

## EXPLORING THE SOUTHERN GOTHIC ELEMENTS, VIOLENCE AND SUFFERINGS IN THE SELECT SHORT FICTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

<sup>1</sup>P.Gopikrishna, <sup>2</sup>Dr.J.Anilpremraj

PhD Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore  
Assistant Professor(Sr.), School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore

Received: 16.12.2019

Revised: 18.01.2020

Accepted: 21.02.2020

### Abstract

The motto of researching in literature is to try to bring a harmony in the society. Where social imbalance increases, need for literary works sustains in that community. Flannery O'Connor is a writer who stressed on faith and literature in her public speeches. She gave in her literary works what the society exactly needed. She portrayed the South America in her works to bring out the sufferings of those people. This paper tries to prove that above title is the modern American reality, with the evidence of a couple of short stories by Connor "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge". "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is a Typical Connorial story with Mystic elements which follows southern gothic style, a style initiated by Connor. In addition to realistic elements, human psyche, violence, and religion can be found with appropriate purpose in the stories of Connor. "A Good Man is Hard to Find" story starts normally moves with some ironical elements but it gave the violent ending which the reader never expects. "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is a story of mother and son relationship of the black/white divide but ended tragically which is not expected by the Son. This paper is a study on life in the south with the reference to Connor's short stories. it is also an attempt to bring out the style of writing of Connor and the modern realistic elements in her works which are unique.

**Keywords :** Flannery O'Connor, Gothic, Race, Religion, Short Stories, Social, Southern, South America, Suffering, Slavery, Violence.

© 2019 by Advance Scientific Research. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.04.118>

### OBJECTIVES

The Main Aim of this study is to explore the gothic elements, violence, and sufferings as projected in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "Everything Rises That Must Converge" short stories. The researcher tries to deduce the impact of above elements on the characters of two short stories. These two short stories will project real-time human conflicts in fictional aspects irrespective of religion and race.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Flannery O'Connor known also as Flannery O'Connor, is a Multi faceted personality, who contributed a number of fiction, short stories and essays to American Literature. Her birth place is Savannah, Georgia. She completed her graduation in the stream of Social Sciences degree in Georgia College for women which is now called as Georgia College & State University and she received her M.A. from the University of Iowa in 1947. She is a "Southern American Writer" who implemented the southern gothic style in her works which is her own invention. Her works are marked by regional setting, grotesque in characters, sentimental, religious, acceptance and rejections by the society, and violence towards individuals with many sociological issues. Flannery O'Connor is a Catholic devotee, the faith on Catholicism reflected in her writings. She wrote novels and 32 short stories (published in three collections). In her career and posthumously she received many awards and honors such as O. Henry Prize of 1963 and 1965 years and National book award in 1972 for Wise Blood novel. At the last she died with Lupus in 1964 and rested at Memory Hill cemetery, Milledgeville, (Georgia).

### BACKGROUND

Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" story belongs to the short story collection named as "A Good Man is Hard To Find" which is published in 1955 and Everything that rises must converge' is a story, belongs to the short story collection named "Everything that rises must converge". pub-

lished in 1965 respectively. "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is her second short story collection in which the title story won O'Henry Award in 1965.

### INTRODUCTION

The term 'gothic' was originally derived from the style of medieval architecture and art. Later it was transformed to Literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and popularized by several writers in the nineteenth century all over Europe. Examples of this genre is "The Castle of Otranto" and "Dracula". The Gothic fiction first began in England with "The Castle of Otranto" which is written in 1764 by Horace Walpole. The Primary motive of this genre is to induce a pleasing terror in the reader, it is new kind of extension which related to the romantic era. The Basic definition of 'gothic' is connected to the horrific and dark elements particularly the constructional setting of the particular novel or story. The common features of gothic fiction are terror (psychological and physical), supernatural elements, mystery, appearances of ghosts, haunted houses with gothic architecture, death, darkness, curses, decays, and secrets.

### THE SOUTHERN GOTHIC

The concept of southern gothic is influenced by gothic writing of Europe, but it is quite different from the gothic concept. We can say the southern gothic genre is derived from the original gothic writing. American Gothic Literature began with the horror stories written by 19<sup>th</sup> century writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne who wrote tales with mystical elements, crime and flawed characters. The southern gothic style is different from other gothic writing because, the southern gothic does not dwell on the suspense, supernatural and other horrifying things. Connor eliminated other aspects from the genre and added dark humor in the stories. She gave a microscopic focus on the behavior of the people (mostly strange) to create a gothic mood and to expose the social order of the south which sustained for centuries and created confusion by the distance between the law and practicality. For Example "The Grandmother" and "The Misfit" characters in "A Good man is hard to find" story. Connor's style of gothic writing is quite

different even from the other American authors who wrote in this genre. Most of the southern gothic characters are not mentally stable, and these stories will start with a very simple things with the presence of dark humour and later the situation becomes complex. For example the story structure of "Everything that rises must converge" and the major characters of this story like Julian's Mother, Julian, and Carver's Mother reflects social and regional issues along with human suffrages. Her fictional characters represent the dialects, struggle, slavery, habits and personalities and defaults of the southern American society.

American gothic got a different semblance and began in 1920s. Later the genre is widely used by American authors during 1940s to 60s. The popular southern gothic writers are William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers and Flannery O' Connor. Especially the role of Flannery O' Connor is different because she is the person who added grotesque along with southern gothic elements in her works.

The reader should be aware of South American Black people's sufferings to understand the core of the story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is one of the best works of Connor. Approaching Connor's works without prior knowledge of the history of the south will rise many doubts towards ideology and perception of the author. Even some people may think this story is a cynical tale which is not compromising in the way to show out human pettiness and manipulation, and some people may think that it is a roaring black comic story. The researcher of this paper supports above three perceptions of the author in this story, because "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is a story which is allocated with both tragic and comic impulse presentation of Connor. Apart from these, the author used authentic Christian perception and worked on it to bring out Christian reality.

The narration of this story started with a family conversation, a discussion about planning a tour to Florida. The main character of the story is "The Grandmother", her name is not mentioned by the author. She lives in a joint family with her son Baily, his wife and their three children (June star, John Wesley and one baby). The most hated character or antagonist of this story is "The Misfit" who appeared in the later part of the story. But there was a disagreement aroused in the family about tour destination. Baily wanted to take all of the family members for the tour to Florida but his mother (the grandmother) did not agree to go to Florida. The grandmother was strong in her decision with an objection, she mentions about a dangerous criminal called "The Misfit" escaped from prison who, she suspected that may head in their way. But no one took her objection seriously it shows dislike towards her, that they are thinking that after all, she is just a grandma.

After that discussion grandmother secretly kept a cat in a basket which was under the seat of the car and unknown to the others. On their way, the grandmother cheered the children by playing games and telling stories to the kids. They pulled over at a restaurant to have meal. The had a small conversation with the owner of restaurant and his wife. The grandmother worried about the state of their society by complaining about the rareness of finding a "good man" and added that now a days they cannot trust strangers. They also discussed about "The Misfit".

The grandmother starts to narrate stories again when they started their journey again, with some fictitious extensions of an old plantation to which she added some stories of religion. When the kids learn that their grandmother visited the plantation which is nearby, they compelled their father to go to see that plantation. Their turned into dirt road as the grandmother leads the way. After travelling a while in that unknown direction she realized her mistake that the plantation is not at all located there, actually it is in Tennessee. To cover her mistake, she suddenly lets her cat out on Baily which she had kept in a basket so far. This causes an accident with which the car flips over. Except Baily's wife, no one gets injured. June started lamenting that no one is died.

After that accident the family waits for any car to ask for help, a car comes in the same way with some strange men. Soon the family realises that it is the misfit and his friends. Despite the grandmother's attempts to dissuade him from any evil intention, he and his company enjoyed shooting the the family members one by one. The gun sound had echoed from the bushes as the mother, the baby and June were killed.

Fearred from that incident the grandmother continued to talk with the Misfit out of shock. She continued to persuade him that he is a nice person and suggested him to pray to God. This led him to confess a little about his personal life and open up some of his opinions on God. Meanwhile the grandmother wrongly imagined that he turns soft, she moved towards him. She called him her child and moved to touch him. But the misfit respond quickly and shoot her three rounds on her chest. Then only Misfit started to tell his philosophy. He throw away her body along with her family and told: "She would've been a good woman if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life". Thus, the story ends tragically.

Southern gothic elements along consisted of violence and sufferings could be witnessed in this short story. In what way the southern gothic is different is it uses irony and includes eccentric, deeply flawed characters, and unlike her parent genre, the main intension of southern gothic is "to explore social issues and especially the cultural character of south". We can say that the violence and sufferings are the sub content or tools of southern gothic, but there is a need to prove them separately. At the beginning of the story the grandmother warned about the misfit properly. But at the same time later she manipulated the family to see that plantation, she intentionally wrecked the car on the way, only to cover her mistakes. She is as motiveless as the misfit. The misfit felt bitter about the entire world, the concept of God and his life too. On the other hand, the grandmother behaved with very much negligence towards her family. The misfit killed the entire family for no reason. The events or scenes in this story are extremely bizarre, the psychic character of the misfit is extremely mystic.

With the gothic genre, the author created the suspense and used foreshadowing to heighten the suspense. Characterization in this story seem very simple and comic at one point but seems very complex and incomprehensible at the end. The grandmother and Misfit are examples. If we see at the grandmother, she is an arrogant, quarrelsome nature, fussy, self-righteous, and hypocritical who tells the lies easily. We can see another character named as 'Red Sammy', owner of the tower, who always keeps a "gray monkey about a foot high" as a pet (O' Connor 204). Even his behaviour towards his wife is like dealing with a slave. Among all of them, the most difficult or dangerous character is "The Misfit". Even his name suggests that he is not fit for social living or anything of the sort. Even in the story, we can observe him that struggles in himself. He is a great example of a grotesque character. He never felt bad about his massacre and he is not sympathized one. Rather, he and his company enjoyed the fun of killing. Even he did not melt for grandma kind and soothing religious and affectionate words towards him. He is the major reason who makes the story horrific and with a tragic ending.

The next story "Everything that Rises Must Converge" also follows the same elements of the southern gothic genre like religious discussions, interactions with an outsider (like with disabled, different race, criminal or a poor people), violence, hypocritical, racist characters and deeply imperfect characters. Actually "Everything that Rises Must Converge" narrates the story of two mothers and their respective sons in white and black families. The Major characters of this story are Julian Chesney leading character, Julian's mother, Carver, and Carver's Mother. This story simply starts at where the doctor suggested Julian's mother to reduce her weight at least 20 pounds from now to save herself from blood pressure. So, she decided to go for reducing class to lose her weight, but she was afraid to travel alone at night in the bus, she seeks help from her son, Julian agreed to accompany her on every Wednesday.

But at one Wednesday Julian noted her hat which looks ugly and he thought that his mother may have any racist things or intensions. Without clarifying the things, he immediately decided to teach a lesson to his mother regarding old-fashioned views on race and class. At first attempt he did not go well, when Julian tries to speak with him, but the black guy did not have any interest to speak with others. Moments later next to the Julian and his mother, two people sat after them, who were black, and Julian observed that black women also wear the same kind of hat like his mother's, he thought co-incident, but this time, unfortunately, he didn't expected that it is a worth of losing his own mother. Because his mother saw Carver (kid of black women) she found him skinny, she is too distracted by carver. But the black woman is much afraid of her son being affectionate towards white lady, so she dragged her son back.

Julian's mother intended that to give a nickel to Carver when they all reached the same bus stop. Finally she took up a penny to give Carver but her son insisted not to give. When she tried, Carver's mother hit her with bag. After these incidents, Julian thought his mother got a good lesson and he started the conversation about black's emergence to the south with his mother. When the conversation was going on, suddenly she fell down and dies, probably due to a heart attack. Julian ran for help in panic.

In "Everything that Rises must Converge" we can observe the impact of the southern gothic genre and its elements, but mainly those elements are indirectly influenced this story characters. This story stands on the matter of mother and son relationship and Black and White relationship, and the setting of the story is the southern American area. It is where the racism existed and they supported slavery during the civil war. So, as we all know that the southern gothic genre deals with social evils and defaults of the society with the lite touch of religion, race, violence, struggle and suffrages of the lower-class.

In above story, we can see physical violence rarely but the shock given by actions of these characters are still there, it harshly touched the heart of the Julian Mother. Out of this shock, Julian's mother passed away from this world tragically. With this story along with the convictions between Julian and his mother. Miss O' Connor indirectly showing the conflicts between generations and their way of thinking. At the beginning of the story, she used a symbol which presented the religion and also, she used the busses also a symbol of 1960s situation of southern American black people because at that time, most of the bus's drivers are blacks.

The narrating technique of the story more emotional, an omniscient narration, maybe it is from Julian's head. The themes of "Everything that Rises must converge" is Suffering, Family, Race, Society, and class. We can consider the suffering is the major element or theme of this story. Because there is a lot of scenes in this story which indicated the suffrages of the characters, ironically it presented the suffering of Julian's Mother. According to the narrator, she is the one who suffered a lot about her son. She is a widow, being a single mother, it is not an easy task to put her son in a college. But unfortunately, Julian misunderstood his mother who looks a little bit ugly because she is overweight and she wore an ugly hat, like any high school children he may do not have that much of sense, who may think that his mother's outer ugliness is the reflection of the inner self? At the same time, few of her statements in the story may support Julian's judgments that she is a little bit racist.

Regardless of her statements in a practical manner or incidents that she encountered the child kid 'carvel' who is black. Even she likes that kid genuinely. Even she tries to give penny to that boy where we and her son and that carver's rude mother may be misunderstood her actions as racist. But certain things of her seems to be like a racist.

Julian Chestny is the son character of this story who is like so many college grads, who later tried to sell typewriters, but his income was not sufficient to purchase cigarette for himself. According to the story, he did not properly understand his

mother, that is why is he gave rude statements towards his mother. If he properly understood his mother, he might not lose her at the end of this story. He is the one in the story who do not have any black friends in real friends' circle, who always speak with them in sole inside only. Simply like murmuring in mind. He seemed to be like an introvert. At a certain point, he became the devil's servant to his mother by his words towards her. But at the last, he is the one who fell aside and cried 'mamma, mamma'. At the last, he suffered the loss of his mother.

Carver is a cute 4 years old black kid, who do not know about this external world, extremely loved by Julian's mother because of his cuteness. But the mother of Carver is a terrific character of this play she is the one who hurtled Julian's mother when she tried to play with Carver. She is also like Julian's mother not in fashion but in the sense. Because when the black people in South America are abused for hundreds of years how can we think she trust white people, she just reflected the ways of white people to black people with her behaviour. They both could not come out that old state of mind. That is why when Julian's mother tried to approach Carver, his mother is afraid and humiliated her twice. Through this character miss O' Connor raised many questions about this biased society. And it is really hard to judge her role in this story.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the need of American Society during the early 20th century is clearly portrayed through the works of Connor. This research article proved the existence of southern gothic elements, violence and sufferings in the above two short stories. Flannery O' Connor is a bold writer who experimented in her style of writing, especially against the majority of mindset in her country. She never hesitated to show off the grotesques in human nature and other defaults of the society, even her characters are filled with negative shades and not sympathized, stating that it is the true shade of this society. That is why her style is different from other authors. Even in one interview, she mentioned that the characters in her works are hard to digest because that is the reality. She gave what exactly her society needed from a creator like O' Connor. Southern gothic style is a way of expressing the terrors of black people to the readers. Grotesque and violence show off little sense of humour and accustomed feel of beaten down respectively. The readers must realise at least half the feel of the black people who underwent so much hazards while reading these literary arts which will make them meaningful.

## REFERENCES

1. Bandy, Stephen C. (1996). "One Of My Babies': The Misfit And The Grandmother." *Studies In ShortFiction* 33.1: 107. *MasterFILEElite*. Web. 14 Jul. 2019.
2. Desmond, John.(2004). "Flannery O'conner's Misfit And The Mystery Of Evil." *Renascence* 56.2: 129-137. *MasterFILE Elite*. Web. 14 Jul. 2019.
3. Flint, & Thomas,P.(2018).On the Significance of Civil War References in Flannery O'connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find".*Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*.Vol.70.No.2
4. Gatti, & Olivia.(2005).Stab at Mother: Self-Made Messiahs, Maternal Suffering, and the Cost of Co-Redemption in Flannery O'connor's Everything That Rises Must Converge.*Magistra*.Vol.11.No.1
5. GradesFixer. (2018, August, 05) Gothic Elements in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and "The Lottery. Retrived July 14, 2019, from <https://gradesfixer.com/free-essay-examples/gothic-elements-in-a-good-man-is-hard-to-find-and-the-lottery/>
6. <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/o/oconnors-short-stories/summary-and-analysis/everything-that-rises-must-converge> . July 15 2019.
7. McDermott, & John,V.(2010).Flannery O'Connor's Validation of the Unreasonable in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find."*Notes on Contemporary Literature*.Vol. 40, No. 1.

8. O'Connor, F. (1983). *A good man is hard to find and other stories*. San Diego, Calif: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
9. O'Connor, F. (1965). *Everything that rises must converge*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
10. O'Connor, F., & Magee, R. M. (1987). *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor*. Jackson: *University Press of Mississippi*.
11. Kumar A, Hasamnis A. "A Clinical Update on Peroxisome Proliferator-Activated Receptors." *Systematic Reviews in Pharmacy* 1.2 (2010), 175-181. Print. doi:10.4103/0975-8453.75075
12. Bhatia, L.C., Naik, R.H. *Clinical profile of acute myocardial infarction in elderly patients(2013) Journal of Cardiovascular Disease Research, 4 (2), pp. 107-111. DOI: 10.1016/j.jcdr.2012.07.003*
13. Schroeder, & Michael, L. (2012). *Desegregation and the Silent Character in O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge"*. *Flannery O'Connor Review*. Vol. 10.
14. Russell, & Shannon. (1988). *Space and the Movement through Space in Everything That Rises Must Converge: A Consideration of Flannery O'Connor's Imaginative Vision*. *The Southern Literary Journal*. Vol. 20, No. 2.
15. Srigley, & Susan. (2013). *Flannery O'Connor in the Public Square: Karin Coonrod's Everything That Rises Must Converge*. *Flannery O'Connor Review*. Vol. 11.
16. Shmoop Editorial Team. (2008, November 11). *Everything That Rises Must Converge Summary*. Retrieved July 15, 2019, from <https://www.shmoop.com/everything-that-rises-must-converge/summary.html>
17. Shmoop Editorial Team. (2008, November 11). *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. Retrieved July 15, 2019, from <https://www.shmoop.com/good-man-hard-to-find/>
18. Yao, Tianyuan Ben. (2013) "A Test of Faith: Analysis on 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'." *A Journal of Academic Writing* : 10.