

# Literature analysis of a good man is hard to find by flannery o'connor

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



"A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is a story written by Flannery O'Connor in 1953.

"A Good Man is Hard to Find" is a short story written by Flannery O'Connor, a significant American writer and essayist. Her writing style reflects the ethnic relation in the South and her own Christian faith. The author writes in third person limited point of view to portray the tragic journey of a family who lived in Georgia in 1953. Bailey wants to take his family to Florida, but his mother, "the grandmother" disagrees with him because there's a dangerous criminal named The Misfit who is also on the way to Florida.

Bailey ignores the grandmother's concern and headed to Florida. On the road, The kids and the grandmother persuade Bailey to drive them to the see a plantation which the grandmother visited when she was a lady. Unfortunately, the family gets into an accident on the desolate dust road to the plantation. The only thing the family can do is to wait for help, and it turns out that their help is none other than The Misfit and his buddies. The Misfit orders his buddies to take all the family members except the grandmother into the wood and shoot them.

Hopelessly, the grandmother calls The Misfit her child and wants to touch him on the shoulder, but this angers The Misfit. As a result, he shoots the grandmother three times on the chest. The author uses characterization, foreshadowing, and irony to illustrate the theme that the tendency to manipulate people's actions and thoughts may introduce tragic outcomes to the love ones.

In the short story "A Good Man is Hard to Find", the author applies both direct characterization and indirect characterization to exhibit the selfishness of the grandmother, the innocence of the children, and the wickedness of The Misfit.

In the exposition of the story, the grandmother wants to go to Tennessee to visit her connections instead going to Florida, so she tells Bailey that he "ought to take the kids somewhere else for a change so they would see different parts of the world and be bored. They have never been to east Tennessee" (O'Connor 403). From this quote the readers can perceive that the grandmother is good at manipulating her son by saying that going to Tennessee can be beneficial to the kids in order to achieve her own purpose.

She also mentions that The Misfit is also on the way to Florida and she "couldn't answer to her conscience" (O'Connor 402) if she brings the kids to Florida. In this quote, the grandmother uses the word "conscience" to threaten Bailey with the idea that he is going to put his children in danger, so he would give up the trip to Florida.

In Katherine Keil's article "O'Connor's 'Good Man is Hard to Find'", Katherine analyzes "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and comments that "the grandmother shows her indifference for creation by selfishly manipulating and nagging to get her way on the family's vacation" (Keil 45).

Keil's analysis is reasonable because through the interactions between the grandmother and other family members on the issue about the family trip, the grandmother is used to manipulate people's decisions by taking advantage of the vulnerable side of people's mind and being selfish without

knowing it herself. The kids, John Wesley and June Star, are innocent compare to their selfish grandmother. After the family encounter The Misfit in the country, John Wesley notices that The Misfit is holding a gun, so he asks him: "What you got that gun for?" (O'Connor 410).

Under this kind of circumstance, probably most of the people would be quiet in order to avoid trouble, but John Wesley mentions the gun just because he is simply curious. Unfortunately, his inquiry brings The Misfit into action, and results in tragedy. Although The Misfit is not present until the final pages of the story, he influences the story from the exposition of the story when the grandmother tells Bailey that he flees from the prison, and is on the way to Florida.

The author uses a clear and detailed direct characterization to portray The Misfit when he first appears in the story. The author describes him as a man whose Hair just beginning to gray and he wore silver rimmed spectacles that gave him a scholarly look.

He had a long creased face and didn't have on any shirt or undershirt. He had on blue jeans that were too tight for him and was holding a black hat and a gun. (O'Connor 410) It is easy for the readers to realize that he is an antagonist from his appearance-- long creased face, unsuited clothes, holding a gun, a typical image of villains.

The conversations between The Misfit and the grandmother also reveal the evil inside The Misfit. After the execution of Bailey and his son, The Misfit tells the grandmother that he " found out the crime doesn't matter. You can do one thing or you can do another, kill a man or take a tire off his car,

because sooner you're going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it"(O'Connor 414).

John Desmond's, a professor of English at Whitman College made comment in his article that " the Misfit acts under the delusion that his actions are somehow good, i. e. good for him. Since he cannot make sense of his spiritual condition, he now tries to reduce ethical mystery to a perverse pleasure-pain principle"(Desmond135).

Desmond's comment reveals the characteristic of The Misfit because The Misfit's demeanor exhibits that his values is tangled, and he has developed his own philosophy, which is evil and lawless. As a result, his philosophy blinded his conscience, and make his sinful actions look naturally appropriate to himself. Besides characterization, foreshadowing is also a significant literary element throughout the story .

The author uses foreshadowing to give the story its air of suspense, and to hint the outcome of the story. At the beginning of the story, the grandmother refers to the news that " The Misfit is a loose from the Federal Pen and headed toward Florida" (O'Connor 402). Initially, the grandmother just wants to use this scary news to threaten Bailey, and tries to change his mind. The reference to a dangerous criminal raises a sign of hazardousness. The grandmother's dress on the day of departure also foreshadows the misfortune of the family.

" She had on 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 organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline she had

pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet"(O'Connor 404). In the book *Short Stories for Students*, the author of the article 'Overview: " A Good Man is Hard to Find"' analysis that " as the family prepares to embark on their vacation, the grandmother plans her outfit with an eye toward tragedy"(Short Stories for Students 103).

Wilson's analysis is fair because when people die, they usually are dressed in their best outfit, just like the grandmother is dressed in her best clothes, so its clear that the grandmother holds a pessimistic view on the family trip. On their way to Florida, the family " passed a large cotton field with five or six graves fenced in the middle of it, like a small island"(O'Connor 404).

It is pretty disturbing for people who are on a family trip to see thing like graveyard, and the number of the graves clearly represent the six family members, including the baby. When the family are waiting for help after the accident, they encounter The Misfit, who drives " a big black battered hearse-like automobile" (O'Connor 409).

It is very obvious that the appearance of the car is a vigorous example of foreshadowing, which foreshadows the tragedy that is about to happen. In Arthur F. Bethea's article, he states that " O'Connor's villain is relentlessly associated with death: he worked as an undertaker, drives a black " hearse-like automobile,"(Bethea 239). Bthea's interpretation is vigorous because the image of a hearse-like automobile gives rise to a bodeful ambience which perfectly foreshadows the debut of The Misfit.

Other than characterization and foreshadowing, irony is another essential literary element that helps to carry out the purpose and the theme of the

whole story. Both verbal irony and situational irony are used by the author in this story to illustrate how the grandmother's manipulative behaviors lead the whole family into deadly situation.

In the exposition of the story, the grandmother warns Bailey that she " wouldn't take her children in any direction with a criminal like that a loose in it "(O'Connor 402).

Ironically, she is exactly the person who take the family into dangerousness when she deliberately excites the children in order to force Bailey to take them to see the plantation, where they meet The Misfit. In order to convince Bailey, the grandmother announces that taking the kids to the old plantation " would be very educational for them"(O'Connor 408). To educate the children is not the purpose of the trip to the plantation in the grandmother's mind, it is just a excuse that used to disguise her selfishness.

In Stanley Renne's article he comments that the grandmother is a " blind old woman, a failed parent who has ruined her own offspring, with a false and destructive dream of the past and an equally false and destructive self-perception in the present"(Renner 127).

Renne's analysis is reasonable because the grandmother always wants others to accept her idea, and force his family members to do what she thinks is right and what she thinks is good for them, but the grandmother doesn't perceive that herself is being selfish and nostalgic all the time.

As a result of her selfishness and nostalgia, the grandmother ultimately brings misfortune to the family. After the car accident, the kid says: " But

nobody's killed"(O'Connor 409) with great disappointment. It is very awkward that a kid could have this kind of horrible thought, and it is an example of verbal irony because at the end of the story every family member gets killed eventually. Another irony happens when the grandmother is giving her grandkids a lecture on respecting others.

She announces that in the old times " children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else"(O'Connor 404), but at the same time, she saw an African American child on the roadside and says: " Oh look at that cute pickninny" (O'Connor 404). It is ironic that the grandmother is teaching her grandkids the importance of respect while she calls an African American child pickninny, which is disrespectful.

In Stephen Brandy's article he analyzes and describes the grandmother as a old woman who " is filled with the prejudices of her class and her time" (Brandy 110). Brandy's comment is agreeable because although the grandmother's conversations make her seem like a nice and traditional Southern old lady, her mindless insult on African Americans reveals that her racism is rooted in her mind for a very long time that even herself does not notice it, or she ignores this issue deliberately.

In the short story " A Good Man is Hard to Find", the author applies characterization, foreshadowing, and irony to illustrate the theme that the tendency to manipulate people's actions and thoughts may introduce tragic outcomes to the loved ones. By using both direct and indirect characterization, the author is able to portray the characters in detail, and create a vivid image of interactions between characters.

Foreshadowing is also an important literary element that the author applies in this short story because foreshadowing gives the story its air of suspense thus making the story more interesting and dramatic. Through both situational irony and verbal irony, the author shows how the grandmother's character trait brings misfortune to the family, and unlocks the theme of the story. Being manipulative not only distances a person from his or her family, but also could cause trouble to the loved ones.

Most Common Questions:

- What is the main theme of a good man is hard to find?

The primary themes of "A good man is hard to find" are death as a test of faith, grace in daily life, and the relationship of sinners. Death as a test of faith. As an example: in the last minutes of her life, her grandmother tries to show The Misfit love, emphasizing her discovery of true faith.

- What is the moral of a good man is hard to find?

From a moral point of view, there are two types of people in "The good man hard to find": those who know they are bad and those who are bad, but at the same time everybody continues to believe that they are good.

Grandmother makes the mistake of thinking that her moral qualities are obvious.

- What is Red Sammy's purpose in the story?

His purpose in this story is to confirm the fact that no one can trust anybody. It is a foreshadowing that former prisoners have killed a family. He also

states that " A good man is hard to find". He explained how some children lost the bill a few days ago.