Southern Gothic and the Grotesque in Fiction by Flannery O'Connor

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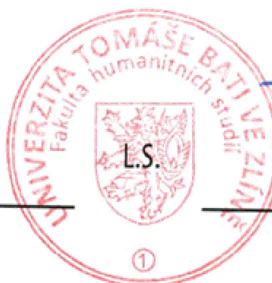

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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat díla Flannery O'Connorové a způsob, jakým využívá prvky jižanské gotiky a groteskna. První část práce se zaměřuje na teoretické pozadí obou žánrů. Druhá část práce začíná představením autorky a analyzovaných povídek. Zbytek práce je věnován rozboru vybraných povídek a ukazuje, jak je autorčina víra a využití dříve představených prvků činí jedinečnými.

Klíčová slova: Flannery O'Connorová, *Dobrého člověka těžko najdeš, Řádní venkované, Chrám Svatého ducha, Pelargónie, Soudný den,* jižanská gotika, groteskno, katolicismus

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis aims to analyze the works of Flannery O'Connor and the way she uses the elements of Southern Gothic and the grotesque. The first part of the thesis focuses on the theoretical background of the two genres. The second part of the thesis starts with the introduction of the author and the analyzed short stories. The rest of the work is devoted to an analysis of the chosen stories, and it shows the way the author's Catholic faith and use of the previously presented elements make them unique.

Keywords: Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "Good Country People," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "The Geranium," "Judgement Day," Southern Gothic, the Grotesque, Catholicism

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

In the vast landscape of American literature, the Southern Gothic genre occupies a distinctive niche characterized by an evocative blend of the macabre, the surreal, and the hauntingly atmospheric. Within this genre, Flannery O'Connor emerges as a preeminent figure, renowned for her incisive exploration of the complexities of human nature against the backdrop of the American South. Steeped in the traditions of the Southern Gothic, O'Connor's work is marked by a pervasive sense of decay and moral ambiguity, through which she deftly navigates themes of redemption, sin, and the divine. At the heart of O'Connor's fiction also lies the concept of the grotesque—a motif that, among other things, serves as a potent vehicle for exploring the darker aspects of the human condition. Through characters marked by physical deformity, moral depravity, and spiritual desolation, O'Connor confronts readers with the unsettling reality of human frailty and the pervasive presence of sin. Yet, even amidst the grotesque, there exists the possibility of grace—a notion deeply rooted in O'Connor's Catholic worldview, wherein redemption is made possible and, sometimes, even manifest through acts of divine intervention and human contrition.

The thesis explores the features of Southern Gothic and the grotesque in texts of Flannery O'Connor. Consequently, the first chapter of this work focuses on the theoretical background of the genres. It shows certain aspects of these and how ideas of different writers, academics, and the like work there. Subsequently, the second chapter of the thesis presents Flannery O'Connor herself, her style of writing, and her usage of the elements and ideas described in the first chapter exemplified by her short stories: "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "Good Country People," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "The Geranium," and "Judgement Day." Essentially, the thesis shows how her beliefs, health, and other aspects of her life influence her work and show her unconventional world view.

I. SOUTHERN GOTHIC AND THE GROTESQUE

1 SOUTHERN GOTHIC

1.1 From the Origins

According to the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, the genre of Southern Gothic developed from the American Gothic, which itself came from the English Gothic tradition.[1]

The English Gothic tradition is said to have begun with Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) and Ann Radcliff's romances like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797).[2] Professor of English and American History H. L. Malchow writes in his *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1996) that the Gothic is a discourse rather than a genre, or that it is "a language of panic, of unreasoning anxiety."[3] Additionally, British scholar of 19th century American literature and culture Allan Lloyd Smith in his *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (2004) contends the Gothic revolving around the resurgence of the past, the suppressed and the overlooked aspects, and the concealed secrets that undermine and erode the present, while at the same time confronting and acknowledging what a culture consciously avoids or hesitates to recognize and communicate to itself.[4] Moreover, Jerrold Hogle in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002) notes that since the 18th century, Gothic fiction has provided readers with a means to explore and conceal crucial desires, uncertainties, and sources of distress, which encompass not only inner and mental aspects but also extend to broader "social and cultural" concerns.[5]

American Gothic, a genre a step closer to Southern Gothic, was first categorized as such in the work of the so-called "father of the American novel" Charles Brockden Brown.[6] According to Associate Professor of English Eric Savoy (2002), Brown's novel *Wieland* (1798) distinguishes itself by repositioning history "in a pathologized return of the repressed" wherein the present observes the realization of grim destinies rooted in America's

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[1] Thomas Ærvold Bjerre, "Southern Gothic Literature," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, June 28, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.304.
[2] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic."
[3] H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 4.
[4] Allan Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 1.
[5] Jerrold E. Hogle "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.
[6] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic;" Eric Savoy, "The Rise of the American Gothic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 174; T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Charles Brockden Brown," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 19, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Brockden-Brown.

past.[7] However, to American literary critic Leslie Fiedler (1997), American Gothic is not "a proper literary movement," as it is more of a "pathological symptom,"[8] while Professor of English and American Studies Teresa Goddu (1997) argues that it is difficult to define the genre on a national scale, rather than in a regional form.[9] Additionally, even though some would describe this Gothic as a realm where the symbolic identity of a nation is disrupted by the resurgence "of its repressed Otherness,"[10] Allan Lloyd Smith (2012) identifies four inherent characteristics that distinguish the American Gothic from its European counterpart: "the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism."[11] Moreover, Eric Savoy (2002) observes the peculiar significance "of Gothic cultural production in the United States, where" historical echoes persist in the present, and where craving relentlessly for displays "of grotesque violence is" woven into the fabric of daily existence.[12]

1.2 To the Southern Gothic

Although it is hard to define American Gothic on a national scale, a usable definition of Southern Gothic presents less of a problem, as the Gothic is predominantly present in the South. According to Professor of Communications Allison Graham (2007), the American South represents a storage site for suppressed national elements and latent contradictions within the "United States." The South signifies a darkened realm "'down there' whose exposure to the light" consistently evokes both terror and fascination.[13] Furthermore, thanks to the "haunting history" of the region, especially the pre- and post-Civil War period, the dilapidated or crumbling "plantations and mansions in the South" served as eerie settings for Gothic tales revolving around sins and secrets.[14] Consequently, Professor of English Benjamin Fisher (2008) characterizes the literary Gothic as inducing "anxieties, fears, terrors, often in tandem with violence, brutality, rampant sexual impulses, and death."[15]

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[7] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic;" Savoy, "The Rise," 174.
[8] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), 135.
[9] Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 3-4.
[10] Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy, "Introduction," in *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*, eds. Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), vii.
[11] Allan Lloyd-Smith, "Nineteenth-Century American Gothic," in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 163.
[12] Savoy, "The Rise," 167.
[13] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic;" Allison Graham, "The South in Popular Culture," in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, eds. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 349.
[14] William Moss, "Fall of the House, from Poe to Percy: The Evolution of an Enduring Gothic Convention," in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 179.
[15] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic."

Even though many authors could be listed as the first to use the elements of Southern Gothic, like the tragedian of the Early Republic William Bulloch Maxwell (1787-1847), English poet Edward Coote Pinkney (1802-1828), and Maryland novelist John Pendleton Kennedy (1795-1870), the genre takes on a more tangible shape in the writings of the South Carolinian William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870). Elements of the Gothic can be observed in Simms's adventure novels set on the frontier like *The Yemassee* (1835), in his aggressive and perverse main character of *Martin Faber* (1833), who seduces and murders an innocent maiden to marry a different woman, and in his ghost story *Castle Dismal* (1844), which features "a narrator who spends a night in a haunted chamber of an old mansion."[16]

Another prominent figure of what would become the Southern Gothic, one whose position as a writer in this genre was problematic during his lifetime, is Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849).[17] "His rejection of the ideas of perfectibility, dislike of utopianism, urbanism and intellectual abstraction […] underpinned Poe's status as a forerunner of the 'Southern Gothic.'"[18] Nevertheless, Poe was deemed "only half a Southerner" by American journalist W. J. Cash in *The Mind of the South* (1941).[19] Cash viewed Poe as someone who, while alive, was despised by the South, considered insignificant, left to starve, and recognized only after his death.[20] Additionally, as he was deemed "a Virginia man of letters" and particularly identified with the world of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, this literary magazine, to Cash, suffered the same fate.[21] One of the problems of associating Poe with Southern Gothic is, according to lecturer in American Literature Tom F. Wright (2016), chronology. Poe wrote "almost nothing about the South," although "he was writing just before the Civil War," an event that galvanized many of the key themes and tropes like "the importance of family and place, social class, religion and the tragic haunting of slavery."[22] Despite these potential issues of categorization, Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1837) is "widely seen as one of the foundational texts of the Southern Gothic" and "his most 'Southern' story," one which can be interpreted chiefly "as an allegory of the male psyche's attempts to confront the inward female" depicted by the Usher siblings. Moreover, it contains motifs like the examination of aberrant mental conditions, "dark humor," acts of violence, and a profound

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[16] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic."
[17] Susan P. Castillo and Charles L. Crow, eds, *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 17.
[18] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 17.
[19] Wilbur Joseph Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 93.
[20] Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 93.
[21] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 12; Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 93.
[22] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 9.

feeling of hopelessness "in the face of sin" while being situated in a typically ambiguous dreamlike setting, encompassing all the components "that would later" define the Southern Gothic such as "a feverish morbid introspective hero, an ethereal heroine, implications of incest, a pervading sense of guilt propelled from the past," and for some people the most frequent setting of the Southern Gothic – the deteriorating "old plantation mansion."[23]

Although Poe is recognized as a key figure in the development of Southern Gothic literature, William Faulkner (1897-1962) is generally regarded as the most impactful writer within the Southern Gothic tradition of the 20th century.[24] American writer and liberal political activist Kay Boyle (1989) noted that the two authors were alike "in their common 'immunity to literary fashion'" and "their fanatical obsession with the memorable depths of mankind's vice." Additionally, American literary critic and social historian Malcolm Cowley (1936) described Faulkner's writing style as if Faulkner was possessed by "a daemon" who "forced him to the always intense, […] to write in a wild lyrical style, to omit almost every detail that does not contribute to a single effect of somber violence and horror" hinting at Faulkner's kinship with "the 'satanic' poets" like Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) or "the 'black' or 'terrifying' novelists" like Edgar Allan Poe.[25] Another approach to characterizing Faulkner's works might also serve to define the Gothic using the writer's well-known aphorism: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." This perspective relates to the confrontation between the Old South and the emerging New South.[26] This notion of continuity could be seen a century earlier in the declaration of 19th century abolitionist Wendell Phillips, who argued that: "The South is the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries," referring to the concept of feudalism and "the Dark Ages" rather than the antebellum historical era he was writing in.[27]

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[23] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 13-14.
[24] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic."
[25] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 27-28.
[26] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic."
[27] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 29.

2 THE GROTESQUE

The grotesque is closely associated with the hyperbolic, but grows out of it with different qualities of its own, where hyperbole "violates logical decorum through excessive unruliness," while "the grotesque breaks the decorum of proportion and separation."[28] Even though, in the past, the term grotesque once carried a negative connotation, it is now connected with a sort of an emotional shock that is craved by the modern society and is achieved by its aesthetics, such as bewildering violence, astounding scenery, or abnormalities that are important for southern literature.[29]

Such tropes can be seen in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" by Flannery O'Connor (1953), in which the grandmother declared she would not be surprised if The Misfit, an escaped criminal she had read about in the newspaper, attacked the place, yet when her and the family actually encounter The Misfit and his group, she shrieked, "scrambled to her feet and stood staring" at him in shock as the family members were taken to the woods that "gaped like a dark open mouth" and one by one were killed.[30]

According to Professor of English Geoffrey Harpham (1982), the classification of these aesthetics is situated "at a margin of consciousness between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into question the adequacy of" the ways the people are organizing the world.[31] He presents the idea of the "interval," which he illustrates as a fleeting moment when someone stands on the verge of perceiving the "unruly multiplicity of forms in an object" not yet understanding the prevailing principle that defines it, however, it is evident that it differs from what is familiar to people, which brings uncertainty, revelation, and an overflow of emotions that remodel "one's perception of things" and of the world itself.[32] A great example of this is the trauma represented in O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" in not only the violent murders of the family, but the "interval" of perception within the grandmother's mind as the events are unfolding.[33]

Different definitions of what the grotesque is can be found, with many views expressing similar characteristics. To 17th century French theorists, the grotesque is a blend of terror and laughter, while John Ruskin, an English critic from the 19th century, recognizes the noble

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[28] Michał Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles: Metafigurative Strategies of Narration* (Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 24-25, 28.
[29] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 24-25.
[30] Flannery O'Connor, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 8, 14.
[31] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 25.
[32] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 28.
[33] O'Connor, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories*, 1-23.

grotesque, which is connected "with flawed human nature" as well as the ignoble grotesque, associated "with lascivious frivolity."[34] Another distinction divides the modes of grotesque aesthetics into horror and comic, while at the same time, paradoxically, keeping these two together.[35]

The grotesque brings confusion that stems from its explicit neglect of mimesis, which is described by the Poetry Foundation as "Greek for 'imitation.' In aesthetic theory, mimesis can also connote 'representation,' and has typically meant the reproduction of an external reality, such as nature, through artistic expression."[36] Mimesis then does not offer an accurate depiction of the world around us, neither does it show shapes as they really are. Concepts such as proportion or the wholeness of objects are, therefore, misrepresented. Moreover, as the grotesque distorts these principles, it disregards the concept of "vertical organization of space," deviating from a flawless completion and "enclosure of circularity."[37]

This is connected with Jacques Derrida's (1984) idea of the *non-concept* in metaphysics – a liminal mode that "cannot be defined in terms of oppositional predicates" as "it is neither *this* nor *that*, but rather *this* and *that*" which "is not reducible to a dialectical logic."[38] Although the *non-concept* remains within the "closure" of language, this notion of the inside does not imply confinement like being in a box, "and the idea of closure does not indicate a circularity with a limit or simple boundary."[39] This limit and boundary is, to Jacques Derrida, divisible, and as soon as one acknowledges this, "the logical rapport between inside and outside" ceases to be simple, which might also point out to the fact that "the *non-concept* is neither inside nor outside."[40]

However, the *this and that*, or rather *both-and* logic, came a long time before Derrida. One of the most important Catholic philosophers, St. Thomas Aquinas, wrote about it in his *Summa Theologiae* (1274). Aquinas, for example, addressed the inquiry of whether a person

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[34] "The Grotesque: A Brief Overview of the Literary Term," Owlcation, last modified November 24, 2023, https://owlcation.com/humanities/The-Grotesque-A-Brief-Overview-of-the-Literary-Term; Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 25.
[35] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 25.
[36] "Mimesis (imitation)," Poetry Foundation, accessed January 7, 2024, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/mimesis-imitation.
[37] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 26-27.
[38] Stefan Polatinsky, "Psychoanalysis and the non-conceptual: The aporia of the pre-symbolic" (PhD diss., University of London, 2005), 15; Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," in *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 142.
[39] Polatinsky, "Psychoanalysis," 15.
[40] Derrida, "Deconstruction," 143; Polatinsky, "Psychoanalysis," 15.

consists solely of body or solely of soul. According to his explanation: "it is clear that man is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body."[41] Flannery O'Connor was fond of Aquinas and greatly influenced by him, as beginning as a teenager she read from the *Summa Theologiae* every night before she went to bed. She even wrote in *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor* (1979):

> If my mother were to come in during the process and say, "Turn off that light. It's late," I with lifted finger and broad, bland, beatific expression, would reply, "On the contrary, I answer that the light, being eternal and limitless, cannot be turned off. Shut your eyes," or some such thing. In any case I feel I can personally guarantee that St. Thomas loved God because for the life of me I cannot help loving St. Thomas.[42]

To Geoffrey Harpham (1982), the grotesque belongs to a space between hell and heaven, where "perfectly formed shapes metamorphose into demons."[43] This liminal space could be seen in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953) and the woods. In this sense, the beautiful nature represents heaven, while the woods being the site of mass murder represent hell.[44]

The two following approaches dismantle established norms, which makes the grotesque unbearable to those, who appreciate "symmetry and decorum."

2.1 Terror-oriented Grotesque

One of the 20th century theorists from Germany, Wolfgang Kayser, centers on the etymological origins of the term, which comes from the Italian word for hidden cave, "grotto." For him, "the grotesque signifies the ghostly, estranged, and demonic realm of the world that cannot be accounted for and that pressures and alienates our natural realm with its abysmal force."[45] He speaks of "a world totally different from the familiar one."[46] There is a "sense of pessimistic alienation" in his definition, moreover, he believes that the grotesque does not spring from "the fear of death," but "from the fear of life."[47] This type of grotesque is a dark one with "uncontrollable discordance." In Kayser's grotesque, the dismantling of meaning through the handling of opposites unveils something

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[41] Charles Harris, "The 'Both-And' Principle," *Medium*, March 9, 2015, https://medium.com/@Chesterbelloc14/my-both-and-principle-fdbbd3f370de; New Advent, "Summa Theologiae," accessed April 25, 2024, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1075.htm.

[42] Brandon Vogt, "Flannery O'Connor and the Summa," *Brandon Vogt*, accessed April 25, 2024, https://brandonvogt.com/flannery-summa/.

[43] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 27.

[44] O'Connor, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories*, 1-23.

[45] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 26.

[46] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 21.

[47] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 26.

"uncontrollable, dangerous, and tainted," which results in "an epistemological dismay."[48] Consequently, to Kayser, "The Sandman" by E. T. A. Hoffmann (1817) serves as an "example of the pure grotesque," as the story leaves the reader "ultimately in doubt as to the nature of the "dark forces" that destroy Nathanael," letting the reader question, whether they are simply projections of Nathanael's "troubled soul, as Clara suggests," or whether they are real.[49] Additionally, Associate Professor of English Michael Steig (1970) points out at the dual effect that the description of one of the characters from "The Sandman," Coppelius-Coppola, has on the reader: "at once of making him horrible and frightening to the childlike part of us, and of defending our ego, our rational consciousness, against the threat by degrading him into something absurd."[50] This could be seen, for example: "When Coppelius sees the boy he cries, 'Eyes here! Eyes here!' and 'Now we've got eyes–eyes–a beautiful pair of children's eyes.'"[51]

In *The Grotesque* (1972) by Philip Thomson, the former Chair of German Studies, it is written that the grotesque might be "at its most effective" when one is exposed to "extreme incongruity" in the, otherwise, congruous world.[52] This can be seen, for example, in works of Argentine writer Griselda Gambaro, who wrote texts dealing with the issues of Argentine politics and society of the second half of the 20th century.[53] For instance, in her play *Nada que ver* and her novel *Nada que ver con otra historia* (1972), Stipendiary Lecturer in Spanish American Literature Guadalupe Gerardi points out: "The very contradiction between the title of the play, that affirms there is nothing to see, and the staging of the same play, places the" spectators in the spotlight, making them conscious of their "seeing whilst affecting customary positions in the theatrical scene."[54]

In *Gothic Fiction and the Grotesque* (1972), American Professor of English Maxmillian E. Novak points at "the weakness […] of Kayser's effort at definition" of the grotesque caused by the German theorist's merging of the "comic grotesque" with "psychologically

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[48] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 28.
[49] Michael Steig, "Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29, no. 2 (1970): 257–258, https://doi.org/10.2307/428606.
[50] Steig, "Defining the Grotesque," 253, 258.
[51] Steig, "Defining the Grotesque," 257.
[52] Philip John Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen, 1972), 5.
[53] Joanne Pottlitzer, "Griselda Gámbaro's 'Theatre of Violence,'" *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 26, no. 1 (2004): 103–5, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3246449.
[54] Guadalupe Gerardi, "Interrogating Monstrosity and the Grotesque in Griselda Gambaro's *Nada Que Ver* and *Nada Que Ver Con Otra Historia*," *Latin American Literary Review* 49, no. 99 (2022): 19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48762352.

disturbing aspects."[55] In his opinion, the division made by Ruskin is to be followed as it is "parallel to the 'separation of styles,'" in which the grotesque is present. Similarly to Kayser's pessimistic and dark definition of the term, Novak mentions something called "grotesque in the proper sense," which is closely related to "the grotesque of the Gothic" and results in "disgust rather than laughter." An example is provided in the form of the Catholic Inquisition and "its instruments of torture, its odd rituals, and its threat to the normal world." Novak goes on to depict the Gothic demon, who, whether real, imaginary, or fabricated, symbolizes an abrupt manifestation of the unrestrained "forces of the mind," materializing within the ostensibly structured and tangible reality.[56]

2.2 Laughter-oriented Grotesque

Contrary to Kayser's definition of the grotesque, Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) characterizes these aesthetics by "a more positive and ludic openness."[57] Bakhtin places emphasis on the *carnivalesque*, a literary mode where norms are degraded "in order to bring forth something more and better."[58] He claims that the grotesque is often evoked by something that is "'low' and 'vulgar,'" which is connected with the "degradation" or "the lowering of all that is high."[59] Bakhtin also accentuates the folk tradition and folk humour, which he sees as grotesque, as "it seeks to bring all citizens to a common level, to remove the hierarchy." By his definition, "the grotesque transgresses accepted limitations and caricatures the inappropriate." Furthermore, he points out that "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style" which relies on the "abnormality and asymmetry" that the disorderly excess generates. Additionally, the surplus engenders laughter and enables the portrayal "of characters whose singular obsessions, exaggerated features, and preoccupations do not pose any threat to the reader or the onlooker."[60] Bakhtin, for example, mentions Don Quixote and "Sancho's fat belly (*panza*), his appetite and thirst" and his yearning for abundance and riches – the attributes "on the absolute lower level of grotesque realism of the gay bodily grave (belly, bowels, earth) which has been dug for Don Quixote's abstract and deadened idealism."[61]

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[55] Maxmillian E. Novak, "Gothic Fiction and the Grotesque," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 13, no. 1 (1979): 57, https://doi.org/10.2307/1344951.
[56] Novak, "Gothic Fiction," 58.
[57] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 26.
[58] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 21.
[59] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 19.
[60] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 26, 28.
[61] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 22.

Another difference between these two views is that of the grotesque body. While Kayser does not really concentrate on this aspect and, following the traditional concept, sees the physical as “divisible, static, and coherent,” Bakhtin sees the body as something that, in order to achieve a cosmic and universal existence, is “in the act of becoming.”[62] Moreover, according to the Russian theorist, the body repeatedly triggers the grotesque whenever there is a focus “on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.”[63] In the works of François Rabelais, a 16th century French writer whom Bakhtin analyses, Professor of Spanish Ariel Gómez Ponce points out “senile pregnant hags, giants whose members merge with the soil, and bodies torn apart whose fragments acquire new life.”[64] The “openness” of the body concurrently remaining similar to different bodies may be “considered dangerous and effectively transformed into a cultural taboo,” which often happens “in the southern decorum.”[65]

2.3 Southern Grotesque

One of the sources where one can recognize the grotesque is Southern literature. Southern grotesque is to some people characterized as “the literary aftermath of historical misfortune.” Additionally, in his book *The Grotesque: An American Literary Genre* (1962), American professor of English and American Literature William Van O’Connor wrote that “the ‘old agricultural system’ of the South” exhausted the land, resulting in an economically precarious “and emotionally underdeveloped society.” Furthermore, according to him, poverty gives rise to abnormality, with many individuals adhering to a code that has become obsolete, leading to “a detachment from reality and a” decline in vitality.

Irving Malin (1962) agrees with John Aldridge – both being American writers and literary critics – and describes the grotesque as “a ‘poetry of disorder.’” According to these authors, there are three characteristics of disorder: “narcissism, familial conflict, and dream-like confusion.”[66] Malin notes that while it might be tempting to disregard “the cripples and homosexuals in new American Gothic as sensational cardboard figures, they” often serve as

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[62] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 26; Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317–318.
[63] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 26.
[64] Ariel Gómez Ponce, “The Horrors of the Body: Notes on Mikhail Bakhtin and the Images of the Grotesque Body,” *Bakhtinskiy Vestnik* (2022): 3, https://www.academia.edu/80124247/The_Horrors_of_the_Body_Notes_on_Mikhail_Bakhtin_and_the_Images_of_the_Grotesque_Body.
[65] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 27.
[66] Delma Eugene Presley, “The Moral Function of Distortion in Southern Grotesque,” *South Atlantic Bulletin* 37, no. 2 (1972): 37, https://doi.org/10.2307/3197720.

symbols of distorting, "narcissistic love." Malin then points out "the family dramatizes the conflict between private and social worlds," as well as between the "ego and super-ego." And finally, as the third characteristic, he recognizes the effect of a dream, which "accounts for chronological confusion and personal disengagement in 'gothic.'"[67] One example of such a character, who fits most, if not all, of the characteristics, would be Oliver Winemiller from "One Arm" by Tennessee Williams (1948). Oliver is described as "an unforgettable youth" who lost his arm after a collision in a car and who now "looked like a broken statue of Apollo" acquainting himself, for instance, with "some wealthy sportsmen" in Miami passing "from one to another with money that piled up faster than he could spend it on clothes and amusement."[68] After being imprisoned for murder, he was getting letters from his previous partners, who were shocked by his predicament and they could not "believe it was true, it was like a bad dream" to them. They spoke of something about him, except his physical disposition that haunted their minds. As "he was sentenced to death, Oliver had for these correspondents the curtained and abstract quality of the priest who listens without being visible to confessions of guilt."[69]

Other characters of the Southern Grotesque are also often physically disfigured, as they frequently have crippled limbs, cross-eyes, wooden legs, or no limbs at all. These deformities symbolize a flawed ethical direction and indicate how Southern Gothic writers explore the dissonance between conventional, heteronormative standards of normalcy and the concealed truths lying beneath.[70]

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[67] Presley, "Southern Grotesque," 38.
[68] Tennessee Williams, *One Arm and Other Stories* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1948), 7-8, 10.
[69] Williams, *One Arm*, 13.
[70] Bjerre, "Southern Gothic."

II. SOUTHERN GOTHIC AND THE GROTESQUE IN SELECTED WORKS BY FLANNERY O’CONNOR

3 FLANNERY O'CONNOR

The subject of the analytical part of this thesis is an American writer Mary Flannery O'Connor. It describes the author herself, as well as her writing style and the influence of some external factors that make it unique. Also, it focuses on the elements mentioned in the previous part of the text and shows the use of a selection of these in some of O'Connor's short stories.

Flannery O'Connor was born in Savannah in the state of Georgia in 1925 and when she was twelve, she moved to Milledgeville, where she remained for the rest of her life.[71] The only time she spent somewhere else was when she was taking a Master of Arts Degree at the University of Iowa, and also, when she was staying in "the Connecticut home of Robert and Sally Fitzgerald."[72] However, due to her poor health, which eventually led to her death in 1964, as she was diagnosed with lupus, she had to return to her home in Milledgeville in 1951.[73]

O'Connor's conception of a fiction writer is not that of an individual who should manipulate or shape reality in the pursuit "of abstract truth."[74] The concrete is the writer's medium, and he will come to recognize that fiction can surpass its constraints only by remaining within them through strong and clear language. In following this belief, O'Connor also seeks to transcend such limitations in her own writing.[75] In words of American writer Melvin J. Friedman (1962): "Her chaste, unimposing sentences, her refusal to tamper with consciousness," and "her fairly strict chronological narrations," combine "with her realism to" highlight the intensity "of the actions and […] of the underlying spiritual struggle."[76]

Throughout her short life, as she wrote letters, novels, short stories, and essays, she also gave some interesting lectures on, apart from literature, one of the most prominent aspects of her life which shows also in her writing—her faith.[77] According to American literary critic and Professor of English Thelma J. Shinn (1968), O'Connor's Christian and Southern

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[71] Melvin J. Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor: Another Legend in Southern Fiction," *The English Journal* 51, no. 4 (1962): 233, https://doi.org/10.2307/810724; Melvin J. Friedman and Beverly Lyon Clark, eds, *Critical Essays on Flannery O'Connor* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), 1.
[72] Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor," 233; Friedman and Clark, *Critical Essays*, 1.
[73] Friedman and Clark, *Critical Essays*, 1-2.
[74] Thelma J. Shinn, "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace," *Contemporary Literature* 9, no. 1 (1968): 64-65, https://doi.org/10.2307/1207391.
[75] Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 65.
[76] Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor," 243; Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 65.
[77] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 137; Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor," 233; Friedman and Clark, *Critical Essays*, 2.

heritage both originate “from a redemption achieved through suffering” which significantly shapes the perspective “in her fiction and the method she uses to express it.”[78]

3.1 O’Connor’s Catholic Influence

The analysis primarily draws from a selection of five short stories by Flannery O’Connor, namely: “The Geranium” (1946), “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” (1953), “A Temple of the Holy Ghost” (1954), “Good Country People” (1955) and “Judgement Day” (1965).

The first short story, “The Geranium,” presents an exploration of isolation and alienation. The story revolves around an old man, Old Dudley, who was forced to leave his rural home and who has moved to New York City with his daughter and her husband. Through Mr. Dudley’s perspective, O’Connor portrays the contrast between the rural and urban environments, highlighting the loss of identity one experiences when uprooted from the familiar surroundings. Old Dudley feels nostalgic, longs for a sense of belonging, and the geranium he so eagerly looks for from his window serves as a symbol of his old life. However, as he attempts to recreate his former lifestyle, he only accentuates his isolation, ultimately leading to his demise.

The second story, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” follows a dysfunctional family on their trip to Florida. On the road trip, they encounter an escaped convict, The Misfit, which leads to a frightening and at the same time redemptive climax of violence and despair. Through the character of The Misfit, O’Connor confronts the reader with questions of sin, grace, and the nature of evil.

The third tale, “A Temple of the Holy Ghost,” shows the reader the quite imaginative mind of a 12-year-old girl at a convent. Through the character of the nun, Sister Perpetua, O’Connor explores the tension between worldly desires and religious devotion, ultimately emphasizing the importance of faith and moral integrity in the face of temptation.

The fourth story, “Good Country People,” presents the atheistic, intelligent, wood-legged woman Hulga and her encounter with a seemingly simple but sly Bible salesman. Hulga is a highly educated but cynical young woman who prides herself on her intellectual superiority. When she meets Manley Pointer, however, he challenges her preconceptions and exposes her vulnerability. Through him, O’Connor explores the theme of deception and the

[78] Shinn, “Violence of Grace,” 60.

manipulation of appearances, as Manley's façade of innocence conceals his true intentions, ultimately leading to Hulga's emotional and psychological downfall.

The fifth story, "Judgement Day," a rewriting of "The Geranium," written by O'Connor 20 years earlier, depicts an old man, Tanner, who is also forced to live with his daughter in New York City. Tanner encounters a new neighbor, a black actor who he calls a preacher. Tanner also thinks about his own past, home, and the plan to escape from his daughter's apartment, as he wishes to die and be buried back in Georgia. His plan, even though in some passages it seems to have worked, is a failure with a fatal conclusion.

When O'Connor was told that because she is a Catholic she could not be an artist, she replied that it is because she is a Catholic, she could not "afford to be less than an artist."[79] Moreover, she states in one of her own prefaces that the conviction that belief in Christ is "a matter of life and death" can be challenging for readers who would rather perceive it as inconsequential.[80] As the Apostle Paul in "1 Corinthians 15:1-4" states:

> The Gospel which […] ye have received, and […] by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. […] For […] Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.[81]

Additionally, Eric Savoy (2016) notes that in her texts "lies the uncanny and incongruent 'recall' of a long-forgotten vocation, for there are no saints in the Protestant South."[82] An example of this could be found in O'Connor's short story "Good Country People" (1955) where, according to Assistant Professor of Religion Wayne Elzey (1975), the text shows the ambivalence of the "popular Protestantism" in its critique of "liquor, gambling, and illicit sex" but at the same time its support for these things as the experiences they represent hold "considerable religious value" to Protestants.[83] Reflected in the story, Hulga, a young, educated, wooden-legged woman living, together with her mother and a housekeeper, at a farm tries to seduce a seemingly simple, young Bible salesman who carries with him a briefcase with Bibles. However, the briefcase has:

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[79] Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor," 234.
[80] Albert Sonnenfeld, "Flannery O'Connor: The Catholic Writer as Baptist," *Contemporary Literature* 13, no. 4 (1972): 451, https://doi.org/10.2307/1207441.
[81] "A Matter of Life and Death," Distinguishing Truth, accessed March 28, 2024, https://distinguishingtruth.com/2019/06/30/a-matter-of-life-and-death/.
[82] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 136.
[83] Wayne Elzey, "Liminality and Symbiosis in Popular American Protestantism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43, no. 4 (1975): 741, 748-749, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1460791.

> Only two Bibles in it. He took one of these out and opened the cover of it. It was hollow and contained a pocket flask of whiskey, a pack of cards, and a small blue box with printing on it […] THIS PRODUCT TO BE USED ONLY FOR THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE, she read.[84]

As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter on the grotesque above, the influence of Aquinas on the philosophy and works of Flannery O'Connor is quite profound. Therefore, the difference between Hulga and the Bible salesman might not be big. Hulga is, on one hand, a cold, intelligent, and one could argue not good-natured, while on the other hand still innocent as when she meets the Bible salesman and is swayed by his words "she felt as if her heart stopped and left her mind to pump her blood." The Bible salesman, however, might seem to be one of the stupid and nice "good country people," but he is at the same time a conman seducing women and stealing their artificial body parts, which he also does to Hulga and her leg.[85] This broken body of Hulga reflects O'Connor's own health problems, as the writer experienced hair loss and had to rely on crutches for mobility as a result of her disease. O'Connor was also "rather disfigured by the medicine" and all this might be the reason for her "view of the body […] being only a source of dark things." [86]

In one of her lectures called "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," Savoy describes O'Connor approach:

> 'the vital strength of Southern literature'—and Southern 'identity' itself—have been 'absorbed' equally from Scripture and from a 'history of defeat and violation: a distrust of the abstract, a sense of human dependence on the grace of God, and a knowledge that evil is not simply a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured.'[87]

O'Connor follows her characters as they navigate through a sequence of misadventures, resulting from their deliberate blindness, leading them towards a traumatic incident that is both contingent and inevitable. One such character would be the grandmother from O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953). As the family goes on the road trip to Florida, first, the grandmother brings her cat along, even though she knows that her son does not like that.[88] Then she "craftily," through manipulating her grandchildren, makes her son take a detour and visit a house she ostensibly clearly remembers to be nearby.[89] However, when they are on the road leading to the supposed house, the cat jumps on the father, who is

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[84] Elzey, "Liminality and Symbiosis," 749; Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 289-290.
[85] Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 289-291.
[86] Liz Fields, "How did Flannery O'Connor's writing reflect her disability?" *PBS*, March 27, 2021, https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/how-did-flannery-oconnors-writing-reflect-her-disability/17614/.
[87] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 137.
[88] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 118.
[89] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 123.

driving, which leads to an accident.[90] Moreover, as a car, seeing their crash, slowly heads their way, the grandmother recognizes the driver to be an escaped convict, The Misfit, and unfortunately identifies him in front of everyone, to which he points out: "it would have been better for all of you, lady, if you hadn't reckernized me." Her decisions, therefore, lead the family, including herself, to death.[91] The placement of these characters has a proleptic nature as O'Connor "sets them up for" the "encounter with the Christian mystery," akin to French Psychoanalytic Jacques Lacan's (1950s) conceptualization of the Real as "that which is outside language and thus unassimilable to symbolization."

O'Connor renders an idea through the poetic essence of what she refers to as "incarnation." This incarnation embodies the Christian doctrine asserting "that the Son of God, the second person of the trinity" assumed "a human body and nature," thereby becoming both human and divine.

Both early and late works of O'Connor's fiction turn "crucially on the figural," which is depicted as "the return of the prophetic figure," emerging from or departing into the distance. The figure carries "a violent, redemptive zeal that O'Connor" portrays as the frightening "descent of grace on the erring" individual. Her "ultimate 'mystery'" demands the alignment of the contemporary prophet, simultaneously "despite and because of his violent and corrupt nature, with the prophetic word of the Old Testament."[92] As such, The Misfit from "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953) and his meeting with the family—and especially with the grandmother—could be seen as such descent. The Misfit even compares himself to Jesus Christ saying: "Jesus thown everything off balance. It was the same case with Him as with me except He hadn't committed any crime and they could prove I had committed one because they had the papers on me."[93] However, The Misfit, contrary to Jesus Christ, does not know what crime he had committed and "by insisting on his own innocence, the Misfit is actually committing a graver sin than whatever got him into the penitentiary: he is in fact a heretic." The Misfit argues that if one accepts that Jesus resurrected Lazarus, then nobody has a reason not to fully commit "and follow Him." Conversely, if one doubts Lazarus's resurrection, it is difficult to believe in Jesus's own resurrection, leading to a state of being beyond redemption. Such individuals have no prospect of a fulfilling life here or happiness in the afterlife. The Misfit is one such individual, "one of the unregenerate, the

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[90] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 124.
[91] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 127-132.
[92] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 142.
[93] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 131.

lost." In that scenario, the Misfit suggests: "it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him."[94] He also notes he is who he is because he was not there when Jesus resurrected Lazarus: "if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now." This speech elevates the Misfit's emotions, seen by the grandmother as a moment of lucidity in which he might be receptive to her last emotional plea. According to O'Connor's clarification: "[T]he grandmother recognizes the Misfit as one of her own children and reaches out to touch him. It's the moment of grace for her anyway." Moreover, she goes to touch his shoulder because "she has been touched by the Grace that comes through him in his particular suffering." However, The Misfit, considering her "a silly old woman" reflecting "the banalities of the society," misunderstands her gesture and as she touches him: "The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest."[95]

According to The Misfit's last few words of the story directed at the grandmother: "She would of been a good woman [...] if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."[96] O'Connor, however, comments on that saying that he "pronounces his judgement: she would have been a good woman if *he* had been there every moment of her life." This demonstrates O'Connor's aim to depict The Misfit as viewing himself akin to a prophet or even a savior, suggesting he could have served as the grandmother's guardian, advising her to abandon her shallow and hypocritical interpretation of Christianity in favor of a more profound connection with Christ.[97]

When a reader encounters her texts for the first time, the overall strangeness appears "to arise from their literary form," as they read like "dark parodies, or comic retellings, of the Old Testament prophets," whom O'Connor situates "as 'a man apart.'"[98] According to her, "the prophet bears an unacceptable authenticity" as, according to "a quotation from the Library of America edition of her collected works," "his kind of Christianity may not be socially desirable, but it will be *real in the sight of God*."[99] As Savoy notes, "figural interpretation" rejects the framework of "'mere allegory,' because the Old Testament"

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[94] T. W. Hendricks, "Flannery O'Connor's 'Spoiled Prophet,'" *VoegelinView*, May 20, 2020, https://voegelinview.com/flannery-oconnors-spoiled-prophet/.
[95] Hendricks, "Flannery O'Connor's 'Spoiled Prophet;'" O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.
[96] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 133.
[97] Hendricks, "Flannery O'Connor's 'Spoiled Prophet.'"
[98] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 142-143.
[99] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 143.

maintained a "real, literal meaning throughout," essentially referring to "historical reality." If then O'Connor "displaces the Old Testament prophetic figure" through the narrative elements of Southern Gothic, she positions the modern fanatic in a visually genuine progression "toward the traumatic Real, and within the" underlying, "theological temporality of eternal return."[100]

Another type of her characters is the intellectual. According to English language teacher John F. McCarthy, writing in 1966, this typically refers to an individual who rejects the reality "of God and believes that human intellect alone is" adequate to guide his life. While devoted to intellectual pursuits, O'Connor firmly believed that without the potential "of grace and divinely ordained salvation, human existence" lacked dignity and meaning. Her intellectuals often overreach, seeking to be God "with the power of their minds," leading to them to being lost as they reject "to recognize the divine scheme of redemption." Frequently, these characters immerse themselves exclusively in one discipline, distancing "themselves from the real world."[101] This can be observed in case of the first intellectual O'Connor ever created, Hulga Hopewell from "Good Country People" (1955), a nihilist doctorate of philosophy holder who leans towards "a belief in the meaninglessness of human existence."[102] To O'Connor, intellectual pride is an abuse of "God's most generous gift," rational mind, and "the most heinous of sins" that humanity can commit.[103] Hulga was so full of herself and so proud of her intelligence, that she had her birth name Joy changed into Hulga because: "She had a vision of the name working like the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called."[104] Her behavior, however, did not go unpunished by God in the story, and at the same time by O'Connor herself, as Hulga's intelligence was tested and bested by the Bible salesman. Hulga thought he was "a fine Christian" saying: "You're just like them all–say one thing and to another. You're a perfect Christian." He, however, stealing her artificial leg, says: "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!"[105]

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[100] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 143.
[101] John F. McCarthy, "Human Intelligence versus Divine Truth: The Intellectual in Flannery O'Connor's Works," *The English Journal* 55, no. 9 (1966): 1143, https://doi.org/10.2307/812300.
[102] McCarthy, "Human Intelligence," 1143-1144; Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 181.
[103] McCarthy, "Human Intelligence," 1144.
[104] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 275.
[105] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 283-291.

3.2 Southern Gothic and the Grotesque in the Eyes and Pen of O'Connor

To Éric Savoy (2016), the Gothic of Flannery O'Connor seems like "a discursive field that laminates violence and the loss of everything, of life itself, to a dimension of truth beyond our understanding, yet that she insists we must accept."[106] Her Gothic is interlined with her poetics related to time and space, yet these literary elements "are in turn shaped by her acute sense of time and place."[107] This works well with the idea of the real, imaginary, fabricated and the manifestation of the "forces of the mind" mentioned in the introduction to Gothic above.

For instance, in "The Geranium" (1946), Old Dudley seems to be in a world of his own, often thinking about the boarding house he once lived in back in "Coa County," while currently being metaphorically imprisoned in his daughter's and her husband's apartment in New York City, becoming a part of it. This is evident as he "folded into the chair he was gradually molding to his own shape."[108] Moreover, in Old Dudley's eyes: "The apartment was too tight. There was no place to be where there wasn't somebody else. The kitchen opened into the bathroom and the bathroom opened into everything else and you were always where you started from."[109] However, when his daughter comes, it is as if she pulls him back into reality only to then leave him to his imagination again. This jump in space and time is usually indicated by some paragraph starting and ending as Old Dudley either reminisces about his past or just thinks about what he would have done if something went differently and he, for example, would not have come to New York with his daughter.

In "Judgement Day" (1965), the situation is quite similar to "The Geranium," because Tanner, as a Southern man, is also living with his daughter in New York. However, instead of only reminiscing and thinking about *what ifs*, Tanner thinks about his escape from the apartment and the return to the shack he once lived in back in Corinth, Georgia.[110] To him as a believer, the South might represent "his eternal resting place" as he also says to his daughter: "The Judgement is coming."[111] One of the situations repeating itself is Tanner's imagination of being sent home in a grotesque way, as "he could feel the cold early morning air of home coming through the cracks of the pine box," that is of his coffin while one of the

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[106] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 137.
[107] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 136-137.
[108] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 3-5.
[109] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 7.
[110] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 531, 534.
[111] Nasrullah Mambrol, "Analysis of Flannery O'Connor's Stories," *Literary Theory and Criticism*, June 21, 2020, https://literariness.org/2020/06/21/analysis-of-flannery-oconnors-stories/; O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 541.

blacks "began to pry open the lid."[112] In this short story, however, the transition between Tanner's imagination and reality is much smoother and the black men are, at the end, hard to tell apart even for Tanner, it seems. He, yet again, imagines himself being in the coffin, waiting to surprise the black men who are prying open the lid, but as he sees the light and cries "in a weak voice, 'Judgement Day! Judgement Day!'" he finally realizes, he is met with someone else: "'Coleman?' he murmured. The Negro bending over him had a large surly mouth and sullen eyes. […] At the Negro's side was another face, a woman's." This last imagination of his happens as he falls to his death with "his feet dangled over the stairwell like those of a man in the stocks." Tanner's last words are directed at the black actor standing above him, although this could be also his imagination: "Help me up, Preacher. I'm on my way home!" while home might again refer to his actual home in Corinth or to heaven.[113]

In "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" (1954), the little 12-year-old girl has quite an imagination and she even makes things up. For example, she describes the two boys, Wendell and Cory, who are supposed to visit the convent, to Joanne and Susan, as if she knew them: "Wendell is six feet tall and got red hair. Cory is six feet six inches talls got black hair and wears a sport jacket." She then proceeds to imagine, how she saved these boys in the world war: "They were under me and I saved them five times from Japanese suicide divers and Wendell said I am going to marry that kid and the other said oh no you ain't I am and I said neither one of you is because I will court marshall you all before you can bat an eye." However, when the girls meet them, they find out "they were short thin boys."[114] Another one of her quite bizarre trains of thought concern her thinking about how: "She could never be a saint, but she thought she could be a martyr if they killed her quick. She could stand to be shot but not to be burned in oil. She didn't know if she could stand to be torn to pieces by lions or not." The imagined martyr-like death she arrived at ended up to be having her head cut off, quite an unusual idea for a girl of her time and place. This brings the reader directly into the unorthodox imagination of the writer herself.[115]

According to Savoy, it is the Gothic that "approaches violence as redemption, and is addressed to 'the people who think God is dead.'"[116]

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[112] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 546.
[113] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 549-550.
[114] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 239-240.
[115] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 243.
[116] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 140.

In one of O'Connor's essays, she writes about the grotesque. She argues, that "anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic."[117] She highlights the unusual "thing that the grotesque hero sees, and what the novelist" tries to observe in their act of seeing, as she strives to characterize the grotesque figure within the context of "the 'Christ-haunted' South." She argues that for the novelist, "prophecy is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up." And additionally, the prophet is in her eyes "a realist of distances […] in the qualitative sense, and it is this kind of realism that you find in modern instances of the grotesque."[118] Basically, O'Connor literalizes "the abstract temporality" of her plots "in the poetics of space" by using the trope of 'distance.'" Therefore, it is crucial "to be acutely sensitive to the space of the" approaching entity, the looming and inherent contact with the Real, while reading her texts.[119]

An example of this distance could be seen in the geranium that Old Dudley from "The Geranium" is watching from his window. The plant to him is the reminder of his life back in the South, as seen at the beginning of the story when: "The geranium they would put in the window reminded him of the Grisby boy at home who had polio and had to be wheeled out every morning and left in the sun to blink."[120] That is when Old Dudley starts remembering his old life, which continues until the end of the story when the geranium from the window opposite to his suddenly disappears: "It was supposed to be the geranium. The geranium belonged there, not the man."[121] However, the flower that brought him closer to his beloved home and old life has shattered: "Down in the alley, way six floors down, he could see a cracked pot scattered over a spray of dirt and something pink sticking out of a green paper bow. It was down six floors, Smashed down six floors." This triple repetition of sixes points, first of all, at the long distance between Old Dudley and the geranium–in other words his old life–and second of all, at the devil–together with the steps he wanted to take down to gather the geranium as: "The steps dropped down like a deep wound in the floor. They opened up through a gap like a cavern and went down and down."[122] The repetition is also connected with the biblical Book of Revelation as: "'One who understands can calculate

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[117] Choiński, *Southern Hyperboles,* 136.
[118] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 144.
[119] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 145.
[120] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 3.
[121] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 13.
[122] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 13-14.

the number of the beast, for it is a number that stands for a person. His number is six hundred and sixty-six' (Rev. 13:18)." This, among other things, points at the incompleteness of something or being "short of being the real thing."[123] Additionally, this depiction of the surroundings is similar to the woods that "gaped like a dark open mouth" in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953). As Old Dudley gets scared, he returns to the apartment, sits down in the chair, and looks out the window, only to see the man who replaced the geranium, which might point at Old Dudley being unable to return to his old life, and possibly his incompleteness, as he lost a part of himself represented by the destroyed geranium.[124]

O'Connor's fiction is, within contemporary literary culture, "the locus of horror" that "opens out into this dimension, into this impossible possibility," which makes her realism that of the Real. Her realistic portrayal relies on the gradual "accumulation of sharp, concise, and unkind detail," often pertaining to "appearance or gesture."[125] She argues that "the most reliable path to reality … is by way of the grotesque" as "it is 'more real than the real.'"[126] Many of her characters embody the physical grotesque, and "physical afflictions have their place in art, particularly when they point to privation of the mind, ignorance, or prejudice, or," on a more profound level, to the necessity "of redemption of souls out-of-joint with reality."[127] This, however, often serves as a protection from "a spiritual affliction, an inverted grotesqueness" characterizing many of O'Connor's works. The modern world does not corrupt the idiots of her stories because they are protected by simply not being able to reach the influences of it as "they remain in the innocent realm of childhood."[128] Speaking of which, some people found her story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953) "merely 'brutal and sarcastic,'" and she had to defend the short story from such accusations. She contends that, in opposition to the inclinations of the sentimental and the unintelligent:

> there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian realism. […] There are many rough beasts slouching toward Bethlehem to be born […], and when I see these stories described as horror stories, I am Always amused because the reviewer always has got hold of the wrong horror.[129]

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[123] Joel Schorn, "What is 666 in the Bible?" *U.S. Catholic*, October 17, 2013, https://uscatholic.org/articles/201310/what-is-666-in-the-bible/.
[124] O'Connor, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories*, 14.
[125] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 137.
[126] Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 59.
[127] Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 60.
[128] Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 61.
[129] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 145.

In the story, the grandmother dying at the end might not be such a horrific scene, as she, in her final moments feels happiness because she thought to have saved The Misfit by her plea.[130]

The grotesqueness of O'Connor's backcountry prophets is a spiritual one that considers God "a physical affliction, to be 'gotten rid of,' as fast as possible." This grotesqueness "leads them to violence" as one can see, for example, in her novel *Wise Blood*. "These spiritual grotesques are also on the path to salvation" and their violence destroys the body in order "to save the soul." Therefore, according to Thelma J. Shinn (1968), if the destruction of the physical can sometimes lead to salvation of the spiritual, then "the secular grotesques" and their destruction of the spiritual would make an attempt to "save the body." However, redemption can only be attained through suffering, as "the secular denial of pain is a denial of salvation."[131] The characters' grotesqueness and the violent deeds contrast with a "starkly realistic background," narrated with objectivity and a disciplined avoidance of sentimentality, using straightforward "and realistic prose."

Connected to her realism is the way she gives individual voices to her characters through them speaking in a "dialect appropriate to" their class.[132] This differentiation of speech can be seen, for example, in "The Geranium" (1946) and "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" (1954). In "The Geranium," the distinction between people is shown by, for instance, the white Old Dudley living upstairs and the black Rabie with Lutisha living "down in the basement," and secondly by the way certain people speak. Old Dudley, although too in a Southern accent and mostly in his imagination, which might also alter his speech, speaks more formally and correctly than Rabbie. As an illustration, Old Dudley speaks like this: "Don't let it get you down, Rabie. It's just like any other city and cities ain't all that complicated." On the other hand, Rabie speaks with much thicker accent like this: "Ain't no use settin' yo' line down dere, boss […] Ain't no fish dere. Dis ol' riber ain't hidin' none nowhere 'round hyar, nawsuh."[133] However, other characters like Old Dudley's daughter or the little girl from "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," living either in the city or at a convent, do not have any accent and speak quite formally. Old Dudley's daughter speaks like this: "Don't you want to go for

[130] T. W. Hendricks, "Flannery O'Connor's 'Spoiled Prophet,'" *VoegelinView*, May 20, 2020, https://voegelinview.com/flannery-oconnors-spoiled-prophet/; Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 132.
[131] Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 61-62.
[132] Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 64.
[133] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 5-6.

a walk? […] Come on, […] you'll feel better when we get home."[134] Similarly, the little girl speaks like this: "I wasn't thinking of him […] I was thinking of these two Wilkinses, Wendell and Cory, that visit old lady Buchell out on her farm. They're her grandsons. They work for her."[135] Therefore, Walter Elder would apparently argue that O'Connor surpasses, in the way "her characters and setting are […] narrow," the Southern regionalist Eudora Welty, as O'Connor deals "with a South that is" while "Welty deals with a South that never was."[136]

Her comic scenes pivot around "an image or a detail that is" blatantly "incongruent and out of place, and yet that 'thing' is" simultaneously, ironically and inescapably fitting "in its place." Moreover, O'Connor's comic sense, being "poised between laughter and an unease," but also pointing "to the eternal human capacity for error that, as 'knowledge' long repressed by complacency," is unsettling.[137] It is produced by the contrast "of realism and violence," employed to convey "spiritual values." She alleviates the intensity "of the vision without" undermining the intention by incorporating "the incongruous adjective." Additionally, "her satirical humor" vividly highlights the contrast between "spiritual awareness and secular blindness in the" contemporary world. Her satire can be defined as consolidating "a dominant ideal" through "irony and analogy and as a form" that destroys human's perception "of himself as a rational creature."[138]

An example of this idea, as well as the idea of the "interval" from the introduction to the grotesque above, is present in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" (1965). The girls, Joanne and Susan, go to the fair near the convent and then describe a show they have seen there to the little girl: "It had been a freak with a particular name but they couldn't remember the name." This freak spoke to the audience and said: "I'm going to show you this and if you laugh, God may strike you the same way. […] God made me thisaway." The freak went from the men's side to the women's side of the tent and showed them what he promised: "it was a man and woman both. It pulled up its dress and showed us. It had on a blue dress."[139] The little girl was unable to imagine this freak. At first, she thought "it had two heads," but Susan denied it and the only part of the show the little girl was able to picture were:

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[134] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 3, 7.
[135] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 239.
[136] Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 64.
[137] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 135.
[138] Shinn, "Violence of Grace," 65-66.
[139] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 245.

> the faces of the country people watching, the men more solemn than they were in church, and the women stern and polite, with painted-looking eyes, standing as if they were waiting for the first note of the piano to begin the hymn.[140]

She was, therefore, unable to imagine this unknown being with an unnatural form as she did not see it for herself.

The violence of events in her texts is intertwined with the sudden descent of what she refers to as "grace," "the corresponding ascent of the subject is" only a momentary recognition "of a pervasive 'mystery' that remains uncanny."[141] According to an English professor focusing on Bible study Bob Dowell (1965), a character experiences the "moment of grace" once he recognizes the presence of evil, his own inclination toward wrongdoing, "and his ability to triumph over evil through grace," grace being a divine gift bestowed by God, attainable only when one fully realizes their fallen state and" dependence on Christ." Then, in alignment to O'Connor's concept "of ultimate reality," he can commence fulfilling their life's purpose, which involves reflecting "the goodness of his Creator and" partaking in the joy "of heaven with Him."[142] O'Connor aimed to breathe new life into what she perceived as crucial "religious truths that were once a living reality but" have been distorted or rejected by the modern mind. Her works may suggest that Satan "has convinced the world that he does not exist," which, in her eyes, is his "greatest triumph." However, she does believe in his existence. The backcountry fanatics depicted in her texts, "who either believe he exists or" are, at the very least, absorbed with the likelihood of his existence, might appear absurdly grotesque to most readers. Despite that, O'Connor "gives serious treatment to" them and defends them saying how their fanaticism is not merely an eccentricity but a reproach. For her, "the conflict between grace and evil in the lives of her characters reflects [...] the most significant drama in the realm of human experience."[143]

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[140] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 245-246.
[141] Castillo and Crow, *The Palgrave Handbook*, 136.
[142] Bob Dowell, "The Moment of Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," *College English* 27, no. 3 (1965): 238, https://doi.org/10.2307/373114.
[143] Bob Dowell, "The Moment of Grace," 239.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor’s thesis was to analyze elements of Southern Gothic and the grotesque in work of Flannery O’Connor while also considering the authors religious worldview, as it is an essential part of her life that is significantly reflected in her texts.

First, it was essential to characterize the Gothic genre itself. Starting with its roots in the English Gothic tradition in the second half of the 18th century and writers like Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliff, Gothic was essentially thought of as a discourse which revolved around the past and a culture unable to communicate to itself. From there came American Gothic, which started to resemble what is today known as Southern Gothic. American Gothic, exemplified by novelist Charles Brockden Brown, also focuses on the American past and history while distinguishing itself from the English version by its regionally specific and cultural elements. The most important type for the thesis, Southern Gothic, was basically a type of Gothic specific for the South of the US. The history of this region, its plantations, and abandoned mansions are used to induce fear and death, supported by violence, dark humor, and perverse nature of the characters in texts of writers like William Gilmore Simms, Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, or Flannery O’Connor. The events and mythology connected to the US Civil War are vital discourses for Southern Gothic, for example abandoned, decaying plantations (replacing the castles of the English Gothic) and the brutal legacy of chattel slavery. Violence and revenge along with the causes and ramifications of brutality are also major themes, as can be seen as a central motif of Flannery O’Connor.

The second genre that was characterized was the grotesque, as shown through the breakdown of the norms and rebellion against them, which makes the form seem strange to some people. Various definitions of the term have been presented, for example, connected to events and characters so strange one has to laugh uncomfortably, or that behave or appear disgusting. Other elements of the grotesque are represented to things being out of place, misunderstandings among characters (and readers) with no clear explanation for certain behaviors and forms, such as that of the grotesque body often present in the form of missing limbs, eyes, or strange protuberances or openings. The grotesque also shows similarities to Southern Gothic as the bizarre events of the grotesque often involve violence and death.

After the theoretical background of the thesis, the introduction of Flannery O’Connor was featured. Her short life, including her illness but also her close devotion to God, played an important role in her writing. Her religiousness is clearly evident to the general reader, although elements of it may seem perverse, as shown in some of the theory in the previous

part of the thesis. Even though she writes in what later became known as the Southern Gothic genre and uses the elements of the grotesque depicted in the first chapter, her main goal is to write about God, grace, the decisions humans make and their motivations.

Her short story “Good Country People” shows her position as a Catholic in a mostly Protestant area as she shows the conflicting ideas of Protestantism that the Bible salesman has and the uncertainty of whether it is right to say someone is only evil or good, or whether one can be both. As O’Connor shows, while mankind has fallen since Eve, then Adam, succumbed to the temptation of the serpent, humans can become as God through grace and compassion, which in O’Connor comes in unexpected ways through the choices her characters make. In “Good Country People,” O’Connor reflects her health problems through the character of Hulga who, at the same time, commits the worst sin in O’Connor’s eyes—hubris. While Hulga is too proud of her intelligence, thus abusing God’s gifts, through her O’Connor shows humility, which is the opposite of hubris and brings mankind closer to God.

The short story “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” works as an illustration of O’Connor’s concept of a “moment of grace.” As the grandmother experiences this grace, she desires to extend redemption to The Misfit, hoping to guide him towards a life with God. Despite the tragic consequences of her past actions and her manipulative tendencies, she appears to find solace in her final moments. Moreover, the narrative delves into the struggle between right and wrong, raising the question about the justification of violent behavior. The Misfit also reflects on the past suggesting, according to O’Connor, that his decisions and life could have been different if he believed in God and lived with the grandmother.

“The Geranium” and “Judgement Day” explore themes of the past, closely related to the Southern Gothic genre. The protagonists’ reminiscence of their former lives enables them to escape the reality of their unfamiliar surroundings. Even though they attempt to implement their Southern mindset to New York City, they are unable to do so, leading to a loss of their identities, reasons to live, and even their own lives, in the process. In “The Geranium,” Old Dudley loses his will to live while Tanner in “Judgement Day” is willing to go down the stairs, even if it means his death, showcasing his and O’Connor’s unwavering faith. Additionally, these stories probe the boundaries between reality, imagination, and fabrication, a theme echoed in “A Temple of the Holy Ghost.” Through a child’s perspective, O’Connor introduces the grotesque body of a hermaphrodite. The little girl, in spite of her vivid imagination, is unable to comprehend it due to its unnatural and multifaceted nature and the fact that she has not seen it, illustrating Geoffrey Harpham’s the idea of an “interval.”

Overall, my research for the text has led me towards a deeper understanding of O'Connor's enduring literary legacy, including her adapt navigation of Southern Gothic tropes and the Grotesque as well as the religious motifs in her remarkable narratives. As her texts include not only fiction but, for example, letters as well, a more complex analysis could shed light on these and other aspects of her thinking and writing.

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