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### **The Grandmother's Death Wish**

There is more to literature than what meets the eyes. On the surface, readers can only begin to understand the plot, characters, and setting. However, if the reader chooses to look deeper they will find a whole new world of literature around them.

Thomas C. Foster, author of How to Read Literature Like a Professor, established quite a few theories of literature to help readers really dig their toes in the sand and get more of the analyzing side of the story. Many of Foster's theories are applied in the short story, "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" by Flannery O'Connor, in which a simple family vacation can go terribly wrong.

Foster's main idea, or claim, throughout his entire book is "irony trumps everything" (Foster, 235). He brings up this theory numerous times and makes it very clear that even though professors and writers have established many theories as to what certain things mean and symbolize within that piece of literature, irony will still beat out all of those theories. In O'Connor's, "A Good Man Is Hard To Find", he uses the technique of foreshadowing to show dramatic irony to the readers. In other words, the

readers can determine what is about to happen by the subtle foreshadowing hints given to them by the author while, the characters within the story have no idea what is about to come. The first foreshadow clue O'Connor leaves behind is in the first paragraph when he writes, "'Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is a loose from the Federal Pen and headed toward Florida...'" (O'Connor, 446). At first, readers may believe this is only an excuse for the pompous grandmother to attempt to change the family's mind about going to Florida instead of Tennessee, but as the story and foreshadowing progresses, the dramatic irony becomes crystal clear. After Grandmother finally decides to go to Florida with her family, she dresses in her best attire. She did this to make certain that "in case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady" (O'Connor, 447). This was the biggest hint for readers to see the dramatic irony in a possible upcoming accident. Even though most readers would have gotten the hint by now, that doesn't stop O'Connor from inserting a few more pieces of good foreshadowing details into his story. While the family traveled along, "they passed a large cotton field with five or six graves fenced in the middle of it, like a small island" (O'Connor, 448). That ignorant grandmother — excited to see such a landmark — had no idea what it symbolized for what to come. O'Connor really incorporated the technique of foreshadowing all the way through the end of his piece. If Foster ever got the chance to read O'Connor's work, he would be proud to see all of the irony hidden within.

O'Connor wasn't willing to let anyone say "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" was anything short of a puzzle the reader had to piece together. He continued to use

Foster's main idea of "irony trumps all" not just in his foreshadowing, but also in the weather. Yes — the weather. In Foster's *New York Times* Bestseller, How to Read Literature Like a Professor, he established a huge analytic theory that caught many reader's off guard —the author's usage of weather. Foster goes into great detail in chapter ten of his book about how "it's never just rain" (Foster, 75). When he states this, he is not only talking about rain but all weather. What Foster is implying is that when an author includes the weather in his or her story it has a purpose, and that purpose usually is tied to which type of weather they choose. However, O'Connor decided to test this theory and make it quite ironic, which Foster said most authors may do. In the beginning of the story, the scene is set to a perfect day where it was "neither too hot or too cold" (O'Connor, 447). As the story goes on, the weather is brought up numerous times. One ironic statement that definitely stood out was when the grandmother and The nihilistic Misfit were discussing the weather and right before he kills her family he comments that there "ain't a cloud in the sky" (O'Connor, 455). That statement is actually supposed to symbolize good luck, but that isn't the case for this family. What made it even more ironic was when the grandmother agreed with the murderer by saying, "yes, it's a beautiful day" (O'Connor, 455). Foster theory of weather is that it matches with the mood of the book; if it's stormy – scary, if it's sunny – happiness. The twist that O'Connor puts on his story is the opposite. The mood is dark and end in death however, it is a perfect day outside. That is the irony in weather that Foster describes as one of his theories in chapter ten.

Overall Foster established quite a few theories and many were extremely original. One that definitely popped out to readers was his theory of vampirism in chapter three. This theory states that being a vampire doesn't always mean the character has to be a physical vampire (Foster, 17). What do vampires do? They suck away at others' lives. So when you think about it, a character doesn't have to physically suck the blood and life out of a character to be considered a vampire; all they have to do is suck out their life — like a vacuum cleaner. In O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find", this is the huge concept. At first it was hard to tell who the vampire may be, but readers soon identify their monster to the grandmother. The grandmother is a ENORMOUS vampire in this story, sucking away her entire family's lives. O'Connor doesn't fully dive into the idea of the grandmother sucking the life out of everyone she ever cared about, but just dips his toe in the idea of sucking away their vacation by delaying it. The grandmother's first wrong move was when she decided she wanted to see an old house she used to visit as a kid (O'Connor, 451). However, she forgot they were in an entirely different state, causing them to go down a road they shouldn't have even been on. The grandmother's next failure that O'Connor made sure to demonstrate, was when a man pulled up after the accident and she immediately identified him and said, "You're The Misfit!" (O'Connor, 454). This blew any chances of that family getting out of there alive almost instantly. The final clue that brought readers to the understanding that the grandmother truly was a vampire was when she turned cold and didn't really care when her family was brought into the woods. The only person she did

care about staying alive, was herself (O'Connor, 458-459). This was most certainly the most evident theory of Foster's that O'Connor inserted and applied to his story.

In Foster's "How to Read Literature Like a Professor", he establishes a theory about baptism: if a character submerges themselves into a body of water and doesn't arise, they can't be saved (Foster, 155-156). The grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard To Find", is one of those characters that cannot be rescued. At the end of O'Connor simple story, the phlegmatic Misfit kills all of the grandmother's family – including herself. Once The Misfit murders the grandmother, her body sits in the ditch "half lay in a puddle of blood" (O'Connor, 595). This proves to the readers that the grandmother can't be saved because she was not able to survive the pool of water, or in this case blood. O'Connor, making it blood instead of water, signifies how dirty and terrible of a person this woman truly is. O'Connor was definitely demonstrating Foster's theory that not every character can be saved.

O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find", had many other theories than the ones listed above; however, vampirism, foreshadowing, and weather all played a big part in the plot. O'Connor was really able to demonstrate Foster's theories throughout his entire piece. Literature is wonderful gift that we were given and we should never cut it short by not being able to look deeper; for now we now, there is more to literature than what is on the surface.

**Works Cited**

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