

Summary

Although her literary career was short, Flannery O'Connor made a great impression with her peculiar characters which are probably the most unsympathetic ones in the world of fiction. These self-indulged, ignorant individuals remain in our minds long after we have finished our reading. This fact perhaps results from the notion that Flannery O'Connor herself did not have sympathy for them either. Despite her deeply religious point of view, her characters are not treated in the light of assumed Christian humanism. On the contrary, at the end they are facing violent deaths, they are robbed of their artificial limbs and every time when it is possible they are in the centre of her scornful satirical and acid humor. This thesis aims to discuss the specific role of the last mentioned phenomenon and that is O'Connor's acid and satirical humor which interwoven with religious concerns plays a specific role in her fiction. The primary aim of the first chapter is the introduction of the tradition of Southern literature and contextualization of Flannery O'Connor unique place within the Southern literary canon. The first chapter, in addition, discusses the role, history and use of humor in Southern literature. Chapter two then shifts the focus on the special quality of O'Connor's humor in particular; moreover it also discusses her humor in connection with Henri Bergson's superiority theory of humor since they both recognize the role of humor as a socially formative phenomenon. The next chapter will consider Miss O'Connor's attitude towards nihilism. Later in the chapter O'Connor's use of comic elements and their semblance to Bergson's theory will be illustrated on the characters of would-be nihilists Hulga Hopewell and Hazel Motes. Chapter four will again consider the relation between O'Connor's characters of pseudo-intellectuals Asbury Fox and Calhoun and comic characters in Bergson's theory of humor. The characters from the opposite side of O'Connor's spectrum, the representatives of real evil Manley Pointer and Tom T. Shiftlet are discussed in the chapter five. These are not primarily discussed in relation to Bergson's theory since they are the ones who expose these self-indulgent and ignorant characters for what they really are. Though, evil they know what really matters and understand the truth in their own ways. The final chapter of this thesis provides the summary stressing the unique skill of O'Connor via humor to capture the universal and uncomfortable state of the modern man.