Flannery O’Connor's Methods To Portray The Protagonist And Antagonist

The Bible says, “After the flood, Noah began to cultivate the ground, and he planted a vineyard. One day he drank some wine he had made, and he became drunk and lay naked inside his tent.”(New Living Translation, Gen. 9:20-21). As shown throughout the bible, even the most righteous men have fallen short at times, and this world is seeing men fall short more than ever today. Committing sin and being of hateful nature seems to be like something that is a commonplace in this world. Flannery O’Connor tries to emphasize this by providing logical instances that could happen in real life. Her use of the protagonist and antagonist in her works show characters who need a call to action in their lives. O’Conner is a remarkable at getting her point across because of her use of characters, the theme, and her spiritual views towards the theme.

O’Connor uses multiple methods to portray the protagonist and antagonist. She also has an effective way of showing how the two characters work together to produce the theme. In her stories she portrays the worst and best sides of their personalities and actions. Showing how imperfect both characters are makes it hard to choose sides. Instead of picking sides, this makes the reader listen and try to understand both characters causing readers to try and bring out the good from the bad instead of rooting for the “good guy” the entire time.

The author uses intense imagery at the climax of her stories to convey the point she wants her readers to understand. For example, in “A Good Man is Hard to Find” right after the kids were taken from the family into the woods, O’Connor uses a descriptive and detailing statement to record the fear of the grandmother. The statement said, “There was a pistol shot from the woods, followed closely by another. Then silence. The old lady’s head jerked around. She could hear the wind move through the tree tops like a long staisfied insuck of breath. “Bailey Boy!” she called.”(O’Connor 456). This gives whoever is reading a feeling of suspense, and it causes the reader to be more intrigued to the. When people read books they want to feel frightened and optimistic, or they just want to feel a heighten of energy within themselves.

The Antagonist in “A Good Man Is Hard To Find” is a perfect example of when the reader feels very optimistic. In the story, the grandmother speaks nothing but words of hope to the Misfit. She tells him how she knows he is a good man on the inside, and he actually takes the time to listen to her. One example of this is when she says, “‘You’ve got good blood! I know you wouldn’t shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not shoot a lady. I’ll give you all the money I’ve got’”(O’Connor 458). However, in this example you can see how selfish the woman becomes. She does not truly care about the Misfit. She is only trying to save her own life. This story was a great example of how selfishness will not get people anywhere. Being blind and selfish put the grandmother 6 feet under the ground.

The Misfit tells of how he was put in a prison cell and says, “‘I forget what I done, lady. I set there and set there, trying to remember what it was I done and I ain’t recalled it to this day’”(O’Connor 456-457). The Misfit may have not even committed a crime, and he could have been wrongly sentenced. However, he accepts what may not even be true because his society has convinced him that he is a criminal. All people, regardless of race or sex, are torn

apart by the horrific messages that society puts out. This world is losing people of honesty and integrity because society says it is okay to be of sin. Good men are hard to find because of an exponential increase of sin. Citizens seem to be okay with being okay. What happened to people having a drive to be better than average?

In “Good Country People” and “A Good Man Is Hard To Find” the theme is very consistent. As Mrs. Hopewell says in “Good Country People”, “‘Everybody is different’”(O’Connor 462). Differences do not not make you any less important than someone else, and O’Connor emphasizes that throughout her stories. In a source I was reading one person made the observation that “‘his name ironically connects him to the world of popular psychology and textbook sociology in which he is merely a deviant from society's norms. The Misfit himself sees his problem religiously and metaphysically'' (57).” (Evans 182). The Misfit’s name literally singles him out and makes fun of his differences, and just look at how he reacts to that.

The Misfit is unaware of how blind he is and how easily he could crawl his way out of this situation with grace. He does not know how sinful he is because he is blinded by what others say and by of how easy it has become to sin. To show how much evil is involved, in a text over “A Good Man Is Hard To Find”, Thomas P. Flint mentions another writer and says “As Frederick Asals puts it, “there is a darkly menacing undertone that runs throughout the first part of the story in the form of recurrent references to violence and death” (147).”(Flint 119). Readers get a feeling in their gut that is very startling, throughout the story. Often times people become unaware how one small action begins adding up. The more sin that one has in their lives, the more they are going to realize less and less that they do it.

O’Connor supports her own text through her own spiritual beliefs. When reading, people can tell that her viewpoint on religion is from the Christian eye. Since she understands how a Christian can react in complex situations, she shows how some Christians will only act religious when they have to. The grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard To Find” did not mention her God until faced with death. That is exactly why the Misfit said, “‘She would have been a good woman ... if there had been someone there to shoot her every minute of her life''(O’Connor 459). He understood that she was only good when she had to be; however, he does not realize his own wrongs. The only friends he has are ones who murder innocent people with him. The Misfit is missing someone to hold him accountable for his actions.

People of all backgrounds want someone to care about them regardless of how they act. You can tell that the Misfit is missing a person to truly show affection towards him. No one likes a fake personality, not even a convicted murderer. Through the author’s use of characters and the way she wants the message to get across, she allows the antagonist to have a good side. Since the Misfit is unaware of his sinfulness, it becomes hard to actually acknowledge good. However, he is in need of a spiritual revival. It is never too late to change, and it is definitely better late than to never have a renewing of the soul.

Works Cited

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