UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

The Conflict of Country and City in Flannery O'Connor's Short Stories

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):
doc. Clare Wallace, PhD, M.A.

Zpracoval (author):
Anna Hejzlarová

Studijní obor (subject):
Anglistika a amerikanistika

Praha, 14.1.2013

Declaration

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval/a samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval/a všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze dne 14.1.2013 Anna Hejzlarová

Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Acknowledgements

Tímto bych ráda poděkovala doc. Clare Wallace, PhD, M.A., za cenné rady, trpělivost a vedení, jež mi pomohly při psaní a formování této práce.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to doc. Clare Wallace, PhD, M.A., for her valuable advice, patience, and guidance, which helped me to write and shape this thesis.

Table of Contents

Declaration ... ii
Permission ... iii
Acknowledgements ... iv
Table of Contents ... v

Chapter 1 - Introduction ... 1

Chapter 2 – Flannery O'Connor and the Conflict of Country and City ... 4
- 2.1 Socio-historical Context ... 4
- 2.2 The Sense of Place ... 13
- 2.3 Conflict in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction ... 18

Chapter 3 – Flannery O'Connor's Places ... 22
- 3.1 The Country ... 23
- 3.2 The City ... 26
- 3.3 The Place Between ... 30

Chapter 4 - "City Interleckchuls" and Witty Country People ... 34
- 4.1 The Pride of Intellect ... 35
- 4.2 "City Interleckchul" Hulga ... 36
- 4.3 Witty Mr. Head ... 40

Chapter 5 – Progress / "Progress" ... 44
- 5.1 Flannery O'Connor's Absolute View in the Time of Progress ... 45
- 5.2 Mr. Fortune's View of the Woods ... 46

Chapter 6 – Conclusion ... 52

Bibliography ... 55
Summary ... 59
Key Words ... 61
Resumé ... 62
Klíčová slova ... 64

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Flannery O'Connor was born in 1925 in Savannah, Georgia into a Roman Catholic family. Such biographical information is often passed over without deeper consideration. In the case of Flannery O'Connor however, the omission of such a consideration would mean ignoring crucial aspects of her fiction. She was, above all, a writer of the American South with a Roman Catholic upbringing and belief, whose literary career took place in the age of the large social and economic changes accompanying the decades after World War II.

Born and raised in the American South, Flannery O'Connor was familiar with the norms and codes of behavior connected with Southern life. Except for the years spent at the University of Iowa, where she attended the Writer's Workshop, her subsequent brief stay in New York and her stay with close friends, the Fitzgeralds, in Connecticut, she spent most of her life in the South. Although her permanent residence in Georgia was involuntary – she was diagnosed with lupus erythematosus, as was her father, who died when Flannery was fifteen. Nevertheless, she viewed her bond with the South in a positive manner. In a letter to Maryat Lee, she wrote about her forced return to the South:

> This is a Return I have faced and when I faced it I was roped and tied and resigned the way it is necessary to be resigned to death, and largely because I thought it would be the end of any creation, any writing, any WORK from me. And as I told you by the fence, it was only the beginning.[1]

The South proved to be an inspiration for Flannery O'Connor; it was her "texture and idiom."[2] But it was not an end – the South was not the ultimate theme of her fiction. Her main concern, as she frequently expressed in her letters and in lectures, essays, and occasional prose collected in *Mystery and Manners*, was her belief in the Christian, and specifically Roman Catholic, dogma. Christianity and Southern manners were the two essential, closely interconnected components of her fiction. As Margaret Earley Whitt writes in her complex study, "O'Connor was both Southern – ripe with its manners – and Roman Catholic – replete with its mystery. The blend of these two provided her a rich milieu out of which her worldview develops."[3]

---

[1] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 224.
[2] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 230.
[3] Margaret Earley Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O'Connor* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 5.

For O'Connor, the religious perspective was the fundamental one in both her writing and her life. Nevertheless, "[t]o say that religious issues mattered more to O'Connor than political ones did is not to say that O'Connor was blind to the political and cultural transformation of the South of her day."[4] She was aware of the changes, coming mainly from Northern cities, that forced the South to adapt to the ideal of a homogenous, global America. Her criticism of modern materialism and secularism was reminiscent of the Agrarians of the preceding generation, whose famous manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, published in 1930, warned against "industrial capitalism, material ethics, technology, consumerist habits, and wasteful competition."[5] Similar to the Agrarians, she was "bitterly critical of the urban habit of life and of secular culture [...] and those characters who represented for her a modern, cosmopolitan, secular, Northern-oriented consciousness [...] were subjected to a ruthless satire."[6]

Unlike the Agrarians, the wrong, O'Connor believed, did not come from the economic, political or social external situation without, but from the spiritual evil within – "My Devil has a name, a history and a definite plan. His name is Lucifer, he's a fallen angel, his sin is pride, and his aim is the destruction of the Divine plan."[7] O'Connor's characters are not innocent victims of the modern, materialist society; they are, on the contrary, "active participants in their own corruption."[8] It is the secularism and the rejection of the Christian tradition that O'Connor aimed most of her criticism at, rather than the materialism of the modern world as such.[9] Nevertheless, the political and social changes of the American South under the pressure of urbanization, industrialization and capitalist modernity are still reflected in her work and they are often used for dramatizing O'Connor's Christian perspective.

This thesis will deal precisely with the reflection of the tension between the rural, traditional and urban, modern. The aim is to show how the conflict between country and city is represented in Flannery O'Connor's short stories, and how they reflect the conflict between belief and disbelief, between the Christian Reality and the reality of the modern, secularized world. The theme will be illustrated by the short stories "The Good Country People," "The Artificial Nigger," "Judgment Day," and "A View of the Woods." The selection was made according to the setting and thematic aspects of the stories: "The Good Country People"

---

4 Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 347.

5 Justion Quinn (ed.), Martin Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2011) 213.

6 Bercovitch, 347. Flannery O'Connor was a remarkable satirist and she incorporated humor into her fiction. Nevertheless, her use of irony, satire and humor will not be the subject of this thesis.

7 O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 456.

8 Richard J. Gray, *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977) 277.

9 Bercovitch, 348.

combines a country setting with the conflict between the country and city way of life represented by Hulga; “The Artificial Nigger” takes place in the city and it depicts both physical and spiritual loss in the modern world; “Judgment Day” is unique among O’Connor stories because it alone is set in the North (together with “The Geranium” that was the former version of “Judgment Day”) and it therefore reflects the conflict between Southern rural and Northern cosmopolitan life; “A View of the Woods” describes the progress that accompanies the urbanization and materialist values and it shows the effects of the modern notion of progress on spirituality. The next chapter will provide a deeper context to the theme. The first part will introduce the socio-historical aspect of the expansion of the city and city values connected with the progress of industrialization, modernization, expansion of commerce, spreading of university education; and its impact on the country areas connected with agricultural tradition. The second part, with regard to the fact that country and city are both places, will consider the sense of place in Southern literature and in Flannery O’Connor’s perspective. The third part will discuss the importance of conflict in her fiction and its connection with O’Connor’s Christian faith. It will consider conflict also in the light of the literary criticism that tries to go beyond the theological framework. In the third chapter, I will illustrate firstly O’Connor’s portrayal of the country and country people, and subsequently her portrayal of the city and city values in the selected short stories. In the last subchapter, I want to concentrate on the symbolism of place (country vs. city) that appears repeatedly in O’Connor's stories. The fourth chapter will concentrate on aspects of education and intellect. One of the impacts of the progress of city values is the spreading of education, which can be illustrated by the characters of pseudo-intellectuals in O’Connor’s stories. Flannery O’Connor depicts the spiritual danger connected with city intellectualism, and she also focuses on the pride of intellect connected with the belief in reason, common sense, witticism and pragmatism of country people. I will illustrate her views with the characters of Hulga from “Good Country People” and Mr. Head from “The Artificial Nigger.” The fifth chapter of the thesis will deal with the idea of progress. I will discuss Flannery O’Connor’s understanding and criticism of progress and its implications for the Christian faith. Arguments will be supported by the analysis of the short story “A View of the Woods.” In the concluding chapter, I will summarize the conflict between country and city in O’Connor’s short stories, and I will consider whether the representation of this conflict in her fiction differs in its theological and socio-historical frameworks.

Chapter 2 – Flannery O'Connor and the Conflict of Country and City

Flannery O'Connor, in her reaction to questions posed in a *Life* editorial, commented on the anguish that appears in the fiction of Southern writers. According to the editorial, the anguish "is a result of isolation from the rest of the country." O'Connor disagreed with this interpretation:

> The anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that every day we are getting more and more like the rest of the country, that we are being forced out not only of our many sins, but of our few virtues.[10]

Considering O'Connor's argument, one may subsequently ask: What exactly does "the rest of the country" mean? In what way is the South "not alienated enough"?

From a socio-historical perspective, the South was becoming like the rest of the country as the process of urbanization that had started particularly after the Civil War, culminated in the post-World War II era, and as the ideal of an ideologically unified America forced the South to abandon its distinctiveness. Consequently, the distinctiveness of Southern literature was also threatened as its typical features, such as the sense of place, were forced to give way to a "national" rather than a "regional" kind of literature. For Flannery O'Connor, to lose the region's distinctiveness meant to lose its manners. Although she was aware of the imperfections of Southern traditional habits and manners, and the Southern way of practicing of religion, she claimed that "[b]ad manners are better than no manners at all."[11] All of these perspectives will be discussed in the following three subchapters.

2.1 Socio-historical Context

Although urban and industrious development had started in the USA before the Civil War, it was the post-Civil War era that brought the dramatic boom of urbanization and industrialization, particularly with respect to the American South. The antebellum towns and cities were closely connected with the agricultural traditions of the Southern region; their primary functions being marketing and transporting the agricultural crops, supplying "local

[10] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) 28-29.
[11] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* 29.

planters and farmers with such necessities as agricultural implements" and manufacturing "goods needed by farmers."[12] The pre-Civil War cities in the South were thus mostly coastal trade centers. Moreover, the slave-based agrarian society of the American South naturally opposed industrial development. Plantation owners feared the growth and spreading of cities; they realized that "slave labor could be adapted to industrious work and urban labor markets only at the risk of losing full control over the slaves."[13] Slaves were crucial for planters, representing both labor power and wealth itself. Slavery thus stood in the way of economic and urban development.

After the Civil War, the character of Southern cities changed radically. During Reconstruction, both the population and the extent of the existing Southern urban areas significantly increased and many new cities appeared. The important aspect in the growth of new urban areas was the railroad, due to which many towns expanded by becoming "central locations for rail traffic," and many new inland cities were established.[14] The process of urbanization was accompanied by "modernization and the rapid process of industrialization."[15] Thanks to new industries and the rise of factories, cities offered new employment opportunities. Due to mechanization, agriculture required fewer workers and many people had no other choice than to set out for the cities. Moreover, the city attracted people as it offered a more comfortable life style and many conveniences "years before such things reached the village or the farm."[16] The rise of cities was thus characterized by migration. Americans from declining agricultural areas, former slaves, and foreign immigrants flocked to them. Despite their rural origins, most of the new European immigrants settled in large urban centers. The city became a place where the conflict between rural and urban values and ways of life was taking place. However, not only the urban areas, but also the country and those who stayed on their land were greatly influenced by the new values spreading from these urban developments. "Traditional rural values changed slowly in response to the influence of the urban environment, but change they did." The city thus emerged as "the central focus of American economic, social, and cultural life" [17] in the late nineteenth century and its values were spreading rapidly to all areas, influencing the way of life of their inhabitants.

---

[12] James Kirby Martin et al., *America and Its People* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1989) 349.
[13] Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris eds. *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 1446.
[14] Wilson and Ferris, 1436.
[15] Diana Kendall, *Sociology in Our Times* (London: Wadsworth, 2002) 12.
[16] *American History: A Survey/ Volume II: Since 1865* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991) 539-540.
[17] *American History: A Survey/ Volume II: Since 1865*, 539.

The railroad was crucial not only for industry but also for agriculture. After technology and mechanization changed the nature of agriculture, production rapidly increased and the Southern region needed to expand its markets, "which required cheap and reliable transportation facilities."[18] The railroad system contributed to the changes in the Southern agricultural tradition and sense of community - "Instead of selling surplus food to the local cobbler, American farmers fed distant urban masses at home and abroad."[19]

The agricultural system of the South experienced huge changes, not only in technological innovations and the mechanization of production, but also in the relationships between the farmer and the planter and their land. The antebellum South "nurtured two systems of agricultural economy and modes of life – the yeoman farm and the plantation."[20] In the postbellum agricultural system, the farmer and the planter were affected by the new way of farming, which in many ways resembled the manufacturing principles of urban factories: "specialization, new technology, mechanization, expanded markets, heavier capital investment, and reliance on interstate transportation."[21] The figure of a furnishing merchant emerged – "It was through his stores that goods were made available to customers on their home grounds, and it was he who facilitated the process of economic revival in the badly isolated regions of the South." [22] The local merchant provided cash and equipment for the next planting season, and he also represented the connection to "the big wholesale mercantile houses, the fertilizer manufacturers, the meat packers, and the grain, feed, and cotton speculators."[23] Since there were very few local banks, farmers were forced to cooperate with furnishing merchants. They borrowed against future crops, which often resulted in their inability to pay the loan back. Their indebtedness frequently grew to the point that they were forced to become tenants on their own land. Plantation life was also fundamentally altered. "Though plantations survived, they operated on a different scale."[24] After the abolition of slavery, sharecropping became the basis of the new plantation economy. Unable to keep the whole plantation, the landowners allowed their tenants – mainly former slaves – to use part of their land in return for half to two-thirds of the tenants' crops.[25] The sharecropping system

---

[18] Martin et al., 539.
[19] Martin et al., 539.
[20] Wilson and Ferris, 6.
[21] Martin et al., 538.
[22] Thomas D. Clark, "The Furnishing and Supply System in Southern Agriculture since 1865," *The Journal of Southern History,* 12.1 (Feb., 1946): 24.
[23] Clark 25.
[24] Wilson and Ferris, 6.
[25] Robert Kelley, *The Shaping of the American Past* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1986) 366.

ended the plantation way of life that had traditionally been connected with the American South and, consequently, it affected the social order.

One of the social impacts influencing both city and country life was the emergence of a new class of merchants, industrialist and businessmen. The social system of the Old South (roughly distinguishing four social classes – planters, yeomen, poor whites and slaves[26]) underwent large changes after the abolition of slavery, partition of plantations, the crop-lien system, mechanization and overall changes to business-like agriculture. As in the cities, the major influence and power belonged to those in connection with new industries and factories. In the case of Southern rural areas, it was the merchant and the planter class, although the planter class "had to compromise its opposition to towns and factories."[27] New economic opportunities fostered harsh competition "from which fewer and fewer winners emerged."[28] Consequently, new ideologies that explained and justified the ruthlessness accompanying the competition spread from the city, specifically: Social Darwinism and the Gospel of Wealth.

Social Darwinism applied Darwin's theories of "survival of the fittest" and "struggle for existence" to the new economic situation and to the workings of society – "Just as competition for survival insured that the fittest of a species would live longer and produce more offspring, a similar process of natural selection in society was said to cause the fittest individuals to survive and flourish in the marketplace."[29] According to Social Darwinism, negative aspects of the economy, such as poverty and slums, were consequences of natural selection. From "the confrontation between the church and the city"[30] emerged the ideology of the Gospel of Wealth. As the name suggests, the Gospel of Wealth was accompanied by "religious rationales for the accumulation of great wealth."[31] Since the Protestant work ethic of the colonial times, wealth had been understood as God's blessing and success meant God's approval. From this basis the Gospel of Wealth was constructed to justify the enormous wealth of representatives of the elite. Based on the ideology that the elite deserve their riches, the Gospel of Wealth blamed the poor for being responsible for their own status. Both theories had a huge impact on the society and it reinforced the gap between the elite and poor class, not only materially but also ideologically.

The influence of Charles Darwin on the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of twentieth century can also be seen in education. Similar to other levels of

[26] Wilson and Ferris, 1383-1385.
[27] Wilson and Ferris, 1385.
[28] Martin et al., 519.
[29] Martin et al., 519.
[30] Wilson and Ferris, 677.
[31] Martin et al., 520.

society and social institutions, the education system underwent fundamental changes. In the Southern region, both basic and higher education spread rapidly. Nevertheless, it often conflicted with values of the region, mainly with religion. "The predominant Southern orientation has been theological orthodoxy," which was in opposition to the modernist approaches associated mainly with the 1920s and with the attempt to "adjust traditional religious doctrines to the intellectual demands of the modern world."[32] Conflicts between modernists and fundamentalists were manifested also in the question of the teaching of evolution in public schools. The controversy culminated in the state of Tennessee in the Scopes Trial in 1925, which is often regarded as "a landmark of American cultural history."[33] The trial revealed new directions in education that reflected the values of the "new, technological and scientific society."[34] Science also emerged as a new commodity, different from "those of other forms of knowledge" which lead to the enlargement of "public demand for *scientific* knowledge."[35] Another effect of the trial was on the dichotomy between rural fundamentalism and urban modernism. Many of those who had previously accepted both theories were forced to radically reject one of them; many "rejected Darwin to keep God."[36] In the South, subsequent waves of anti-intellectualism brought many people closer to rural values and religious orthodoxy.

The Scopes Trial reflected the general situation of the 1920s. The years between the end of the First World War and the economic depression of the thirties were characterized by a reinforcing of the country-city tension. Several historians have suggested that by the 1920s, "the cultural split in the US was less one of North versus South than it was a rural, small-town versus an urban-industrial one."[37] Due to the development of transportation – caused mainly by the rise of the automobile industry, to innovations in communication technologies – the radio that "brought the same programmes into rural and urban homes alike"[38] and to other factors, "a clear urban-rural division could no longer be made."[39] During and after the First World War, millions of people moved to cities and for the first time in the history of America more people lived in urban areas than in the country.[40] Those who stayed in the countryside

---

[32] Wilson and Ferris, 1294.
[33] Thomas F. Gieryn, George M. Bevins and Stephen C. Zehr, "Professionalization of American Scientists: Public Science in the Creation/Evolution Trials," *American Sociological Review,* 50.3 (1985): 392.
[34] Malcolm Bradbury and Howard Temperley, *Introduction to American Studies* (London: Longman, 1989) 245.
[35] Gieryn, Bevins and Zehr, 394.
[36] Wilson and Ferris, 243.
[37] Richard H. King, "The Regions and Regionalism," *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 55.
[38] Bradbury and Temperley, 245.
[39] Bradbury and Temperley, 244.
[40] Martin et al., 745.

did not escape the influence of the city. According to Richard Gray, the dramatic changes at last led the American South to acknowledge "the death of its traditional way of life, based on the small farm and the great plantation" and to recognize "its absorption into the strange new world of industrialism and advanced capitalism."[41] This realization awakened regional awareness which is reflected also in the revival of Southern literature.

Values spreading from the city in the 1920s were connected with material comforts and with the subsequent rise of the consumer culture. As Diana Kendall, professor of sociology at Baylor University, describes, "many people shifted from being *producers* to being *consumers*. For example, families living in the cities had to buy food with their wages because they could no longer grow their own crops to consume or barter for other resources."[42] The postwar prosperity shifted America to a consumer culture: "Propelled by revolutions in transportation, advertising, communications, and entertainment, a new consumer society emerged during the 1920s as the dominant cultural motif of modern America."[43] The nature of advertising changed, it "developed from announcement to image-maker." Advertisements depicting idealized life based on such values as "democracy, the family, bourgeois comfort and modernity itself"[44] were rapidly spreading from cities to the countryside.

The advertised pleasures of the consumer culture and increasing mobility had a huge impact on the value systems of both country and city inhabitants, "[t]echnological developments transformed more than the economy; they also created new dreams"[45] and personal expectations. The spread and availability of education weakened the sense of family, caused partly by the fact that more and more young people preferred education to starting a family, partly by the changing role of women, greater sexual freedom and the appearance of the birth control issue, and partly by the compulsory school attendance laws in the 1930s which led to a division of children by age, and the subsequent increase in the importance of peer-groups at the expense of family relationships.[46] The weakening of the family and its connection to urbanization also attracted the attention of the sociologists. In the 1930s, the Chicago School sociologist Louis Wirth suggested that the division of labor and spatial segregation in cities led to the replacement of primary-group ties by secondary relationships. Kendall summarizes Wirth's arguments: "Even though people get some degree of freedom

[41] Richard Gray, *Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977) 3.
[42] Kendall, 12.
[43] Martin et al., 758.
[44] Bradbury and Temperley, 247.
[45] Bradbury and Temperley, 247.
[46] Bradbury and Temperley, 249-251.

and privacy by living in the city, they pay a price for their autonomy, losing the group support and reassurance that come from primary-group ties. [...] A sense of community is obliterated and replaced by the 'mass society.'"[47] Although not all urban sociologists shared Wirth's gloomy interpretations of urban life,[48] his hypothesis pointed to general problems connected with the urban values and way of life, and their effect on the traditional rural values of responsibility to family and community.

One of the important aspects that contributed to the change in the notion of family was the urban way of accommodation. Many of those who were either forced by economic necessity or who voluntarily moved to cities were living in tenements. Urban tenements were often seen and felt as unnatural by those coming from rural areas: "in the rural mind, accommodation was interwoven with land. [...] In the city, dwellings were separated from land. The individualized [...] character of rural home became in the city the tenement, and in with the tenement block came an enforced and unnatural community." Although in the countryside the inhabitants were often tenants and did not own their own land, they were still in close connection with it. Because of the absence of land and of "the relationship between the individual and his dwelling-place" being "casual and contractual" in the city, the family could not act as a unit "with regard to the rest of the community."[49]

Although the Great Depression of the 1930s brought a sense of reinforcing of the traditional home and family life caused by the general fear of losing things, many married women were forced to look for work to support the family income – which led again to the feeling of a weakening of domestic security.[50] The social system of the American South was also affected by the Depression era as "traditional landlord/tenant relationships began to give way to the powers of the federal government and the alphabetical agencies."[51] Nevertheless, despite the deep crisis in the capitalist system, unemployment and poverty issues, and a general economic recession, the 1930s did not put an end to the influence of the commercial-civic elite. Several economists have suggested that while the power was in the hands of the national government, the "emergence of the American welfare state involved the gradual adoption of organizational innovations first developed in the private sector [...] into the public

[47] Kendall, 617.
[48] Compare for example with Herbert Gans and his division of the urban environment and life into five categories of adaptation.
[49] Bradbury and Temperley, 219-220.
[50] Bradbury and Temperley, 287.
[51] Bradbury and Temperley, 286.

sector."[52] The nature of competitive, business capitalism was preserved even in the era of economic depression.

The idealized picture of modern American life that was connected with advertising in the 1920s was somehow preserved during the 1930s; it moved to the cinema. "Movie-goers were sustained by the myth of opportunity, and few films actually dealt with the life-styles or problems of working-class Americans or with national politics and economics."[53] The movies also reflected the "city-versus-country" conflict. Many films portrayed a simple and naïve hero overcoming the wicked world of the big city. The emotional structure of such movies "combine[d] sentimental feeling for small-town life with populist resentment of the city."[54] The cinema, together with radio and other technological innovations, sustained "the myth of a mobile, classless society containing endless possibilities for success."[55]

Considering the agriculture of the South during the 1930s, New Deal reforms deeply affected its system. The crucial law of the New Deal reforms in the context of Southern agriculture was the Agricultural Adjustment Act, enacted in 1933, which "accomplished crop reduction by paying landowning farmers to restrict their production." The Act was an important step to the end of "the crippling economic system that had characterized Southern farming since the Reconstruction." It also reflected the continuing process of the city influence on the countryside; the Act helped farmers to gain money and to increase their production by adopting progressive and scientific methods of agriculture. This process culminated during and after World War II when the influence of scientific agriculture was so massive that it gradually eliminated the small, family farmer from Southern agriculture. The sharecropping system was replaced by the wage labor system.[56]

World War II was a landmark in American history and culture. It fundamentally influenced the Southern region; "it reinvigorated the region's long-troubled economy and swung the battle between the modernists and traditionalists in favor of progressive change, greatly accelerating the Americanization of the South."[57] The changes that occurred after the war were unparalleled in Southern history. James O. Breeden, professor at Southern Methodist University, summarizes the main innovations and alternations in Southern life after World War II:

---

[52] Jeff Manza, "Political Sociological Models of the U.S. New Deal," *Annual Review of Sociology,* 26.1 (2002): 302.
[53] Bradbury and Temperley, 277.
[54] Bradbury and Temperley, 278.
[55] Bradbury and Temperley, 287.
[56] Wilson and Ferris, 20.
[57] Wilson and Ferris, 1343.

> Prominent among them [changes] were the triumph of industry, the transformation of agriculture, burgeoning urbanization, the breaking of the hold of ruralism, the ending of physical and cultural isolation, the dismantling of the Jim Crow system, the disintegration of the political Solid South, and a revitalized role in national politics. The result [...] has been the demise of the "sectional South" and the rebirth of the "American South."[58]

The "Americanization" of the South was the consequence of the outright victory of the United States in World War II and the subsequent pressure of the Cold War and its ideal of homogeneity.[59] In the conflict of the Cold War, the United States represented one of the two "essential principles of modernization and development – the successful 'American way' of individualism, capitalism, and mass consumerism" which was opposed to "the 'Communist way' of collectivism, a managed economy and one-party system." [60] The fear of "the other" from both outside and inside led to a sense of unity, supported also by the postwar boom of economy, prosperity and consumerism. In this homogenous world, the distinctiveness of the American South was threatened. According to Richard Gray, the problem of survival was reflected in the Southern literature and it is, in fact, "a major one for Southern literature now."[61]

The conflict between country and city was a significant one in Southern literature and culture in the decades following World War II as it reflects the fight for preservation of the region's distinctiveness and uniqueness. The massive urbanization that had started during the war, as military bases and the defense industry were developed in many Southern cities, culminated in the postwar years thanks to economic development. New communication technologies and increased mobility caused by "the expansion of the automobile industry, building of the interstate highway system, and the growth of commercial aviation," enabled corporations to locate their factories and offices to the region.[62] Urbanization also stimulated mechanization in agriculture, such as the development of the tractor and the mechanical picker, which contributed to the "decline of the Southern farm population and agricultural work force."[63] The problem of survival became a major one for those who remained in rural areas. In the acceptance of the city influence, scientific farming became necessary for survival

---

[58] Wilson and Ferris, 1343.
[59] Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Culture of the Cold War," *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 257.
[60] Bradbury and Temperley, 291.
[61] Gray, *Literature of Memory* 257.
[62] Wilson and Ferris, 1438.
[63] Wilson and Ferris, 26.

in the new environment.[64] After the elimination of small, family farming from Southern agriculture and the decline of the system of tenancy, one of the main features that distinguished the region had vanished. The class system also conformed to that of the city: "Post-World War II prosperity has strengthened the urban middle class, which is made up of professional, white-collar workers, businesspeople, and blue-collar workers."[65] The character of the city underwent transformations, mainly in connection with the rise of suburbs and the dramatic shift of thousands of urban middle class families moving to suburbs.[66] Suburbs and the commuting lifestyle also contributed to the fading of the country's distinctiveness and the all-pervasive influence of the city.

In order to preserve the rural values and way of life it was necessary to oppose the influence of the city. The opposition to the modern, capitalist, secular city and the idea of material progress has been characteristic in Southern literature for a longer time, particularly in connection with the Southern Renaissance in the 1920s and with the members of the Fugitive Agrarians. After World War II, opposition continued to appear in the works of Southern writers as a way of distinguishing the traditional Southern consciousness from the influences of the modern world. Flannery O'Connor was one of the Southern writers of this generation.

2.2 The Sense of Place

"It is a truth universally acknowledged among Southern literary scholars that 'the South' and 'Southern literature' have been characterized by a 'sense of place,'"[67] as Martyn Bone introduces his study of the postSouthern sense of place. Indeed, "the importance or the sense of place" or "an awareness of place" repeatedly appears as an answer to the question "What is Southern literature?" Scott Romine subsequently asks another question: "how can any regional literature be distinguished on so ambiguous a basis?"[68]

Considering the sense of place in Southern literature, it is crucial to understand place not merely as a location, although, at the same time, "geographical criteria can never be removed

---

[64] Wilson and Ferris, 20.
[65] Wilson and Ferris, 1438.
[66] Kendall 621.
[67] Martyn Bone, *The Postsouthern Sense of Place In Contemporary Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005) vii.
[68] Scott Romine, "Where Is Southern Literature? Practice of Place in a Postsouthern Age," *South to a New Place: Religion, Literature, Culture*, ed. Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 23.

from the equation."[69] As Romine points out, the term "sense of place" refers not only to a region but also to a way:

> The term connotes something that is not just *geographically* different [...] but *qualitatively* different. [...] Traditionally, "place" has signified a nexus of *is* and *ought*, a describable outside metonymically associated with a network of imperatives, codes, norms, limitations, duties, obligations, and relationships.[70]

Charles Reagan Wilson and Timothy Oakes confirm Romine's concept. For Wilson, the sense of place is connected with a relationship to others – to family and community.[71] According to Oakes, place "is a site of meaningful action for the individual." He puts the concept in opposition to "region" and "nation" which "remain imagined abstractions for individuals." Place, on the other hand, overcomes this abstraction by meaningful action: "such action cannot be territorially delimited as with regions or nations, but is rather derived from linkages across space and time which make place more of a dynamic web than a specific site or location."[72] Both critics thus support the concept of place as something more than a merely geographical aspect; they both see place as a dynamic system based on the consciousness and actions of its inhabitants. In other words, they both emphasize, similarly to Romine, the importance of people and society in the conception.

The society that is traditionally associated with the Southern sense of place is a rural, agricultural one. According to Bone, this idea comes from the Agrarian ideal – "the standard Southern literary-critical conception of "place" derives substantially from the Agrarians' idealized vision of a rural, agricultural society."[73] Bone emphasizes the Agrarian notion of Southern place as "agricultural real property, apotheosized in the subsistence farm." After the publication of *I'll Take My Stand* in 1930, the leading Agrarians "tried to transform their proprietary ideal into a social, political, and economic reality." This proprietary ideal was actively put in opposition to the changing economic and modern finance-capitalist situation that emerged in the 1920s and continued to influence American society in the following decade. For Agrarians, "the rescue and wider realization of this proprietary ideal offered the South's last best hope of surviving" in the modern world.[74]

---

[69] Romine, 27.
[70] Romine, 23-24.
[71] Wilson and Ferris, 1137-8.
[72] Timothy Oakes, "Place and the Paradox of Modernity," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 87.3 (Sep., 1997): 510.
[73] Bone, vii.
[74] Bone, viii.

The Agrarians' conception of place is sharply criticized by Michael Kreyling who claims that the sense of place was in fact *invented* by Agrarians and neo-Agrarians. Kreyling argues that "the Agrarian project was and must be seen as a willed campaign on the part of one elite to establish and control "the South" in a period of intense cultural maneuvering."[75] In other words, Agrarians were forced to construct the tradition of rural, agricultural place because they feared the "impact of modern capitalism upon the contemporary South."[76]

The sense of place, in both possible forms – real or fabricated -- became problematic in connection with the cultural and social changes of the 1930s and 1940s. During those decades, "Southern socio-spatial relations" significantly shifted: "sharecropping was being replaced by wage labor" and subsistence farms became extremely rare. The Agrarians' propriety ideal proved to be unrealistic and Agrarianism departed the political scene.[77] In an era of "rapid change, increasing social mobility, and the accelerating exchange between cultures,"[78] the South's isolation, which is one of the factors that Wilson mentions as an agent needed for the development of the Southern sense of place,[79] became impossible. Richard Gray, who argues that the South's conscious self-definition is based on its opposition to the "cultural dominance" of the North,[80] claims that social, technological and economic change is both the potential and the peril for Southern self-definition. Gray comments on the problem of Southern self-definition before and after the changes of the 1930s and 1940s:

> The difference now is that inventing or imagining – or simply *assuming the existence of* – the South occurs within an environment where the sheer diversity of information available and the multiplicity of systems supplying that information make cultural insularity close to impossible.[81]

The question is – can the sense of place remain a distinctive feature of Southern literature in the age of "globalized" America?

The presence of "the sense of place" in contemporary literary criticism indicates a positive answer. Despite the argument that "the location of 'place' is not so much in the South or in the Southern literature as in the critical discourse about those things,"[82] the sense place is

---

[75] Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998) xii.
[76] Bone, 4.
[77] Bone, 16-17.
[78] Richard Gray, "FOREWORD: Inventing Communities, Imagining Places: Some Thoughts on Southern Self-Fashioning," *South to a New Place: Religion, Literature, Culture*, ed. Suzzane W. Jones and Sharon Monteith (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) xx.
[79] Wilson and Ferris, 1138.
[80] Gray, xiii-xvii.
[81] Gray, xx.
[82] Romine, 23-24.

largely believed to play an important role in Southern literature. Louis D. Rubin Jr., in his introduction to *The History of Southern Literature* (1985), offers an explanation:

> [T]o consider writers and their writings as Southern still involves considerably more than a geographical grouping. History, as a mode for viewing one's experiences and one's identity, remains a striking characteristic of the Southern literary imagination, black and white.[83]

Although "history" or "historical consciousness" cannot be considered as the unified and only explanation, it frequently appears in contemporary literary criticism as a significant one. Wilson defines "dramatic and traumatic history" as one of two factors that had initiated the development of "an acute sense of place" (the other being the already mentioned rural isolation).[84] The dramatic and traumatic history of Wilson's argument is that connected with the Civil War: "In this [historical] consciousness, the most important fact is that on the very soil of the former Confederacy, the people of South fought in their Civil War and, moreover, were crushingly defeated." The consciousness of defeat distinguishes the Southerner from the "uniformly successful" American, making him thus "an anomalous American."[85] Owing to this anomaly, the sense of place, closely connected with the historical consciousness, continues to be a distinctive feature of Southern literature.

Noticeably, one who supports the importance of historical consciousness and the defeat in the Civil War for the sense of place is Flannery O'Connor herself. To her friend, Janet McKane, O'Connor wrote: "The sense of place is highly developed in Southerners,"[86] and in a subsequent letter to McKane she developed her understanding of the Southern sense of place in comparison with the Northerners' notion:

> I think you have a sense of place up there, but since it is not connected with a historical defeat, I don't think it touches as deep an emotion... It's not simply a matter of present-place, but a matter of the place's continuity and the shared experience of the people who live there.[87]

Flannery O'Connor touches several points when connecting the sense of place with the historical defeat. Firstly, she emphasizes the defeat as something that deepens the emotional attachment to the place. A similar argument was made by O'Connor's contemporary Eudora Welty, whose essay "Place in Fiction" is considered to be crucial in the study of the sense of

---

[83] Louis D. Rubin Jr,. "Introduction," *History of Southern Literature*, ed. Rubin et al. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 5.
[84] Wilson and Ferris, 1138.
[85] Martin Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2007) 227.
[86] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 520.
[87] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 523.

place in Southern literature. According to Welty, "feelings are bound up in place."[88] Place "pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to place; place in history partakes of feeling, as feeling about history partakes of place." Welty illustrates the connection between feelings and place in the example of a bomb explosion (an extremely powerful comparison in the era of the Cold War) – a bomb can destroy only the actual place, it cannot destroy the feelings and history that are connected with it.[89] Place is thus something that has the ability not only to initiate and create feelings, but also to maintain and re-create them. In this sense, the historical defeat still strengthens the South's sense of place as it generates distinct feelings.

Secondly, O'Connor stresses the sense of place as the continuous, shared experience of a community. The communal aspect is important for O'Connor's perspective and her understanding of Southern literature: "Unless the novelist has gone utterly out of his mind, his aim is still communication, and communication suggests talking inside a community. One of the reasons Southern fiction thrives is that our best writers are able to do to this."[90] The community, in O'Connor's view, offers to the writer a knowledge that distinguishes him/her from writers from the rest of the country.

Thirdly, by linking the community with shared experience, the question arises what exactly the experience and knowledge found in the community is. The answer, for O'Connor, lies in the connection between the historical defeat and the Christian tradition of the South. Flannery O'Connor understands the historical defeat as a Fall that has given the South "an inburnt knowledge of human limitations"[91] and she links it with the Fall of man from the Biblical story about Adam and Eve – "'How far we have fallen' means the fall of Adam, the fall from innocence, from sanctifying grace." The Christian tradition gave the South the means for interpreting the lost war – "The South in other words still believes that man has fallen and that he is only perfectible by God's grace."[92] This belief is the knowledge "felt and known" inside the community and it is "what separates Georgia from Hollywood or New York."[93]

The South's sense of place is, according to O'Connor, inherently connected with the Christian tradition, and that Christian perspective is essential in her writings. As Dorothy

---

[88] Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction," *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Random House, 1978) 118.
[89] Welty, 122-123.
[90] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) 53.
[91] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* 59.
[92] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 302.
[93] Margaret Earley Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O'Connor* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 171.

Walters writes in her study, "the region is for her an instrument, not an end,"[94] which, in fact, echoes Welty's understanding of place in fiction: "place is where he [the writer] has his roots, place is where he stands; in his experience out of which he writes, it provides the base of reference; in his work, the point of view."[95] According to Welty, the place can provide the physical texture but cannot provide the theme: "It can present theme, show it to the last detail – but place is forever illustrative."[96] Flannery O'Connor understands place likewise: "As a fiction writer who is a Southerner, I use the idiom and manners of the country I know, but I don't consider that I write *about* the South."[97] For O'Connor, the theme is specifically Christian. The place of the South is the natural framework through which she can present the supernatural. As she writes in one of her letters, "for me the visible universe is a reflection of the invisible universe."[98]

2.3 Conflict in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction

When dealing with the fiction of Flannery O'Connor, one soon becomes aware of the importance of conflict in her writings. As Dorothy Walters points out, "tension of various kind charges each work of Flannery O'Connor, from the opening statement to the final line."[99] From the first description of the setting and the introduction of characters to frequently violent climaxes, conflict creates the main structural and thematic body of O'Connor's fiction. In the words of Frederick Asals, "Conflict – often violent conflict – is at the very center of Flannery O'Connor's fiction."[100]

Both in her letters and her public speeches and lectures collected in *Mystery and Manners*, Flannery O'Connor is rather prescriptive about the "proper" readings of conflict in her fiction. For O'Connor, conflict is connected with the Christian belief and with the position of a Christian in the modern world.

O'Connor repeatedly expresses her Christian belief and perspective – "Let me make no bones about it: I write from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. [...] I write with a belief in *all* the Christian dogmas."[101] "This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our

---

[94] Dorothy Walters, *Flannery O'Connor* (Boston: Twayne, 1973) 18.
[95] Welty, 117.
[96] Welty, 128-129.
[97] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* 133.
[98] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 128.
[99] Walters, 23.
[100] Frederick Asals, "The Double in Flannery O´Connor´s Stories," *The Critical Response to Flannery O'Connor,* ed. Douglas Robillard, Jr. (Westport: Praeger, 2004) 191.
[101] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 147.

Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that."[102] All her fiction is deeply grounded in her religious convictions and it is this religious perspective to which she consciously compares the thoughts and actions of her characters.

Despite her Catholic upbringing and environment – "I am a born Catholic, went to Catholic schools in my early years, and have never left or wanted to leave the Church."[103] – Flannery O'Connor was not writing only for a Catholic audience. On the contrary, according to O'Connor's explanation of violence in her fiction, one supposes that her stories are aimed rather at those not sharing the same belief than to Christian readers. Conflict in her fiction is thus closely connected with her understanding of the audience and with the task of a Christian writer in general:

> The novelist with Christian concern 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 beliefs 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.[104]

Flannery O'Connor, seeing herself as a Christian novelist in the age when "the liberal, atheistic, man-centered society of modern times"[105] makes a virtue of egoism and secularism, often uses violent conflict as an "eye-opener." She believed that both the protagonist of her fiction and the reader need "a crisis that reveals to him his haughty and willful misconception of reality, at which time he experiences [...] his 'moment of grace.'"[106] The Christian reality, which is the only true reality for O'Connor, can be revealed only after the overthrow of pride and the false beliefs in self and secularism of the modern age. Conflict thus stands in the center of both Flannery O'Connor's writings and her vision: "for me this [the gravest concern] is always the conflict between an attraction for the Holy and the disbelief in it that we breathe in with the air of the times. It's hard to believe always but more so in the world we live in now."[107]

---

[102] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* 32.
[103] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 114.
[104] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* 33-34.
[105] Joyce Carol Oates, "The Vision Art of Flannery O'Connor," *Flannery O'Connor,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 46.
[106] Bob Dowell, "The Moment of Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," *College English,* 27.3 (Dec., 1965) 236.
[107] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 349.

According to the theological perspective that Flannery O’Connor offers and almost even dictates, conflict on the social level is secondary, it just reflects and dramatizes the conflict on the theological level. Although existing literary criticism mostly defends the theological framework of O’Connor’s fiction, several critics have made an attempt to consider her fiction in light of social relationships. As Laurel Nesbitt points out, Flannery O’Connor’s instruction on how to read her stories was inconsistent: “as prescriptive as O’Connor was on the reading of her work”, she also warned against “read[ing] a story from what you get out of a letter” or “read[ing] the author by the story.”[108] For Nesbitt, this inconsistency opens the way for criticism based on “racial and social matters.” Nevertheless, as Nesbitt subsequently adds, what makes this task “difficult to approach is the body of criticism (and O’Connor’s official word on the matter) which says her work cannot be read as social (racial) narrative.”[109]

Flannery O’Connor, indeed, was highly against a sociological interpretation of her work. The reader, according to O’Connor, “has first to get rid of a purely sociological point of view.” She connects the tendency for sociological interpretation of fiction to the situation in the thirties “when social criticism and social realism were considered by many to be the most important aspect of fiction.”[110] O’Connor opposes this tendency by referring to the Christian perspective. Nevertheless, Nesbitt complicates the reading of conflict in her fiction: for those sharing the same theological framework, O'Connor's stories use social conflict to dramatize the “larger” issue but

> if my faith (or non-faith) offers me another spiritual framework, or [...] if my “place” causes me to see matters of social inequality as being more immediate than all of this, I am likely to criticize O’Connor for her tendency to offer faith as the remedy for social injustice. The real problem at hand here, then, is that the theological reading of O’Connor tends to gloss over and explain away other readings.[111]

Patrician Yaeger and Jon Lance Bacon made similar points in their studies. Yaeger, in her essay focusing on the element of the grotesque in O’Connor’s fiction, tries to look “beyond theology” – “we ignore the text as political-historical process and look instead for the truth of the subject [...] What happens when we read otherwise? What happens to O’Connor’s stories when we wake up the personal and political terrors of her texts?”[112] Similarly, Bacon attempts

---

[108] O’Connor, *The Habit of Being* 170.
[109] Laurel Nesbitt, “Reading Place in and Around Flannery O’Connor’s Texts,” (Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, Fall 1997) < http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.pid9999.0001.107>
[110] O’Connor, *Mystery and Manners* 163-164.
[111] Nesbitt < http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.pid9999.0001.107>
[112] Patricia Yaeger "Flannery O'Connor and the Aesthetics of Torture," *Flannery O'Connor: New Perspectives*, ed. Sura P. Rath and Mary Neff Shaw (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996) 186-187.

to emphasis the political realities of the Cold War era reflected in O'Connor's works and place her into the literary canon not only as a writer of the American South: "By recovering the political dimensions of O'Connor's work, I am able to show the centrality of her writings in the literary history of postwar America. More than any other writer, O'Connor needs to be repositioned in that history."[113] Both critics are, together with Nesbitt, representatives of the relatively recent direction in literary criticism that tries to concentrate on the socio-historical level of Flannery O'Connor's fiction.

In my opinion, both perspectives are so closely interconnected that it is almost impossible to completely separate them. To consider the theological framework, one must always consider the social relationships because it is through them that O'Connor dramatizes the conflict between belief and disbelief. Similarly, to look beyond the theological framework, one must firstly become familiar with it. Conflict in Flannery O'Connor's fiction is thus always a complex one: it is the conflict between people, and between people and God at the same time.

[113] Jon Lance Bacon, *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 5.

Chapter 3 – Flannery O'Connor's Places

The theme of the portrayal of country and city in Flannery O'Connor's short stories has been a recurrent one in literary criticism. The reason for such an interest may be considered in the context of the more complex theme of the pastoral ideal in American literature. In his critical study *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx concentrates precisely on the significance of pastoralism in America, its origins, reflections and changes associated with industrialization. According to Marx, the "pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination." [114] From the beginnings of the pastoral mode, which are, in Marx's view, Virgil's *Eclogues*, the pastoral ideal is based on the opposition of two worlds: "one identified with rural peace and simplicity, the other with urban power and sophistication."[115] The conflict between country and city has been, therefore, an essential part of pastoralism.

Many critics have also considered Flannery O'Connor's short stories from this perspective of mutual opposition. O'Connor's rural environment was often idealized and connected with the pastoral ideal, such as in Micheal Cleary's study: "Generally, O'Connor presents the country as a positive force, a superior environment to the city. She often accompanies this effect by portraying the country as a truly Edenic representation of a world of natural beauty, innocence, harmony and isolation."[116] David Eggenschwiler summarizes the aspects of country and city that have often been associated with O'Connor's fiction:

> As many critics have noted, Flannery O'Connor persistently represents cities as the domain of the devil (with similarities to Sodom and Gomorrah and to Augustine's earthly city), as a nightmare world, and as an insipid place full of lonely or flat people. Correspondingly, in keeping with the Southern agrarian tradition, she often represents the farm as a place of complex and deep loyalties, where one feels related to the land and one's work and where the relations between people are vitally important and therefore elaborately formalized through manners.[117]

---

[114] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) 3.
[115] Marx, 19.
[116] Michael Cleary, "The Environmental Influences in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," *Flannery O'Connor Bulletin,* 8 (1979): 21.
[117] David Eggenschwiler, "The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor," *The Critical Response to Flannery O´Connor,* ed. Douglas Robillard, Jr. (Westport: Praeger, 2004) 152.

Although Flannery O'Connor uses the country-city opposition that has been characteristic for the pastoral ideal, she does not idealize the countryside to the extent described by Michael Cleary. While she seems to be less critical of her country people (advocating the already quoted statement "[b]ad manners are better than no manners at all"), she is still critical of both places, highlighting the spiritual dangers of both rural and urban environments. Her short stories are rather, as Walter Elder suggests, "about country evil and city evil."[118] The critical view of both the country and the city thus cancels the strictly polar opposition of the two places and opens the way for the existence of the place between.

3.1 The Country

The typical setting of Flannery O'Connor's short stories is a rural one; specifically, a Southern rural farm. As Miles Orvell suggests in his analysis of "Good Country People," the farm of the short story is "not unlike the farm where O'Connor herself lived and wrote." Orvell further describes the setting as a "disarmingly routine environment, yet one strangely capable of serving as an arena for disarmingly unroutine revelations."[119] The farm as an environment based on routine and repetition also corresponds to Dorothy Walters's view: "Its attitudes, its ideas – like its daily routines and conversations – are fixed and continue in a comfortable pattern of unbroken repetition."[120] Taking "Good Country People" as an example, it is apparent that repetition and routine penetrate the everyday actions and encounters of the characters, their speech and their attitudes. Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman's usual morning meetings in the kitchen sound like a competition in repetitious, cliché-like phrases:

> "Everybody is different," Mrs. Hopewell said.
>
> "Yes, most people is," Mrs. Freeman said.
>
> "It takes all kinds to make the world."
>
> "I always said it did myself."[121]

The empty phrases are, moreover, the expression of the characters' philosophy. Mrs. Hopewell's favorite saying "Nothing is perfect" (*CS* 272) becomes the standard for her interpretation of the world around her: "She realized that nothing is perfect and that in the

[118] Walter Elder, "That Region," *The Critical Response to Flannery O´Connor,* ed. Douglas Robillard, Jr. (Westport: Praeger, 2004) 26.
[119] Miles Orvell, *Flannery O'Connor: An Introduction* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991) 136.
[120] Dorothy Walters, *Flannery O'Connor* (Boston: Twayne, 1973) 64.
[121] Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971) 273. All subsequent references to the short stories are cited in the text.

Freemans she had good country people and that if, in this day and age, you get good country people, you had better hang onto them." (*CS* 273) Philosophy and attitudes are "limited to a familiar round of banal observations that serve to explain all circumstances and account for all exigencies."[122]

The routines and conversations of Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman refer to more general questions connected with O'Connor's depiction of the country and rural values. Similar to the daily routines and exchanging of general sayings, the values traditionally connected with the rural environment, such as the emphasis on community, formalized relationships, the sense of responsibility to family and attachment to the land, may in fact represent an "attempt to reduce one's concerns within manageable limits and find a hiding place."[123] Adherence to those values provides the characters, on the one hand, a safe place, fixed manners and relationships, and a sense of order. On the other hand, it gives them a false certainty and a sense of completeness without being actually complete.[124] For Flannery O'Connor, a person can be complete only in his or her relationship to God. Attachment to the farm and rural values cannot replace or compensate for it.

The farm in "Good Country People" represents, in the view of its owner – Mrs. Hopewell – precisely the set of familiar rural values according to which one has to behave to be a "good country" person. She, for instance, frequently stresses the fixed social roles of the farm's inhabitants by adhering to the class distinctions that had stratified the society of the American South in the past, and that guarantees her a respectable, superior position. She refers to her former tenant families as to "trash" and appreciates the Freemans more for their social status than for their working abilities – "The reason for her keeping them so long was that they were not trash." (*CS* 272) Mrs. Hopewell clearly sees the farm as the place of fixed positions and manners, as "the *norm* for human conduct and attitudes."[125]

The farm as the standard of "normality" is most clearly revealed in comparison with its aberrations. Similarly, those characters that differ from the "norm" of the farm are often described exactly by means of their distinctness. Hulga is thus constantly being compared to Mrs. Freeman's daughters. Although one is pregnant at the age of fifteen and the other is naïve and foolish in her relationships with men, they are considered to be good examples of "the good country people" – "Mrs. Hopewell liked to tell people that Glynese and Carramae were two of the finest girls she knew. (*CS* 272) Hulga, on the contrary, is seen by her mother

---

[122] Walters, 64.
[123] Eggenschwiler, 152.
[124] Eggenschwiler, 152.
[125] Walters, 64.

as a misfit in the world of the farm. According to Mrs. Hopewell, Hulga's education, excessive independence and physical disadvantage prevent her from assuming a "normal" role in the rural society:

> She thought of her still as a child because it tore her heart to think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any *normal* good times. [...] You could say, "My daughter is a nurse," or "My daughter is a schoolteacher," or even, "My daughter is a chemical engineer." You could not say, "My daughter is a philosopher." (*CS* 274, 276)

Flannery O'Connor also uses this technique of revealing characteristics by means of comparison and confrontation for the theme that interests her the most: religion. When Manley Pointer appears at Mrs. Hopewell's door trying to sell her a Bible, she confirms her belief, in the words of the Bible salesman, in "Chrustian service." Nevertheless, it soon becomes clear that, despite considering herself a Christian, religion does not play an essential part in Mrs. Hopewell's life. Her faith appears to be rather hypocritical, which is revealed in comparison with the seeming faith of the Bible salesman:

> Mrs. Hopewell could not say, "My daughter is an atheist and won't let me keep the Bible by my bedside." This was not the truth. It was in the attic somewhere.
>
> "Lady," he said, "the word of God ought to be in the parlor."
>
> "Well, I think that's a matter of taste," she began. "I think…"
>
> "Lady," he said, "for a Chrustian, the word of God ought to be in every room in the house besides in his heart." (*CS* 278)

In "Good Country People," Flannery O'Connor dramatizes the dangers of practicing a religion connected with the country, which she frequently discusses in her letters. To John Hawkes, she wrote: "The religion of the South is a do-it-yourself religion [...] It's full of unconscious pride that lands them in all sorts of ridiculous religious predicaments. They have nothing to correct their practical heresies and so they work them out dramatically."[126] For Mrs. Hopewell, religion is just part of her clichéd perspective. God is reduced to empty phrases and to the formal possessing of a Bible *somewhere* in the attic. Mrs. Hopewell is thus one of those people about whom O'Connor wrote: "they don't really have faith but a kind of false certainty. [...] It's never hard for them to believe because actually they never think about it."[127] Christianity of the country, as illustrated in "Good Country People," becomes one of the values that are connected with the rural environment and that can actually estrange man from

---

[126] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 350.
[127] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 231.

God and from “the true country of man.”[128] According to O’Connor, faith without questions, self-examinations and even doubts can function only as a false certainty or as a kind of “poor man’s insurance system.”[129]

3.2 The City

Considering her portrayal of the city and the characters representing urban consciousness in Flannery O’Connor’s short stories, it is apparent that she is highly critical of city materialism and secularism, and of the urban way of life in general. One soon recognizes a repeating pattern in many of her stories: a city-representing character is satirized and bitterly criticized, and consequently confronted with his limitations: Hulga of “Good Country People,” Julian of “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” and Asbury Fox of “The Enduring Chill” can be named as examples. Moreover, O’Connor frequently associates the city with the images of hell and the devil, which again points to the dangers of city secularism.

According to Flannery O’Connor, the secularism that had been spreading, together with urbanization, occurs in two forms. The modern world, as she mentions in her essay “The Church and the Fiction Writer,” is divided according to its reaction to religious mystery – “part of it trying to eliminate mystery while another part tries to rediscover it in disciplines less personally demanding than religion.”[130] For O’Connor, city secularism may, in fact, be a form of religion or, rather, a substitution for religion. As she wrote in one of her letters: “All around you, you will find people accepting “religion” that has been rid of its religious elements.”[131] The theme of the substitution of Christian dogma for a kind of secular religion is recurrent in her fiction. As Dorothy Walters mentions in her commentary on O’Connor’s first novel *Wise Blood*, “the city has long since discovered for itself various embodiments of the “new jesus,” with appropriate rituals, tabernacles, and presiding deities.”[132] In *Wise Blood*, the commerce and materialism of the city is promoted to religion – rituals of sales and purchases are substitutes for religious rituals, store windows for church mosaics, street vendors for priests, card tables with buckets and potato peelers for altars. The city itself thus becomes “the Church Without Christ.”[133] Similar motifs appear also in O’Connor’s short stories, where

[128] Robert Fitzgerald, “The Countryside and the True Country,” *Flannery O’Connor,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 30.
[129] O’Connor, *The Habit of Being* 231.
[130] Flannery O’Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) 145.
[131] O’Connor, *The Habit of Being* 365.
[132] Walters, 47.
[133] Flannery O’Connor, *Three* (New York: New American Library, 1964) 24, 60.

characters representing the urban modern consciousness often treat their atheist and nihilist beliefs in Christian-like manners.[134]

Nevertheless, in several short stories the city represents something broader and more complex than "just" modern secularism: experience. Taking "The Artificial Nigger" or "Judgment Day" as examples, the city represents a force that compels the characters to reconsider their belief system. In both short stories, the city is, beyond question, the place of modern secularism (the arguments about Tanner's place of burial are in fact arguments about religion and atheism) but it also represents a set of new impulses for which the characters need to acknowledge their need for grace.

Flannery O'Connor's portrayal of the city as an experience is illustrated in "The Artificial Nigger." According to Walters, Mr. Head and Nelson's journey to Atlanta is "the archetypal voyage into experience."[135] Born in the city, Nelson considers the trip to Atlanta to be his second visit and he frequently boasts of his cosmopolitan origin. His grandfather, Mr. Head, is convinced that "the city is not a great place" and he intends the trip to be a moral lesson in humility for Nelson – "Mr. Head meant him to see everything there is to see in a city so that he would be content to stay at home for the rest of his life." (*CS* 251) From the very beginning, the city is thus seen as a kind of experience. The reader familiar with O'Connor's fiction rightly suspects that it is not only Nelson but mainly Mr. Head "who is instructed as a result of the experience."[136]

From their preparations for the journey, it is apparent that the city for both of them represents an uncommon place and situation. Nelson, for example, wears a suit and a hat for the first time – "His new suit and hat were in the boxes that they had been sent in." (*CS* 250) During their stroll through the city, Nelson is described as being unused to shoes, which points again to the unfamiliarity of the city experience – "Nelson had on his shoes and he was unaccustomed to them." (*CS* 261) The journey to the city is clearly an interruption of their everyday lives and routines in the country. Going to the city, therefore, "means entering upon an unfamiliar experience in which one's previous identity is temporarily dissolved in an unfamiliar milieu."[137]

The unfamiliarity with the city is symbolized by the unfamiliarity with the blacks. In the rural country where Mr. Head and his grandson live, blacks have been forbidden to live for

[134] The theme of secular religion will be closely discussed in chapter 4.2, in connection with the portrayal of intellectualism as a substitution for religion.
[135] Walters, 118.
[136] Walters, 119.
[137] Walters, 119.

many years. As Mr. Head tells Nelson – "There hasn't been a nigger in this country since we run that one out twelve years ago and that was before you were born." (*CS* 252) For Nelson, to confirm his metropolitan origin means to prove to his grandfather that he is able to recognize and deal with the blacks. Although he fails his first test on the train, in the city he experiences another encounter. Lost in a black neighborhood, Nelson asks a black woman for directions. O'Connor describes Nelson's perception of the black woman in a way that indicates a spiritual moment for Nelson:

> He stood drinking in every detail of her. [...] He suddenly wanted her to reach down and pick him up and draw him against her and then he wanted to feel her breath on his face. He wanted to look down and down into her eyes while she held him tighter and tighter. He had never had such a feeling before. (*CS* 262)

Nelson, whose mother died when he was a baby, instinctively feels the maternal attraction of the woman. Instead of the repulsion that he felt towards the black man on the train, he "finds himself pulled toward the woman by some strange magnetic force."[138] Nevertheless, the woman not only represents the missing mother for the boy, she also represents the impulse that Nelson needs to realize his own "blackness." Flannery O'Connor comments on the encounter and its significance in one of her letters to Ben Griffith:

> You may be right that Nelson's reaction to the colored woman is too pronounced, but I meant for her in an almost physical way to suggest the mystery of existence to him – he not only has never seen a nigger but he didn't know any women and I felt that such a black mountain of maternity would give him the required shock to start those black forms moving up from his unconscious.[139]

By linking the incident with the black woman to the "black forms" coming from unconsciousness, Flannery O'Connor confronts Nelson with the dark, sinful part of himself. Before Mr. Head pulls him roughly away, O'Connor describes Nelson as experiencing a moment of darkness: "He felt as if he were reeling down through a pitchblack tunnel." (*CS* 262) This is in fact a reference to the sewer system that Mr. Head and Nelson discussed earlier in the story and that represents the symbolic entrance to hell:

> Then Mr. Head explained the sewer system, how the entire city was underlined with it, [...] how a man could slide into it and be sucked along down endless pitchblack tunnels. At any minute any man in the city might be sucked into the sewer and never be heard from again. He described it so well that Nelson was for some seconds

[138] Walters, 119.
[139] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 78.

> shaken. He connected the sewer passages with the entrance to hell and understood for the first time how the world was put together in its lower parts. (*CS* 259)

By comparing the sewer system to the entrance to hell, Flannery O'Connor presents hell as something necessary, something that underlies man's everyday existence although he may not be always aware of it. For O'Connor, hell is not an abstract concept but a certainty. In a letter to Louise Abbot she wrote: "If there were no hell, we would be like the animals. No hell, no dignity."[140]

Mr. Head also experiences a moment when he feels connected with the symbolic hell. After he denies his grandson and starts to realize his pride and limitations, he almost feels himself to be in hell: "The old man felt that if he saw a sewer entrance he would drop down into it and let himself be carried away." (*CS* 267) Both Mr. Head and Nelson leave the certainty of their rural existence to experience another certainty in the city: "the reality of a personal devil."[141]

Nevertheless, the city in "The Artificial Nigger" does not only represent the symbolic hell; it also offers the symbolic heaven. Paradoxically, Flannery O'Connor uses the black characters to indicate both places. As it has been shown, the black neighborhood represented for Nelson a descent into his personal hell. Mr. Head, though, ironically calls the same neighborhood heaven: 'Anybody wants to be from this nigger heaven can be from it.'" (*CS* 261) By this reference, O'Connor prepares both her characters and her readers for the religious significance of "the plaster figure of a Negro." (*CS* 268) In the lawn statue, Mr. Head and Nelson recognize themselves, their kinship with the Negro and with one another. In this moment, O'Connor's theological language suggests the mystery of redemption and Christ hanging on the cross at Golgotha[142] - "They stood gazing at the artificial Negro as if they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat. They could both feel it dissolving their differences like an action of mercy." (*CS* 269) O'Connor uses the plaster lawn figure "as the medium through which grace is delivered"[143] and through which the entrance to heaven is symbolically offered.

---

[140] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 354.
[141] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 357.
[142] W.F. Monroe, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacramental Icon: "The Artificial Nigger," *South Central Review,* 1.4 (Winter 1984): 67-68.
[143] Whitt, 63.

In addition to the predominant view of the city as "the domain of the devil"[144] and the place of modern secularism, the city in Flannery O'Connor's short stories can be viewed as a kind of unpleasant and often violent experience. Flannery O'Connor's cities are thus places where her country people experience a confrontation with own imperfections and where they are offered God's mercy.

3.3 The Place Between

Flannery O'Connor's constant gesture, as Ronald Schleifer points out, is "to place her characters between the natural and supernatural by locating them on a journey, often literal, between cities and the rural country of the South."[145] Indeed, many of her stories take place on the frontiers between the country and city – both literally and figuratively. In "The Artificial Nigger," the moment of "a deeper understanding of Paradise, and a readiness to enter it humbly"[146] takes place at the junction after getting off the train from the city, which is the literal place between the country and city. Moreover, the place between is indicated by a motif displacement. In "Judgment Day," Tanner is displaced from his Southern home and he stays with his daughter in a New York apartment. He is thus also placed in between – his physical and inner selves are at different places. While geographically he is in the metropolis, his mind and his roots are in the rural South.

For Flannery O'Connor, the place between is a symbolic expression of the paradox of Christian vision – man can experience divine, supernatural revelations through encounters with the natural; he is thus in the natural and supernatural world at the same time. As Schleifer suggests, "[t]his is where the supernatural is most clearly and terrifyingly encountered – on those frontiers between the country and the city, faith and faithlessness, Protestant fundamentalism and skepticism."[147] Many of O'Connor's characters are, therefore, displaced from their communities and placed between the familiar and the strange, the natural and the supernatural, between the country and the city. Such displacement is, therefore, "not a sectional or regional condition; it is a religious condition, common to North and South alike, common indeed to the world we live in."[148] Geographical exiles such as Tanner from "Judgment Day," are thus symbols of different kind of displacements – spiritual ones.

---

[144] Eggenschwiler, 152.
[145] Ronald Schleifer, "Rural Gothic," *Flannery O'Connor,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 84.
[146] Whitt, 68.
[147] Schleifer, 84.
[148] Fitzgerald, 30.

To understand the spiritual aspect of Tanner's exile, both the reader and Tanner himself have to look back at Tanner's life in Georgia. One of Tanner's several flashbacks describes his meeting with Coleman, "a large loose-jointed Negro, twice his [Tanner's] own size." (*CS* 537) They meet when Tanner "works" six Negroes at a saw mill. The ability to "work[ing] niggers" is mentioned several times in the story; for Tanner, the art of "handling niggers" represents both pride in himself and an affirmation of the racial hierarchy. When Coleman's presence disturbs the working routine of the crew, Tanner decides to confront him and thus demonstrate his racial superiority. Nevertheless, what Tanner intends as a confirmation of his supremacy turns into a moment of spiritual significance.

Instead of his usual threat "Nigger, this knife is in my hand now but if you don't quit wasting my time and money, it'll be in your gut shortly," (*CS* 537) Tanner changes his mind in the middle of the sentence and starts carving unconsciously with his penknife – "His own penknife moved, directed solely by some intruding intelligence that worked in his hands. He had no idea what he was carving, but when he reached the Negro, he had already made two holes the size of half dollars in the piece of bark." (*CS* 538) To his and Coleman's surprise, Tanner makes a pair of spectacles which he hands to the Negro. Coleman's reaction to the gesture reveals a sense of mystery. Although the first, instinctive impulse is to crush the fake glasses and Tanner with them, there seems to be "something else at work in him which offset the pleasure of thrusting the white man's knife into his innards."[149] Coleman reaches for the glasses, puts them on and looks directly at Tanner.

Although Coleman's acceptance of the glasses can be seen as an instance of submission, and that's the interpretation that Tanner chooses to accept, the scene, in fact, opens a possibility for a moment of grace for Tanner:

> And then he looked directly at Tanner and grinned, or grimaced, Tanner could not tell which, but he had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot. (*CS* 538-539)

In Coleman's mysterious act of self-humiliation and in Tanner's glimpse of the Negro as a negative image of himself, their "essential condition" was momentarily revealed: "not their racial equality so much as their common imprisonment in the bonds of sin and mortality."[150] The lensless glasses, although useless in reality, better Coleman's inner vision. Tanner, by

[149] Ralph C. Wood, "From Fashionable Tolerance to Unfashionable Redemption," *Flannery O'Connor,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 60.
[150] Wood, 60.

contrast, willfully chooses to blind himself to ultimate truth. He chooses to interpret the scene as another confirmation of his ability to "handle niggers."

During his exile in New York, Tanner gradually realizes Coleman's importance in his life. He misses him as a friend, not as an inferior, anonymous "nigger." Feeling lonely in the city, Tanner tries to befriend the Negro next door, naïvely considering him to be a fellow exile who longs, as he does, to be back in the South. He approaches the black actor with the familiar form: "Preacher." Tanner's greeting is highly ambiguous; the term implies both "the familiar term of endearment which Southerners often (and without condescension) used to address black men"[151] and the religious connotation. The black actor, being aware of both meanings, angrily reacts – "I'm not from South Alabama. [...] And I'm not no preacher! I'm not even no Christian. I don't believe that crap. There ain't no Jesus and there ain't no God." (*CS* 544-545) Their encounter ends violently – Tanner is beaten by the secularized black actor.

The neighbor's fierce reaction leads Tanner to a reconsideration of his stay in the city and to a re-evaluation of the incident with Coleman and the wooden glasses. Tanner starts his conversation with the bespectacled Coleman precisely with the term "Preacher." After the encounter with the Northern Negro, he seems to realize the religious implication of the word. Although nothing is directly stated, Tanner seems, in light of this realization, to understand the religious importance of his first meeting with Coleman and to confess his arrogance and pride. As Ralph C. Wood writes in his critical essay "From Fashionable Tolerance to Unfashionable Redemption:"

> By linking the beating to his earlier encounter with black men [...] Tanner seems implicitly to acknowledge it as a kind of purgation, a terrible penance for failing to decipher the grace Coleman proffered him in pantomime – indeed, for arrogance of his life.[152]

For Tanner, the city thus becomes the symbolical purgatory where his soul must be firstly purified before entering the Heaven. This interpretation is supported by Tanner's description. Before Tanner actually dies at the end, he is described as being already dead throughout the short story: "Tanner had both hands gripped on the chair arms. His eyes were trained on her like the eyes of an angry corpse." (*CS* 533)

The image of purgatory is prominent during Tanner's fatal attempt to accomplish his plans:

---

[151] Wood, 61.
[152] Wood, 62.

> He was halfway there [at the head of the stairs] when all at once his legs disappeared, or felt as if they had. [...] He fell forward and grasped the banister post with both hands. Hanging there, he gazed for what seemed the longest time he had ever looked at anything down the steep unlighted steps; then he closed his eyes and pitched forward. He landed down in the middle of the flight. (*CS* 548)

Tanner is firstly described to be "halfway there" and then landing "in the middle of the flight" which refer to the purgatory-like place between – between the earth and Heaven. Immediately after his fall on the stairs, he imagines his return to the South. In his mind, he experiences the actual Judgment Day. His last words to the black actor, "Hep me up, Preacher. I'm on my way home!" (*CS* 549) are his final affirmation of faith. He thus finally leaves the purgatory city and he "is bound for a City [...] not made with hands but eternal in the heavens."[153]

In "Judgment Day," Flannery O'Connor uses Tanner's purgatory-like exile in the city as an illustration of the place between. Tanner, oscillating in his mind between his past rural experiences and the present city incidents, acknowledges the spiritual meaning of his displacement. He recognizes that he is not only between the country and the city but mainly between earth and Heaven, between the natural and the supernatural, between the concrete and the spiritual. His place in between also refers to Flannery O'Connor's understanding of a place in general: it is through the concrete place and through concrete manners associated with it that mystery is revealed. As Joyce Carol Oates writes: "It is a measure of her genius that she can so easily and so skillfully evoke the spiritual whole dealing in a very concrete, very secular world of fragmentary people."[154]

---

[153] Wood, 63.

[154] Joyce Carol Oates, "The Visionary Art of Flannery O'Connor," *Flannery O'Connor,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 44.

Chapter 4 - "City Interleckchuls" and Witty Country People

As World War II closed and the era of the Cold War began, pressure on the American South to adapt to the rest of the country appeared also in the question of education. The South entered a period of economic prosperity and rapid urbanization which, together with a high birthrate during the war, "helped create a stronger demand for quality education." [155] Thanks to the prosperity, a lot of money was given not only to elementary and secondary education but also to the region's public colleges and universities. University research was fundamental in the context of the Cold War – "with the 1958 National Defense Education Act, in the wake of the Russian launching of Sputnik, federal support increased exponentially."[156] Although the amount of federal funding of Southern universities and institutions was not as great as the funding of universities in other parts of the country, it helped to increase the number of colleges in the region and it supported the demand for a university education. The increased interest in higher education reflected the changes in Southern society in general. The region's attitude toward science and a university education "has become increasingly progressive and supportive"[157] which refers to "a growing awareness of the importance of higher education to the modernization of Southern society."[158] The question of education had, therefore, been a part of the conflict between country conservatism and city modernism; between the effort to preserve the region's distinctiveness and the tendency to draw the region nearer to the rest of the country; between rural common sense and urban intellectualism; between country and city.

The spread of higher education and the conflict between the worlds of urban universities and rural farms is a theme that repeatedly appears in Flannery O'Connor's short stories. Although O'Connor herself received an excellent education, she was critical of several aspects of it. She wrote about the years she spent at the university in a letter to Alfred Cohn: "What kept me a sceptic in college was precisely my Christian faith. It always said: wait, don't bite on this, get a wider picture, continue to read."[159] For O'Connor, the conflict connected with a university education and intellect in general mirrors the conflict that interests her the most: the conflict between belief and disbelief.

---

[155] Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris eds. *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 239-240.
[156] Wilson and Ferris, 240.
[157] Wilson and Ferris, 1343.
[158] Wilson and Ferris, 239.
[159] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 477.

4.1 The Pride of Intellect

"I'm not an intellectual and have a horror of making an idiot of myself with abstract statements and theories,"[160] Flannery O'Connor writes in one of her letters. She often mocks pseudo-intellectuals and their abstract ideologies and concepts, which is apparent both from her letters and the characters of pseudo-intellectuals in her fiction. In her letters, she mentions several encounters with would-be intellectuals, such the one mentioned in the letter to her friend Cecil Dawkins: "When they appear, they do all the talking and they have fantastic but very positive ideas about how everything is and ought to be; and they are mighty sophisticated on the outside. The visits leave me exhausted and yearning to go sit with my chickens."[161] The last sentence illustrates O'Connor's technique – she often juxtaposes "unacknowledged pretension and foolishness with honest, down-to-earth nature."[162] The term "city interleckchuls"[163] that she uses several times in her letters is a perfect example of her mocking style.

By satirizing the "city interleckchuls" of her times, Flannery O'Connor points to serious issues connected with the Christian faith. According to O'Connor, a university education often replaces faith by speculations about it:

> One result of the stimulation of your intellectual life that takes place in college is usually a shrinking of the imaginative life. This sounds like a paradox, but I have often found it to be true. Students get so bound up with difficulties such as reconciling the clashing of so many different faiths such as Buddhism, Mohammedanism, etc., that they cease to look for God in other ways.[164]

To say that Flannery O'Connor is against university education as such would be, nevertheless, incorrect. It is the excessive belief in one's own intellect that she aims her criticism at, rather than intellectualism in itself. For O'Connor, intellect and reason are necessary components of life but they are not the essence of it. Robert Coles comments on O'Connor's view of reason and mind in his study: "Even as she believed in a tripartite God, she believed as well in the tripartite nature of the human being – body mind and soul." Those who confused the soul with the mind were for her "badly confused, if not wicked."[165] Indeed, if the mind is not anchored in something higher than itself, it represents, according to O'Connor, a self-destructing pride rather than positive knowledge. As she mentions in one of her letters, "when there is nothing

---

[160] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 202.
[161] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 249.
[162] Robert Coles, *Flannery O'Connor's South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980) 114.
[163] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 318.
[164] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 476.
[165] Coles, 151.

over the intellect it usually is tyrannical. Anyway, the mind serves best when it's anchored in the word of God."[166]

However, such an anchoring of the mind in the word of God does not imply, as one could suspect, a faith without reason. On the contrary, reason is a gift from God and faith is, consequently, based on it – "Don't think that you have to abandon reason to be a Christian. [...] I believe what the Church teaches – that God has given us reason to use and that it can lead us toward a knowledge of him [...] I find it reasonable to believe, even though these beliefs are beyond reason."[167] If the intellect is a gift, then it is also, Coles argues, "the responsibility – something on loan, as it were."[168] By regarding the intellect as a kind of loan from God, Flannery O'Connor opposes the rationalist belief that "in human reason is man's greatest distinction, his highest calling."[169] In her short stories, she repeatedly proves that the intellect and the excessive pride in it may become an instrument for the suppression and overriding of faith.

Although the pride of intellect has been connected mainly with the characters of city pseudo-intellectuals in Flannery O'Connor's short stories, such as Hulga, it also appears as an attribute of her country people. Considering "The Artificial Nigger," even the names of the protagonists, the Heads, suggest the overconfidence in reason. As W.F. Monroe argues – "Throughout her work O'Connor characteristically deflates the pride placed in reason by all sorts of "heads," and also characteristically, she does this by linguistic as well as dramatic means."[170] The "heads" of O'Connor's fiction are thus both – the city intellectuals whose pride of intellect is based on their university education and country people who pride their witticism, pragmatism, and "bidnis-like common sense."[171]

4.2 "City Interleckchul" Hulga

"Good Country People" is one of the short stories in which Flannery O'Connor dramatizes the spiritual dangers connected with education, intellectualism and the "twentieth-century attachment to logical positivism."[172] Hulga, who has a Ph.D. in philosophy, is because of her

[166] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 134.
[167] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 277, 279.
[168] Coles, 151.
[169] W.F. Monroe, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacramental Icon: "The Artificial Nigger," *South Central Review,* 1.4 (Winter 1984): 67.
[170] Monroe, 66.
[171] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 209.
[172] Coles, 139.

weak heart forced to return from “the great world of the university”[173] to a rural farm. Due to her academic attainments, she considers herself to be different from the country people and, as it is indicated several times in the story, it is only because of her physical condition that she stays at the place – “She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about.” (*CS* 276) She makes it apparent also by the changing of her name – “Her name was really Joy but as soon as she was twenty-one and away from home, she had had it legally changed.” (*CS* 274) Both her doctorate and her new name signal, as Dorothy Walters writes, “her renunciation of her old environment and her intent to claim a new role.”[174]

Although the new role makes her unsuited for life on the farm, Hulga feels proud of her intellectual superiority. She sees the new name itself as a product of her intellectual uniqueness – “She saw it as the name of her highest creative act.” (*CS* 275) Though ugly by sound, it in fact hides an inner beauty for its bearer. Hulga chooses her clothes and her behavior in a similar way. She “emphasizes her outer ugliness in dress, manner, and action, but she secretly cherishes the vision of an inner self that is beautifully unique.”[175]

Hulga’s understanding of her inner uniqueness and intellectual supremacy is revealed mainly in her connection with Manley Pointer, the seemingly simple and naïve Bible salesman. After they agree on a picnic, Hulga imagines that she seduces him. She sees the seduction as an intellectual lesson for the simple country boy – “True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.” (*CS* 284) What is “useful” according to Hulga may be derived from her philosophy and belief, or rather disbelief.

“It’s not said that she has never had any faith but it is implied that her fine education has got rid of it for her, that purity has been overridden by pride of intellect through her fine education,”[176] O’Connor writes about Hulga in one of her letters. Indeed, when Manley Pointer asks Hulga about the place where her wooden leg joins in, she recollects the feelings that have been removed by her education – “As a child she had sometimes been subject to feelings of shame but education had removed the last traces of that as a good surgeon scrapes away cancer.” (*CS* 288) Before she realizes the spiritual significance of the wooden leg, she frequently pronounces her atheistic philosophy, the belief in nothing and a purely scientific

---

[173] Dorothy Walters, *Flannery O’Connor* (Boston: Twayne, 1973) 65.
[174] Walters, 65.
[175] Frederick Asals, “The Double in Flannery O´Connor´s Stories,” *The Critical Response to Flannery O´Connor,* ed. Douglas Robillard, Jr. (Westport: Praeger, 2004) 197.
[176] O’Connor, *The Habit of Being* 170.

point of view – "I don't have illusions. I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing." (*CS* 287) This opinion in fact mirrors the passage from Hulga's book that her mother opens and reads. By mentioning that Hulga had underlined the passage, O'Connor indicates the importance it has for her: "Science, on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh and declare that it is concerned solely with what-is. [...] If science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing." (*CS* 277)

When explaining her views of Nothing to Manley Pointer, Hulga, importantly, uses the Christian terminology – "We are all damned," she said, "but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation." (*CS* 288) Flannery O'Connor uses Hulga's extreme atheism to illustrate the secular religion of the modern world and the idea that "modern atheism is still Christ haunted."[177] Hulga looks for a kind of substitution for faith, which she finds in the belief in self and in scientific knowledge. It is thus her and the pride of her intellect which stand in the center of her secular religion. As O'Connor writes: "Faith is a gift, but the will has a great deal to do with it. The loss of it is basically a failure of appetite, assisted by sterile intellect. Some people when they lose their faith in Christ, substitute a swollen faith in themselves."[178] The spirituality of the Christian religion is preserved but Christ is replaced by pride in self. Flannery O'Connor calls this the "modern man": "There is a type of modern man who recognizes spirit in himself but who fails to recognize a being outside himself whom he can adore as Creator and Lord; consequently he has become his own ultimate concern."[179] Hulga, regarding her critical way of thinking as the source of her superiority over others, is thus one of O'Connor's studies in pride. And as it is typical of O'Connor, the pride will be overthrown.

Instead of "play[ing] intellectual Eve to this untouched Adam,"[180] as Dorothy Walters calls Hulga's intentions, it is in fact Hulga and not Manley Pointer whose knowledge and perspective is changed. In Mainly Pointer, she faces not the simple country boy with a naïve Christian faith but a true nihilist – "I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" (*CS* 291) When he steals her wooden leg and thus the part of her soul that she values the most, Hulga experiences the "full implications of nihilism – nothing, including the prosthetic leg

---

[177] Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 353.
[178] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 452.
[179] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) 159.
[180] Walters, 66.

that accounts for her uniquely dour self-image, has value."[181] The image of self as beautifully unique and intellectually superior that Hulga secretly cherished, is completely shattered. As Robert Coles writes, "[s]he has flirted with nihilism, with the Devil. Her visitor *is* the Devil."[182] Face to face with the Devil, all degrees, philosophical pondering of nothing and thus the whole concept of her secular religion are revealed to be of no value. Although considering herself a cosmopolitan atheist and Manley Pointer a naïve Christian, Hulga realizes that it is, in fact, the other way around. In this moment, she uses the cliché-like language of country people that has irritated her before:

> Her face was almost purple. "You're a Christian!" she hissed. "You're a fine Christian! You're just like them all – say one thing and do another. You're a perfect Christian, you're…"
>
> The boy's mouth was set angrily. "I hope you don't think," he said in a lofty indignant tone, "that I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn't born yesterday and I know where I'm going." (*CS* 290)

In the encounter of Hulga and Manley Pointer, Flannery O'Connor illustrates the dangers of intellectual knowledge of reality that "stops at the scientifically knowable"[183] and does not see beyond. According to O'Connor, education may become a basis of pride and, therefore, a basis of sin. Hulga, who is left at the end of the story with her pride overthrown and with a realization of the inadequacy of her former belief system, is thus finally confronted with true knowledge – the knowledge of her own imperfection.

In "Good Country People," the conflict between city intellectualism and country common sense and naivety is dramatized on three levels. Firstly, Hulga is contrasted with her mother and with Mrs. Freeman's daughters. While Hulga's education is seen as inappropriate in the context of the farm values and way of life, the common sense of the two girls is preferred and praised – "Mrs. Hopewell said there were not many girls with Glynese's common sense. She said what she admired in those girls was their common sense." (*CS* 282) Secondly, Hulga is confronted with the Bible salesman who, although initially seen as a rural simpleton, is in fact an example of worldly sophistication. The confrontation with Manley Pointer points to Huga's actual naivety, which reveals the third level of the conflict – Hulga herself represents both city intellectualism and rural common sense. Despite her philosophical ponderings and her intellectual superiority, she is also a country girl with a naive attitude toward men and

---

[181] Carol Schloss, *Flannery O'Connor's Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980) 45.
[182] Coles, 140.
[183] Miles Orvell, *Flannery O'Connor: An Introduction* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991) 137.

toward the world in general. The whole seduction scene may be seen as an example of the conflict of her two selves. Hulga forces herself to control her reaction by reason and scientific perspective. Their first kiss is, therefore, is suppressed almost to a clinical experiment:

> Even before he released her, her mind, clear and detached and ironic anyway, was regarding him from a great distance, with amusement and pity. She had never been kissed before and she was pleased to discover that it was an unexceptional experience and all a matter of the mind's control. (*CS* 285-286)

The newness of the experience and emotions, nevertheless, overcomes Hulga's forced perspective. As Margaret Earley Whitt mentions, Hulga's "mind is overdeveloped, but her emotions, governed by her weak heart, are without exercise."[184] When finally experiencing the first love with all its clichés and naivety, Hulga is reduced to a simple country girl with naive dreams – "She was thinking that she would run away with him and that every night he would take the leg off and every morning put it back on again. [...] Her brain seemed to have stopped thinking altogether and to be about some other function that it was not very good at." (*CS* 289) Hulga, both sophisticated and ignorant at the same time, illustrates the complexity of Flannery O'Connor's view. In her inner self, Hulga reflects the general conflict connected with the spreading of university education and with country anti-intellectualism and, moreover, she reflects the conflict between Christian faith and modern atheism that keeps a religious element but rejects Christian dogma.

4.3 Witty Mr. Head

As the opening of the story suggests, the theme of the pride of intellect is central also to "The Artificial Nigger." The story begins with Mr. Head's perception of the moon and of the "dignifying light" (*CS* 249) it casts on the things in his bedroom. Mr. Head's imagination elevates the common articles under the moonlight into noble objects – "the ticking on his pillow, which might have been brocade," or trousers with a "noble air, like the garment some great man had just flung to his servant;" and it, moreover, affords him the power to control the moon – "he saw half of the moon five feet away in his shaving mirror, paused as if it were waiting for his permission to enter." (*CS* 249) Nevertheless, Mr. Head's view is severely limited. He does not perceive the moon directly; he sees only a reflection of half of it in the

[184] Margaret Earley Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O'Connor* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 77.

shaving mirror. Flannery O'Connor treats Mr. Head's pride in his "secular rationalism"[185] in a similar manner as Mr. Head sees the moon at the beginning. Before he acknowledges his pride and the shortness of his reason, his knowledge, similar to his view of the moon, is only partial. Only when he realizes that true knowledge must be grounded on something higher than mere reason and common sense, does his view become fuller, just as the moon is "restored to its full splendor" (CS 269) at the end of the story.

Mr. Head's pride is based on his "faith in himself, [...] on his sure knowledge of the world and all its hierarchies."[186] The adjective "witty" thus precisely characterizes Mr. Head's view of self – having wisdom, knowledge, good judgment or discernment, endowed with reason, capable of saying brilliant or sparkling things.[187] O'Connor supports this interpretation with several incidents and allusions. One of them, the allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, appears at the beginning of "The Artificial Nigger" and it, as W.F. Monroe points out, provides the readers "with a useful structural model for her story"[188] – Mr. Head and Nelson's journey through the city is similar to Dante's journey through the Inferno. The immediately following allusion is to Raphael who is an angel "sent by God to guide Tobias to retrieve a sum of money for his father Tobit."[189] Both comparisons emphasize the role of the guide:

> His [Mr. Head's] eyes were alert but quiet, and in the miraculous moonlight they had a look of composure and of ancient wisdom as if they belonged to one of the great guides of men. He might have been Virgil summoned in the middle of the night to go to Dante, or better, Raphael, awakened by a blast of God's light to fly to the side of Tobias. (*CS* 249-250)

He considers himself to be the guide, the one with true wisdom, providing answers leading to new knowledge. He believes that his witticism entitles him to be the guide and he intends to lead his grandson through the city to reduce his pride. O'Connor, nevertheless, makes it apparent that it is Mr. Head himself who will be forced to acknowledge the sin of pride. She constantly mocks and deflates Mr. Head's image of himself as "a paragon of reason."[190] For example, the allusion to Raphael is ridiculed in the following paragraph by the image of the slop jar – "The slop jar, out of the shadow and made snow-white in the moonlight, appeared to stand guard over him like a small personal angel." (*CS* 250) By ascribing to a common

[185] Monroe, 74.
[186] Monroe, 68.
[187] "witty, adj." OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 14 December 2012 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229757?redirectedFrom=witty>
[188] Monroe, 65.
[189] Whitt, 64.
[190] Monroe, 67.

object the same role as Mr. Head ascribes to himself, O'Connor mocks his image of self. Both allusions thus call attention to the theme of pride and, at the same time, poke fun at that pride.[191] As Margaret Earley Whitt comments, "[t]he contrast between O'Connor's plot – a grandfather with a "moral mission" to reduce a grandson's boastful pride – and the significantly loftier aims of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the *Apocrypha*'s "Tobit" quickly establish the comic veneer."[192] The excessive pride in country common sense and witticism is mocked and criticized by "the obvious incongruity between classical authors and middle Georgian rustics."[193] In "The Artificial Nigger" it is, ironically, the guide who is enlightened.

Flannery O'Connor continues to depict Mr. Head as witty throughout the story. On the train, he entertains the travelers in the dining-car by his sharp comments, which causes Nelson to take pride in his grandfather – "Mr. Head was known at home for his quick wit and Nelson felt a sudden keen pride in him." (*CS* 257) In the city, he interprets for his grandson the ticket received from a weighing machine and he receives his own – "Mr. Head's ticket said, 'You weigh 120 pounds. You are upright and brave and all your friends admire you.' He put the ticket in his pocket, surprised that the machine should have got his character correct but his weight wrong." (*CS* 259) In this incident, O'Connor illustrates Mr. Head's limitation – he deliberately chooses to accept only the favorable view of self. Nevertheless, he is witty also in the negative sense of the word – crafty, cunning, skillfully devised for an evil purpose.[194] He uses his intellect and witticism to confirm his domination over his grandson which leads him to the point of abandoning the boy in the city – "then another idea occurred to him. [...] He justified what he was going to do on the grounds that it is sometimes necessary to teach a child a lesson he won't forget, particularly when the child is always reasserting his position with some new impudence." (*CS* 263-264) After the boy awakens and, terrified to be lost and alone, runs through the streets where he accidentally knocks down an old woman, Mr. Head starts to realize the evil side of his self. He slowly approaches the place of the incident in a way that reminds one of a snake, the traditional symbol of the devil – "Something forced Mr. Head from behind the trash box and forward, but only at a creeping pace." (*CS* 265)

Mr. Head's evil and crafty part of self is revealed in its full size in the moment when he denies his grandson and walks away from the incident. Consequently, he rambles through the city as if through hell, with Nelson silently following him. Mr. Head's sure knowledge of

---

[191] Monroe, 66.
[192] Whitt, 64.
[193] Monroe, 66.
[194] "witty, adj." OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 14 December 2012 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229757?redirectedFrom=witty>

things and his witticism proved to be insufficient and based rather on pride, rather than on true wisdom and knowledge. He acknowledges this realization by crying out – "Oh Gawd I'm lost! Oh hep me Gawd I'm lost!" (*CS* 267) The final astonishment before the lawn figure, then, dissolves "his smug confidence in what and how he knows. He calls on a higher authority, for he is no longer certain of who he is or where he is going to."[195]

According to O'Connor, it is possible for a man to be witty – having wisdom and knowledge. To achieve the wisdom, he has to, however, to acknowledge the witty – that is, the crafty and evil part of self. Only when he moors his intellect to God, can it become something more than "a sophisticated tool for domination and power."[196]

---

[195] Monroe, 71.
[196] Monroe, 68.

Chapter 5 – Progress / "Progress"

The idea of progress has inherently accompanied the spreading of urbanization, modernization, advances in technology and science and it has, therefore, been a fundamental aspect of the conflict between country and city. Its basis is the belief, as J.B. Bury writes in his study of the origin and growth of the idea of progress, that "civilization has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction."[197] Victor S. Yarros defines progress to be, in a sense, "the law of humanity" – "human beings as such tend to perfect themselves, to grow and improve in certain directions; that they are better now than they were in the past, and will be better tomorrow than they are today."[198] Such a conception of progress is connected mainly with the Enlightenment proposition that "a free development of knowledge of nature will more or less automatically lead to an increasingly humane society."[199] All suggested definitions point to a belief in the gradual improvement of society and in the linear approximation to human perfection.

Southern literature has traditionally opposed the belief that material innovations, changes in technology and an improvement in living conditions can improve the man himself. Such an opposition has been connected, as was the understanding of the sense of place, with the historical consciousness and sense of historical defeat that has stigmatized the region. "History has proven beyond any doubt that human beings do not change much, and indeed they may be harmed by the material phenomena usually understood as being part of progress."[200] While progress and the idea of a uniformly progressive and successful nation are based on the belief that man can be perfected and that it is the future that matters, the South accepts the man as imperfect and inseparable from his past. According to the Southern attitude, "humans face the same moral difficulties no matter what the exigencies and achievements of the age."[201] Similarly ambivalent feelings towards the idea of progress also underlie the fiction of Flannery O'Connor. In her short stories, transformation of the countryside under the name of modernization, urbanization and progress is associated with moral and spiritual doubts about the validity of the idea of progress. The conflict between

---

[197] John Bagnell Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (London: Macmillan, 1920) 2.
[198] Victor S. Yarros, "Human Progress: The Idea and the Reality," *American Journal of Sociology,* 21.1 (Jul., 1915): 17.
[199] Arnold Burgen, Peter McLoughlin, Jürgen Mittlestrass, *The Idea of Progress* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997) ix.
[200] Martin Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2007) 227.
[201] Procházka, et al. 227.

country and city thus reveals O'Connor's absolute view and her belief that man can be approximated to perfection only by approximation to God.

5.1 Flannery O'Connor's Absolute View in the Time of Progress

Flannery O'Connor understands progress and its implications for man in terms of her Southern and Catholic background. She shares the Southern attitude and belief that man remains the same no matter how much the world around him materially and technologically changes. In her Christian perspective, she goes even further – progress is in fact "a kind of reverse evolution"[202] that pushes man backwards in his spiritual development. For O'Connor, as Stanley Edgar Hyman rightly observes, "progress in the world is retrogression in the spirit."[203] Technological achievements, economic prosperity and material advantages cannot conceal the fact that man is fallen. As Dorothy Walters writes, O'Connor "scorns the cult of progress and insists upon the validity of original sin as the source of man's guilt and as explanation for his faulty behavior."[204] Indeed, Flannery O'Connor constantly points to the sinful nature of man and the need of God's grace for his salvation. She opposes the "progressive" liberal opinion that the evil comes from the outside - "this Liberal approach is that man has never fallen, never incurred guilt, and is ultimately perfectible by his own efforts. Therefore, evil in this light is a problem of better housing, sanitation, health, etc."[205] Material progress merely diverts attention from the concrete, personal evil and converts spiritual questions to imperatives of the modern world – "Think what? The slogans are everywhere. Think hamburgers. Think jeans. [...] Think to consume."[206]

Moreover, the liberal approach also appears, as O'Connor observes, in the way of practicing religion – "I have just got back from the Symposium on Religion and Art at Sweet Briar and boy do I have a stomach full of liberal religion! The Devil had his day there."[207] Flannery O'Connor is strictly against "progress" in faith, against the relativistic view that the Scriptures mean only what the modern interpreter wishes and that "an indiscriminate love is the proper expression of the religious sentiment."[208] The "progressive" relativism of modern

---

[202] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) 160.
[203] Stanley Edgar Hyman, *Flannery O'Connor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966) 36.
[204] Dorothy Walters, *Flannery O'Connor* (Boston: Twayne, 1973) 154.
[205] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 302-303.
[206] Robert Coles, *Flannery O'Connor's South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980) 122.
[207] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 510.
[208] Walters, 154.

Christians is for her a step away from God to secularism and a replacement of God by belief in one's own ability:

> One of the effects of modern liberal Protestantism has been gradually to turn religion into poetry and therapy, to make truth vaguer and vaguer and more and more relative, to banish intellectual distinctions, to depend on feeling instead of thought, and gradually to come to believe that God has no power, that he cannot communicate with us, cannot reveal himself to us, indeed, has not done so, and the religion is our own sweet invention.[209]

As O'Connor subsequently adds, she opposes all these manifestations of religious relativism – "Of course, I am a Catholic and I believe the opposite of all this."[210] Sin, judgment, atonement, redemption are not mere archaisms "lacking applicability to modern experience"[211] but absolute realities that cannot be shaped and reshaped under the name of "progress." Walters summarizes O'Connor's adherence to Christian orthodoxy and her absolute view: "She is an absolutist in an age which has embraced relativism on all levels. [...] In an age of leniency, she insists upon judgment; in a society of disbelievers, she supports the doctrines of an ancient faith; in a time of alienation, she indicates the paths by which man may recover his lost spiritual heritage." [212]

5.2 Mr. Fortune's View of the Woods

The changing of the Southern countryside by the force of modernization, urbanization and progress in general is dramatized in one of the darkest and most violent of O'Connor's short stories – "A View of the Woods." Mr. Fortune, a representative of modern materialists, sells his land in the name of progress, which has been fine with his granddaughter until the day he decides "to sell the lot right in front of the house for a gas station." (*CS* 341) While for him it is just another lot, to his granddaughter, Mary Fortune, it is the place where she plays with her siblings and which enables a view of the woods. She resists her grandfather's decision and he resolves to beat her to teach her a lesson in Southern manners. The beating ends in a mutual fighting and in the deaths of both participants. Due to their resemblance, the fight and the killing strongly suggest a mutual suicide.

---

[209] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 479.
[210] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 479.
[211] Walters, 36.
[212] Walters, 22,154.

On a literal level, the story illustrates the conflict between the agrarian imagination connected with an attachment to land and the pressure of progress and modernization. Mr. Fortune frequently expresses his positive view of progress and his unconcern over the preservation of pastures and the agricultural way of life as such – "Any fool that would let a cow pasture interfere with progress is not on my books." (*CS* 335) O'Connor often characterizes Mr. Fortune precisely in terms of progress and material development:

> He was not one of these old people who fight improvement, who object to everything new and cringe at every change. He wanted to see a paved highway in front of his house with plenty of new-model cars on it, [...] he wanted to see a gas station, a motel, a drive-in picture-show within easy distance. Progress had suddenly set all this in motion. [...] He was a man of advanced vision, even if he was seventy-nine years old. (*CS* 337-338)

Progress, for Mr. Fortune, means not only "the easy accessibility of convenience"[213] but also a tool for confirmation of his supremacy over his son-in-law and other members of the family. In the act of gradually selling off his property, Mr. Fortune affirms his own worth and his power – "Anyone over sixty years of age is in an uneasy position unless he controls the greater interest and every now and then he gave the Pittses a practical lesson by selling off a lot." Although Mr. Fortune asserts the positive aspects of progress, he uses it in fact as "his ally" (*CS* 337) in controlling others – "Nothing infuriated Pitts more than to see him sell off a piece of the property to an outsider, because Pitts wanted to buy it himself." (*CS* 337) The tension between Mr. Fortune and Pitts is based, as the name of the main protagonist suggests, on fortune and the old man hates his son-in-law because "the latter took from him a piece of property (Fortune's daughter)."[214] In their relationship, property "becomes a weapon employed in the war of ego."[215] Mary Fortune, who stands in the middle of their conflict, is in fact treated in a similar way as the land; she herself is property by which both men demonstrate their domination.

The beating that Mary Fortune receives from her father may, therefore, be considered as Pitts's asserting of his power over his property and as a way to get revenge on Mr. Fortune – "This was Pitts's revenge on him. It was as if it were *he* that Pitts was driving down the road to beat and it was as if *he* were the one submitting to it." (*CS* 341) In the context of the Southern culture, the violence of Pitts's confirmation of his "property" is not unusual. As

---

[213] Margaret Earley Whitt, *Understanding Flannery O'Connor* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 128.
[214] Walters, 141.
[215] Walters, 140.

Richard E. Nisbett and Dov Cohen suggest in their study of the psychology of violence in the American South, violence has been inherent part of Southerners' defense of home and property. The non-violent response to violation of one's estate or to an insult would mean, in the code of Southern culture of honor, that one lacks "the strength to protect what is his. Therefore the individual must respond with violence or the threat of violence."[216] Bryant N. Wyatt made a similar point in his critical essay concerning the domestic dynamics in O'Connor's short stories. According to Wyatt, the beating is more an act "of familial bonding, acknowledgment by her father and family that she is indeed one of theirs – a Pitts" than punishment for particular wrongdoing.[217] Similarly, Mr. Fortune resorts to violence when he feels that his influence over the girl has faded and that, consequently, he is losing his special possession.

As the experienced O'Connor reader anticipates, the story does not stop on the literal level and it offers a symbolic, religious one. The figurative level is introduced in the first paragraph by the image of the woods reflected in the lake – "The red corrugated lake eased up to within fifty feet of the construction and was bordered on the other side by a black line of woods which appeared at both ends of the view to walk across the water and continue along the edge of the fields." (*CS* 335) By describing the woods as walking on water, O'Connor alludes to the Biblical story in which Jesus walks on the sea towards his disciples. The woods are given symbolic weight and they continue to remind the reader of Christ throughout the whole story. They become, in the words of Miles Orvell, "a kind of spiritual touchstone."[218] Flannery O'Connor herself confirms their spiritual implication in one of her letters: "Pitts and Mary Fortune realize the value of the woods, and the woods, if anything, are the Christ symbol."[219] The question of the view of the woods does not, then, point only to the conflict between the agrarian and progressive values but mainly to the spiritual, religious grace that is offered to the secular modern materialist through the image of the woods.

The view of the woods stands in the center of Mr. Fortune and Mary's disagreement. Her disapproval of his selling the lawn represents a mystery to Mr. Fortune, as the admiration for progress and for transformation of the countryside has been their common characteristic. The loss of the view of the woods is repeated three times in their conversation, and three times Mr. Fortunes looks out of the window across the lawn to assure himself that there is nothing more

---

[216] Richard E. Nisbett and Dov Cohen, *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) xv-xvii.
[217] Bryan N. Wyatt, "The Domestic Dynamics of Flannery O'Connor: *Everything That Rises Must Converge*," *Twentieth Century Literature,* 38.1 (Spring, 1992): 75.
[218] Miles Orvell, *Flannery O'Connor: An Introduction* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991) 15.
[219] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 189-190.

than just woods to see – “Every time he saw the same thing: woods – not a mountain, not a waterfall, not any kind of planted bush or flower, just woods.” (*CS* 348) The third time he looks out, the vision of the woods at sunset evokes again the image of Christ and a sense of mystery:

> [T]he gaunt trunks appeared to be raised in a pool of red light that gushed from the almost hidden sun setting behind them. The old man stared for some time, as if for a prolonged instant he were caught up out of the rattle of everything that led to the future and were held there in the midst of an uncomfortable mystery that he had not apprehended before. He saw it, in his hallucination, as if someone were wounded behind the woods and the trees were bathed in blood. (*CS* 348)

In the third view, Mr. Fortunes briefly recognizes the symbolic, religious connotation of the woods. He is offered grace and mercy but wilfully refuses to accept them. Similar to Peter's denial of Christ three times, Mr. Fortunes denies the Christ-like significance of the woods the same number of times. The fatal implication of his denial is also revealed by the image of the woods. O’Connor ends the short story with Mr. Fortune’s imaginative escape from the place where his dead granddaughter lies. Although physically lying next to the little corpse, in his mind he runs away from the middle of the woods where the fatal fighting took place. He runs to the lake where he realizes that he cannot swim and that he did not buy the boat – the one he wanted to buy back Mary’s favor with. In the moment of his death, he understands the “uncomfortable mystery” of the woods and his own damnation – “On both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance.” (*CS* 356) He is left alone, without the view of the woods, without the possibility of redemption. The only thing that remains with him in his imagination is the yellow, gorging tractor which symbolizes the material progress that Mr. Fortune believed in – “He looked desperately for someone to help him but the place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was, gorging itself on clay.” (*CS* 356) In the third, crucial denial of the Christ symbol, Mr. Fortune seals his damnation. Although Mary Fortune’s recognition of the woods’ significance cannot be considered as an act of orthodox Christianity, and the religious significance of the view she so passionately protects is larger than her comprehension, she is saved in the Christian understanding of the term. As O’Connor writes – “One is saved and the other is damned and there is no way out of it, it must be pointed out and underlined.”[220]

[220] O’Connor, *The Habit of Being* 190.

The reason for Mr. Fortune's denial of the offered grace is his belief in progress. According to Claude C. H. Williamson, the belief in progress is perhaps the one of all the modern ideas "which has come nearest to the strength of a religion."[221] Certain critics, as Georg G. Iggers points out, interpret the idea of progress, due to its notion of the movement toward improvement and a meaningful end, "as a secularized form of the Judaeo-Christian conception of Providence."[222] In his decision about the final selling of the lot enabling the view of the woods, Mr. Fortune thus decides to keep not only the right to treat his property as he wishes but mainly the whole belief system according to which he has been living. Nevertheless, his repetitive self-assurance of the convenience of progress suggests that he himself is not completely sure about the rightness of his decision. After his short mystical experience, Flannery O'Connor devotes a whole paragraph to Mr. Fortune's listing of the advantages of his decision:

> He ate quickly and returned again to his room and spent the evening pointing out to himself the advantages for the future of having an establishment like Tilman's so near. They would not have to go any distance for gas. Anytime they needed a loaf of bread, all they would have to do would be step out their front door. They could sell milk to Tilman. [...] (*CS* 348)

The strongest argument comes in form of the idea of equality of men – "All men were created free and equal. When this phrase sounded in his head, his patriotic sense triumphed and he realized that it was his duty to sell the lot, that he must insure the future." (*CS* 349) Mr. Fortune's sense of patriotism and duty is connected with the popular, though not quite rightful, association of progress with democracy. As J.B. Bury writes, "[t]he ideals of liberty and democracy, which have their own ancient and independent justifications, have sought a new strength by attaching themselves to Progress. The conjunctions of 'liberty and progress,' 'democracy and progress,' meet us at every turn."[223] In Mr. Fortune's self-assurance and adherence to progress, Flannery O'Connor comments on the common attitude of her times – to be against progress means to be against democracy and the freedom of the individual. Words such as "freedom" and "liberty" may serve, according to O'Connor, as an almost magical answer for all kinds of questions and contemplations. They are, as Mr. Fortune's attitude illustrates, the absolute of the modern, "progressive" world. For O'Connor, the absolute is only one – God.

---

[221] Claude C. H. Williamson, "Progress," *International Journal of Ethics,* 31.4 (Jul., 1921): 394.
[222] Georg G. Iggers, "The Idea of Progress: A Critical Reassessment," *The American Historical* Review, 71.1 (Oct., 1965): 2.
[223] Bury, 1.

O'Connor's criticism of the idea of progress, which is apparent from the religious level of "A View of the Woods," is illustrated also in the character of the prospective buyer of the controversial land – Tilman. His name, like the name of the protagonist, characterizes his life position and intention – "a till keeper, a man who would care about money, a modern materialist, like Fortune himself."[224] Tilman, for Mr. Fortune, represents progress and the future – "He was an up-and-coming man – the kind, Mr. Fortune thought, who was never just in line with progress but always a little ahead of it so that he could be there to meet it when it arrived." (*CS* 345) It is Tilman whose name Mr. Fortune mentions seven times when listing the reasons for sacrificing the view of the woods. The old man chooses the businessman and progress that Tilman stands for. O'Connor's description of Tilman suggests that Mr. Fortune in fact chooses the Devil and hell. Tilman's store is advertised "in dazzling red letters," (*CS* 345) his head is described as "weaving snake-fashion," eyes as "green and very narrow" and his tongue as "always exposed in his partly opened mouth." (*CS* 352) He is persistently compared to a snake, referring to "the serpent that deceives Eve in the temptation scene in the Garden of Eden."[225] Analogous to the biblical story, Mr. Fortune is deceived by the devil and his "progressive" secularism. He symbolically bites the apple by signing the contract. The land that the old man sells is thus, in Miles Orvell's view, "a kind of Edenic paradise, and the process he has set in motion under the name of progress is the Fall."[226]

On the symbolic level, "A View of the Woods" represents the spiritual retrogression that often accompanies a modern understanding of progress. The modern materialist chooses the religion of progress with the Devil in its center and denies Christ and his grace. Nevertheless, "[in] reading "A View of the Woods" in this manner," Orvell argues, "it must be stressed that the theological level implicit in it does not cancel the issue of whether or not Fortune should be building a gas station qua gas station on a site that will block a view of the woods qua woods."[227] Indeed, the conflict between country and city, between the agrarian and urban ways of life, between traditional and modern is still present in the short story. The literal, naturalistic reading mirrors the symbolic, religious one and, at the same time, is mirrored in it.

---

[224] Whitt, 130.
[225] Whitt, 130.
[226] Orvell, 15.
[227] Orvell, 16.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

"To my way of thinking, the only thing that keeps me from being a regional writer is being a Catholic and the only thing that keeps me from being a Catholic writer (in the narrow sense) is being a Southerner,"[228] Flannery O'Connor writes in a letter to Andrew Lytle. Her statement exactly expresses the ambiguity and complexity of all her fiction and it also provides a commentary for understanding the conflict between country and city in her short stories.

Considering such a conflict merely in the light of a socio-historical perspective, it is possible to say that O'Connor depicts the tension between the traditional rural values of the South and its adjustments to the modern world represented by the city and urban way of life. O'Connor was, without question, aware of the changes in society and culture that took place in the postwar era and she, as did most Southern writers, treated them with anxiety and doubt – "The present state of the South is one wherein nothing can be taken for granted, one in which our identity is obscured and in doubt."[229] According to O'Connor's Southern perspective, the conflict between country and city in her short stories is a sharp, often violent one. The agricultural emphasis on land and the farming way of life is contrasted with industrialization, modernization and progress; likewise the idea of community and responsibility to family is contrasted with the anonymity enabled by an urban environment; rural pragmatism and common sense with university education; clear class and race distinctions with the idea of equal opportunity and the equality of mankind in general; religious fundamentalism with liberal secularism.

According to the Christian interpretation, the conflict between country and city in O'Connor's fiction is, on the contrary, almost nonexistent. As has been shown, Flannery O'Connor criticizes both places and she concentrates more on people as prideful, sinful but at the same time worthy individuals, rather than on the distinctions caused by their place of living. For O'Connor, one's whole earthly existence is the place "between" and the real conflict is, therefore, between Heaven and Hell, between belief and disbelief.

The conflict between country and city perfectly illustrates O'Connor's perspective and technique of revealing religious mystery through concrete manners and situations. It, moreover, exemplifies O'Connor's opposition to the argument that a Christian writer is limited by dogmas – "a belief in fixed dogma cannot fix what goes on in life or blind the

[228] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 104.
[229] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) 57.

believer to it. It will, of course, add a dimension to the writer's observation."[230] Flannery O'Connor's Catholic faith is a dimension added to her Southern perspective and it, therefore, enlarges the view – "The Church's vision is prophetic vision; it is always widening the view. The ordinary person does not have prophetic vision but he can accept it on faith."[231] Such a widening of the view through Christian faith brings man closer to the Absolute and also, paradoxically, closer to the concrete world around – "to know oneself is to know one's region, it is also to know the world, and it is also, paradoxically, a form of exile from that world, to know oneself is above all to know what one lacks. It is to measure oneself against Truth, and not the other way round."[232]

Flannery O'Connor's close friend Robert Fitzgerald wrote: "In most O'Connor stories we are aware of the Roman or universal Church mainly by its absence."[233] His comment on O'Connor's technique in fact echoes the above quoted view of O'Connor – man learns the most about himself and about the world from what he lacks. The whole with which he compares himself is, of course, God. And it is the wholeness of God, according to Flannery O'Connor, that modern man must compare himself with and not the relative, abstract concepts of humanism and liberalism. "In Flannery O'Connor's view," Dorothy Walters writes, the "set of once universally-assumed beliefs has faded dangerously from the modern consciousness. Her intent is to restore its dimmed outlines through severe reminders that man's rejection or ignoring of his traditional spiritual heritage does not diminish its validity nor relieve him of his inner responsibility to fulfill its demands."[234]

Due to her religious perspective and orthodox Christian faith, Flannery O'Connor's fiction displays "a remarkable unity of purpose and consistency of theme."[235] All her fiction, letters, lectures and essays are grounded in her belief in the imperfection of man, the necessity of God's grace, the reality of sin and judgment, and redemption as the ultimate end towards which man's life directs. She uses the reality of the post-World War II South to dramatize the demands of Reality. Her fiction reveals, in the words of Miles Orvell, "a constantly felt tension between the pull of reality and the pull of Reality, between surface and depth, between

---

[230] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* 150.
[231] O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* 365.
[232] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* 35.
[233] Robert Fitzgerald, "The Countryside and the True Country," *Flannery O'Connor,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 25-26.
[234] Dorothy Walters, *Flannery O'Connor* (Boston: Twayne, 1973) 35.
[235] Walters, 35.

fact and mystery."[236] One of the representations of this tension is, as has been shown in this thesis, the tension between country and city.

[236] Miles Orvell, *Flannery O'Connor: An Introduction* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991) 18.

Bibliography

Primary literature:

O’Connor, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971.

O’Connor, Flannery. *The Habit of Being*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.

O’Connor, Flannery. *Mystery and Manners*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.

O’Connor, Flannery. *Three*. New York: New American Library, 1964.

Secondary sources:

American History: A Survey/ Volume II: Since 1865. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991.

Asals, Frederick. “The Double in Flannery O´Connor´s Stories.” *The Critical Response to Flannery O´Connor*. Ed. Douglas Robillard, Jr. Westport: Praeger, 2004.

Bacon, Jon Lance. *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Bercovitch, Sacvan, ed. *The Cambridge History of American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Bone, Martyn. *Postsouthern Sense of Place In Contemporary Fiction.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

Bradbury, Malcolm and Temperley, Howard. *Introduction to American Studies.* London: Longman, 1989.

Burgen Arnold, McLoughlin, Peter and Mittlestrass, Jürgen. *The Idea of Progress.* Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997.

Bury, John Bagnell. *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth.* London: Macmillan, 1920.

Clark, Thomas D. “The Furnishing and Supply System in Southern Agriculture since 1865.” *The Journal of Southern History* 12.1 (Feb., 1946): 24-44.

Cleary, Michael. “The Environmental Influences in Flannery O’Connor’s Fiction.” *Flannery O’Connor Bulletin* 8 (1979): 20-34.

Coles, Robert. *Flannery O’Connor’s South.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.

Dowell, Bob. “The Moment of Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O’Connor,” *College English* 27.3 (Dec., 1965): 235-239.

Eggenschwiler, David. “The Christian Humanism of Flannery O’Connor.” *The Critical Response to Flannery O´Connor.* Ed. Douglas Robillard, Jr. Westport: Praeger, 2004.

Elder, Walter. “That Region.” *The Critical Response to Flannery O´Connor.* Ed. Douglas Robillard, Jr. Westport: Praeger, 2004.

Fitzgerald, Robert. “The Countryside and the True Country.” *Flannery O’Connor.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.

Gieryn,Thomas F., Bevins, George M. and Zehr,Stephen C. “Professionalization of American Scientists: Public Science in the Creation/Evolution Trials.” *American Sociological Review* 50.3 (1985): 392-409.

Gray, Richard. *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977.

Gray, Richard. “Foreword: Inventing Communities, Imagining Places: Some Thoughts on Southern Self-Fashioning.” *South to a New Place: Religion, Literature, Culture*. Ed. Suzzane W. Jones and Sharon Monteith. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

Hyman, Stanley Edgar. *Flannery O’Connor.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966.

Iggers, Georg G. “The Idea of Progress: A Critical Reassessment.” *The American Historical* Review 71.1 (Oct., 1965): 1-17.

Kelley, Robert. *The Shaping of the American Past.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1986.

Kendall, Diana. *Sociology in Our Times.* London: Wadsworth, 2002.

King, Richard H. “The Regions and Regionalism.” *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture.* Sd. Christopher Bigsby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Kreyling, Michael. *Inventing Southern Literature.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.

Manza, Jeff. “Political Sociological Models of the U.S. New Deal.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26.1 (2002): 297-322.

Martin, James Kirby, et al. *America and Its People.* Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1989.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Monroe, W.F. “Flannery O’Connor’s Sacramental Icon: “The Artificial Nigger.” *South Central Review* 1.4 (Winter 1984): 64-81.

Nesbitt, Laurel. “Reading Place in and Around Flannery O’Connor’s Texts.” Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, Fall 1997. Web. 26 October 2012.

Nisbett, Richard E. and Cohen, Dov. *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.

Oakes, Timothy. “Place and the Paradox of Modernity.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87.3 (Sep., 1997): 509-531.

Oates, Joyce Carol. “The Visionary Art of Flannery O’Connor.” *Flannery O’Connor.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.

Orvell, Miles. *Flannery O’Connor: An Introduction.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

“witty.” *Oxford English Dictionary.* Dec. 2012. 14 Dec. 2012 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229757?redirectedFrom=witty>.

Procházka, Martin et al. *Lectures on American Literature.* Praha: Karolinum, 2007.

Procházka, Martin et al. *Lectures on American Literature.* Praha: Karolinum, 2011.

Romine, Scott. “Where Is Southern Literature? Practice of Place In a Postsouthern Age.” *South to a New Place: Religion, Literature, Culture*. Ed. Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

Rubin Jr., Louis D. “Introduction.” *History of Southern Literature*. Ed. Rubin et al. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985.

Schleifer, Ronald. “Rural Gothic.” *Flannery O’Connor.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.

Schloss, Carol. *Flannery O’Connor’s Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.

Walters, Dorothy. *Flannery O’Connor.* Boston: Twayne, 1973.

Welty, Eudora. “Place in Fiction.” *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews.* New York: Random House, 1978.

Whitfield, Stephen J. “The Culture of the Cold War.” *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*. Ed. Christopher Bigsby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Whitt, Margaret Earley. *Understanding Flannery O’Connor.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.

Williamson, Claude C. H. “Progress.” *International Journal of Ethics* 31.4 (Jul., 1921): 394 – 407.

Wilson, Charles Reagan and Ferris, William eds. *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

Wood, Ralph C. “From Fashionable Tolerance to Unfashionable Redemption.” *Flannery O’Connor.* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.

Wyatt, Bryan N. “The Domestic Dynamics of Flannery O’Connor: *Everything That Rises Must Converge.*” *Twentieth Century Literature* 38.1 (Spring, 1992): 66-88.

Yaeger, Patricia. "Flannery O'Connor and the Aesthetics of Torture." *Flannery O'Connor: New Perspectives*. Ed. Sura P. Rath and Mary Neff Shaw. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Yarros, Victor S. “Human Progress: The Idea and the Reality.” *American Journal of Sociology* 21.1 (Jul., 1915): 15-29.

Summary

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.

Key Words

- Flannery O'Connor
- Conflict
- Country
- City
- Southern literature
- Sense of place
- Urbanization
- Modernization
- The idea of progress
- American South
- Education
- Religion
- Catholicism
- Socio-historical perspective
- Theological perspective

Resumé

Flannery O'Connor, jedna z předních jižanských autorek poválečného období, je známá zejména pro své hluboké náboženské smýšlení, které propojuje s typicky jižanským prostředím a charakteristickými rysy amerického jihu. Předmětem její tvorby, jak O'Connor sama častokrát prohlašovala, je zejména náboženská rovina. Nedá se však říci, že by zároveň nevnímala společenské a politické změny, které doprovázely urbanizaci, modernizaci, šíření univerzitního vzdělání, rostoucí důraz na racionální pohled a víru v pokrok, které nutily Jih, aby se přizpůsobil představě o sjednocené, úspěšné Americe. Ba naopak, O'Connor cítila, stejně jako mnoho další jižanských autorů, že město a městský způsob života je ve sporu s tradičními hodnotami venkova a s jedinečností Amerického jihu. Cílem této práce je přiblížit ono napětí mezi venkovem a městem a ukázat, jakým způsobem odráží napětí mezi náboženskou vírou a novodobým sekularizmem.

Druhá kapitola uvádí téma do sociálně historického a literárního kontextu. Její první podkapitola se zaměřuje na sociálně historickou skutečnost spojenou s procesem urbanizace Amerického jihu, který začal převážně po občanské válce a vyvrcholil v období po druhé světové válce. Tato část znázorňuje přeměnu jižanského venkova a s ním spojeného sociálního systému, způsobu života i myšlení pod tlakem industrializace, modernizace a urbanizace. Vzhledem k tomu, že venkov i město jsou místa, následující podkapitola představuje pojetí vědomí místa, které patří mezi charakteristické rysy jižanské literatury. Toto pojetí je následně propojeno s porozuměním prostoru podle O'Connor. Konkrétní, viditelné místo a s ním spojené zvyky a způsoby chování odráží neviditelnou, náboženskou podstatu. Konflikt, který je rozebírán v závěrečné podkapitole, může být chápán podobným způsobem – konflikt na úrovni konkrétních lidských vztahů vyjadřuje současně i konflikt na úrovni křesťanské víry a ateizmu.

Třetí kapitola se soustřeďuje na vyobrazení venkova a města v povídkách Flannery O'Connor. Ačkoliv O'Connor byla kritická zejména k postavám reprezentujícím město, její venkované jsou rovněž předmětem satiry. Obě místa totiž představují jistá duchovní nebezpečí. Kritický pohled tak ruší charakteristiku založenou na přísně protikladné interpretaci obou míst, která byla často spojována s tvorbou O'Connor, čímž navíc otvírá prostor pro existenci jistého meziprostoru - místa mezi městem a venkovem. Symbolická rovina takového místa poukazuje opět na porozumění konfliktu a místu jako takovému podle O'Connor – člověk zakouší ve stejnou chvíli jak viditelné a světu přirozené, tak neviditelné a

nadpřirozené. Člověk sám je navíc umístěn do meziprostoru – do prostoru mezi nebem a peklem.

Kapitola čtvrtá ilustruje konflikt venkova a města na otázce vzdělání, která úzce souvisí s rozvojem univerzit po druhé světové válce. Šíření univerzitního vzdělání bylo součástí diskuzí ohledně modernizování či zachování jižanského vzdělávacího systému a tudíž i celé jižanské společnosti. Jak univerzitní vzdělání, tak pragmatismus a důraz na zdravý rozum často spojovaný s venkovem, se může z pohledu O'Connor stát nástrojem pýchy a tudíž hříchu. Jak je patrné například z postavy městské intelektuálky Hulgy nebo z postavy pana Heada, z přílišné hrdosti na vlastní rozum se může stát dokonce i jakási forma sekulárního náboženství, jehož středem je víra v sebe sama. Obě zmíněné postavy jsou následně konfrontovány s nedostatečností vlastního přesvědčení a je jim ukázána nutnost Boží milosti.

Kapitola pátá se soustředí na myšlenku pokroku, která je nedílnou součástí procesu urbanizace a modernizace. Pro jižanskou literaturu je charakteristický odmítavý postoj k pokroku a s ním spojenému přesvědčení, že člověk může zdokonalit sám sebe prostřednictvím zdokonalení svých životních podmínek. Podobně i povídky Flannery O'Connor nakládají s myšlenkou pokroku se smíšenými pocity. Vezmeme-li v úvahu povídky jako například „Vyhlídka na lesy" (A View of the Woods), materiální pokrok se může rovnat duchovnímu úpadku. V této povídce se tak boj o přeměnu venkova pod jménem pokroku stává bojem o spásu či zatracení duše pana Fortune. Jak naznačuje analýza této povídky, teologická interpretace neanuluje interpretaci sociálně historickou a obě tak existují současně.

Závěrečná kapitola shrnuje předložené poznatky a pokouší se zvážit konflikt venkova a města v povídkách Flannery O'Connor v perspektivě ryze sociálně historické a následně ryze náboženské. Tato úvaha však spíše dokazuje, že oba pohledy jsou neoddělitelné, což poukazuje na komplexnost literární tvorby Flannery O'Connor.

Klíčová slova

- Flannery O'Connor
- Konflikt
- Venkov
- Město
- Jižanská literatura
- Vědomí místa
- Urbanizace
- Modernizace
- Myšlenka pokroku
- Americký jih
- Vzdělání
- Náboženství
- Katolicismus
- Sociálně historický pohled
- Teologický pohled