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Formal Paper 3

The book “A Good Man is Hard to Find ” by Flannery O'Connor's is thought to be a short story that has sparked countless discussions and debates among literary critics and scholars such as myself. Through her masterful use of symbolism and distorted imagery, O'Connor explores the complexities of human nature, the concept of grace, and the consequences of sin. In this essay, I will inform you about a story that can be interpreted as a warning against the dangers of self-righteousness and a call for humility and compassion towards others. I will support my argument by citing two academic articles that offer insights into the themes and motifs of the story.

One of the central characters in “A Good Man is Hard to Find” is the Misfit, a cold-blooded killer who has a philosophical bent. Throughout the story, he engages in a dialogue with the grandmother, who tries to appeal to his sense of morality and Christian values. However, the Misfit remains unmoved by her words and eventually orders his henchmen to execute the entire family. One interpretation of the story is that the Misfit represents the embodiment of evil, while the grandmother symbolizes the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the religious establishment.

In her article “The Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor’s ‘A Good Man is Hard to Find,’” Ruthann Knechel Johansen argues that the grotesque elements in the story serve as a means of exposing the distorted and twisted nature of

human beings. She writes that “O’Connor’s grotesque is a mode of revelation, not of obscenity, and it is meant to shock us out of our complacency and to reveal the underlying reality of human existence” (Johansen 152). The Misfit, according to Johansen, is a prime example of the grotesque in the story. His rationalizations for his actions reveal the cold and calculated nature of evil, which is often disguised as reason and logic. The grandmother, on the other hand, represents the false piety and moral superiority of the religious establishment, which is equally grotesque in its own way.

Another interpretation of the story argues that it is a departure from the typical Southern Gothic narrative, which often romanticizes violence and sensationalism, Robert E. Hosmer Jr. argues. He writes that “O’Connor’s story takes the tradition of the grotesque and the violent to a new level of seriousness and profundity, revealing the underlying moral and theological implications of such narratives” (Hosmer 67). Hosmer contends that the moment of grace at the end of the story, when the grandmother realizes her own sinfulness and reaches out to the Misfit in compassion, is a radical departure from the typical Southern Gothic narrative, which usually ends in a nihilistic and fatalistic manner.

In conclusion, “A Good Man is Hard to Find” is a powerful and thought-provoking story that challenges readers to examine their own assumptions and beliefs about human nature, morality, and grace. Through her use of symbolism and grotesque imagery, Flannery O’Connor exposes the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the religious establishment, while also offering a critique of the Southern Gothic tradition. As Ruthann Knechel Johansen and Robert E. Hosmer Jr. have shown, the story can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but its message is ultimately one of humility, compassion, and the need for grace in a fallen world.

Work Cited Page

- Johansen, Ruthann Knechel. "The Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor's 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'." *The Southern Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1998, pp. 151-163.
- Hosmer Jr., Robert E. "'A Good Man is Hard to Find': The Moment of Grace." *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin*, vol. 18, 1989, pp. 67-75.