

Comparison a good
man is hard to find
and boys and girls



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Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls" both use symbols to highlight significant meanings in the characters' lives. This essay will examine two differences and one similarity in the authors' use of symbols: * O'Connor uses a gun to symbolize fear, whereas Munro uses a gun to characterize shame. * O'Connor uses a specific animal to signify death, while Munro uses a specific animal to represent freedom. * In both stories, the house symbolizes imprisonment.

O'Connor uses the gun that The Misfit carries to symbolize fear. Until the climax, the family was enjoying their road trip to Tennessee. When The Misfit, Hiram, and Bobby Lee arrive with their guns, the characters in the family slowly begin to show symptoms of fear. "There was a pistol shot from the woods, followed closely by another", (O'Connor 63). Even though the characters remaining with The Misfit don't directly see who Hiram and Bobby shot at that moment, they start to fear. The children's mother begins to make heaving noises as if she couldn't breathe.

When The Misfit asks if she would like to join her husband and son, she replies "'Yes, thank you,' the mother said faintly" (O'Connor 64). At that same situation, the grandmother also begins to fear. "'Pray, pray,' the grandmother began, 'pray, pray...'" (O'Connor 63). The grandmother starts to fear even more when she hears the "pistol report" for the second time after the children's mother and June Star were taken to the dark forest. "Pray! Jesus, you ought not shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got!" (O'Connor 65).

She is so consumed by fear that she begins to negotiate for her life. The grandmother is the last member of the family to persist with The Misfit before she is killed. As a result of fear, her attitude has the most dramatic change from how she behaves when the story started. In contrast, Munro uses the gun to symbolize shame. The narrator quotes " I shot two rabid wolves who were menacing the schoolyard (the teacher cowered terrified at my back)" (Munro 84) while she lay on her bed telling heroic stories about herself.

Also, the narrator states that she was " really" learning to shoot too. During this time, she relates shooting and killing to fearlessness, and work that is " ritualistically important" (Munro 87). After witnessing Mack get shot, her approach and belief towards how she felt about the gun switches. " I felt a little ashamed, and there was a new wariness, a sense of holding-off, in my attitude to my father and his work" (Munro 93). She did not feel in place working with a gun. When Flora, the second horse is scheduled to get shot, the narrator quotes " this time I didn't think of watching it.

That was something to see just one time" (Munro 93). She was so ashamed of what she had seen the first time that she refuses to witness that shame again. From the story " A Good Man Is Hard to Find", O'Connor uses a cat to symbolize death. This specific animal is named Pitty Sing. The grandmother felt " pity" for the cat so she decides to take the cat with them on their trip. She hides Pitty Sing under a black valise. While the cat was hidden, the family was traveling safely. Once the cat " sprang onto Bailey's shoulder" (Munro 59), there was an accident.

Also, Bailey was the first of two to get shot by Hiram and Bobby Lee. After shooting the grandmother, The Misfit lifts up Pitty Sing and quotes that the grandmother would have been a good woman “ if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life” (Munro 66). The story ends with Pitty Sing in the hands of the murderer. In contrast, Munro uses a horse to signify freedom. “ Freedom is symbolically represented by the horses from the girl’s own stories and from reality” (no author). When Laird falls asleep, the narrator stays up telling happy stories about herself.

She quotes “ for the time that remained to me, the most perfectly private and perhaps the best time of the whole day” (Munro 84). She feels satisfied and free during this time of the night. In one of her stories, she says “ I rode a fine horse spiritedly down the main street of Jubilee” (Munro 84). She then compares that scenario to King Billy, the only one that had enough freedom to ride a horse in Jubilee. The horse symbolized freedom to her. When Mack is shot, the narrator shows feelings of guilt. She starts to reevaluate her father’s work. When it is Flora’s turn to get shot, the narrator opens the gate wide instead of shutting it.

She was running free in the barnyard, from one end to the other” (Munro 93). Avoiding guilt, the narrator lets Flora run free like in her stories. In both stories, the house symbolizes imprisonment. In O’Connor’s personal life, she moved back to Milledgeville permanently when she survived her first life-threatening attack. “ In spite of the debilitating effects of the drugs used for treating lupus, O’Connor managed to devote a good part of the day to writing” (O’Connor article). O’Connor portrays her own feelings through using the house as a symbol.

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In the story, June Star insults the grandmother by saying “ she wouldn’t stay at home to be queen for a day” and “ she wouldn’t stay at home for a million bucks” (O’Connor 52). This passage implies that staying indoors have the same routine in comparison to all the exciting and adventurous thrills that partake outdoors. It is common for young families to leave the elderly home while they enjoy the night out. In this story, the grandmother is considered a drag by the children. “ The next morning the grandmother was the first one in the car, ready to go” (O’Connor 52).

This shows how excited she is to leave the house. In comparison, Munro also uses the house to symbolize imprisonment. “ The dark, hot, stifling kitchen imprisons the narrator’s mother and threatens to imprison the narrator” (Marlene Goldman). The narrator expresses her attitude towards work done indoors at numerous times. “ It seemed to me that work in the house was endless, dreary and peculiarly depressing” (Munro 87). As a young girl, she feels trapped doing household chores. She prefers to work outdoors with her father which she thinks is more important.

Over many decades, most women spent their time indoors cooking, cleaning and taking care of the family. “ It did not occur to me that she could be lonely, or jealous” (Munro 88). As young girls get older, they slowly realize how this stereotypical feminine life style can be very unpleasant. Flannery O’Connor and Alice Munro both use significant symbols in their story to bring forth different meanings. Both stories had similar symbols such as the gun and an animal to represent different meanings. On the other hand, both authors used similar symbols such as the house to produce similar ideas.