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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

**Southern Gothic in the works of Flannery O'Connor and Carson
McCullers**

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Cílem diplomové práce je analyzovat dílo amerických jižanských autorek z hlediska způsobů využití gotických prvků. V úvodu práce studentka definuje pojem "jižanská literatura" a do tohoto literárně-historického kontextu tvorbu obou autorek zařadí. Dále bude definovat další teoretické pojmy, s nimiž bude pracovat.

Jádrem práce bude analýza vybraných děl zvolených autorek, v níž se diplomantka zaměří především na gotické rysy (násilí, samota, absurdita, podivnost, apod.)

Závěrem studentka své vývody shrne a díla obou autorek ze zvoleného úhlu pohledu porovná. Studentka bude pracovat s relevantními kritickými zdroji týkajícími se jak jižanské literatury, tak konkrétních děl Flannery O'Connorové a Carson McCullersové, a rovněž s teoretických pojednáními týkajícími se pojmů a témat, jimž se bude věnovat.

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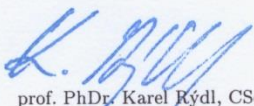
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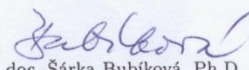
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- Ad.

Prohlašuji:

Tuto práci jsem vypracovala samostatně. Veškeré literární prameny a informace, které jsem v práci využila, jsou uvedeny v seznamu použité literatury.

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Souhlasím s prezenčním zpřístupněním své práce v Univerzitní knihovně.

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Bc. Monika Fantová

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ANNOTATION

The main aim of this master thesis is to analyse the short stories of Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers with the attention being paid to the gothic elements of violence, loneliness and freakishness. Since the authors were the most prominent writers of the American Southern literature, the general characterization of the American South and its socio-historical context are provided. The theoretical part deals with the Southern literature and its phenomenon of the twentieth century, the Southern Renaissance. The terms Southern Gothic and grotesque are also clarified. The analytical part discusses the short stories "The Ballad of the Sad Café" and "A Good Man Is Hard To Find."

KEYWORDS

Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, The Southern Renaissance, The American South, Gothic, Southern Gothic, Grotesque, violence, loneliness, freakishness

ANOTACE

Hlavním cílem této diplomové práce je poskytnout analýzu povídek Flannery O'Connorové a Carson McCullersové se zaměřením na gotické prvky jakou jsou násilí, osamocení a podivínství. Vzhledem k tomu, že obě autorky jsou jedny z nejvýznamnějších spisovatelek americké jižanské literatury, zabývá se práce také obecnou charakteristikou amerického Jihu a jeho společensko-historickým kontextem. Dále se v teoretické části pojednává o jižanské literatuře a jižanské renesanci a nechybí vysvětlení pojmů jižanská gotika a groteska. Analytická část se zabývá rozborem povídek *Balada o smutné kavárně* a *Dobrého člověka těžko najdeš*, s cílem analyzovat použití gotických prvků.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Flannery O'Connorová, Carson McCullersová, jižanská renesance, americký Jih, gotika, jižanská gotika, groteskno, násilí, osamocení, podivínství

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor are considered to be two of the most prominent writers of the American Southern literary tradition, the Southern Renaissance in particular. They both felt to be bound to the South and its peculiar regionalism of language and voices. Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor were both born in Georgia, growing up in the Deep South where tradition and a sense of place used to be more important than wealth and material possessions. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the twentieth century the South began to inevitably change, losing many of its values and its distinctiveness. As a result, the authors began to react to these changes in their writing.

Flannery O'Connor was a devout Roman Catholic with a Southern upbringing. These two components directed her writing and formed her worldview. Her fiction is interwoven with gothic and grotesque elements aiming to communicate her concerns but also to shock her readership. She was aware of the fact that the South was gradually deteriorating in terms of religiosity. As a result, the only way to awaken people from spiritual drowsiness was to present them with the most horrid scenes. Margaret Earley Whitt, who wrote *Understanding Flannery O'Connor*, points out that O'Connor in her short stories draws "large and startling figures" assuming that her hostile audience would not understand the world her way, she thus desires to make sure that the distortions she is writing about are seen and understood as distortions to "an audience which is used to seeing them as natural." In every story O'Connor suggests that if the Christian beliefs are in place for the reader, her fiction will be clear.¹ Nevertheless, O'Connor was aware that this was not the case. As a result, she decided to create this unsettling and thought-provoking writing. One will find out that her work is violent, disturbing but also grotesque and funny.

Carson McCullers was the opposite of Flannery O'Connor in terms of religiosity. She was still in search for God, claiming that: Writing is not only how I earn my living; it is how I earn my soul, writing is my search for God."² In addition, she and her husband were notorious for their immoderate drinking, homosexual affairs and attempts at suicide. Virginia Carr, a biographer of Carson McCullers, confirms that McCullers's destiny seemed to be full of

¹ Margaret Earley Whitt, *Understanding Flannery, O'Connor* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 10.

² Carson McCullers, quoted in Virginia Spencer Carr's *Understanding Carson McCullers* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 11.

suffering and despair.³ McCullers was aware of the social and cultural degeneration and mental deformity of the South. As a result, the mental imbalance, the feeling of loneliness and separation are pivotal themes of her writing. She integrated the features of gothic and grotesque into her writing to point out the suffering of modern Southerners.

Since the authors belong to the American South, the theoretical part of the thesis deals with the characterization of this part of the United States along with its socio-historical context. It attempts to familiarise the reader not only with the events shaping the new South, but also with its peculiarities which are integrated in the writing of Southern writers. The chapter “Southern Literature,” including the subchapters, outlines and introduces the development of Southern literature along with its main features. The subchapter “Southern Renaissance” further details Southern writing, dealing with the features of the gothic and the grotesque, which are the focal themes of the thesis. This helps comprehend the employment of these elements in the authors’ writing. Lastly, the analytical part centres upon the short stories with the attention being paid to the gothic elements of loneliness, violence, and freakishness. Flannery O’Connor is sometimes placed close to Carson McCullers in terms of employing the mode of gothic. They both put themselves in the roles of observers reflecting the changing South in their fiction, using the elements of gothic and grotesque therefore it is interesting to compare O’Connor’s short story “A Good Man Is Hard To Find” with McCullers’ “The Ballad of The Sad Café.”

³ Virginia Spencer Carr, *Understanding Carson McCullers* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 53, 55.

Chapter 2 The American South

O magnet-south! O glistening
perfumed South!
My South! O quick mettle, rich
blood, impulse and love! Good and
evil! O all dear to me!⁴

Walt Whitman

The South has produced a number of prominent writers who accurately captured the Southern region in their writing. Needless to say that some of the aspects defining the South are presented in their works. As a result, the main features defining the South will subsequently be outlined.

The inseparable part of southern history is definitely the long-standing tradition of slavery. Professor Rubin confirms that the South was closely tied to slavery, this classified the nature of the region, contributing to its uniqueness.⁵ In connection with slavery, there were black folk. As Rubin claims, the mass of black people experienced abject poverty, hard work and became the victims of social humiliation. Nevertheless, they gave a tone and tempo to Southern life.⁶ As a result, the racial issues were also in a way reflected in Southern writing.

Logically, without slavery there would not have been a Civil War, which became one of the most crucial and significant events in Southern history. The loss of the war caused an immense loss of self-confidence for the South. It was viewed as a defeated region for a long time by the rest of the United States. As a result, the South grew more and more alienated. Richard Gray, who studied Southern literature, adds that: “the Southern states had been reduced to the position of a conscious and embattled minority in an aggressive and growing nation.”⁷ The inferiority complex was changed by industrialization at the beginning of the twentieth century, enhancing the economic situation and thus the position of the South in the nation.

⁴ Walt Whitman, “O Magnet South!” in *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Jim Manis (Hazleton: Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 530.

⁵ Louis D. Rubin, Jr., “The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition,” in *The American South, Portrait of a Culture*, ed. Louis D. Rubin (Washington, D.C.: United States Infor. Agency, 1979), 4,15.

⁶ Rubin, “The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition,” 14.

⁷ Richard J. Gray, *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South* (Baltimore: University Press, 1977), 19.

It is vital to note that before the advent of industrialization the South had maintained an agrarian tradition, which defined the typical Southern way of life. Rubin further explains that the South was defined with a farm life, the sense of family roots and complex social relationships.⁸ The deep attachment of Southerners to their homesteads and communities is inarguably part of the South. This issue can be seen in the writings of Southern authors, Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers in particular, their stories are not only set in the South but their characters remain in their communities, demonstrating their close ties with the places in which they live. Another important aspect in the South is strong religious practice. John Shelton Reed, a sociologist and essayist dealing with the contemporary South, confirms that the South's conservatism and strong religious practice are inseparable aspects of the Southerner's nature. There are a large number of religious people, primarily Protestants.⁹

When one wonders about how Southerners are constituted, the best way to express it is by the words of Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* Rubin quotes Quentin Compson: "You can't understand it. You would have to be born there." Or, as Rubin adds, you would have to live there a long time.¹⁰ Rubin further explains what it is to be a Southerner nowadays: "[...] is still to be heir to a complex set of attitudes and affinities, assumptions and instincts, which are the products of history acting upon geography, even though much of the history is now forgotten and the geography modified."¹¹

⁸ Rubin, "The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition," 7.

⁹ John Shelton Reed, "Instant Grits and Plastic-Wrapped Crackers: Southern Culture and Regional Development," in *The American South, Portrait of a Culture*, ed. by Louis D. Rubin (Washington, D. C.: United States Infor. Agency, 1979), 30.

¹⁰ Rubin, "The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition," 17.

¹¹ Rubin, "The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition," 17.

Chapter 3 The socio-historical context

Richard Gray presents that: “a work of literature is both a product and reinterpretation of historical experience; it is at once “of” history and “about” it.” He goes on explaining that the Southern writers, particularly those of the Southern Renaissance period, have been engrossed in the convulsions of their inheritance, the burdens and legacies that the past transmits to the present. Invariably, though, each of them concentrated on different aspects and interpretations of their history as they had different priorities of value and separate ideas of which experiences were significant. It was the disturbing experience of social change in the present that led them to the investigation of their past.¹²

Before the formation of the Confederate States of America in 1860-61, the nature of the South was marked with chattel slavery. Rubin adds that this rather peculiar institution enhanced the uniqueness of Southern life.¹³ After the loss in the Civil War and the subsequent end of slavery, the South, according to Rubin, yet in defeat not only retained its distinctiveness, but added to it the mythos of a lost cause, and unity that was a result of common deprivation and adversity.¹⁴ The South may have been harmed economically; nevertheless culturally it was enriched as the following events shaped its new identity. In addition, they also served as a source of ideas for Southern writers.

A long time before the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the South used to be an overwhelmingly rural region due to its huge involvement in agriculture. Despite the fact that the Industrial Revolution started in the nineteenth century in the US, as Ed Piacentino, a professor of English, clarifies; the Southern region did not accept it until the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁵ Rubin states that the South had to act as it seemed obvious that the only way to retrieve its lost fortunes and pride, which had been lost in the war, was to put aside its old habits and attitudes of the defeated past and to get more involved in commerce and industry with the same vitality and finesse as the victorious North. Some of them called for a “new South” of buzzing cities, prosperous manufacturers, and diversified multi-crop agriculture.¹⁶ Little did Southerners realise how significant and massive an impact that would have on the traditional rural way of life and on the lives of Southerners.

¹² Gray, *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South* (Baltimore: University Press, 1977), 1-3.

¹³ Rubin, “The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition,” 7.

¹⁴ Rubin, “The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition,” 5.

¹⁵ Ed Piacentino, “Industrialization,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora et al. (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 374.

¹⁶ Rubin, “The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition,” 6.

The rural South was gradually urbanised. Dennis Roth, who researched the country life of the American South, points out that the expansion of towns was supported by railroads as the towns became the “central locations for rail traffic.”¹⁷ Furthermore, by that time people were leaving countryside for cities, being attracted by job opportunities and high factory wages. In addition, the on-going mechanization in agriculture had resulted in reducing numbers of people on the farms. As a result, they were forced to move to cities to seek employment. Consequently, the beginning of the twentieth century is marked with deteriorating farm ownership and fading country life in the South.

Gray claims that the First World War became a major precipitant of the South’s industrial development as it created an enormous demand for manufactured goods. Considering the fact that Europe could not satisfy this demand due to its active involvement in the conflict, the United States turned into a major supplier of material to armies and markets in Europe. The South in particular witnessed a sudden and massive transformation of its economy. Specifically, the birth of the new South, marked by the smokestack and the skyscraper, was drastically accelerated.¹⁸

During the 1920s the South was going through an enormous metamorphosis gradually acknowledging the end of its traditional way of life, and as Gray puts it, recognising its absorption into the strange new world of industrialism and advanced capitalism. As a consequence, within the thirty years after the end of the First World War, the number of farms in the South had significantly lowered. Those who stayed on the land underwent a drastic personal transformation as their traditional way of life could no longer be defined by their rural environment. Some of them felt that they had to adopt to a life that identified less and less with the traditional Southern notions of good living. A number of them still identified with the values that most people found completely obsolete.¹⁹ This might have resulted in the disorientation and bewilderment of Southerners which Flannery O’Connor and Carson McCullers are pointing out in their short stories. The South had been inevitably changing and some of its inhabitants had difficulties coming to terms with it, missing the old way of Southern life.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the number of people living in towns and cities outnumbered the rural population. Rubin claims that as soon as The Great Depression swept across the United States in the early 1930s, the industrialization of the South got into even

¹⁷ “The Country Life Movement,” Federal Rural Development Policy in the Twentieth Century, accessed May 22, 2014, http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/rural_development_policy.html.

¹⁸ Gray, *The Literature of Memory*, 3-4.

¹⁹ Gray, *The Literature of Memory*, 6-7.

higher gear. The South recovered from the worst rigors of the Depression and the coming Second World War ensured great prosperity. Defence industries, military and naval installations were set up throughout the South. The American South was at its boom time peak. Significant changes were going on in Southern agriculture. It was not only being mechanized but it was also acquiring a new name, agribusiness. The traditional farm life was phased out, rural electrification brought illumination to remote places, sharecropping and farm tenancy virtually disappeared.²⁰ Southerners were aware of the fact that this was not the South they used to identify with. As the Second World War came to an end, the industrial expansion and urban development continued and the South gradually lost its uniqueness, becoming more like the rest of the nation. This raised several questions for which no one had an answer: Was it the South anymore? Could it not only be defined by geographical lines? Was the South now more urban than rural?

As Gray concludes, when a country finds itself disturbed and disorientated, in the field of literature it does not necessarily have to be negative. In a sense, they were able to analyse their personal motives, examine the premises on which their own beliefs and those of their society depended, which is surely a characteristic that breeds a good piece of writing. Only at a crisis point, when one form of society is disappearing and another is emerging, can writers as a group employ their inheritance as a “source of ideas.”²¹ This is precisely what Southern writers have accomplished.

²⁰ Rubin, “The American South: The Continuity of Self-Definition,” 15.

²¹ Gray, *The Literature of Memory*, 7-8.

Chapter 4 Southern Literature

Southern writing is inarguably distinctive in its forms and attitudes. Susan Irons, a lecturer on Southern literature, claims that each generation of writers has endeavoured to establish criteria for the definition of Southern literature. Their attempts have ranged from strictly geographical guidelines from the birthplaces of authors to a list of qualities sought in the literature itself.²² Nevertheless, it is important to note that when attempting to define this writing, it would be limiting to focus attention solely on geography. According to Scott Romine, who specialises in Southern literature, these authors simply share the so called “sense of place” in their works, and hence the fact that they are Southern writers is not questioned. Romine further states that this sense of place is not only a matter of geography but also of the Southern region itself along with its tradition and cultural background.²³ William L. Andrews, a professor of English, agrees with Romine and adds that it is the personal, almost intimate connection to place and the past what makes the Southern literature so unique. He further claims that “the preference for the tangible over the abstract, a tempered, often tragic view of life, an eye for the peculiar or grotesque and an ear for the cadence of oral storytelling, and so on” are often cited as the signature of Southern writers.²⁴ Randall Stewart, who researches on Southern writing, adds that a Southern writer is the one who was brought up in the South, is aware of its ties and finds them unbreakable and: “exhibits southern prejudices, and continues to draw upon the South as a creative resource even if the writer leaves the South.”²⁵

The very first idea of Southern literature, as Susan Irons explains, emerged with the need to distinguish the South from the rest of the nation on a literary level. Southern literature developed from a white man’s writing into a writing dealing with various issues reflecting differences in race, gender and class. Southern writing also captured the important events going on in particular periods in the South.²⁶ Consequently, this reflection shaped the nature of Southern writing later on. The integration of the events into literature, which have been mentioned in the chapter ‘The Socio-historical context,’ contributed to the definition of Southern writing and made it incomparable to any other literature in the world.

²² Susan H. Irons, “Southern Literature, Idea of,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora et al. (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 831

²³ Scott Romine, “Where Is Southern Literature? Practice of Place in a Post-southern Age,” *Critical Survey* 12 (2000): 5, accessed May 14, 2014, url:

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/41557018?uid=3737856&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103766207591>.

²⁴ William L. Andrews, introduction to *The Literature of the American South* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), xvii.

²⁵ Randall Stewart, quoted in Irons’ “Southern Literature, Idea of,” 831

²⁶ Irons, “Southern Literature, Idea of,” 828-29.

The idea of Southern fiction officially formed in the 1830s. Along with this idea emerged a heightened sense of regionalism. As Irons claims, several authors appeared to be very keen to promote a Southern literature “which would faithfully reflect the South in tradition and subject matter, and thus that would make a distinctive contribution to the fabric of the national literature.” Irons further adds that primarily after the Civil War, there was an immense demand for Southern literature.²⁷ Metaphorically speaking, Southerners set off on a long journey with the aims of promoting Southern writing and of creating their own national literature.

Susan Irons states that mainly after the Civil War Southern writing was synonymous with war recollections and poetry. Southerners were greatly influenced by their defeat in the war, and hence for most of them there was no other way to come to terms with the defeat, except to write about it. Consequently, they made the event part of the Southern literary identity.²⁸

Southern writing was gradually gaining the importance at a national level. By the 1880s and 1890s, it earned respect and authority in northern literary culture as the Southern writers began to create a new genre called “southern local colour”, which significantly contributed to the nation’s literature. The economically and culturally defeated South began to flourish and was just about to prove that it deserved its place in the American literary canon. As Irons explains, the South was strongly motivated to find its place in American writing and probably even challenge the North’s long-running literary dominance. The first promoters of the idea of Southern literature were mainly university academics. They endeavoured to create and promote Southern writing that would present a more modern and appealing view of the South to northerners.²⁹

At the turn of the twentieth century, a new generation, which included the Agrarians and founders of the New Criticism, focused on a regionalism praising the agrarian values of the Old South. They despised the current values of the new South, the commercialism and industrialization. As Irons maintains, during this second quarter of the twentieth century the new period of writing in Southern literature, the Southern Renaissance emerged.³⁰ It is said that this produced writing gave Southern literature even more pre-eminence. Irons further notes that the writing of this era was mainly concerned with the New Criticism of the current situation in the South regarding the issues of consumerism, industrialization and the

²⁷ Irons, “Southern Literature, Idea of,” 828-29.

²⁸ Irons, “Southern Literature, Idea of,” 829.

²⁹ Irons, “Southern Literature, Idea of,” 829-830.

³⁰ Irons, “Southern Literature, Idea of,” 831.

deterioration of the religious way of life. The most prominent writers of the period were William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Thomas Wolfe and Robert Peter Warren.³¹

At mid-century, the second wave of Southern Renaissance unfolded. Many important texts were contributing to a monolithic constitution of Southern literature. The authors focused on qualities supposedly inherent in the southern temper. Iron adds that there is a formal list of topics usually found in Southern writing of the second-wave of Southern Renaissance writers. It concerns manners of modern Southerners, a code of honour, the importance of family, an agrarian society and the political defence of religious principles.³² The most prominent writers who followed William Faulkner were Katherine Ann Porter, Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, William Styron, and Flannery O'Connor.

³¹ Irons, "Southern Literature, Idea of," 831.

³² Irons, "Southern Literature, Idea of," 831.

4.1 Southern Renaissance

The phenomenon of Southern Renaissance came into being in the 1920s. Before its emergence, there had never been any literature of such importance in the Southern region. To clarify this new string of writing in the Southern literary canon, it must be noted that the term “renaissance,” according to Gray: “is a pretty inaccurate term if it is meant to imply the recovery of something previously achieved.”³³ Corner V. Woodward, an American historian, further explains that the word “renaissance” implies a kind of “rebirth.” For Southern literature, however, it is more like a real birth rather than a rebirth as “nothing comparable had happened before in the South that could conceivably be said to have been reborn in the twentieth century.”³⁴

The reasons for the emergence of this phenomenon vary. One of the factors contributing to the new string of Southern literary tradition was the fact that the South was undergoing the transformation from the Old South, rural and agriculturally-based, to the New South, which was more urbanised and industrialized. Gray explains that particularly during the 1920s the United States was facing the process of industrialization, which was about to touch the South and trigger its evolution in terms of urbanisation.³⁵ Despite the fact that the South had experienced significant moments in its history before, such as slavery or the Civil War, they had never been as massive as in the 1920s when the South was transforming from a rural region to a more urban one, and as Gray clarifies: “that put into question its every way of looking at itself.” As a result, the 1920s was the most relevant period for a number of writers to look upon their inheritance as a “source of ideas.”³⁶ Nevertheless, as the paper is concerned with the two female writers who contributed to the formation of the second wave of this phenomenon, it is essential to deal with the second generation of Southern Renaissance. Before doing so, it is necessary to note that the first generation was primarily concerned with Southern history, being focused on a past full of darkness that was not to be found elsewhere. Particularly slavery and the defeat in the Civil War became burdens, deeply rooted in the consciousness of Southerners.

When speaking about the second wave of Southern Renaissance writers, it must be noted that the group of writers emerged after the period of World War II. Hana Ulmanová, a

³³ Gray, *The Literature of Memory*, 35.

³⁴ “Why the Southern Renaissance?” last modified December 12, 2003, <http://www.vqronline.org/essay/why-southern-renaissance>.

³⁵ Gray, *The Literature of Memory*, 37.

³⁶ Gray, *The Literature of Memory*, 8.

lecturer in American literature, states that the generation of writers were represented by Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote and also Flannery O'Connor.³⁷ Even though the most prominent writer of the first period, William Faulkner, was still actively writing at that time, a new generation of writers began to create a completely new view of the South, dealing with more diverse themes. In comparison to the topics addressed in the writing of the 1920s, the sense of history seems to vanish from most of the writing of the new generation. Michael O'Brien, an expert in Southern studies, claims that the writers of the second wave are primarily concerned with issues such as the criticism of modern American society, the changing economic and social orders and the decline of religious coherence.³⁸ To briefly outline the main topics of this period, it is essential to further mention close-knit families, human relations, the issues of religiosity, love, violence and death. Louise Blackwell, the author of the article on Southern Renaissance, adds that some of the writers also integrated the positive view of the Southern agrarian way of life into their fiction, which has been defended in much Southern writing. Another aspect would be the author's involvement with the language itself, capturing the southern rhetoric and the oral tradition. Last but not least, it is crucial to state that the second wave of the Southern Renaissance writers had a high regard for the supernatural playing with the elements of gothic and grotesque.³⁹

³⁷ Hana Ulmanová, "American Southern Literature," in *Lectures on American Literature*, ed. Martin Procházka et al. (Praha: Karolinum, 2002), 225.

³⁸ Michael O'Brien, quoted in Romine's "Where Is Southern Literature?" 8.

³⁹ Louise Blackwell, "Flannery O'Connor and the Southern Renaissance," *Revista de Letras* 17 (1975): 102, accessed February 10, 2014, url: <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/27666204?uid=3737856&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103798316521>.

4.2 Gothic in general

The paper is primarily concerned with the analysis of Southern Gothic elements in the writing of Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers. The terms gothic and grotesque need to be introduced and clarified. Before dealing with Southern Gothic specifically, the beginnings of the gothic genre in general will be presented.

Charles Crow, an expert in gothic writing, claims that gothic itself emerged on the cusp of the neoclassical movement and Romanticism. As a consequence, gothic is often perceived as a variant of or a subset within Romanticism. At its beginnings, the term applied purely to an architectural style having been perceived as a contrast to Classicism and its features.⁴⁰ Fred Botting, a lecturer on Romanticism, explains that in the period of Classicism the buildings, works of art, gardens, landscapes and subsequently written texts had to be adjusted to attend to the classical rules.⁴¹ Regarding the architecture of Classicism, there was a great sense of uniformity, proportion and order. When speaking about literature in the period of Classicism, the texts were written with the intention to instruct rather than entertain, to inculcate a sense of morality and rational understanding. By way of contrast, the typical features of gothic architecture were semi-darkness and the magnificence of the buildings installing various gloomy feelings in human beings. Fred Botting concludes that: “the dominance of classical values produced a national past that was distinct from the cultivation, rationality and maturity of an enlightened age.”⁴² This past was called Gothic.

Gothic started to be classified as an artistic code that is not possible to evaluate on the basis of classical norms. In the second half of the eighteenth century the term gothic as Zdeněk Hrbata, a professor of Czech and Comparative Literature, and Martin Procházka, a professor of English, American and Comparative Literature, suggest, began to be perceived as a reaction to the dark side of enlightened rationalism, perceived as a “black hole” in the rational world of Enlightenment. The criticism of the negative side of this rationalism was achieved through employing the motifs of darkness.⁴³ Botting concludes that this derogatory

⁴⁰ Charles.L. Crow, *Gothic Literary Studies: History of the Gothic: American Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 6.

⁴¹ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 14.

⁴² Botting, *Gothic*, 15.

⁴³ Zdeněk Hrbata and Martin Procházka, *Romanticism and Romanticisms: Terms, Trends, Contexts* (Praha: Karolinum, 2005), 135. “All citations from Hrbata and Procházka were translated by the thesis author.”

term conjures up ideas of extravagant fancies and natural wildness, having all the attributes that are contrast to those of classicism.⁴⁴

Botting explains that the term gothic had a strong pejorative meaning of being fascinated by various objects, practices that are constructed as negative, immoral, irrational or fantastic. He further adds that: “gothic signifies a writing of excess, appearing in the awful obscurity that haunted eighteenth-century rationality and morality. It shadows the despairing ecstasies of Romantic idealism and individualism [...]”⁴⁵ Gothic atmosphere that was marked with gloomy and mysterious features signalled the disturbing return of the past upon the present. Michael Foucault, a French philosopher and social theorist, says that: “the language of terror is dedicated to an endless expense, even though it only seeks to achieve a single effect. It drives itself out of any possible resting place.”⁴⁶ Its main goal is to instil gloomy feelings, to hit the deepest and darkest corners of the human soul. The gothic fiction, in other words, attempts to awake the reader emotionally without relying on reason. Botting adds that it also challenges the reason via overindulgence in flights of fancy.⁴⁷

Edward Young, an English poet, claims that only in the darkness the soul turns to itself, thereby experiencing a spiritual awakening.⁴⁸ The darkness stimulates people’s imagination leading them to questioning the meaning of the world in general. Consequently, as Hrbata and Procházka explain, our reason is left with dark and unknown forces, separated from rationality that had been so strongly promoted by enlightenment thinkers.⁴⁹ Gothic mode begins to explore entities that are beyond human understanding, subjects that cannot be justified by reason. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are periods not only of new literary attributes but also of taking a new perspective of the world and human life itself.

4.2.1 Gothic in English and American literature

The origins of the gothic genre in English literature are believed to be connected with the English writer Horace Walpole and his novel *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. Walpole is therefore perceived as the father of the gothic novel. His novel included all the salient themes and symbols that are an essential part of gothic writing. In addition, *The Castle of Otranto* is considered the vanguard of this genre, and in the following years there were

⁴⁴ Botting, *Gothic*, 1.

⁴⁵ Botting, *Gothic*, 1.

⁴⁶ Michael Foucault, quoted in Botting’s *Gothic*, 65.

⁴⁷ Botting, *Gothic*, 4.

⁴⁸ Edward Young, quoted in Zdeněk Hrbata’s and Martin Procházka’s *Romanticism and Romanticisms: Terms, Trends, Contexts*, 135, 136.

⁴⁹ Hrbata and Procházka, *Romanticism and Romanticisms*, 135-136.

many other authors who employed the same strategies and archetypes and elaborated them further.

Regarding the most salient features of English gothic writing, it is vital to point out that architecture played an important role in the literature. Hrbata and Procházka claim that the interior as well as the exterior, for instance, of Walpole's pseudo-gothic summer residence becomes a perfect place for imagination, the place that is attributed to project ghostly visions.⁵⁰ Gothic writing is full of intense feelings, coveting the joys of extreme emotions and fearfulness. As a result, the gothic atmosphere is accompanied by medieval architectural style. Fred Botting further observes that such architecture symbolised the spatial and temporal separation of the past and its values from the present. In later fiction, however, as Botting points out, the archetypes of medieval castles gave way to old buildings becoming the places where fears and anxieties returned in the present.⁵¹ This will be clarified further later in the paper, particularly in the chapter "Southern Gothic." In the analytical part, one will observe that the type of buildings depicted in Southern Gothic writing differs. Nevertheless, it still preserves its function, which is to evoke the fearful and mysterious atmosphere. To conclude, in gothic writing one never reads about the stories taking place in beautiful and classical mansions. Since gothic investigates a deeper sense of human nature, attempting to evoke the most despicable feelings of humanity, the appropriate architectural style must be selected to establish all this.

Logically speaking, the gothic writing in general is one of the literary genres that is employed when there is a certain discontent with the current situation in society. Botting confirms that the terror depicted in gothic writing and the Romantic escape to the past share a common pretext: an attempt to reveal the defects of the contemporary world. Botting further adds that, for instance, the Romantics had found out that only extreme literary techniques would be relevant for drawing the readership's attention. They decided to shock them into comprehending the evils of the present by depicting the corruption and wickedness of the past.⁵² As a consequence, one may encounter gothic writing dealing with iconic events and their impact on people. Particularly in Southern American writing, one would speak about the Civil War, the tradition of slavery, the advent of industrialization and the process of urbanisation in the overwhelmingly rural South. Taking into consideration the nineteenth and twentieth century in the American South, one realises that significant economic, social,

⁵⁰ Hrbata and Procházka, *Romanticism and Romanticisms*, 137.

⁵¹ Botting, *Gothic*, 2.

⁵² Fred Botting. "In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture," in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 3.

political as well as cultural changes occurred having resulted in breaking the bonds between individuals and an ordered social world. The changes were those of industrial revolution, subsequent industrialization, and urbanisation. Botting concludes that: “Gothic and its disturbing ambivalence can thus be seen as effects of fear and anxiety, as attempts to account for or deal with the uncertainty of these shifts.”⁵³

Flannery O’Connor along with Carson McCullers employed the elements of gothic in order to point out the problems of the American South and its new modern society of the twentieth century. Botting explains that the anxieties varied according to diverse events and changes going on in particular countries and in particular years.⁵⁴ Flannery O’Connor reacted to the changes in the American South in the twentieth century. She employed gothic elements in her writing to point out the horrid truths about human beings. Not only did people keep moving from rural areas at the beginning of the twentieth century but they also began to depart from God. Botting adds that gothic also pointed at the shifts in domestic organisation.⁵⁵ Carson McCullers was concerned with human relationships and domestic matters in contrast to Flannery O’Connor. McCullers pointed out the problem of modern Southern society, which does not respect one’s individuality. This results in people’s inability to understand and love one another. It is important to stress that all these problems had taken root in the Southern past as a number of changes had significantly altered the Southern life.

Fred Botting concludes that gothic fiction was dominated by the uncertainties about the nature of society; power in general and families. All these aspects are linked to wider threads of disintegration. The purpose of the depiction and the employment of these terrors and horrors served a deep purpose; it attempted to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety. Gothic writing in general, particularly in the twentieth century, adopted a strategy of warning of possible dangers of social and moral transgressions by picturing them in their most fearful and darkest forms. Gothic fiction is the examination of all the limits produced earlier in human history and serves to determine between evil, reason, passion, virtue, vice and self and other.⁵⁶

⁵³ Botting, *Gothic*, 15.

⁵⁴ Botting, *Gothic*, 2.

⁵⁵ Botting, *Gothic*, 2.

⁵⁶ Botting, *Gothic*, 3,5.

4.3 Southern Gothic

Needless to say that Southern Gothic in American writing had been inspired by early gothic writing in England. Yet it is necessary to point out that the ruined castles, abbeys, and the gloomy gothic European tradition were not suitable to the new world of North America. According to Botting, the American continent and the British Isles were: “too far removed to have the same significance or effects of terror.”⁵⁷ Logically speaking, there was a different geography and history available to American writers.

America was perceived as an empty land with almost no history as it was officially formed at the end of the eighteenth century. Charles Crow confirms that: “there seemed, to eyes trained in Europe, a lack of history in America. There was in fact almost too much history, but somehow it was difficult to see, or to see it as suitably artistic.” He goes on saying that one may perceive American literature as a means of mediating the awareness of American history, and gothic would play its important part in making this invisible history visible. However, there was a noticeable lack of architectural ruins in the new world, either for gothic effects or for gentle reflective melancholy.⁵⁸ Southern Gothic writers handled this problem excellently by substituting medieval castles for old decaying buildings that serve to establish the true gothic atmosphere.

At this point, one may ponder about the subject of American gothic. According to Botting, the American world showed an interest in the individual, mental and political relations to social and religious forms of order.⁵⁹ Eighteenth century gothic tradition along with its wilderness of Romantic individualism withdrew to make space for new terrors and horrors that were much more relevant to the twentieth century. Botting talks about “uncanny disruptions of the boundaries between inside and outside, reality and delusion, propriety and corruption, and materialism and spirituality.” He adds that the modern city way of life, industrial and gloomy labyrinth of the twentieth century world has become the chief locus of horror, violence and corruption in the American gothic literary world. Gothic writers in America took the focal interest in the mysteries of human mind or family pasts. As a result, the human and social world inevitably replaced the super-natural kind of gothic writing.⁶⁰

It is important to point out that Southern Gothic is indeed still akin to some features of the eighteenth century gothic, especially in its playfulness and disturbing ambivalence.

⁵⁷ Botting, *Gothic*, 75.

⁵⁸ Crow, *Gothic Literary Studies: History of the Gothic: American Gothic*, 10.

⁵⁹ Botting, *Gothic*, 75.

⁶⁰ Botting, *Gothic*, 74.

Nevertheless, as Crow suggests, the former one presents a rather sceptical, disturbing and unclear view of human nature and history. It tends to tell stories about the repressed, hidden, unspoken and deliberately forgotten in the lives of individuals and of cultures. In addition to this, it hovers on the border between waking and dreams, human and machine, the normal and freakish, and the living and dead. The Southern Gothic plays with the emotions of dread, horror, terror and the uncanny. Crow adds that: “ [It] can indeed function like a thrill ride, with familiar conventions assuring the rider/reader of a safe return.”⁶¹ Broadly speaking, one may perceive the Southern Gothic writing as unsettling, provoking and intellectually stimulating.

This genre of Southern writing was introduced into America by Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. It is Charles Brockden Brown who is labelled as the first gothic author generally in the new world and Edgar Allan Poe who is considered the first Southern writer, who employed the elements of the gothic mode in his writing. The Southern Gothic returned again on the literary scene in the 1920s with the writing of William Faulkner, however, it reached popularity in the 1940s-1960s in the writing of Southern Renaissance writers— Flannery O’Connor and Carson McCullers in particular.

Charles Crow points out that the American South along with its legacy of various social and economic problems has become a major source for American writing in the twentieth century and the principal region of American gothic. The South carried a great burden of history and myth as well as an endless number of stories to tell, many of them twisted and tragic.⁶² Katie Surber, a lecturer on American gothic, describes the term Southern Gothic as a mode of writing that focuses on exposing the problems of society, and therefore complex characters are developed. Southern writers explored the people and their behaviour as well as the social status quo of the South. In other words, the authors attempted to point out the shortcomings of social order; they hoped to show how the social order was fragile and how the realities behind Southern society were disturbing.⁶³ As a consequence, the gothic stories contain grotesque themes, focusing on elements beyond human comprehension. Its characters are simply people lost in their own existence as well as in the existence of their homeland, in this case, of the South. Surber classifies the Southern Gothic characters as: “complex, mentally unstable broken spirits that are struggling to find a place in society once

⁶¹Crow, *Gothic Literary Studies: History of the Gothic: American Gothic*, 2.

⁶² Crow, *Gothic Literary Studies: History of the Gothic: American Gothic*, 124.

⁶³ “Southern Gothic Literature: Definition, Characteristics & Authors,” accessed November 22, 2015, <http://study.com/academy/lesson/southern-gothic-literature-definition-characteristics-authors.html>.

again.”⁶⁴ In addition, their morality is often questioned. Surber further explains that it does not matter whether the characters are mentally unstable, innocent or dark; they always try hard to make sense of the world around them and the society in which they live.⁶⁵ As a result, one eventually finds out that Southern Gothic characters cannot be blamed for their behaviour. They are victims suffering from the consequences of the huge metamorphosis the South had undergone. As a consequence, they manifest grotesque behaviour.

It is interesting to point out that the characters differ to a certain extent when speaking about gothic writing in general and Southern Gothic literature. In Southern Gothic writing, one encounters archetypes that are likely to be met in everyday life. In the traditional gothic, a common character would be a knight or a monster. Southern Gothic thus focuses on real ordinary people.

⁶⁴ “Southern Gothic Literature: Definition, Characteristics & Authors,”

⁶⁵ “Southern Gothic Literature: Definition, Characteristics & Authors,”

4.4 Grotesque

The salient feature of the Southern Gothic genre is the grotesque. To complete the jigsaw of Southern writing, this term needs to be clarified.

The grotesque has become the most penetrating feature of Southern writing. Charles Crow further points out that even though grotesque has become an inseparable part of gothic and one encounters grotesque characters in gothic writing frequently, it must be stressed that these two terms are not equivalent.⁶⁶

Crow reveals that the *grotesque* and its roots come from the classical past. It was applied in a decorative style in painting, sculpture, and architecture that was characterised by complex representations of woven human, animal, and vegetable forms. He further explains that: “the root of the term is “grotto” and it refers specifically to a style of decoration sometimes found in the excavated ruins of ancient Roman homes.” Taking into consideration its literary use in twentieth century writing, he claims that the term refers to the strange, monstrous or distorted being applied mainly to human characters.⁶⁷ Molly Boyd, an expert in grotesque, expands on this adding that such representations distorted the natural to the point of comic absurdity, ridiculous ugliness, or ludicrous caricature.⁶⁸ The grotesque can thus be applied to anything that deviates from an explicit or implicit norm. To be more precise, it can concern the bizarre, incongruous, ugly, unnatural, fantastic, and the abnormal. The grotesque in literature takes the form of human beings who are dehumanized by physical deformity and the discordance of body, soul and mind. Consequently, one projects incoherent behaviour, displaying the traits of a freak.

Crow acknowledges that the grotesque may instil horror and the uncanny; however, on the other hand, it can also produce the feelings of sadness, compassion or humour.⁶⁹ When dealing with the short stories, one will see that Crow’s observation squares with the grotesque addressed in the works of the authors. The analysis of the gothic and its grotesque features will be solely related to the deformity of characters’ souls focusing on the elements of the Southern Gothic such as violence, loneliness and freakishness.

Boyd describes the grotesque as the juxtaposition of horrific events and their matter-of-factly narration, often provoking a humorous response. What grotesque provokes in the

⁶⁶ Crow, *Gothic Literary Studies: History of the Gothic: American Gothic*, 6.

⁶⁷ Crow, *Gothic Literary Studies: History of the Gothic: American Gothic*, 6.

⁶⁸ Molly Boyd. “The Grotesque,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora et al. (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 321.

⁶⁹ Crow, *Gothic Literary Studies: History of the Gothic: American Gothic*, 129.

reader is basically the vacillation between laughter and horror. This clash evokes a powerful emotional response in readers. One often finds such ambivalent reactions discomfoting, attempting to escape them. One tries to find a way out through rationalisation and other psychological defence mechanisms. Boyd highlights that the readers do so in order to avoid the unpleasant notion that: “alongside their civilized response, hidden but very much alive sadistic impulses deep within some area of the unconscious make them react to the grotesque with unholy glee and barbaric delight.”⁷⁰ This is precisely what Flannery O’Connor intended in her short stories. She created scenes that provoke our conscience. One is aware of the fact that they should sympathise with the characters and their misfortune; however, somewhere deep in our soul, there is evil that makes us feel delight in someone’s misfortune.

At this point, it is important to touch upon the authors’ use of grotesque in their writing. There are several reasons for the employment of this literary genre. Firstly, according to Boyd, the expression of the author’s sense of dislocation or alienation may be one of them. Secondly, the grotesque features accompany the satirical undertones of a particular piece of work that reacts to certain issues to which the author is pointing. Thirdly, the author employs the grotesque simply because they wish to bewilder, disorient and shock the reader, awaking them from their accustomed ways of perceiving the world.⁷¹ The writer does so to confront the reader with a different and rather disturbing perspective of the world. Many twentieth-century southern advocates of the grotesque, including William Faulkner, Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy and Carson McCullers, utilised the elements of the grotesque in their fiction to speak out against various issues. C. Hugh Holman, a literary scholar specializing in Southern literature, comments on the use of this literary mode by stating that “[It is] the most typical method of the writers of humour in the South to permit the realistic portrayal of characters and actions that might otherwise overwhelm readers with their crudeness or their horror [...]”⁷²

According to Boyd, the Southern American writers in the twentieth century employed the grotesque to remind the reader of the fact that twentieth century man no longer feels any intimate moral kinship. They also attempted to stress that man himself is a tangle of rationality and irrationality, love and hatred, self-improvement and also self-destruction. For

⁷⁰ Boyd. “The Grotesque,” 321.

⁷¹ Boyd. “The Grotesque,” 321.

⁷² C. Hugh Holman, quoted in Boyd’s “The Grotesque,” 323.

that reason the grotesque narratives are concerned with the irrational, the unpredictable, the bizarre, and various frustrations that turn people into grotesques.⁷³

Carson McCullers was concerned with the psychological side of people. She used the grotesque to reflect internal, psychological horrors and according to Boyd: “to characterise a no-exit, nightmare world unrelieved by a didactic social message or the promise of redemption.”⁷⁴ Boyd claims that McCullers herself pointed out that her fiction primarily deals with love of a person who is incapable of either giving or receiving any love. This is a condition provoking loneliness and spiritual isolation for her characters. However, it is crucial to point out that her characters are grotesque only in their form. They are not inwardly evil. On the other hand, O’Connor’s figures are truly evil attempting to do despicable things to other people. They are lost souls seeking mercy and salvation. Interestingly, before they reach the final destination of endless grace, they are capable of violence.⁷⁵ Their uncontrollable actions speak to the reader to shock them and to realise the truths about modern people’s way of life in general.

To characterise the typical grotesque protagonists in the works of the authors, one observes that they suffer from inability to communicate, to express their affections and the ability to love in return. As Boyd reveals, this concerns not only the love for other people but also the love for God, as one will see when taking a closer look at the short stories. The grotesque characters also struggle with finding appropriate self-fulfilment because their minds are twisted or they lack intelligence.⁷⁶ William Van O’Connor, the author of many books on modern criticism, comments explicitly on the stimuli for describing characters as bizarre in the American South: “[the South] has produced more than its share of the grotesque,” assuming that it was because: “the old agricultural system depleted the land and poverty breeds abnormality,” or because: “in many cases people were living with a code that was no longer applicable, and this meant a detachment from reality and loss of vitality.”⁷⁷ In the case of O’Connor and McCullers this paper talks about the spiritual isolation and alienation not only among people but also from God, having been caused by the enormous economic changes that led to the modern way of life, resulting in altering the traditional Southern mode of living.

⁷³ Boyd. “The Grotesque,” 322.

⁷⁴ Boyd. “The Grotesque,” 323.

⁷⁵ Boyd. “The Grotesque,” 323.

⁷⁶ Boyd. “The Grotesque,” 322.

⁷⁷ William Van O’Connor, quoted in Boyd’s “The Grotesque”, 322.

At this point, the use of violence in the author's short stories will be clarified. As Boyd suggests, O'Connor's characters' illusions of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency simply collapse. However, these illusions are presented as their saving moments of grace.⁷⁸ Flannery O'Connor explains that: "[grace is] simply a concern with the human reaction to that which, instant by instant, gives life to the soul. It is a concern with a realization that breeds charity and with the charity that breeds action."⁷⁹ Charity, as an English professor Kathleen G. Ochshorn claims, means love in this context, which is, however, absent in O'Connor's fiction.⁸⁰ The characters are reaching the moment of grace on arriving at the climax of violence. The epiphanies that appear in her short stories are not precipitated by love but by cruelty. Flannery O'Connor takes into consideration the paradoxical fusion of violence and saving grace, explaining that: "violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them for their moment of grace. Their heads are so hard that almost nothing else will do the work."⁸¹ O'Connor explicitly expresses her opinion about human nature. The only means of awakening people is through some kind of disturbing and violent action. She further explains the employment of violent scenes:

"The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same belief you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock — to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures."⁸²

Flannery O'Connor is openly speaking about real people, about us. The only means of awakening them and making them realise that there is a higher power is only through violence. Via this act she hopes to gain the reader's attention and make them think about their way of life.

⁷⁸ Boyd. "The Grotesque," 324.

⁷⁹ Flannery O'Connor, quoted in Kathleen G. Ochshorn's "A Cloak Of Grace: Contradictions in "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," in *Studies in American Fiction* 18 (1990): 115.

⁸⁰ Kathleen G. Ochshorn, "A Cloak of Grace: Contradictions in "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," in *Studies in American Fiction* 18 (1990): 115.

⁸¹ Flannery O'Connor, "On Her Own Work," in *Mystery and Manners*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 112.

⁸² Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer & His Country," in *Mystery and Manners*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 33-34.

Carson McCullers is mainly concerned with more psychological issues than Flannery O'Connor. McCullers explains why her characters tend to undertake violent actions: "Human beings are innately cooperative, but an unnatural social tradition makes them behave in ways that are not in accord with their deepest nature."⁸³ The social constraints negate one's individuality, which results in the characters' inability to socialize and establish functional love relationships. Consequently, their frustration at this results in the characters' violent behaviour. Melissa Metz, who wrote a thesis on McCullers's work, notes that McCullers' novels consist of dejected dreamers, mostly females, who attempt to escape their lonely world that is enclosed by the thick walls of social conventions hindering one's individuality.⁸⁴ Flannery O'Connor along with Carson McCullers ponders the changes in society in the South and their subsequent impacts on its inhabitants, depicting them as the victims being characterized as lonely and violent freaks.

Freakishness is another noticeable motif appearing in Southern Gothic literature. David de Vore, the co-author of the publication *The Gothic Novel*, explains that this element adds to the already creepy and fearsome atmosphere that the author intends to create. Freakishness is usually demonstrated through characters that are unable to see the world from different perspectives.⁸⁵ Michael M. Chermers, a professor of Dramatic Literature, provides a clarification of the term freak. He claims that this word refers to people who are abnormal or do not behave according to broadly accepted social norms.⁸⁶ This definition fits into a mould of the authors' characterizations of their figures as one will see later in the analytical part of the paper. In O'Connor's fiction, they are, in most cases, people who went astray on their spiritual journey. Flannery O'Connor explains her intention of writing about queer people by saying: "Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one."⁸⁷ Carson McCullers used her freakish characters to highlight their uniqueness, which is not respect by their society. Freakishness appears in the writing of both female authors principally to draw the reader's attention and also to complete the gothic mode. Freakish characters are an inseparable part of

⁸³ Carson McCullers, quoted in Josyane Savigneau's *Carson McCullers: A Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001) trans. by Jean E. Howard, 61-62.

⁸⁴ Melissa Metz, "Freaks, the Grotesque, and Other Sideshow Attractions in the Fiction of Carson McCullers," (MA thesis, University of North Carolina, 2008) 4.

⁸⁵ "An Exploration of Southern Gothic Literature," accessed November 13, 2015, <http://southerngothicliteratureproject.weebly.com/>.

⁸⁶ "Encyclopaedia Britannica," accessed January 22, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/art/freak-show>.

⁸⁷ Flannery O'Connor, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction," in *Mystery and Manners*, ed. by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) 44.

Southern Gothic writing. By depicting them as abnormal people, writers aim to pin down the problems of modern society and to moralise about it and human life.

Boyd zooms in on the use of the grotesque in terms of loneliness, claiming that O'Connor uses grotesque images to point out the moral and mainly spiritual incompleteness of characters which turns them into lonely people. O'Connor also deals with their easily corrupted and fallen nature. Carson McCullers' grotesque figures manifest their inability to communicate the suffering of modern Southerners.⁸⁸ As they suffer, they project bizarre behaviour because they are incapable of fitting into the norms of a particular society, which rejects any abnormal behaviour. Not surprisingly, the characters become isolated and therefore lonely, completing horrible actions. Carson McCullers explains her intention of picturing her characters as lonely individuals. She says that: "Spiritual isolation is the basis of most of my themes.[...] Love, an especially love of a person who is incapable of returning or receiving it, is at the heart of my selection of grotesque figures to write about — people whose physical incapacity is a symbol of their spiritual incapacity to love or receive love — their spiritual isolation."⁸⁹ Minrose Gwin and Trudier Harris, professors of English, comment on her writing, saying that very few authors in Southern literature have captured and consequently depicted loneliness and human isolation better than McCullers, whose freak characters embody a blend of physical, psychological and cultural otherness called "the Southern grotesque."⁹⁰

As one should be familiar with the Southern Gothic and the elements of the grotesque in the writing of Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers, the following chapter will draw the reader into the complicated world of the short stories. The short stories will be analysed with attention being paid to the elements of Southern Gothic, namely loneliness, violence, and freakishness.

⁸⁸ Boyd. "The Grotesque," 322.

⁸⁹ Carson McCullers, quoted in Minrose C. Gwin's and Trudier Harris' "Carson McCullers," in *The Literature of the American South*, ed. by William L. Andrews et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998), 750.

⁹⁰ Minrose C. Gwin's and Trudier Harris' "Carson McCullers," in *The Literature of the American South*, ed. by William L. Andrews et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998), 750.

Chapter 6 The analysis of the short stories

The short story “The Ballad of the Sad Café” introduces the dreary, isolated and grotesque world of the three main characters living in the rural South. The isolation and separation of the three main protagonists, Miss Amelia and the two males, her husband Marvin Macy and her dwarf-like cousin Lymon, are strengthened by a gruesome and depressing description of the town in which they dwell. Joanna Stolarek, an expert in American literature, adds that the place is marked by “misery, lifelessness and constituting spiritual banishment for the characters.”⁹¹ The place is described as:

Dreary, not much is there except the cotton mill, the two-room houses where the workers live, a few peach trees, a church with two coloured windows and a miserable main street only a hundred yards long. On Saturdays the tenants from the near-by farms come in for a day of talk and trade. Otherwise the town is lonesome, sad, and like a place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world.⁹²

This Southern town is a vivid example of a place appearing in Southern Gothic fiction. The cotton mill, a few houses, the trees and church conjure up a gothic and thus unsettling atmosphere of the place. The town lives through loneliness and so do the main protagonists.

Such a description of the town sets the tone for a journey into the bleak, labyrinthine internal world of the main characters. Miss Amelia is the most pitiful and tragic character in the tale. She is a solitary woman living in a large sagging house with boarded-up windows in a small town in North Georgia. Nevertheless, she has not always lived alone. She was married to Marvin Macy.

Marvin is the most handsome man in the region — tall, hard-muscled with grey eyes and curly hair. He is also well-off and makes good money. However, before meeting Amelia, his reputation was unenviable. He was an evil man, leading a lonely life. He killed a man in a razor fight, tortured animals and was involved in an illegal business. Yet there is a justification to his criminal behaviour. He and his brothers were abandoned by their parents, being left to the mercies of the town. He is cruel until the moment he encounters Miss Amelia. He chooses the solitary woman with queer eyes, and falls deeply in love with her. One may notice how the love changes his character and how he is completely reformed.

⁹¹ Joanna Stolarek, “Femininity And Masculinity in Carson McCullers’ Selected Novels – Isolation, Alienation, Existential Quest for Identity and Human Relations,” *Issues of Fertility* 12 (2012): 84.

⁹² Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories* (Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2005), 3.

[...] he reached out toward God. No longer did he lie around on the floor of the front porch all day Sunday, singing and playing his guitar; he attended church services and was present at all religious meetings. He learned good manners: he trained himself to rise and give his chair to a lady, and he quit swearing and fighting and using holy names in vain.⁹³

The love for Amelia sets him free from the prison of loneliness. His true nature comes out and he behaves pleasantly, forgetting about his previous wicked actions.

Their marriage, however, lasts only a short time as Miss Amelia does not develop any feelings for him. She ends their marriage and drives Marvin out of town. He leaves the place; turning back to criminality and soon after that, Macy's place is taken by Amelia's dwarf-like cousin Lymon, who completely enchants Miss Amelia. When Macy returns to the town to take revenge on Miss Amelia, the complicated love triangle is about to emerge. Lymon is attracted to Marvin Macy.

Miss Amelia gives vent to her deep feelings towards her cousin Lymon, who, however, spurns her and develops an unrequited affection for Marvin Macy. He, on the other hand, thinks only of Miss Amelia, who rejects him. Beverley Jean Hulse, who studies Carson McCullers' work, explains that McCullers creates these grotesque characters to demonstrate the futility of communication and the escape from solitude through love. They are in an unusual lover-beloved relationship forming a complete circle.⁹⁴ Hulse further claims that: "this inability of the characters to synchronise their changes of heart produced the interlocking, romantic, complicated triangle which constitutes the plot."⁹⁵ Miss Amelia, Marvin and Lymon are in this bizarre situation, representing the solitary people seeking comfort and love in someone else's heart, clearly not able either to give or receive these feelings.

According to Marielle Bancou, a specialist in literature, their alienation and desolation heightened by their mental torture render them tragic as well as bizarre and grotesque.⁹⁶ Stolarek reveals that the characters cry for companionship and amity as well as the need for the recognition of one's individuality. As a result, when scrutinizing "The Ballad," one observes that both the male and female characters fail to establish intimate and harmonious

⁹³ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 29-30.

⁹⁴ Beverley Jean Hulse, "The Themes of Love Versus Isolation In Carson McCullers," (M.A. thesis, University of Arizona, 1961) 72.

⁹⁵ Hulse, "The Themes of Love Versus Isolation In Carson McCullers," 72.

⁹⁶ Marielle Bancou, quoted in Joanna Stolarek's "Femininity And Masculinity in Carson McCullers" Selected Novels – Isolation, Alienation, Existential Quest for Identity and Human Relations," *Issues of Femininity* 12 (2012): 85.

relations.⁹⁷ McCullers points out the suffering of a modern Southerner, unable to establish a functional love relationship. Even though there is someone around them who could either love them or they could love, the characters are never able to synchronise with the other person's feelings, always desiring the person who does not feel any attraction to them. Hulse points out that "the grotesque comedy arises out of their reach, in turn, conforming to a role they contemptuously reject in another."⁹⁸

The grotesqueness of the story is also strengthened by the characters' ambiguous sexuality. This viewpoint could be supported by McCullers's rather uncommon depictions of Miss Amelia and the hunchback, Lymon. Primarily her female characters are freakish and therefore bizarre. Their freakishness is demonstrated by their masculine features. The description of McCullers's female character negates her femininity and isolates her from the general idea of what constitutes a woman.

...Miss Amelia had been born dark and somewhat queer of face...[...] her face was sexless and white, with two gray crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief. Early in youth she had grown to be six feet two inches tall which in itself is not natural for a woman, and that her ways and habits of life were too peculiar ever to reason about. [...] She was a dark, tall woman with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cut short and brushed back from the forehead, and there was about her sunburned face a tense, haggard quality. She might have been a handsome woman if, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed. There were those who would have courted her, but Miss Amelia cared nothing for the love of men and was a solitary person.⁹⁹

Another of McCullers' freakish characters is the hunchback Lymon. Carson McCullers was a very observant writer depicting the common folk of the American South. In her lifetime she encountered various people who she integrated into her stories, and one of them was a queer man, the hunchback, who served as an inspiration for the character Lymon. Miss Amelia's dwarf-like cousin completes the grotesqueness and the gothic mode of the story:

[...] The man was a hunchback. He was scarcely more than four feet tall and he wore a ragged, dusty coat that reached only to his knees. His crooked little legs seemed too thin to carry the weight of his great warped chest and the hump that sat on his shoulders. He had a very large head, with deep set blue eyes and a sharp little mouth.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Stolarek, "Femininity And Masculinity in Carson McCullers' Selected Novels," 85.

⁹⁸ Hulse, "The Themes of Love Versus Isolation In Carson McCullers," 72.

⁹⁹ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁰ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 7.

Carson McCullers depicted her characters in this way to underline the characters' distinctiveness and uniqueness. In addition, their physical deformities reveal their twisted inner lonely lives. As Stolarek further points out, McCullers purposefully draws the reader's attention to the characters' isolation and alienation from the society and community who fail to accept their individuality and eccentricity.¹⁰¹ In addition, as has been stated in the chapter "Gothic In General," their physical otherness stands for their spiritual isolation, which results in their inability to communicate with one another. Their physical incapacity is a symbol of their spiritual incapacity as they no longer understand the contemporary world. As a result, they become lonely freaks.

When focusing on the relationship between Lymon and Miss Amelia, one notices that despite the negation of maleness and typical male qualities; Lymon becomes the object of Miss Amelia's passion and affection. McCullers' unusual depiction of their relationship completes the grotesqueness of the story. In spite of his looking like a sick pelican with thin crooked legs, oversized head, and great warped chest, she adopts a nurturing and caring attitude towards him. For most women he would be perceived as asexual and unattractive, nevertheless Miss Amelia falls in love with him. Carr points out that Miss Amelia offers the hunchback her love freely, intuiting that the little hunchback is no emotional threat to her.¹⁰² Her heart melts as she finds someone she can give all the stored love she has been keeping inside herself for all those years. Only a few times in her life had she invited anyone to eat and drink with her. When having Lymon around, she regularly asks him to dine with her.¹⁰³ The love that she is cherishing for him changes her view of the world. For the sake of not being alone again, she does whatever he desires.

The people in the town notice the hunchback's emotional power over Miss Amelia and observe that she is gradually undergoing a transformation. Since the hunchback is extremely sociable; she also becomes more companionable. She even goes out a little — to revivals, to funerals, and so forth. She also laughs much more.¹⁰⁴ Miss Amelia has become so infatuated with him that whenever he is sick of the dark at night and dreads to lie and stare into the darkness, she always comforts him, never leaving him alone.

Miss Amelia is experiencing a renaissance in her love relationship with her cousin and this is reflected in the town, which is coming to life. As Miss Amelia's veins are refilled with

¹⁰¹ Stolarek, "Femininity And Masculinity in Carson McCullers' Selected Novels," 85.

¹⁰² Carr, *Understanding of Carson McCullers*, 61.

¹⁰³ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 24.

the desire to live by someone's side and not to be lonely anymore, the dreary town becomes lightened with the rays of love.

The next morning was serene, with a sunrise of warm purple mixed with rose. In the fields around the town the furrows were newly plowed, and very early the tenants were at work setting out the young, deep green tobacco plants. The wild cows flew down close to the fields, making swift blue shadows on the earth. In town the people set out early with their dinner pails, and the windows of the mill were blinding gold in the sun. The air was fresh and the peach trees light as March clouds with their blossoms.¹⁰⁵

The town gradually changes and becomes a warm and bright centre point where people converge. Doreen Fowler, a professor of American Literature, confirms that at this moment the place becomes a symbol of unity, community, and integration as opposed to the fragmentation that the characters were suffering from.¹⁰⁶ As soon as Miss Amelia grew a deep affection for the hunchback, she became more sociable to everyone in town, opening up the store and converting it to a café, which became the centre of prosperity. In the café, there are tables with cloths and paper napkins, coloured streamers from the electric fans and great gatherings on Saturday nights. It provides not only meals and liquor but also warmth and companionship.¹⁰⁷ Doreen Flower, a professor of American literature, suggests that the café is then a symbol of a return of a buried desire before alienation and division.¹⁰⁸

Little does Miss Amelia suspect that she is being tricked into a dishonest practice which has been created by her former husband, Marvin Macy. He arrives in the town, seeking revenge for his unreciprocated and rejected love towards Miss Amelia. He is about to take advantage of Lymon in order to hurt Miss Amelia's feelings.

Since Miss Amelia falls deeply in love with the hunchback, she is prepared to fight anyone who could be an obstacle to their relationship. Her heart had been closed to other men until the hunchback appeared; he means the world to her. Lymon, however, gradually ceases to care for Amelia as he is attracted to Marvin. As soon as Amelia's former husband arrives, the hunchback's behavior changes.

Amelia fears that Marvin could lure Lymon away. She becomes furious upon this vision so, as a result, she attempts to do away with Marvin by poisoning him, unsuccessfully.

¹⁰⁵ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Doreen Fowler, "Carson McCullers's Primal Scenes: The Ballad of the Sad Café," in *Bloom's Critical Views: Carson McCullers*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 76.

¹⁰⁷ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Fowler, *Carson McCullers's Primal Scenes: The Ballad of the Sad Café*, 77.

In addition, the grotesque moment emerges when the plates of food are confused and the poisoned plate ends up in front of Miss Amelia. “This she quickly realized by the slight bitterness of the food, and that day she ate no dinner. She sat tilted back in her chair, feeling her muscle, and looking at Marvin Macy.”¹⁰⁹ With this action she punishes only herself and begins to loathe Marvin even more. Whenever she is close to him, she clenches her fists, ready for a fight with him.

Marvin irritates Amelia, and this is reflected in the atmosphere of the town: “The snow gave the town a drawn, bleak look. The two room houses near the mill were dirty, crooked, and seemed about to collapse, and somehow everything was dark and shrunken.”¹¹⁰ This is a picture of Amelia’s internal world, which is now dark, gloomy and about to collapse. She knows that Lymon will sooner or later abandon her.

Since first setting eyes on Marvin Macy, the hunchback Lymon is possessed by an unnatural spirit. Lymon wants to follow him everywhere he goes, being full of silly schemes to attract his attention.¹¹¹ Lymon performs every trick to flirt with him. “He [Lymon] fluttered his eyelids, so that they were like pale, trapped moths in his sockets. He scraped his feet around on the ground, waved his hands about, and finally began doing a little trotlike dance. [...]”¹¹² Lymon’s performance does not make any impression on Marvin Macy and when he approaches Lymon, he gives him a cuff on the side of his head, which shows that Marvin does not care for the hunchback whatsoever. Each time Lymon attempts to please Marvin, he never displays any gratitude for his favours, and if he gets in his way he would always say: “Out of my way, or I’ll snatch you bald-headed.”¹¹³ Macy puts up with the hunchback only because he wants him as an ally against Miss Amelia. The narrator confirms that: “[...] Marvin Macy either treated him hatefully or failed to notice him at all”¹¹⁴ Lymon’s feelings towards Marvin mean nothing to him. Despite the fact that Marvin treats Lymon like an animal, the hunchback still adores him, and, later on, he invites Amelia’s former husband to move in with them.

One can observe that the characters display the same schemes of behaviour. Once they find somebody to love, they will not let this chance slip through their fingers. They are willing to endure humiliation and the emotional torture of not being loved in return, for the sake not to be loners anymore. This disguised emergence of the characters’ desire to be loved causes only pain and, later on, results in violence. The failure to love one another, to satisfy the needs

¹⁰⁹ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 57.

¹¹⁰ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 57-8.

¹¹¹ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 52.

¹¹² McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 50.

¹¹³ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 57.

¹¹⁴ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 52.

of not being alone anymore eventually culminates in a violent fight, in which the frustration of their loneliness reaches its climax.

Sadly enough, Miss Amelia does not rebel against Marvin's moving in whatsoever, fully aware of the fact that if she drove her rival Macy rival away, Lymon would follow him and thus would abandon Miss Amelia forever. The thought of being alone again is intolerable. Miss Amelia cannot bear to be abandoned and decides that: "it is better to take in your mortal enemy than face the terror of living alone."¹¹⁵ In the pursuit of not experiencing solitude ever again, Miss Amelia ends up in a bitter fight with Marvin Macy. She gives vent to her aggression and frustration upon the vision of losing her lover, Lymon. Since she is determined to protect her love towards the hunchback, she starts a battle with Marvin. One night, they square off in the centre of the café watched by all the people from the town.

And now that Miss Amelia and Marvin were locked in a hold together the crown came out of its dare and pressed closer. For a while the fighters grappled muscle to muscle, their hipbones braced against each other. Backward and forward, from side to side, they swayed in this way.[...] Now the test had come, and in these moments of terrible effort, it was Miss Amelia who was the stronger. Marvin Macy was greased and slippery, tricky to grasp, but she was stronger. Gradually she bent him over backward, and inch by inch she forced him to the floor.¹¹⁶

It is clear that Miss Amelia is determined to win this fight as far as love is concerned. The terrible fear of living without her cousin drives her to amass sufficient physical strength to beat Marvin. She does not realise that the hunchback does not care for her. The only person he is devoted to is Marvin Macy.

But at that instant, just as the fight was won, a cry sounded in the café that caused a shrill bright shiver to run down the spine. And what took place has been a mystery ever since. The whole town was there to testify what happened, but there were those who doubted their own eyesight. For the counter on which Cousin Lymon stood as at least twelve feet from the fighters in the centre of the café. Yet at the instant Miss Amelia grasped the throat of Marvin Macy the hunchback sprang forward and sailed through the air as though he had grown hawk wings. He landed on the broad strong back of Miss Amelia and clutched at their neck with his clawed little fingers.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories* , 45.

¹¹⁶ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories* , 67.

¹¹⁷ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories* , 67-68.

The fight is won by Marvin Macy because of the hunchback, who, out of love, had to protect him. This pathetic defeat of Miss Amelia affects the whole town. “This was not a fight to hash over and talk about afterward; people went home and pulled the covers up over their heads.”¹¹⁸ Marvin Macy and the hunchback are leaving the town together, doing all the ruinous and mischievous they can think of. Amelia withdraws and, metaphorically speaking, builds walls of loneliness around her once again. She is now trapped in the abyss of solitude and isolation.

Her café gradually deteriorates and so does she. As a victim of complete abandonment, Miss Amelia sits on the front steps of her sagging house every evening for three years and gazes forlornly down the road upon which the hunchback had first appeared. This pathetic woman is an absolute wreck. The loss of the hunchback affected her not only mentally but also physically:

Miss Amelia let her hair grow ragged, and it was turning grey. Her face lengthened, and the great muscles of her body shrank until she was thin as old maids are thin when they go crazy. And those grey eyes—slowly day by day they were more crossed, and it was as though they sought each other out to exchange a little glance of grief and lonely recognition. She was not pleasant to listen to; her tongue had sharpened terribly.¹¹⁹

She hires a carpenter to board up the premises of her café. This can be a symbol of Miss Amelia’s life being boarded up, not letting any light — love get into her life, doomed to loneliness and isolation until the end of her life.

Miss Amelia is now described as a woman wearing the lonesome look of the lover.¹²⁰ As Fowler explains, this lonesome look could be identified as “repressed desire for incorporation”¹²¹ and love. In addition, after Lymon and Marvin depart together, Lymon never receives any love from Marvin either. Marvin Macy uses the hunchback only for making money. He sells him to a side show and uses him to climb through windows to steal.¹²² One may notice that the characters can see no obstacles as far as love is concerned. The desire of not being alone anymore is so strong that they are willing to take risks and be with those who will never love them in return. In many cases, their unreciprocated love results in their frustration at their inability to establish a harmonious love relationship which subsequently leads to the characters’ violent behaviour.

¹¹⁸ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 65.

¹¹⁹ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 70.

¹²⁰ McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 23, 26.

¹²¹ Fowler, *Carson McCullers’s Primal Scenes: The Ballad of the Sad Café*, 75.

¹²² McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Other Stories*, 70.

Carson McCullers was writing in the period around the Second World War, which was marked by spiritual angst and loneliness. People were naturally seeking ways of coping with the on-going evolution of American society and trying hard to fit into the new society. She simply took on the task of an observer of those who were unable to adapt to the new social order. As a result, her use of the freak and the grotesque is a natural response to the modes of the behaviour of the Southern American society in the twentieth century. Her freakish characters represent the human uniqueness and eccentricity, which, as McCullers felt, the new society failed to respect. They are presented as freakish and lonely figures, who, according to Metz, are trying hard to break free from their loneliness by searching for ways of escaping from the rooms and houses that enclose their isolation. Metz further explains that the walls are “a metaphor for confinement within a set of conventions that denies individuality.”¹²³ One encounters one of the most grotesque figures in McCullers’s writing whose desire to break out of human isolation is always doomed. Sadly enough, their desire will never die. As Fowler adds, Carson McCullers’s story, “The Ballad”, “is an expression of a forbidden undying desire no longer be alone,”¹²⁴ no matter what it costs.

Flannery O’Connor’s short story “A Good Man Is Hard To Find” is one of the most violent and horrific stories in her collection. According to Whitt, it is also one of the most widely discussed and problematic short stories. The New Yorker, an American magazine, acknowledged O’Connor’s ability to depict the manners and language of her characters. Her tales, however, were perceived meaningless and without depth. Those who were analysing her short stories did not realise that her major interest was in combining what she observed in the concrete world with what existed “in a point not visible to the naked eye,” which embodied the mystery of human existence. Even the Catholic press did not understand her orthodoxy, although they admired her “relentless vision.” Whit concludes that something powerful and remarkable was going on in O’Connor’s writing, but reviewers were having difficulty interpreting her fiction.¹²⁵

Michael Clark, a literary critic, notes that readers who meet O’Connor for the first time should be aware that she always perceived herself as a Southern writer with Christian faith. Consequently, her stories are always interwoven with these identities and beliefs.¹²⁶ To comprehend O’Connor’s fiction one does not only need to have knowledge of her

¹²³ Metz, “Freaks, the Grotesque, and Other Sideshow Attractions in the Fiction of Carson McCullers,” 4.

¹²⁴ Fowler, Carson McCullers’s Primal Scenes: The Ballad of the Sad Café, 82.

¹²⁵ Whitt, *Understanding Flannery, O’Connor*, 40-43.

¹²⁶ Michael Clark, “Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man Is Hard To Find’: The Moment of Grace,” *English Language Notes* 2 (1991): 68.

background, but also of her deep Christian faith. Whitt states that in the story “A Good Man Is Hard To Find,” “the rural South is, for the first time, viewed by a writer whose orthodoxy matches her talent.” O’Connor desired to attract the attention as she was aware the modern audience did not share her spiritual vision. As a result, she employed the elements of gothic and grotesque, violence in particular, to return her audience to reality and to help them comprehend what she perceived as her truth.¹²⁷

The story centres on a Southern family who is about to set out for a trip to Florida. It looks like an ordinary day for the family, who desires to go on a holiday. There is nothing indicating that they should be struck by any misfortune, except for a newspaper report, which is warning about the escaped convict, The Misfit. The family are about to meet him and his companions as they reverse their direction for Tennessee. Little do they suspect that the change in direction symbolizes their future direction in life.

The family consists of the grandmother, her son Bailey, Bailey’s children, and his wife. Interestingly, one may notice that most of the characters in this story remain nameless. Although the grandmother’s name is never mentioned in the story, she is a crucial character. Many of O’Connor’s important characters do not have any names, as they are referred to by the roles they assume in her stories. The grandmother adopts a role of the woman who leads a superficial religious life although she claims the opposite. Nevertheless, in spite of her afflicted religiosity, she is the only character in the story who believes in a higher power. This may enable her to convince other characters, The Misfit in particular whose role will be clarified later in the analysis, to put aside rationality and to accept the fact that there is something higher that cannot be justified by reason.

The grandmother’s imperfect religious life serves as a demonstration for O’Connor’s audience who are not aware yet of the likeness with her characters. Many of them, as well as the grandmother, claim that they are religious people, but do not realise how superficial and poor religious lives they are living. The grandmother does not become aware of her afflicted spiritual life until she is on the brink of her death, when meeting The Misfit. At that moment, she awakens, beginning to take her faith seriously. O’Connor stirs her audience’s conscience by presenting her characters to them and encouraging them to think about similarities between the characters and the readers.

As the story progresses, one learns that the grandmother believes in Jesus, nevertheless, most of the time she is selfish, pushy and superficial. Her self-centredness and

¹²⁷ Whitt, *Understanding Flannery, O’Connor*, 43.

selfishness are apparent right at the beginning of the story. The family is heading to Florida, but the grandmother desires to visit her relatives in east Tennessee. When getting dressed for a trip, she puts on a nice dress and a hat with a brim. The narrator explains that: “in case of an accident anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady.”¹²⁸ As the grandmother herself is so superficial and judges other people by their looks, she assumes that everyone else will do the same with her. Despite the fact that she claims to be a religious woman, she is only concerned with what is seen on the surface, not thinking about one’s soul. She also does not hesitate to address a small Negro boy as a “cute little pickaninny” or remark that “little niggers in the country don’t have things like we do.”¹²⁹ The grandmother makes her point clear about her perception of Negroes. She thinks that they are below her level. A university lecturer Rodney Edgecombe reveals that the grandmother “is the exemplar of all the moral and social deficiencies of the South.”¹³⁰ She represents not only Southerners and their negative perception of black people but also Southerners who claim to be religious but they do not behave accordingly. As a result, O’Connor creates one of her characters to point out the deficiencies of the twentieth century American South. The grandmother gradually transforms into a grotesque character. She assumes that she is on a higher level than other people. This would lead her to The Misfit, another character, in order for her to spiritually mature. She needs to realise that everyone is a child of God and that she is no more important than other people.

Dealing with the issue of loneliness in O’Connor’s short stories, it is vital to compare the grandmother with Miss Amelia from “The Ballad.” They are both trapped in solitude, even though they endeavour to find their way out of it. One might notice that the Bailey’s mother is as lonely as Miss Amelia. On the one hand, Miss Amelia intentionally leads a solitary life, trying to keep herself away from other people. On the other hand, somewhere deep in her heart, she desires companionship, love and understanding. Unfortunately, her desire is not fulfilled, as she is too different to fit into society and therefore to find a companion. The grandmother is ignored by her family most of the time. Nancy L. Nester, a professor of Writing Studies, points out that: “We’re appraised that the grandmother, an interloper, lives with Bailey.”¹³¹ Nester calls her an intruder; therefore one may assume that nobody in the family appreciates her presence, perceiving her as an interloper. One of the grandchildren remarks grudgingly that [the grandmother] has to go everywhere with

¹²⁸ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 118.

¹²⁹ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 118.

¹³⁰ Rodney Stenning Edgecomb, “O’Connor’s A Good Man Is Hard To Find”, *The Explicator* 64.1 (2005): 56.

¹³¹ Nancy L. Nester, “O’Connor’s A Good Man Is Hard To Find”, *The Explicator* 64 (2006): 125.

them,¹³² indicating that the grandmother should stay at home. This confirms that nobody of her own family is fond of socializing with her. She, as a result, leads a lonely life. O'Connor turns her into a lonely woman because of her faith. She creates grotesque characters to stress their moral and mainly spiritual incompleteness. In addition, the family does not identify with any religious beliefs so they are estranged from their grandmother, not feeling any attachment to her.

When zooming in on *The Misfit*, he could be compared to Marvin Macy from "The Ballad." *The Misfit* is as notorious as Marvin Macy. Marvin was involved in horrible and violent actions after Miss Amelia had chased him out of the town and ended their marriage. His frustration at his unrequited love for Miss Amelia had resulted in his loneliness and violent behaviour. *The Misfit* is a criminal too. He calls himself *The Misfit* as he feels that he does not fit into society. One may draw an analogy between McCullers' characters, who also struggle with their integration into community, and *The Misfit*. This not fitting turns him into a lonely and freak character. He is one of O'Connor's lonely characters, who is not only morally afflicted but also spiritually. What one learns about *The Misfit* is that:

He was an older man than the other two [his companions]. His hair was just beginning to grey and he wore silver-rimmed spectacles that gave him a scholarly look. He had a long greased face and didn't have on any shirt or undershirt. He had on blue jeans that were too tight for him and was holding a black hat and a gun. The two boys also had guns.¹³³

It is said that *The Misfit* wears glasses, which give him a scholarly look, implying that he is not simply a murderer. His character possesses a deeper sense in the story. As will be shown later in the analysis, he has a certain awareness of religiosity and appears interested in the conversation about Jesus with the grandmother. In addition, he behaves politely towards his victims by calling the mother of the children "a lady" asking her: "would you mind..."¹³⁴ One readily understands that this not the way a criminal behaves and speaks. In Flannery O'Connor's literary world the extraordinary nature of this character can be comprehended. He is another of O'Connor's nameless characters and his mission is to take people on a righteous spiritual journey, which enables them to reach salvation later on. Nevertheless, this could not be possible without violent actions as he is aware that people need to be shocked and shaken out of their weak religious lives.

¹³² O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 137.

¹³³ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 126.

¹³⁴ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 126.

Before the family set out on a trip, the grandmother reads a newspaper article about an escaped convict, The Misfit, and says to her son, Bailey:

Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is aloose from the Federal Pen and headed toward Florida and you read here what it says he did to these people. Just you read it. I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that aloose in it. I couldn't answer my conscience if I did.¹³⁵

O'Connor creates a grotesque moment as the grandmother exactly does that. The family intend to go to Florida but the grandmother changes their plans. She remembers that in Georgia used to be an old plantation that she had visited when she was a young lady. Since no one in the family listens to her, she expects that her son will not drive there. Nonetheless, she manages to persuade him because the children second her suggestion, and they set out for that plantation. The grandmother confidently navigates Bailey. O'Connor demonstrates through the grandmother how gullible people can be assuming that they know which road to take. In an allegorical reading, the grandmother believes that she knows her life journey, that she knows where she is going. However, surprisingly, the family ends up on a dirt road. By this O'Connor might suggest that they are on their way not to the old mansion but to hell and are thus doomed. Bailey seems to suspect that something bad is going to happen when he groans: "A dirt road."¹³⁶ He is correct as they are about to meet The Misfit.

After a few miles, the family have a car accident as the car gets out of the control. It turns over once and lands right-side-up in a gulch off the side of the road. The grandmother remembers that the house was not in Georgia but in Tennessee. She shudders at the thought suspecting that something horrible will follow afterwards, not realising how much the future experience will spiritually enrich her.

After the accident, a big black battered hearse-like car with The Misfit and his companions emerges on the top of the hill. The description of the car evokes the mystical and gothic atmosphere, suggesting that something mysterious is going to happen. As soon as the group of men approach the car and the family, the grandmother realises that she is meeting the killer about whom she has read in the newspaper. The criminals have no mercy to the family. First, they take Bailey and his son into the dark woods to be shot dead. The woods are described as a dark mouth that is about to swallow the victims. This completes the ghostly atmosphere of the scene.

¹³⁵ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 117.

¹³⁶ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 124.

The grotesque moment arises when The Misfit, who is now alone with the grandmother, her daughter-in-law and her children, apologises for being shirtless. "I'm sorry I don't have on a shirt before you ladies." As if the grandmother was not so close to death and not realising the seriousness of the situation, she says: "That's perfectly all right, maybe Bailey has an extra shirt in his suitcase."¹³⁷ Flannery O'Connor eases the situation by this bizarre dialogue. The Misfit reacts to this suggestion by saying: "I'll look and see terrectly."¹³⁸ When his companion returns from the woods, he is dragging Bailey's yellow shirt. The Misfit puts it on at once, on a literary level assuming the role of the grandmother's dead son.

When Bailey's wife spots her dead husband's T-shirt, she begins to make heavy noises as if she could not get her breath. The Misfit talks to her and her daughter. "Lady, would you and that little girl like to step off yonder with Bobby Lee and Hiram [his companions] and join your husband?"¹³⁹ The wife says faintly but readily: "Yes, thank you,"¹⁴⁰ and then her little baby and older daughter are taken to the woods to be killed. One could notice that the Bailey's wife is so calm even though she is about die. Interestingly, none of the family members except for the grandmother pleads for their lives. Despite the fact that the family do not utter a word about believing in Jesus, in contrast to the grandmother, they do not mind if they die, as if the temporal world does not matter to them. They do not fear death even though after it they will be probably doomed. The grandmother, who should believe in an afterlife with Jesus, fights so much for her earthly life that she eventually loses it. Nevertheless, when The Misfit talks about Jesus with her, she still has a chance to re-evaluate her religious life and entry into the next.

The grandmother and The Misfit remain alone. The narrator observes that "she [the grandmother] reached up to adjust her hat brim as if she were going to the woods with him. But it came off in her hand. She stood staring at it and after a second she let it fall on the ground."¹⁴¹ The brim here might symbolise materialism and thus her afflicted spiritual life. She cares to look neat and immaculate, not aware that her appearance will not matter when she dies; her soul is the most important. As she lets the hat go and drops it, her gradual loss of grip on the temporal world is witnessed.

¹³⁷ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 129.

¹³⁸ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 129.

¹³⁹ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 131.

¹⁴⁰ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 131.

¹⁴¹ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 128.

From this moment on, upon realising that she is about to be killed, she flatters The Misfit to save her life. She cries out loud: “I know you’re a good man....You’re not a bit common!”¹⁴² Then the grandmother asks him whether he prays and he says he does not. She suggests that Jesus will help him, that he should pray to Him. He admits that she is right, nevertheless saying: “I don’t want no help [...] I’m doing all right by myself,”¹⁴³ assuming that he manages fine without Jesus.

The grandmother goes on talking about Jesus, attempting to mediate salvation to The Misfit. She wants The Misfit to put aside his rationality and to believe in Him. Even though she is doing so for the sake of saving her own life, she tries hard to convince him about His existence.

As their discussion progresses, The Misfit admits that: “Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead.”¹⁴⁴ The frightened grandmother mumbles: “Maybe He didn’t raise the dead.” The Misfit says: “I wasn’t there so I can’t say He didn’t. I wisht I had of been there.[...] It ain’t right I wasn’t there because if I had of been there I would of known. [...] Listen lady: “if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn’t be like I am now.”¹⁴⁵ Piedmont suggests that by this talk The Misfit demonstrates his frustration of his longing for faith. He would believe, if only he could have seen Jesus performing miracles. This would be, however, an easy way for him to become a religious man. The Misfit is simply incapable of accepting the paradox, as O’Connor phrased it, “that you must believe in order to understand, not understand in order to believe.”¹⁴⁶ Through The Misfit O’Connor points out the problem of modern Southerners. Everyone assumes that if they are able to rationally justify and explain the existence of a divine power, then they will be able to comprehend faith. They do not realize that first they need to have faith, leaving rationality aside, and then they attain the knowledge. Everything will fall into the right place and they will be able to come to God.

The Misfit, however, is still not prepared to accept this. In addition, he seems to be aware that the grandmother needs to be shocked out of her artificial, selfish and judgmental views by a threat of being killed so he continues in talking with her, pushing her into realization of the seriousness of faith. The Misfit responds to the grandmother by saying: “Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead. [...] 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

¹⁴² O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 128.

¹⁴³ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 130.

¹⁴⁴ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁴⁵ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁴⁶ Flannery O’Connor, “Catholic Novelists and Their Readers,” in *Mystery and Manners*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 173.

nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can [...].¹⁴⁷ In this conversation, The Misfit attempts to show the grandmother the seriousness of faith. He wants her to know that she should not be uttering the word “Jesus” just for nothing. If she really believes in Him, she should re-evaluate her religious life and begin to take her faith seriously and live according to it. In addition, in this conversation, one may notice that The Misfit seems to ponder the existence of Jesus for himself once again; nevertheless, his reason is still an obstacle to acknowledging His existence.

When focusing on the grandmother and The Misfit in terms of their beliefs, one may observe that, paradoxically, in comparison to the grandmother, as Clark suggests, The Misfit’s passionate convictions and beliefs serve as a foil, or contrast to the grandmother’s easy platitudes and clichés.¹⁴⁸ Despite the fact that he himself has difficulties accepting that there is a higher power, he knows that if one believes they should take their faith seriously. This is what the grandmother has to learn from The Misfit. On the other hand, even though he eventually takes the grandmother on a righteous spiritual journey, he continuously struggles with accepting Jesus. Clark explains that: “the source of his stubborn non-belief is his insistence that everything be explained rationally.”¹⁴⁹ Piedmont-Martón, a professor of English, states that The Misfit’s is too rational and thus incapable of believing in something he cannot be rationally certain of, whereas the grandmother clings to “a faith without and intellectual foundation or certainty of belief.”¹⁵⁰ The grandmother’s ability to believe in something that cannot be justified by reason may set a good example for The Misfit. Throughout the story, with her constant reference to Jesus, the grandmother adopts the role of a woman who should persuade The Misfit to forget about his rationality and believe in Jesus. They both have an opportunity to learn something from each other in order to reach salvation. Nevertheless, it seems that, at this moment, the grandmother’s spiritual maturing is more important so despite the fact that The Misfit is incapable of accepting Jesus, O’Connor places him into the role of a man who helps people realise what naïve lives, in terms of their religiosity, they are living.

As the grandmother’s end is coming, she yells “Jesus, Jesus, meaning Jesus will help you, the way she was saying it, it was like she was using his name in vain.”¹⁵¹ She continues crying: “Jesus! You’ve got good blood! I know you wouldn’t shoot a lady! I know you come

¹⁴⁷ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁴⁸ Clark, “Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man Is Hard To Find’: The Moment of Grace,” 67.

¹⁴⁹ Clark, “Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man Is Hard To Find’: The Moment of Grace,” 67.

¹⁵⁰ Elisabeth Piedmont-Martón, “A Good Man Is Hard To Find: Essays and Criticism,” *Gale Research* 17 (1998): 11, accessed July 5, 2016, url: http://www.academia.edu/11796220/A_Good_Man_Is_Hard_to_Find.

¹⁵¹ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 131.

from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got!"¹⁵² Whitt notices that O'Connor's placement of the word "Jesus" might be ambiguous. She claims that it could be a natural way of speaking for her because "Jesus" is what she has been taught to say if she finds herself in a wretched situation like this. As she has been brought up in the South, which used to be perceived as a strongly religious area of America, it is natural for her to refer to Him. Nevertheless, O'Connor might, as a matter of fact, suggest that the grandmother is only hiding behind this word, not really meaning it as she is on the brink of death. The grandmother uses this word here more like a curse word. O'Connor reveals how Southern people can be superficial in their faith, pointing out the fact that there are no longer as religious as they used to be.

The Misfit responds to her pleading and says: "Lady, there never was a body that give the undertaker a tip."¹⁵³ The Misfit is metaphorically suggesting that money, a symbol of materialism, has no value in the place where she is going next, the afterlife.

During the conversation with The Misfit about Jesus and seeing her dead son's T-shirt on him, the grandmother's mind clears. She reaches out to him, crying: "[...] you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!"¹⁵⁴ She has a moment of clarity beginning to be aware of her twisted humanity. She realises that he could indeed be her son; he could be old enough to be her own child. Whitt reveals that the grandmother is now aware of what a charade her life has been upon realising that her existence is going to be blown away. Whitt adds that: "the grandmother acknowledges that she is no better than The Misfit."¹⁵⁵

Piedmont-Martón suggests that when the paths of these two cross, in the final moment of the story, they are both offered opportunities for grace.¹⁵⁶ The Misfit, however, recoils in horror at her gesture and springs as if a snake has bitten him and then he shoots the grandmother three times through her chest.¹⁵⁷ Whitt explains that O'Connor couples a reference to a "snake," linked to the devil from the biblical Garden of Eden, with the number "three" that O'Connor repeatedly uses to elicit the Christian Trinity. Allegorically speaking, the devil is destroyed by Christ's goodness. The "snake" is associated with the grandmother and the "three" with The Misfit.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁵³ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁵⁴ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁵⁵ Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O'Connor*, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Piedmont-Martón, "A Good Man Is Hard To Find: Essays and Criticism," 11.

¹⁵⁷ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁵⁸ Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O'Connor*, 47-48.

According to Whitt, The Misfit kills the grandmother upon realising that even the one who has seen the truth can be easily “poisoned by the devil’s venom and betray that truth.”¹⁵⁹ The grandmother assumed that she had led a good religious life; in reality, however, she thought only of herself and her needs, looking down on other people. Even though she prayed, she did not seem to take her faith seriously. The grandmother thought of herself as a religious person, nevertheless she did not behave accordingly. She had to meet The Misfit to realise that all people are equal and that she lived a superficial spiritual life.

The narrator comments on the grandmother after she has been shot: “half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child’s and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky.”¹⁶⁰ According to Piedmont-Martón, The Misfit simply brings the grandmother to a moment of a long awaited grace in which she awakens and thus makes an unselfish, religious connection with another human being. She has demonstrated something she had not been capable of before that time.¹⁶¹ This explains her smile as she is now at peace.

The story ends with the talk between The Misfit and one of his companions: She was a talker, wasn’t she?” his companion says. The Misfit answers: “She would have been a good woman, if it had been somebody there to short her every minute of her life.”¹⁶² The Misfit admits that the grandmother could be a good woman if she realised that she could die every minute of her life. The closer to death, the more people think about their lives and the existence of a higher power. This often makes them to re-evaluate their lives, which, eventually, may bring them to God.

Were it not for The Misfit, the grandmother would not have reached that moment of grace and would not have realised that nobody is higher up than anyone else. In addition to this, she would have not returned on a righteous spiritual way if she had not meet The Misfit. Piedmont-Martón concludes that The Misfit seems to understand that her salvation required an extreme action. He is aware of the fact that grace had worked through him to strengthen the grandmother’s faith.¹⁶³ The Misfit, by helping the grandmother make the connection to “all God’s children,” could be, as a matter of fact, perceived as somebody who may become a decent religious man. Nevertheless, he himself needs to find his own way towards his salvation as his dismissive words suggest when talking to one of his companions: “It’s not

¹⁵⁹ Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O’Connor*, 48.

¹⁶⁰ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁶¹ Piedmont-Martón, “A Good Man Is Hard To Find: Essays and Criticism,” 12.

¹⁶² O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 133.

¹⁶³ Piedmont-Martón, “A Good Man Is Hard To Find: Essays and Criticism,” 12.

real pleasure in life.”¹⁶⁴ Flannery O’Connor, however, had a last word on his future: “I don’t want to equate The Misfit with the devil. I prefer to think, however, unlikely this may seem, the old lady’s gesture, like the mustard-seed, will grow to be a great crow-filled true in The Misfit’s heart, and will be enough of a pain to him there to turn him into the prophet he was mean to become.”¹⁶⁵

To conclude the analysis, one might notice that O’Connor’s grotesque figures are creators of their own happiness and they consciously choose what to believe in or not to believe in. In her short stories, a spiritual level is always involved. Carson McCullers, on the other hand, seems to deal with more psychological matters such as the suffering of modern Southerners, who are not to be blamed for their behaviour as they are rejected by the society, which results in their isolation and thus loneliness. As a matter of fact, she might criticise the modern Southern society, which is not willing to accept any abnormal behaviour. One may notice that the authors are both concerned with the South and its transformation, employing the modes of gothic and grotesque to communicate their concerns.

¹⁶⁴ O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

¹⁶⁵ O’Connor, “On Her Own Work,” 112-113.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

The main aim of this diploma paper was to provide an analysis of Carson McCullers's "The Ballad of the Sad Café" and Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find." The analysis was centered on the authors' employment of the gothic elements of loneliness, violence, and freakishness. The grotesque situations were also pointed out throughout the analysis.

Considering the fact that the authors grew up in the American South and subsequently drew on it as a source for their writing, the theoretical part dealt with an introduction to the this part of America by presenting its main characteristics, its history of slavery, defeat in the Civil war, an agricultural way of life and a strong religious practice.

The second chapter further talked about the socio-historical context of the American South, familiarizing the reader with the main events which formed the new South. The southern region had significantly transformed from a rural area into a more urban one as a result of industrialization. This metamorphosis did not just result in better economics and the extension of cities, but also in the bewilderment of Southerners. They could no longer identify with the old South and its values. The new region was becoming more like the rest of America, loosing much of its distinctiveness. Those who were unable to accept the new South, found themselves lost and isolated.

The chapter "Southern Literature" provided an overview of the development of Southern writing along with its characterization. The main features of this writing are the authors' preference of the tangible over the abstract, an eye for peculiar or grotesque, the tradition of storytelling and a tragic view of the world in their fiction. The period of the twentieth century in the American Southern literary tradition was the most fertile, as the authors reacted to all the changes that the South had been going through. As a result, the phenomenon Southern Renaissance emerged, employing the modes of gothic and grotesque. This new string in the bow of writing contributed to Southern literature, giving it a new dimension, which brought it glory and recognition in American national literature. The authors of Southern Renaissance literature were primarily concerned with the deteriorating religiosity of Southerners, disappearing agricultural areas and fading country life. The South was changing and so were the manners and values of Southerners.

The sub-chapters dealing with the gothic and grotesque primarily focused on the employment of the elements of loneliness, violence, and freakishness in the authors' short

stories. The theoretical part of the thesis made a rich ground for the analytical part in which the short stories are discussed, allowing a deeper insight into the fiction of these two authors.

Carson McCullers shows the most grotesquely and ironically the emotional maze of her characters. Miss Amelia, Marvin and Lymon desire to love and be loved, however, their inability to adapt to the new social order that the twentieth century brought along, turns them into grotesque characters, who are unable to understand one another, communicate and establish harmonious relationships. Their incapacity to accept the new social paradigm is also caused by the society's failure to respect one's individuality and eccentricity. They are presented as lonely and freakish people whose frustration at their inability results in their violent behaviour. McCullers attempts to show her readership how one may feel when not identifying with the new paradigm. She herself says that even though human beings are cooperative by nature, an unnatural social tradition makes them behave in ways that are not in balance with their deepest nature.¹⁶⁶ The author may refer to human relationships in general and the problem of alienation and loneliness as one is too different to fit the set norms of new society.

Flannery O'Connor, on the other hand, was mainly concerned with a spiritual level. She employed the elements of the grotesque and gothic to point out the deficiencies of the South. In her writing it was the deteriorating religiosity in the Southern region. In the short story "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," she presents her lonely and freakish characters, The Misfit, a criminal, and the grandmother, an old religious lady, to demonstrate her strong belief in salvation. She desired to stress that everyone's soul deserves to be saved no matter how impious a life they have led. Flannery O'Connor points out that "you should be on the lookout for such things as the action of grace in the Grandmother's soul, and not for the dead bodies."¹⁶⁷ What is important is the fact that the old lady's soul reached the moment of grace due to her encounter with The Misfit, gaining an understanding of her own mortality and connection with "all God's children." Even though she has to pay her own life, she realizes the charade her spiritual life has been and that no one is better than anyone else.

The Misfit, on the other hand, is still too rational to accept the existence of Jesus. In the conversation with the grandmother, one can notice that the grandmother attempts to convince him about Jesus as she constantly advises him to pray. He thinks carefully about the grandmother's words and seems truly upset about not living when Christ was alive. He desires

¹⁶⁶ Carson McCullers, quoted in Josyane Savigneau's *Carson McCullers: A Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001) trans. by Jean E. Howard, 61-62.

¹⁶⁷ O'Connor, "On Her Own Work," 113.

to have seen him performing some miracles. If he had witnessed that, he would believe in Him now and would be a different person. This, however, would be for him too easy a way to gain salvation. Through this character O'Connor points out the problem of modern Southerners, who are too rational. They are not able to grasp the fact that they have to believe first and then they will understand.

To conclude the analysis, it is vital to state that, despite the fact that the authors are concerned with different issues, one could observe that they both deal with the alternation of the South and its impact on modern Southerners. They both employed gothic elements, such as loneliness, freakishness, and violence to communicate their messages about the American South and its people. They both play with establishing a gothic atmosphere by depicting the places as lonesome, dreary, dark, and scary which underline and consolidate the mysteriousness and, at the same time, the importance of their telling. In addition, one could observe that their characters bear similar features even though they are suffering from different problems. They are lonely, separated from other characters, and frustrated, which results in their violent behaviour.

One of the contrasts in their writing could be the fact that McCullers sees no hope for her Southerners letting them suffer from their isolation. She does not find any solution for their state and it seems that neither does American society. Carson McCullers, in comparison with Flannery O'Connor, is more pessimistic. O'Connor attempts to show her readership that the good wins over the evil and that every single person is able to reach salvation when thinking more about their spirituality.

These Southern writers felt the need to express their concerns trying to convince Southern people to think about the new American South. At first reading, due to their employment of the gothic and grotesque, one may think that their stories are amusing until one realises that the authors are talking about everyday people and their suffering in modern society.

Resumé

Flannery O'Connorová a Carson McCullersová se cítily být natolik svázány se svou domovinou, americkým Jihem, že nemohly jinak, než prostřednictvím svého psaní vyjádřit své obavy nad nově se formující jižanskou společností. Obě pocházely ze státu Georgia, kde tradice a vztah k místu bývaly důležitější než materiální bohatství. A tak v důsledku obrovské proměny, kterou Jih začal procházet od konce občanské války, se řada spisovatelů rozhodla reagovat na měnící se jižanský region. O'Connorová a McCullersová zaintegrovaly své poznatky do své beletrie s cílem předat svým čtenářům to, co ony samy vnímaly jako problém. S použitím literárních prostředků jako je gotika a groteska vytvořily jedinečný náhled na nový americký Jih a jeho společnost.

Cílem diplomové práce je analyzovat vybrané povídky těchto dvou autorek. Pozornost je věnována především použití gotických prvků v jejich tvorbě, konkrétně násilí, osamocení a podivínství. Pro analýzu byly vybrány povídky od Flannery O'Connorové, *Dobrého člověka těžko najdeš* ("A Good Man Is Hard To Find") a *Balada o smutné kavárně* ("The Ballad of the Sad Café") od Carson McCullersové.

Flannery O'Connorová byla silně věřící katolička, která vždy vedla spořádaný křesťanský život. Ve své tvorbě pojednává nejen o důležitosti víry v Boha, a tématu milosrdenství i pro největší zločince, ale také o problému upadajícího náboženského života Jižanů a jejich povrchní víře. Naopak Carson McCullersová byla notoricky známa pro časté alkoholové a sexuální dýchánky. Ona sama cítila osamocení a utrpení, a tak možná proto vytvořila postavy, na kterých ukazuje neschopnost přizpůsobit se nové jižanské společnosti, která odmítá přijmout jedincovu výjimečnost.

Druhá kapitola pojednává o charakteristikách amerického Jihu s cílem čtenáři přiblížit jeho jedinečnost, která je často reflektována v dílech jižanských autorů. Patří sem otrokářská tradice, která zapříčinila masivní příliv černošského obyvatelstva do tohoto regionu. Sociální utlačování, žalostná chudoba a těžká práce černošského lidu jsou také často zobrazeny v jižanské literatuře. Jih byl dále poznamenán prohrou v občanské válce proti americkému Severu. Řadu let byl vnímán jako poražená oblast. Na počátku dvacátého století spolu s příchodem industrializace se situace na Jihu zlepšila a spolu i s ním i jeho sebevědomí.

Je důležité připomenout, že před příchodem průmyslové revoluce do Ameriky, tedy počátkem dvacátého století, byl Jih převážně venkovskou oblastí plnou farem, což charakterizovalo způsob života Jižanů. S takovýmto životem byl spjat i smysl pro rodinu, život v komunitě a komplexní společenské vztahy. Mimo jiné, Jih byl známý vysokým

počtem věřících, především protestantů. Téma náboženství, jak už bylo dříve zmíněno, se objevuje v tvorbě O'Connorové. Jižané nejsou definováni jenom zeměpisnou polohou, ale také komplexní historií plnou událostí a tradic, které zformovaly jedinečnost amerického Jihu.

K porozumění tvorbě jižanských autorů je nutné být seznámen s událostmi, které se na Jihu odehrávaly od konce občanské války. Tyto události zformovaly nový Jih a tudíž novou společnost, na kterou později začali reagovat ti, kteří se s takovou změnou nedokázali vyrovnat a kterým chyběl Jih starý, plný tradic a pevných hodnot.

Třetí kapitola se tedy zabývá společensky-kulturním přehledem amerického Jihu. Před občanskou válkou bylo pro Jih charakteristické otroctví, zatímco po skončení této války bylo otroctví zakázáno, což zasáhlo Jih především ekonomicky, kulturně byla ale tato oblast obohacena. Události, které následovaly, zapříčinily vznik nové jižanské identity, z které pramenila řada nápadů a mnoho inspirace pro jižanské autory. Před příchodem průmyslové revoluce byl tento region převážně venkovskou oblastí díky své účasti v zemědělském průmyslu. Bylo zde velké množství farem. Jih ale nechtěl být pozadu ve svém rozvoji, a tak později průmyslová revoluce vstoupila i do této oblasti. Málo Jižanů ovšem tušilo, jak velký vliv bude mít takováto změna na jejich životy. Venkovský Jih se začal postupně přetvářet na městskou oblast, přičemž růst měst byl posilován výstavbou železnic. Lidé žijící na venkově začali odcházet do měst kvůli lepším pracovním příležitostem. Díky mechanizaci v zemědělství docházelo ke snižování počtu farem, což vedlo k tomu, že obyvatelé Jihu byli nuceni odcházet do měst, aby si našli jiné zaměstnání. Dvacáté století je tak spojeno s pomalu mizejícím venkovským životem. Řada lidí si začala uvědomovat, že to, co definovalo Jih, se vytrácí. Pro jižanské spisovatele z toho pramenila obrovská inspirace pro jejich díla, nicméně ostatní čelili nově formujícímu se regionu a řada z nich shledala těžkým se přizpůsobit novému tempu života.

Čtvrtá kapitola se zabývá jižanskou literaturou a jejím vývojem a dále pokračuje podkapitolami jako jsou „Jižanská renesance,“ „Gotika,“ „Gotika v anglické a americké literatuře,“ „Jižanská gotika“ a „Groteskno.“ Jižanská literatura byla dlouho definována pouze svojí geografickou polohou, nicméně tento druh literatury v sobě skrývá mnohem více. Je to především osobní a intimní vztah autorů k místu. Důležité je také zmínit, že jižanští autoři ve své tvorbě preferují hmatatelné prvky před abstraktními, tragický pohled na život, použití osobitých až groteskních postav a mají smysl pro vyprávění historek. Je to jakýsi hlas, který utváří jedinečnost této literatury.

První nápad vytvořit jižanskou literaturu se objevil s potřebou Jižanů rozlišit sebe od ostatních států na literární úrovni. Jižanská tvorba se začala zabývat nejrůznějšími

záležitostmi, od rasových problémů přes genderové, až po problémy související s třídními rozdíly. Postupně začala zachycovat významné události Jihu, které byly zmíněny výše, což přispělo k její jedinečnosti.

K zformování jižanské literatury paradoxně přispěla i porážka v občanské válce. Po jejím skončení byla jižanská literatura spjata zejména s válečnou poezií. Po porážce Severem, se motivace jižanských autorů zvyšovala s cílem dohnat dlouho trvající literární tradici Severu. Jižané se snažili vytvořit literaturu, která by přinesla Seveřanům úctyhodnější pohled na Jih.

Na počátku dvacátého století nastupuje generace agrárníků, kteří se rozhodli vyzvednout hodnoty starého Jihu a zároveň kritizovat hodnoty nového. Především komerčnost, industrializaci a upadající náboženský život Jižanů. Za jejich působnosti vzniká termín jižanská Renesance, která jižanské literatuře přidala na významu. V první vlně jižanské Renesance působili autoři jako William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Thomas Wolfe a Robert Peter Warren.

V polovině dvacátého století přichází vlna druhá v podobě tvorby Katherine Ann Porterové, Roberta Penne Warrena, Eudory Weltyové, Carson McCullersové a Flannery O'Connorové. Tato generace autorů se soustředila na témata jako jsou způsob života Jižanů, význam a hodnota rodiny, a obrana náboženských principů. Do svých děl zaintegrovaly i důležitost mezilidských vztahů a lásky. V důsledku měnící se ho Jihu se autoři rozhodli pracovat i s tématy jako je násilí a smrt. K tomuto využili prvky gotiky a grotesky, které jsou neoddelitelnou součástí jižanské Renesance.

Následně je objasněn termín gotika. Tento pojem vznikl na pomezí uměleckých směrů neoklasicismu a romantismu. Na počátku svého vzniku se tento termín uplatňoval pouze v architektuře a byl považován jako kontrast k architektonickému směru, klasicismu, který se vyznačoval velkou jednotností a pořádkem. Co se týče literatury, řada textů v tomto období byla psána s důrazem na morálku a rozum. Naopak typická gotická architektura se vyznačovala nejednotností a velkolepostí svých budov, které v člověku vyvolávaly neradostné pocity.

V druhé polovině osmnáctého století byl termín gotika chápán jako reakce na osvícenecký racionalismus, který začínal být stále více kritizován. Přílišný důraz na rozum vyústilo v používání motivů temnoty, extravagantních představ a divokosti, které silně kontrastovaly s hodnotami osvícenství. Výraz gotika získává hanlivý význam, jelikož v popředí zájmu jsou rozdílné postupy, které jsou posuzovány jako negativní, nemorální, iracionální nebo příliš fantastické. Gotická atmosféra se vyznačovala chmurnými a záhadnými

prvky, které symbolizovaly navracející se minulost do přítomnosti s cílem rozrušit čtenáře, dotknout se jeho nejhlubších a nejtemnějších míst duše, bez možnosti si cokoli vysvětlit svým rozumem. Řada příznivců gotiky věří tomu, že pouze v temnotě je duše schopna se obrátit sama k sobě a tudíž zakusit duchovní probuzení. A tak jsou osmnácté a devatenácté století obdobími nejen nových literárních směrů, ale také nového pohledu na svět a lidskou bytost jako celek.

Počátky tohoto literárního žánru v anglické literatuře jsou asociovány s anglickým spisovatelem Horacem Walpolem a jeho dílem *Otranský zámek* (*The Castle of Otranto*). Walpole je považován za otce gotického románu. Co se týče hlavních znaků, tak je důležité zmínit význam architektury. Jak interiér, tak exteriér budov se stává ideálním místem pro čtenářovu představivost. Gotická literatura usiluje o navození intenzivních pocitů a emocí. K jejímu vyvolání sloužila právě středověká architektura hradů.

Gotika je jeden z literárních žánrů, který se vyskytuje, když lidé cítí jakousi nespokojenost se současnou situací ve společnosti. Autoři se rozhodli šokovat své čtenáře za použití různých literárních technik, které by upoutaly jejich pozornost. Pomocí zobrazování zkažené minulosti se snažili přimět čtenáře, aby si uvědomili nedostatky současné společnosti. Americká gotická literatura se zabývá událostmi jako občanská válka, tradice otroctví, příchod industrializace a procesu urbanizace.

Flannery O'Connorová a Carson McCullersová použily prvky gotiky s cílem poukázat na problémy amerického Jihu. O'Connorová se zabývala nejen Jihem, proměňujícím se ve více městský, ale také ustupujícím náboženským životem jeho obyvatel. McCullersová řeší problémy mezilidských vztahů. Všechny tyto neduhy vznikly díky obrovské transformaci, kterou Jih prodělal.

Další část kapitoly pojednává o jižanské gotice, která byla inspirována anglickou gotickou literaturou. Je důležité říci, že zříceniny hradů a dlouholetá evropská tradice nebyly vhodné pro nový svět v Severní Americe. A tak se jižanští autoři ponořili do hororů a hrůz dvacátého století, zabývajíce se městským způsobem života, materialismem a chudým duchovním životem obyvatel Jihu. Polorozpadlé ruiny hradů byly nahrazeny temnými rozpadajícími se budovami.

Je důležité poznamenat, že jižanská gotika si ponechala řadu znaků, které charakterizovaly gotiku osmnáctého století, jako například svoji hravost a znepokojující rozpolcenost. Svoji hravost uplatňuje především ve svém skeptickém a zneklidňujícím pohledu na lidskou povahu. Jižanská gotika si hraje se strachem a nadpřirozenem. Tento žánr byl v Americe představen Edgarem Allanem Poeem a Nathanielem Hawthronem. Jižanská

gotika se poté dostává znova na výsluní v roce 1920 v tvorbě Williama Faulknera, nicméně hlavní popularitu získává až s druhou vlnou jižanské renesance včele s Flannery O'Connorovou a Carson McCullersovou.

Jih se stal bohatým zdrojem pro tento typ literatury, jelikož se vyznačoval bohatým dědictvím plných sociálních a ekonomických problémů. Prostřednictvím jižanské gotiky se autoři snažili poukázat na veškeré problémy Jihu a doufali, že si lidé uvědomí, jak je společenský řád křehký, a jak moc je realita jižanské společnosti znepokojující. Výsledkem toho bylo použití gotiky spolu s prvky groteskna, zabývající se situacemi, které jsou za hranicemi lidského chápání. Literární postavy jsou často ztracená individua, která hledají své místo ve společnosti. Vzhledem k tomu, že je společnost nestabilní, lidé mají problém v ní najít své místo a tak se často dopouští nemorálních činů.

Poslední částí kapitoly "Jižanská renesance" je pojednání o grotesknu, které tvoří neodmyslitelnou součást jižanské gotiky. Tento termín je uplatňován v malování, sochařství a architektuře, charakterizován lidskými, zvířecími a rostlinnými zobrazeními. V literatuře tento pojem byl spíše spojován s postavami, které byly podivné, monstrózní a fyzicky zdeformované. Takové zobrazení postav bylo důvodem jejich vnitřní a duchovní rozpolcenosti.

I přestože groteskno ve čtenáři vyvolává zděšení a strach, na druhou stranu také může vyvolávat pocity smutku, soucitu nebo dokonce pobavení. Jádrem groteskna je spojení strašlivých událostí a jejich nevzrušené vyprávění, které vyvolává humornou reakci. Spojení těchto elementů ve čtenáři vyvolává silnou emociální reakci. To je přesně to, o co gotická literatura usiluje. Čtenář se nemá spoléhat na svůj rozum, ale na své emoce.

Vzhledem k tomu, že cílem práce je analýza gotických prvků osamocení, násilí a podivínství, další část kapitoly pojednává o účelu použití těchto prvků v dílech autorek. Carson McCullersová se zajímala o psychologickou stránku svých postav. Použila groteskno k zobrazení vnitřních, psychických hrůz. Nejvíce se zabývala láskou člověka, který je neschopen dát najevo jakákoli city, natož je přijmout, což vyvolává v daném člověku pocit izolace a osamocení. V porovnání s O'Connorovou, postavy McCullersové jsou groteskní pouze ve své formě, nejsou opravdu zlé. Na druhou stranu postavy O'Connorové jsou opravdu zlomyslné, pokoušející se o ublížení ostatním lidem. Její postavy jsou ztracené duše hledající milost a spasení. Než ale dosáhnou té nekonečné boží milosti, jsou schopni násilí. Jejich pokusy zachránit svůj pozemský život často působí groteskně. Jejich těžko kontrolovatelné činy čtenáře šokují, ale také je nutí si uvědomit mnoho pravd o lidském způsobu života.

Pokud se člověk zaměří na charakteristiku postav, je nutné si všimnout, že často trpí neschopností komunikovat a vyjádřit to, co cítí. Toto se netýká pouze vyjádření určité blízkosti k ostatním lidem, ale také k Bohu. Řada autorů tuto neschopnost a zmatenost lidí přičítá kulturním změnám, kterými si Jih prošel, což vyústilo ve změnu tradičního jižanského způsobu života, který byl vždy charakterizován bohatým náboženským životem.

Co se týče použití prvku násilí v dílech autorů, O'Connorová se zabývá povýšeností lidí a myšlenkou, že si člověk ve svém pozemském životě vystačí sám bez Boha. A tak ve svých povídkách používá násilí, při němž si její postavy, které jsou na hraně života a smrti uvědomí, že Boha potřebují. Často si také musí uvědomit, že ony samy nejsou na vyšší úrovni než ostatní lidé. Fakt, že jim hrozí smrt, je donutí přehodnotit svůj život. Toto jim následně umožní dosáhnout božího milosrdenství. O'Connorová se rozhodla pro použití toho gotického prvku, aby čtenáře šokovala a tak je donutila přemýšlet o jejich vlastním způsobu života.

Carson McCullersová se ve srovnání s O'Connorovou se zabývala více psychologii svých postav a jejich vyrovnáváním se se společenskými normami. Často prohlašovala, že lidské bytosti preferují žít ve společenství, nicméně daná společnost je nutí chovat se tak, jak jim není přirozené. Společnost potlačuje lidskou přirozenost, což potom vyústí, v případě McCullersové, v násilné chování postav. Cítí se být osamělí, obklopeni tlustými zdmi společenských konvencí.

Podivinství je další aspektem gotiky, který napomáhá dokreslovat už tak hrůzu nahánějící atmosféru daného díla. Význam termínu podivín (freak) charakterizuje lidi, kteří jsou abnormální, nechovají se podle společenských norem, a tudíž nezapadají do společnosti. O'Connorová vysvětluje důvod zaintegrování podivínů do její tvorby tak, že takové lidi je stále možné rozeznat v současném světě. Její postavy jsou často neschopné vést řádný duchovní život. Stávají se podivíny, kteří jsou izolováni od ostatních postav. Fyzická nedokonalost McCullersových postav znázorňuje nejen jejich výjimečnost, která není přijata společností, ale také jejich duševní nevypěstlost, což vyústí v neschopnost zaintegrovat se do společenského života.

Co se týče použití elementu samoty, O'Connorová zobrazovala své postavy jako osamocené, aby poukázala na jejich morální a hlavně duchovní nedokonalost. Postavy McCullersové představují trpící lidé moderního věku. Jejich neschopnost být přijati společností je staví do pozic osamělých a opuštěných postav.

Analýza první povídky *Balada o smutné kavárně* (The Ballad of the Sad Café) se soustředí na tři hlavní postavy, Amelii, Marvina Macyho a Ameliina bratrance, hrbáče, Lymona. Tito protagonisté jsou osamělí a izolováni. Jejich osamělost je umocněna popisem

malého jižanského městečka v severní Georgii. Město je pochmurné, depresivní a bez života. V městě se nachází pouze pár domů, stromů a kostel, což dokresluje gotickou a tudíž znepokojující atmosféru místa. Město je tak osamělé, jako jsou hlavní postavy. Jejich problémem je neschopnost komunikovat, vyjádřit pocity a milovat. To vše je způsobeno tím, že se společnost utvářela. Postavy nejsou schopny zapadnout do této nové společnosti, která ani není schopna přijmout je.

Amelia, která vždy vedla osamělý život, se setkává s Marvinem Macym, zločincem, kterého si bere za muže. Marvin se do ní hluboce zamiluje. Čtenář si může všimnout, jak láska tohoto zločince k Amélii mění. Nicméně Amelie není schopna jeho city opřevrat a tak ho po deseti dnech manželství vyžene z domu. Marvin se vrací ke špatným činnostem. Od té doby je Amelie neschopna se znovu zamilovat, až do té doby, než se objeví její údajný bratranec, hrbáč Lymon. Amélie se do něj hluboce zamiluje. Jeho láskou vzkvétá a spolu s ní i město. Město se vrací znovu k životu, stává se místem společenských událostí, kde není místo pro osamocení. Amelie si otevírá kavárnu, která se stává symbolem společenství.

McCullersová prezentuje Amelii a Lymona jako dva podivíny, zejména co se týče jejich vzhledu. Amelia není typickou ženou, má spíše mužské rysy a hrbáč Lymon také nepřestavuje ideál muže. Je malý, hubený a má hrb. Takové zobrazení jejich postav znázorňuje nejenom jejich výjimečnost, která není přijata společností, ale také jejich vnitřní nedokonalost, která je způsobena tím, že nerozumí modernímu světu. Toto zobrazení také doplňuje grotesknost celé povídky.

Lymon cítí náklonnost pouze k Marvinovi, který ho ale jenom využívá. Mezi těmito třemi postavami vzniká složitý a komplikovaný milostný trojúhelník. Jejich neschopnost opřevrat city k druhé osobně vyúsťuje ve frustraci. Postavy touží milovat a být milovány, nechtějí žít osamoceny život. Tato frustrace z neschopnosti dosáhnout svých tužeb vyúsťuje v násilí. Amélie skončí v boji s Marvinem. Boj nakonec vyhrává Marvin díky Lymonovi, který mu pomohl. Oni dva nakonec spolu odchází z města. Marvin ale Lymonovu lásku nikdy neopřevratuje, pouze ho využívá. Amélie zůstává znovu sama a opuštěná. Zavírá se do svého domu, fyzicky i duchovně upadá a město také.

Carson McCullersová prezentuje tyto tři postavy s cílem poukázat na to, jak změny, kterými si americký Jih prošel, přispěly k zformování nové jižanské společnosti, která je neschopna přijmout jedince, kteří se liší od norem společnosti. Postavy samotné tak nerozumí moderní společnosti a to má za následek, že jsou osamělé a cítí se být izolované. McCullersové postavy ale nikdy neztrácejí naději a doufají, že jednou se dostanou z tohoto začarovaného kruhu osamocení.

I přestože silně věřící Flannery O'Connorová se zabývala problémem upadající víry u Jižanů, je velmi často srovnávána s Carson McCullersovou. Zejména použití gotických prvků a groteskna jsou aspekty, které jsou v jejich tvorbě nejčastěji porovnávány.

Katolická autorka, Flannery O'Connorová, vytvořila velice komplikovanou povídku *Dobrého člověka těžko najdeš* ("A Good Man Is Hard To Find") ve které poukazuje nejen na neschopnost lidí věřit v něco, co je jejich rozumem neuchopitelné, ale také na to, jak jsou věřící povrchní. Tvrdí, jak věří v Boha, ale jejich životy a chování k ostatním tomu tak neodpovídá. O'Connorová vytvořila v této povídce postavu babičky a Neřáda (The Misfit), kteří jsou stejně tak osamělí jako Amélia, Marvin a Lymon. O'Connorová s prvkem samoty pracuje, aby poukázala na jejich duchovní nedokonalost, proto je odděluje od ostatních postav. Navíc ostatní postavy jsou bezvěrci, tudíž necítí žádné spojení s těmi, kteří tvrdí, že věří. Postava babičky je věřící, ale potřebuje si řadu věcí uvědomit, aby si mohla zasloužit spasení. I přestože říká, že je věří v Ježíše, čtenář si může všimnout, že se podle toho tak nechová. Je sobecká, povrchní a myslí si, že je něco víc než ostatní lidé. Neřád je známý kriminálník, který později v konverzaci s babičkou o Ježíši tvrdí, že by někdo takový skutečně mohl žít, ale jeho rozum není schopen pochopit paradox, že nejdříve musí uvěřit, aby pochopil a ne nejdříve pochopit, aby porozuměl.

Tyto dvě postavy se spolu setkávají v momentě, kdy babička, její syn a jeho rodina havarují. Neřád a jeho společníci zastaví u místa nehody a blíží se k rodině. Babička si uvědomuje, že Neřáda zná a že je to velký zločinec, netušíce jak moc ji toto setkání duchovně obohatí.

Neřád a jeho kumpáni zavraždí celou babiččinu rodinu. Jen babička zůstává naživu, protože s Neřádem vede diskuzi o Ježíši. Ví, že se blíží její konec, a tak se snaží Neřáda přesvědčit o existenci Ježíše. Tímto se mu vlastně snaží zprostředkovat spasení. Neřád si je vědom toho, že aby si babička uvědomila, jak moc byla její víra povrchní, tak ji musí nechat v nejistotě s vidinou toho, že babička zemře.

Poté, co zločinci zabili babiččinu syna, si Neřád bere jeho tričko. O'Connorová tím naznačuje, že tím Neřád přejímá role syna babičky. Po rozpravě o víře v Ježíše si babička uvědomuje, že Neřád by klidně mohl být její syn, že všichni lidé jsou si rovni, a jak špatný duchovní život vlastně vedla. V ten moment natahuje ruku k Neřádovi a říká: „Mohl bys být klidně můj syn.“ Neřád ji ale střílí třikrát do hrudi. V povídce je řečeno, že Neřád cítil babiččin dotek, jako by se ho snažil dotknout had. Had, symbol ďábla, tu představuje babičku, která ačkoli věřila v Ježíše, tuto víru zradila tím, že nevedla řádný život. I přestože je babička mrtvá, uvědomila si podstatné věci a Neřád ji tak zprostředkoval boží milosrdenství. Neřád si

uvědomuje, že by to byla dobrá žena, kdyby ji každou minutu jejího života hrozilo, že jí někdo zabije. O'Connorová poukazuje na to, že pokud nám hrozí smrt, jsme ochotni se nad sebou zamyslet a řadu věcí přehodnotit. Neřád měl možnost také dosáhnout božího milosrdenství, ale zdá se, že ještě není duchovně připraven. V této povídce byla babiččino uvědomění důležitější.

McCullersová a O'Connorová použily prvků gotika a groteska s cílem poukázat na problémy moderní jižanské společnosti. McCullersová se zabývá pocitem osamocení a izolovanosti těch, kteří nebyli schopni se přizpůsobit nové společnosti, která se zformovala v průběhu dvacátého století. Stejně tak jižanská společnost se nesnaží porozumět jedincům a odmítá tak jejich individualitu a výstřednost. Jedinci se pak cítí osamocení, neschopni vyjádřit a komunikovat své city. Tato frustrace nakonec vyústí v násilí. O'Connorová se zabývá více duchovní stránkou života. Také poukazuje na nedostatky jižanské společnosti a to v případě upadající víry. Před průmyslovou revolucí a následnou urbanizací byl Jih vnímán jako silně věřící oblast, to se ale v průběhu dvacátého století začalo měnit. O'Connorová tak poukazuje na to, jak lidé přestali potřebovat Boha, jak je pro ně těžké věřit v něco, co si logicky nemohou vysvětlit a také, že když už věří, tak tak skutečně nežijí. Pouze pokud by jim hrozila smrt, byli by ochotni, stejně jako postava babičky, přijmout fakt, že je třeba vést řádný duchovní život, abychom si zasloužili spasení.

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