

Flanery oconner good
country people



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In "A Good Man Is Hard To Find", O'Connor introduces the reader to a family representative of the old and new Southern culture. The grandmother represents the old South by the way in which she focuses on her appearance, manners, and genteel ladylike behavior. O'Connor writes "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. In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady" (O'Connor 118). In this short story, "the wild disproportion of the terms, the vapid composure that summons up the ultimate violence only to treat it as a rare social opportunity, and the cool irony with which O'Connor presents the sentence makes it both fearful and ludicrous" (Asals 132). The irony that O'Connor uses points out the appalling characteristics of the grandmother's self-deception that her clothes make her a lady and turns it into a comic matter. Flannery O'Connor goes to great length to give the reader insight into the characters by describing their clothes and attitudes. The fact that the grandmother took so much time in preparing herself for the trip exemplifies the old Southern tradition of self-presentation and self-pride. The grandmother takes pride in the way she presents herself because she wants everyone to know that she is a "lady". Bailey's, the grandson's, family represents that of the new Southern culture that is more open to change, but they are not totally receptive to change. O'Connor describes the children's mother in contrast to the grandmother by what they are wearing; thus their clothes represent the age from which they are. The Children's mother "still had on slacks and still had her head tied up in a green kerchief, but the grandmother had on navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white dots in the print" (O'Connor 118). The children's mother is representative of the New

South in which the Southern Lady is becoming less of a central figure within society. A lady of the old south would never wear slacks and tie her hair up in a kerchief to go out in public. Under an old south mentality these actions would be considered very unlady like. O'Connor illustrates the tension between the old and the new south by the constant struggle between the grandmother, her son, and the daughter-in-law. O'Connor also poses the contrast between the old and new South in her short story " Good Country People". Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman represent the old South because of the way in which they carry themselves and their traditional beliefs and values. Mrs. Freeman works for Mrs. Hopewell who states " the reason for her keepin her so long was that they were not trash. They were good country people"(O'Connor 272). Mrs. Hopewell describes Mrs. Freeman and her two daughters as " two of the finest girls she knew and Mrs. Freeman was a lady and that she was never ashamed to take her anywhere or introduce her to anybody they might mett"(O'Connor 272). In contrast to Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Hopewell, Joy/Hulga represents the new south that is not concerned with self presentation in the way that the grandmother is in " A Good Man Is Hard TO Find". Joy/Hulga did not care to participate in the morning gossip between the older ladies. O'Connor describes Joy/Hulga's disregard for the old south and its sense of manners: When Hulga stumped into the Kitchen in the morning (she could walk without making the awful noise but she made it-Mrs. Hopewell was certain-because it was ugly-sounding), she glanced at them and did not speak. Mrs. Hopewell would be in her red kimono with her hair tied around her head in rags. (275) O'Connor juxtaposes Joy/Hulga to her mother, Mrs. Hopewell, by contrasting her mannerism, clothes, and overall demure. Joy/Hulga is described as making awful noises in contrast to

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her mother whom is sitting in her red kimono across the kitchen from her. Mrs. Hopewell's name is symbolic of her very hopeful and optimistic nature. Joy's changing her name to Hulga represents her renouncing of the old Southern traditions imposed by her mother. Joy/Hulga does not conform to the social codes of the old south because she deliberately makes grotesque and unlady like noise and does not apologize for them. Joy/Hulga is " forced by her physical disabilities to live at home, the girl's existence has become one continuous of outraged rejection of the life around her"(Asals, 103). Joy/Hulga is also set apart from the old south because she has obtained a PH. D. in philosophy. O'Connor writes Mrs. Hopewell thought it was nice for girls to go to school to have a good time but Joy had " gone through". ... The girl had taken the Ph. D. in philosophy and this left Mrs. Hopewell at a complete loss. You could say, " My daughter is a nurse," or " My daughter is a schoolteacher," or even, " My daughter is a chemical engineer. " You could not say, " My daughter is a philosopher". (276) Mrs. Hopewell feels that it is unlady like to pursue an education that far, but Joy/Hulga disregards this old southern sexist attitude about women and education. Joy/Hulga thinks she has " defined a self that is the antithesis of her mother's"(Asals 104). Education and mannerisms of the old and new south are not the only contrasting views that Flannery O'Connor explores in these two short stories. Christianity and fallen human nature are two other aspects that bring depth and ironic twists to " A Good Man Is Hard To Find" and " Good Country People". In both stories, O'Connor explores the ideals and hypocrisies of the Christian religion and faith. Within O'Connor's writings, the traditional Christian themes of " fall and redemption, nature and grace, sin and innocence" are explored (Bleikasten 138). In " A Good Man Is Hard To Find", <https://assignbuster.com/flanery-oconner-good-country-people/>

O'Connor questions the faith and beliefs in Christianity of the grandmother. At the closing of the story, when the grandmother is facing her own death, the Misfit says: Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead ... and he shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. O'Connor 132) The Misfit's view illustrates the active presence of an Evil force within the society. The grandmother assumed that if you came from " good people" that you would naturally be a " good person". In contrast to this view of the old south, O'Connor presents the reader " with a world haunted by the sacred—a sacred with two faces now distinct and opposed, now enigmatically confused: the divine and the demonic", and " in her fables the battleground where these two antagonistic powers confront each other and fight for possession of each man's soul"(Bleikasten 139). The grandmother represents the active and faithful Christian servant, and the Misfit is symbolic of the devil or an Anti-Christ figure. Despite all of the good deeds that the grandmother has accomplished, God is not there to help her in her time of need. The old southern and traditional secular view was that good deeds would lead to a good life, but O'Connor recognizes that there is also an active force of Evil and presence of the Devil in this world. O'Connor's antiseular and antiindividualistic views are also present in her short story " Good Country People". Within this short story, the reader is presented with two differing views of religion: the devout Christian and the atheist. The devout Christians, Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs.

Freeman, represents the old south as does the grandmother in “ A Good Man Is Hard To Find”. O’Connor criticizes the old southern Christian for being faithful and trustful in “ A Good Man Is Hard To Find”, yet the reader the does not quite know what to make of the ending in “ Good Country People”. The story ends with the atheist being deceived by one who pretends to be a Christian. O’Connor could be presenting the reader with the view that one is not able to really tell the difference between “ good country people” and Christian or liars and cheats. “ Good Country People” can be read as exploiting the idea that one is not able to tell the difference between Christians and non-Christians based on their appearance and actions. The old south puts their trust and hopes into appearances, while the new south is more reluctant and cautious. This is not to say that they cannot be deceived because the reader sees what happens to Joy/Hulga in the end. Joy/Hulga is an atheist who dismisses all Christian beliefs by saying “ in my economy ... I’m saved and you are damned but I told you I didn’t believe in God”(O’Connor 286). She compares her realization to the Christian salvation by saying “ we are all damned ... but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there’s nothing to see. It’s a kind of salvation”(O’Connor 288). Joy/Hulga believes that she is saved from the hypocrisies of the Christian faith, and she represents the new south because she is open to different interpretations. She feels that she as been saved from Christianity, but O’Connor raises the question: is she really saved at all? Joy/Hulga sets off to seduce Pointer, the Bible salesman, and “ she imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changes it into a deeper understanding of life”(O’Connor 284). Ironically, it is Pointer that teaches Joy/Hulga the lesson that needs to be learned. He turns on her and steals her

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wooden leg. In a fit of rage Joy/Hulga bursts out ““ You’re a Christian! ‘ ... ‘ You’re a fine Christian! You’re just like them all–say one thing and do another. ‘”(O’Connor 290). Joy/Hulga is not able to tell the difference between him and Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman. She feels that by setting herself apart from Christianity she is saved from its pitfalls and hypocrisies. In reality, she is not saved from it at all. Pointer returns her comment saying ““ I hope you don’t think ... that I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn’t born yesterday and I know where I am going! ‘”(O’Connor 290). O’Connor presents the reader with a critique of religion and Christianity in both of her stories. Joy/Hulga believes that all Christians are the same, but O’Connor points out that there are all types. Pointer pretends to be a Christian in order to prey off of their needs and insecurities. Joy/Hulga is taken in by his charming and trustworthy persona, but she is unable to see his false motives. “ Good Country People” points out that people do not always prove to be who they portray. The reader is left doubtful and questions the idea of naturally “ good” people and questions value of the Christian faith. While criticizing the Christian faith and practices, O’Connor also raises the issue of fallen human nature. The Misfit in “ A Good Man Is Hard To Find” and Pointer in “ Good Country People” both represent a character of fallen human nature. O’Connor explores the idea of fallen human nature. The Misfit comes from a good family, and he states “ God never made a finer woman than my mother and my daddy’s heart was pure gold”(O’Connor 127). O’Connor questions how someone from such a “ good family” can turn out to be so evil? Fallen human nature is one explanation posited. The Misfit retorts the grandmother’s argument that he is a good man saying, “ Nome, I ain’t a good man ... but I ain’t the worst in the world

neither”(O’Connor 128). He has the self-realization that he is not a good person. He does not know where it is that he went wrong, but he states, “ I never was a bad boy that I remember of ... but somewhere along the line I done something wrong and got sent to the penitentiary. I was buried alive”(O’Connor 130). The Misfit admits that he was once good, but he is unable to determine the source of his fallen human nature. O’Connor presents us with another character in “ Good Country People” of fallen human nature. Pointer does not argue that he was once good; instead, he tells Hulga, “ you ain’t so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born! “(O’Connor 291). Pointer’s character illustrates that one can be born with a fallen human nature, or he is made that way by society from the time he is born. In contrast to the Misfit’s fallen human nature that comes about when he is older, Pointer began falling the day he was born. The idea of fallen human nature is contrasting to the ideas of the old south. Good country people” were assumed to always be “ good”, and the old south also thought “ bad” people were born that way. O’Connor posited the idea that the society in which one lives can influence a person to change. The Misfit was raised by “ nice folks”, and the old south would have assumed that he would be nice. The grandmother repeatedly argues that “ I know you came from nice people! “(O’Connor 132). Bailey, the grandmother’s son, realizes the situation that they are in, and he knows that the Misfit is not a nice person. In “ Good Country People”, Pointer portrays himself as a “ good country person”, and he states, “ I’m as good as you any day in the week”(O’Connor 290). Pointer dismisses the old south’s view that there are good people in this world, and he argues that he is not a bad person. O’Connor explicitly explores the themes of Christian theology through

Pointer and the Misfit in "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" and "Good Country People". In addition, she presents the reader with the differing generations of the old and new south, and she illustrates the ontrasting views between the two. O'Connor is not afraid to question Christian theology or the Southern culture. Her irony and satire add depth to ther stories, and her deep cultural analysis of the South brings a higher level to her writings. O'Connor also explores the concept of fallen human nature and how it is brought about. Overall, O'Connor's works prove to be very in depth in both her social and cultural analysis of the South. She is not afraid to critique the society in which she grew up and lived. Bibliography Asals, Frederick. Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1982. Bleikstan, Andre. "The Heresy of Flannery O'Connor". Critical Essays on Flannery O'Connor. Ed. Melvin J. Friedman and Beverly Lyon Clark. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. , 1985. Friedman, Melvin J. Introduction. Critical Essays on Flannery O'Connor. Ed. Melvin J. Friedman and Beverly Lyon Clark. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. , 1985. O'Connor, Flannery. The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor. New York: The Noonday Press, 1971.