

Flannery o'connor's story a good man is hard to find essay

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In Flannery O'Connor's story *A Good Man is Hard to Find* the title illustrates the changing times and how progressively from the grandmother's perspective, the future is quite different from the past; in which the grandmother believes that the past presented people with a much simpler way of life and the future is not as decadent and is too complex. The title also refers to the interchange between the grandmother and the Misfit at the end of the story. In fact, the pinnacle moment of the story occurs between the Misfit and the grandmother. Both use religion to their own device, in similar fashions, but each in a peculiar manner. Although the Misfit believes there is a God, he does not offer himself up to religion, just as the grandmother uses religion to coerce her immediate family to think, and do things according to her liking. Both characters are revealed to be of similar characterizations, but neither of them supposes this similarity. The Misfit was made a misfit by the society in which he lived, and the way in which he grew up.

The grandmother chose to act the way she acts, but in some instances her reaction to the world around her may be attributed to the lifestyle she's lead. It seems that O'Connor created this story in order to allow for the reader to decide their own moral grounds, or at least to challenge their own religious rites, and beliefs. The Misfit is a man who has recently escaped from prison. When the grandmother and the Misfit meet up on a country road after the grandmother's family has been in a car wreck the Misfit and his gang take care of the family, with the Misfit killing the grandmother last. The title of the book bears relevance to this in that the ideals that the grandmother tries to uphold and apply to the Misfit bear no relevance in

reality; for her, the title connotes that the past is unattainable, a good man is hard to find means that the world is changing rapidly and her reference towards life is outdated. For the Misfit the title connotes his childhood and how he simply was borne bad and that the object of a good man being hard to find entails the psycho-socio-balance that cannot exist rightly in any man.

Here again, the reader comes across a contention point in which there is a cyclical argument where the character becomes trapped due to outside sources. Furthermore, the title resembles in a way how a the world has lapsed in faith; both the grandmother and the Misfit have a lack of faith in anything, and as O'Connor has written the story she adds in her touch of personality, "If you would pray," the old lady said, "Jesus would help you." "That's right," The Misfit said. "Well then, why don't you pray?" she asked trembling with delight suddenly. "I don't want no hep," he said. "I'm doing all right by myself." (O'Connor A Good Man is Hard to Find 11). Thus, when the Misfit admits that he likes who is, or at least does not want to go around changing who he is, it is O'Connor's omission that there is no such thing as a saint, as a good man and thus the impetus for the title is found.

The theme of the book is progression; progress from a former state of being to a later state of being which is shown succinctly with the car trip, the drive down the country road to a house which does not exist in that state and finally with the family facing their death at the pistol end of the Misfit and his gang. This theme of progress goes into detail with the characterization of the Misfit. The Misfit, like the grandmother denies the theme of progression. While the grandmother clings wholeheartedly to the past, the Misfit does this

as well. I call myself The Misfit," he said, " because I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment." (O'Connor A Good Man is Hard to Find 11). Thus, the Misfit is stating that his future does not match his expectations, and his progression as a person has stalled and his stuck being the Misfit which incidentally is a name he designed and applied to himself to further exemplify that he is without development and surely, as represented in O'Connor's story a man without hope of change.

Thus, the religious concept of redemption is a mute point for the Misfit since his life philosophy does not allow for that type of entrapment. The Misfit cannot be redeemed since his personal belief structure states that he cannot fathom a punishment, even hell, for the life that he has had to leave. In similar fashion, the grandmother does not believe her soul so guilty of all of her offenses that she will have to bear the brutality of hell, either. Thus, both characters are in denial of their true intentions. O'Connor's story subsequently allows the reader to find out that what the grandmother and Misfit's true crime is that they fear change and thus that is their sin.

O'Connor's story is a tale told about redemption; or rather the lack of redemption. Neither the grandmother nor the Misfit feel morally remiss about their actions or their attitude towards things, such as crime and killing for the Misfit and racism and prejudices for the grandmother.

By allowing these characters to be recalcitrant toward the theme of progression she is making the characters human which is not often done in novels or short stories. O'Connor's approach to characterization makes for the story to have a lot of gumption in its writing style and subject matter. By

including the ' dirtier' side of life, such as biases and murdering O'Connor is allowing the story to shape within a paradigm of humanity which must by its nature be inclusive of both good and bad, and O'Connor is an expert in the writing of the yin and yang as it were.

Throughout O'Conner's short story a definite feeling of doom pervades the foibles of the characters, the Misfit and the grandmother. This feeling intensifies as the reader begins to find more comparisons between these two characters, the fact that neither one of them believes they need to be redeemed from the lifestyle they've chosen to live. O'Connor was a great user of allegory in her stories. As O'Connor in her life was an introvert most of her characters are gregarious such as in Good Country People and the character Hulga. Hulga denies herself first in the story by the changing of her name from Joy to Hulga which signifies O'Connor's own contempt of falsities. She is stating through the character Hulga that people are prone to be blind in areas in which they should be keeping both eyes open. She states this in regard to events in her own life such as growing up Catholic in a mostly Protestant neighborhood.

Hulga is blind to her own personality and what she is capable of doing and by changing her name she is trying to rewrite her own history. The rejection of the name Joy to the embrace of the name Hulga reveals for the audience that Hulga does not enjoy herself but expects life to be filled with disappointment and in fact has been taught as much from family and neighbors. Upon meeting Manly Pointer Hulga, Hulga is contemptuous and sees herself as better than him whom she describes as simple and dim

witted yet agrees to go on a picnic with him in order to show him a deeper meaning to life (Hulga is hung up on suffering and sadomasochistic fantasies). In fact, Hulga is the one who is ignorant about the world as Manly Pointer demonstrates a series of hoodwinking events in which he seduces Hulga and leaves with her wooden leg. This is where Manly Pointer reveals his true self and where the reader is exposed to the true Hulga. O'Connor was brilliant at recognizing the validity of a person in key moments.

Hulga had to be stripped of her dignity in order to be humble and recognize some truths about herself. This parlays to the fact of O'Connor's illness and her attempting to make sense and assign some sort of purpose to the disease in which she could see none as a Catholic expect to think of it as a way in which it allowed herself to remain humble before God. As O'Connor states in *Good Country People*, "Everybody is different," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Yes, most people is," Mrs. Freeman said." It takes all kinds to make the world." "I always said it did myself." (O'Connor 181 -82) Thus, O'Connor is exemplifying that diversity is the key to the enjoyment of life and that ascertaining to the idea of perfection is unconscionable. Work Cited O'Conner, Flannery.

A Good Man is Hard to Find. Harvest Books, New York. 1977.