

In all of Flannery
O'Connor's short
stories, the theme of
alienation



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In all of Flannery O'Connor's short stories, the theme of alienation is portrayed at different levels. Most of the characters suffer from moral corruption, mental illness and grotesque appearances. This instantly suggests to us that these characters may be alienated from the rest of their society, as they may be viewed as strangers.

The story "The Life You Save Maybe Your Own" opens with Mrs Crater and her daughter Lucynell watching Mr Shiftlett moving towards them. The names of these characters give us a glimpse of their personality as their names are packed with symbolism. Mr Shiftlett's name conjures up the word "shifty" implying an evasive and deceptive personality. Mrs Crater's name "Crater" suggests a giant hole, which is the moral gap in her personality. Everyone in this story has a physical or mental abnormality; Mr Shiftlett with his arm, Lucynell with her mental limitations and Mrs Crater with her moral bankruptcy. This alienates these characters from the supernatural world.

Despite of Mr Shiftlett's appearance as a "crooked cross" and his physical deformity, the look of "composed dissatisfaction" on his face "as if he understood life thoroughly" implies to us that he is a man who has been travelling around and knows how to get along the world in spite of his physical disability. It is also very clear to us that he appreciates his freedom as the first word he teaches Lucynell to say the word "bird". As a drifter, it is clear to us that more than anything Mr Shiftlett values his freedom. He compares himself with a bird that can go anywhere it wishes. He sets himself as an outsider, possibly implying that he is a survivor. Yet he is morally corrupt along with most of Flannery O'Connor's characters.

We sympathise with Mr Shiftlett, as he seems alienated from the supernatural world. Mrs Crater calls him a “ poor disabled friendless drifting man”. He is abandoned from the friendliness of people as many my look at his as a disabled drifter. All his life he had felt and probably been treated inadequate. By marrying Lucynell he will make up for his inadequacies at the expense of others.

After the marriage, Mr Shiftlett looked “ morose and bitter as if he had been insulted while someone held him”. This is because he has been broken of his spirit and his birdlike wanderlust has been halted. Now he has responsibilities tying him down and will become like many men in his society with the responsibility of marriage and family. When he leaves Lucynell alone and drives off, he “ felt that a man with a car had a responsibility to others and kept his eye out for a hitchhiker”. Ironically, he feels no responsibility towards the helpless girl he left in the restaurant. However there is a moment of grace, as Shiftlett:

“...Was more depressed then ever as he drove on by himself”

It could be implied that all Flannery O Connor's characters have a moment of redemption, as the hostility they act in is strangely capable of returning them to reality and prepare them to accept their moment of grace. This suggests that violence brings the characters to life, as life for Flannery O Connor may have to involve violence in order to be realistic.

The story “ A Good Man Is Hard To Find” begins with the typical nuclear family being challenged by the grandmother who doesn't want to take the vacation to Florida as she has read about a misfit on the loose. The realism <https://assignbuster.com/in-all-of-flannery-oconnors-short-stories-the-theme-of-alienation/>

and classic of such a nuclear family alienates these characters from spiritual extension.

Initially, the structure of the story is vivid as it introduces an ordinary family planning their annual vacation. We met the members of the family as they display their attitudes towards reality. The grandmother arranges reality to suit her when she is capable of doing so.

When the family stop for lunch at The Tower, the story indicates to us a subtle contrast between a man's desires for closing his eyes to reality, which is a form of self-alienation from the reality and an animal's immediate apprehension of it:

" A grey monkey about a foot high, chained to a small chinaberry tree."

This implies to us that the monkey knows how to respond to reality when the children run towards him. This could suggest that animals and children both relate to reality, as only the children respond honestly to reality.

When the misfit enters the story, he brings with him a different kind of alienation. He has a completely honest conception of reality and no faith in God. His scepticism alienates him from the supernatural world. He also brings into the story a form of violence and aggression, which may bring the characters to reality. It is implied to us that the grandmother is deeply alienated as the misfit implies that:

" She would have been a good woman...if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life"

He indicates that he is aware of the force of violence, which has ended the grandmother's alienation as she is confronted with reality through aggression.

In " Good Country People", we are introduced to a different form of alienation. Hulga, the well-educated girl alienates herself from the people around her. Her mother implies to us that her education could have corrupted her mind, which lead to her alienation, as she does not communicate with others around her. She feels different as she has a wooden leg and therefore is one of Flannery O Connor's grotesque characters. Her wooden leg is her identity as she takes a great deal of care for it as though it was her " soul".

She is alienated from the supernatural world because she is an atheist. However, it becomes ironic when she claims to have no illusions but yet believes in the Bible salesman. When she believes in him, her identity and her privacy (of which is portrayed by the wooden leg) is destroyed when the Bible salesman runs away with her wooden leg and leaves her in a humiliating position.

In all of Flannery O'Connor's short stories, alienation is present. Most of the characters suffer from moral corruption, mental illness and grotesque appearances, which results in their alienation from the supernatural world.