants to display his authority by sounding tough yet this action is taken for what he believes is most beneficial for the family. Likewise, the quote further exhibits Bailey struggles to find grace in a spontaneous situation. Instead, he tends to be more panicky and unstable yet still shows some grace for the sake of his beloved ones. On the other hand, unlike the dynamic characters of the Misfit and the grandmother who make decisions for themselves, Bobby Lee finds comfort in the decisions of

someone else in spontaneous situations. As the Misfit's accomplice, he follows the commands of him instantly which shows he is a follower opposed to a leader. It can be assumed that, at large, he would look to the advice of others to acknowledge how to handle certain situations. According to Nancy Nester, it is common in modern literature that at least one character must display weakness in literature and seek out the comfort of others. It serves to provide a variety of characters to help further develop the plot of certain stories.

All in all, Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find," elaborates on the battle between good and evil in order to display the struggle of finding grace in spontaneous situations.

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