

Flannery O'Connor, one of the prominent Southern writers of the post-World War II era, has been known particularly for her deeply religious convictions that she interconnected with typically Southern settings and attributes. Although the aim of her fiction, as she herself frequently pronounced, was predominantly in its religious significance, she was not blind to the social and political changes that accompanied the spreading of urbanization, modernization, university education, an emphasis on the scientific perspective and belief in progress – all of which forced the South to adapt to the ideal of a unified, successful America. On the contrary, she felt, similar to many other Southern writers, that city and the urban way of life clashes with traditional rural values and with the region's distinctiveness. This thesis aims to discuss precisely the tension between rural and urban and the way it reflects the conflict between religious faith and modern secularism as understood by Flannery O'Connor.

The second chapter provides a deeper context, both socio-historical and literary. The first subchapter focuses on the socio-historical reality of the urbanization of the American South that started mainly after the Civil War and culminated in the period immediately following World War II. It illustrates the transformation of the Southern countryside, the social system and the way of living and thinking under the influences of industrialization, modernization and urbanization. Considering that country and city are both places, the next subchapter introduces the concept of the sense of place: one of the characteristic features of Southern literature – and it links the concept with Flannery O'Connor's understanding of place. A concrete, visible place and the manners associated with it are, according to O'Connor, reflections of its invisible, religious essence. Conflict, which is discussed in the final subchapter, may be understood in a similar way – conflict on the level of concrete social interactions is, at the same, conflict on the level of Christian faith and atheism.

The third chapter concentrates on the depiction of country and city in Flannery O'Connor's short stories. Although O'Connor was bitterly critical especially of the city-representing characters, she satirizes also her country people. For O'Connor, both places represent spiritual dangers. Such a critical view of both country and city cancels the strictly polar opposition that has been frequently associated with O'Connor's depiction of places. Moreover, it opens the way for the existence of the place between. Symbolism of the place between country and city echoes O'Connor's understanding of conflict and of place in general – man experiences the visible, natural and invisible, supernatural at the same time. According to O'Connor, man himself is situated in between – between the Heaven and Hell.

In the fourth chapter, the conflict between country and city is illustrated in the question of education. The spread of university education has been characteristic for the post-World War

II era and it has contributed to the debate over modernization versus the preservation of the Southern education system, and therefore the distinctiveness of Southern society in general. In O'Connor's view, both university education and the pragmatism and common sense of the country may become an instrument of pride and, therefore, of sin. The pride of intellect, as O'Connor illustrates in the city intellectual Hulga and the country-representing Mr. Head, may become a kind of secular religion, the basis of which is the belief in self. O'Connor confronts both characters with the inadequacy of their belief system and reveals God's grace.

The fifth chapter focuses on the idea of progress, which has inherently accompanied the process of urbanization and modernization. Southern literature has traditionally opposed the idea of progress and the belief that man can be perfected by improvements to his living conditions. Flannery O'Connor's short stories also illustrate her ambiguous feelings towards progress. Considering stories such as "A View of the Woods," material progress may be equated to spiritual regress. The conflict over the transformation of the Southern countryside in the name of progress, therefore, becomes the conflict over salvation or the damnation of Mr. Fortune's soul. Nevertheless, as the analysis of the story suggests, the literal level is not cancelled by the theological one, and they both coexist together.

The concluding chapter provides the summary and it attempts to consider the conflict between country and city in Flannery O'Connor's short stories in a purely socio-historical and purely theological perspective. The attempt demonstrates the interconnection between the two views as well as the complexity of O'Connor's fiction.