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The Commodified Religious Aura of the American

South in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "Good Country People"

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all my family, to my parents

The dearest people to my heart.

Thank you for all your encouragement, and above all your love.

Thank you for your patience and support.

Nesrine

Acknowledgments

I would like first to thank **Allah** for giving me strength and capacity to complete this work.

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Abstract

During the twentieth century, the American people lived through a difficult period, as the Second World War negatively affected them in all political, cultural, and psychological aspects, so that high values and morals were absent and corruption spread. As a result, society has become psychologically broken, relying on everything that is material, ignoring the principles, and religion has not followed from that, so it has become a commodity intended to earn money and fame. In both stories: “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*” (1953), and “*Good Country People*” (1955) by Flannery O’Connor (1925-1964), there is an honest depiction of dullness of feelings, and murder is become horribly common, religiosity and respect for others are easily neglected. The topic shed light on the transformation of society, its religion and values into a commodity that works to achieve ephemeral materialism, and this is confirmed by the Marxist point of view, which recognizes the materialism of society, on which this research is based through its focus on the extent to which the characters are affected by materialism and their depiction of their lived reality in a template devoid of religious and moral concept.

Keywords: American South, Aura, Commodity, Feeling, Religion.

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General Introduction

The Background of the study

As a reaction to the puritan literary movement, romanticism as an artistic and philosophical movement came to United States in the early of the 19th century (Englist,2020). Here, “The prominent historical issues that led to the manifestation of Romanticism were the rebellion against Puritan beliefs and the ending of the civil war” (Englist,2020). This movement was divided into two parts: light Romantics or Transcendentalism and dark Romantics. Transcendentalists focused on expressing their inner emotions and feelings by match out into the outside world like forest or sea with a view to show the relationship between the individual and the spirit. Whereas, the second, dark gothic writers, concentrated on “the individual with fascination to the supernatural and fantasy such as ghosts and monsters through an imaginative, horrible characters and scenes as in Edgar Allan Poe’s works” (Englist,2020).

In the same century in the southern region of America, a new type of Gothicism has appeared and has been affected by the original American Gothic. Moreover, the phenomenal literary movement called Southern Gothicism because it shares almost the similar themes as dark Gothicism like tragedy, mystery, and death. In addition, many authors embraced this style but the well-know one is Flannery Mary O’Connor (1925-1964) who was the greatest writer from the southern Gothic tradition as devoted her life to write about subjects that outspread in society such as violence and racism. In spite of being adroit in similar themes, her dominant theme was religion because she was devout in Catholicism.

1. The Statement of the problem

The popular attitude in the South of the United States was the appearance of many apathetic people who were far from Christianity and God in opposite to O’Connor who was adhered to Christianity and went her society to sympathize her. Moreover, she used her pen and fiction to demonstrate Christianity as “Christ is the real hero of O’Connor’s fiction” (Chapman, 2005, p.2). Flannery introduced religion through mysterious scenes in order not to shock the reader by forcing faith on them and also show how characters have commodified religion. This study is intended to investigate how religion is used in “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*” (1953) and “*Good Country People*” (1955) taking into account the contradictions between what characters think and do about religion.

2. Literature Review

Flannery O’Connor is one of the prolific short story writers of the twentieth century. She wrote about life of people in the Southern America. Many researches have discussed her well-known themes and works. As a consequence, there are many dissertations and articles that composed O’Connor’s works such “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*” (1953) and “*Good Country People*” (1955). Abdulla Shafiq in his dissertation “Dysfunctional Families: A study in Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man is Hard To Find” and “Good Country People”(2017) explains the central social dilemma between parent and child what really reflects the violence and tension of American life. For example, in “Good Country People” when Joy changes her name to Hulga, she really rebels her mother and breaks the traditions what caused her to become an easy prey to a deceiving Bible salesman. As a result, O’Connor always relates the social dilemma with the Christian theme, from O’Connor’s perspective, someone who enforces himself to Christ, God will provide solution for him (p.8).

Sanchez Guia wrote a dissertation entitled “Flannery O’Connor and her south: A study through *“Good Country People”* (2018). In this study, he examines the old values that occurred in the south of the United States while transmitting a Roman Catholic message, since O’Connor was a devout believer. He chooses the tale *“Good Country People”* because it characterizes O’Connor’s desire (p.20). For instance, the characters of this tale are Christian, but most likely not Roman Catholics as O’Connor is.

Additionally, Muneba wrote a research paper entitled “A Feminist and Psychoanalytical Analysis of Flannery O’Connor *“Good Country People”* (2002) where he indicates that many of O’Connor’s works suggest a theological lens to examine her writing through religious beliefs. However, O’Connor imposes new attitudes to analyze through it. Like, for example, O’Connor’s work is often seen as a feminist work because it shows how women were always confined to traditional gender roles. The story also depicts the trouble of human psychology; the inferior look towards Hulga only because she was disabled.

Overall, these research papers and studies have discussed different aspects that are definitely interesting, but no one has addressed or applied both religion and the Marxist analysis to the analysis and interpretation of *“A Good Man is Hard to Find”*(1953) and *“Good Country People”*(1955), concerning religion, this current work will study the two short stories by a Marxist approach and show how religion is commodified by the characters in both stories.

3. Aim of the study

Flannery O’Connor contributed to a deeper understanding of the role of religion in the American South and the ways in which it is used to justify oppressive systems what attracts numerous researchers to work on. Additionally, the works of O’Connor’s *“A Good Man is Hard to Find”* (1953) and *“Good Country People”* (1955) are written to defend religion. Thus, the present research aims to explore and show the Marxist reading of O’Connor’s works through a commodified religious ideology.

4. Research Question

In a society where the spread of secularism became popular, Flannery O’Connor had the chance to write about her neutral ideas and thoughts on religion. She used fiction and imagination to express what she could not express in reality. This dissertation expounds the character’s behavior in relation to religion. Therefore, it asks the following research question:

1. To what extent does Flannery O’Connor’s Southern Gothic literature challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles prevalent in the American South during her time?
2. How did Flannery O’Connor’s life affect her writings?
3. How were the characters’ ideas in the stories commodified by religion?

5. Hypotheses

In this study, it is hypothesized that:

1. Flannery O’Connor’s Southern Gothic literature both challenges and reinforces traditional gender roles prevalent in the American South, as her narratives depict a tension between subverting and adhering to social expectations.
2. Any production of any writer mirrors his/her life as O’Connor did.
3. Characters were using religion when necessary, and where they were in quarrel with the self or the other

6. Research Methodology

This dissertation is carried by the Marxist theory and in particular by the idea of commodity which aims to explore the ways in which O'Connor critiques the southern lifestyles and attitudes of the mysterious characters. Additionally, the interpretation will be through the behaviour and attitudes of characters. For instance, the Grandmother in "*A Good Man is Hard to Find*" (1953) is a character that never took religion seriously and she recognizes that when she encounters the Misfit and asserts her death. Moreover, "*Good Country People*" (1955) portrayed Manley Pointer as a simple Bible salesman who manipulates the feeling of Hulga to serve his desire.

7. Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter one represents the characteristics of Southern Gothic literature and Flannery O'Connor style in the twentieth century. This chapter illustrates also the Southern Gothic characters and society in relation to the concept of religion. Chapter two is the corpora analysis on the light of Marxist theory and the concept of commodification which is discussed. Chapter three attempts to synthesise between characters and religion through a Marxist view. The conclusion shows the role of religion in Flannery O'Connor's works.

Chapter one
The Depiction of Religious Decline
in the Gothic American short story
after WW5

Introduction

The American society has witnessed many changes due to the conflicts that occurred in the world. The twentieth century was full of these domestic changes. Before the WW II, American society was somehow prosperous, but after the war, America emerged as one of the most powerful countries in the world (Mackay, 2009, p. 68). Yet, in spite of the positive outcomes, the war had also affected the American society and individuals in a negative manner (Mackay, 2009, p. 68).

The social issues that distributed in America as violence, racism, and psychological trauma had influenced authors to explore and comment on the issues that arose during this period (Mackay, 2009, p. 68). In this context, literature can be seen as a reflection of the social and individual realities that took place in America where writers critique and debate the social issues which may affect and corrupt the individuals' values. As a result, a new genre appeared called Southern Gothic, where American writers criticize and debate the individual decadence towards a sensitive concept that represents as the backbone of the individual moral which is religion.

1.1. The Impact WWII on The American Life

The Second World War was a global conflict that lasted from 1939 to 1945 and involved many of the world's major powers, including the United States. World War II had a profound impact on American culture and society, both during the war years and in the postwar period (Mackay, 2009, p. 69). For instance, on culture which the war influenced literature many writers and journalists who experienced the war, wrote about themes like trauma, loss, and the human condition (Mackay, 2009, p. 69). Moreover, the war impacted American society in many aspects. First, the Growth of the middle class; the economic boom of the postwar period helped to create a new middle class in America. Many Americans who had grown up during the Great Depression were able to achieve a level of prosperity that they had never experienced before this led to a greater focus on consumerism and a shift towards a more materialistic culture. Second, environmental impacts which include the pollution and destruction of natural resources caused by industrial production what caused many diseases such stroke and lung cancer.

Furthermore, the war had also a profound impact on the individual, some of the most significant affects include: Firstly, women's role in which the war opened up new opportunities for women to work in various domain for example: factories, offices, and industries, as many men went to fight in the war what led to a significant increase of women gender. Secondly, psychological impact; the war had a profound psychological impact on the American people, as they struggled with the trauma of fighting. This led to a greater awareness of mental health issues such as the post-traumatic stress disorder as many soldiers suffered from it when they returned to their homes after the fight ended. Last, Americans' souvenir; the war left a lasting imprint on Americans lives and the scarifies that made by American soldiers during the war continue to be recalled in museums and memorials.

Overall, World War II had a profound and lasting impact on American society and individual lives, shaping the country in ways that are still felt today.

1.1.1. Social Digression and Deterioration

The Second World War had a significant impact on American society, both in terms of its positive and negative effects. The war helped to unite the country and gave rise to a national pride. However, there were some social digression and deterioration during this time that affected the Americans life (Weird History,2022). For instance, one major factor that contributed to social digression during the war was the widespread discrimination against certain groups, such as African Americans who faced segregation and discrimination in both ordinary and military life, and were often broke to menial jobs and lower pay. Another factor that contributed to social deterioration during the war was the breakdown of traditional gender roles when women take an important step to represent themselves, as the fictitious character Rosie Riveter, in work and society to get their rights (Weird History, 2022). It also led to a sense of uncertainty and instability for many families, and some critics at the time argued that it was contributing to a decline in moral values.

Additionally, there were concerns about the impact of the war on social norms and values. Many feared that the disturbance and trauma of the war would loud to breakdown of traditional social structures and morality (Weird History, 2022). There were concerns about rising crimes rates, corruption, alcoholism, and other social ills. Also, the war effort also had a negative impact on the environment, as industries ramped up production to meet military needs. This led to increased pollution and other environmental problems, which had long-lasting effects on both the natural world and public health (Weird History, 2022).

1.1.2. Religious Decay and the Deterrence of Social Values

Before Second World War started, religion had a significant role in American society, with Christianity being the dominant faith. However, as the war progressed, the importance of religion began to decline (Aboukhadijeh, 2012). One reason for the decline in religion was the trauma of the war itself the war was a brutal conflict that caused immense suffering and loss of life, and it forced many people to question the existence of a loving God in the face of such tragedy (Aboukhadijeh,2012). The war also exposed Americans to different cultures and belief systems, leading to different religious and beliefs. Another factor was the rise of scientific rationalism and the Enlightenment ideals, which began to challenge religious authority and traditional beliefs (Aboukhadijeh,2012). As in the eighteenth century, with many people shifting their focus towards secular concerns such as “economic growth, political power, and social progress, including Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington who considered God as a clock-maker, creating the universe and then stepping back to watch his creation function what led these thinkers to adopt the deistic belief” (Aboukhadijeh, 2012). Additionally, the post-war years saw significant changes in American society, including the rise of consumer culture and the pursuit of material wealth, which drew attention away from religious values and traditions, which challenged traditional religious beliefs and practices (Aboukhadijeh, 2012). The Second World War played a significant role in the decline of religion in American society. The trauma of the war,

exposure to different cultures and beliefs, scientific rationalism, and social changes all contributed to shift away from traditional religious values and practices.

1.1.3. Religious and Social Decadence and their Influence on American Individual

Historians indicates When society is on chaos or mess, it means that its population who neglect their ethical values; religious decadence can affect the individual and the whole community. In contrast, religious society can have a significant positive influence on the individual because religion shaped their values, beliefs, and behavior.

The impact of religious and social decadence on the individual can be seen in their attitudes towards social issues where individual become more susceptible to promote violence, intolerance, and discrimination this led to conflict within communities. Moreover, the decline of ethical values can also affect individuals' mental health and body where people lost the taste of life and contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. It can also lead to unhealthy conduct, such as substance abuse and addiction. In addition to, the decline of religion impacted individuals to become less motivated and engage with others; a decline in religious values may lead to a decrease the help of others or be a volunteer in work.

The impact of religious and social decadence on the individual can also affect their relationships with others. Furthermore, a decline in moral and ethical values can lead to breakdown communication where individuals cannot form meaningful connections with other or they interact harmful and disrespectful to others. In contrast, individuals who have a strong relation with morals maybe better equipped to form beneficial relationships with others and being optimistic.

Critics point out that skeptical people may convert to different religion what led to alternative spiritual practices. For example, "In a process that had started during the late 1950s and accelerated during the decades that followed, witchcraft was revived as a neo-pagan religion which attracted those who felt disconnected from Christianity and other mainstream religions (Murphy, 2009, p.62).

1.2. The Interpretation of Social Decay in American Writings

The Second World War led to major changes in the culture field especially in the field of literature. The visible change that occurred on literature was influenced by the social issues such as: violence and drug abuse that happened on American society in the 20th century.

The Second World War had a significant impact on literature, both in themes and styles of writing. The war had shaped literature through a new genre known as "War Literature". It is undoubtedly natural and "not surprising that a war of such magnitude was often represented in literature" (Puster, 2007, p.12). Many writers who lived through the war, like Ernest Hemingway used his experience to create works that explored the themes of loss and trauma. In contrast, other writers preferred to give clues through the use of satire and black humor to convey the absurdity and senselessness of war such as Joseph Heller in his novel *Catch-22* (1961) long with many other writers who used satire to express the effects of the Second World War.

The war continued to be a rich source of inspiration for writers whose works are influenced with themes of conflict and trauma as many post-war writers and novelists rebelled against the Second World War and dealt with every of problem in life that many people felt. Apart from the war, many writers interpreted the social decay into written words where they

expressed themes as: dehumanization, absurdity, and fragmentation. First, the theme of dehumanization expressed by Joseph Heller in his novel *Catch-22* in which soldiers and civilians were subjected to brutal and dehumanizing treatment during times of war. His works explore the psychological impact of this treatment on individuals, showing the ways in which, it leads to trauma and loss of humanity (Dergisi,2012, p.57). Second, many writers expressed their views on the war and the world through their works; absurdity was a prominent theme in 20th century literature. As Puster said “the absurdity of everyday life has had a deep impact on the narratives” (p.40).

Fragmentation, postmodernist reflect the sense of alienation, and loss of faith into fragmented characters because they believe that society or character live in troublesome era, they could not belong anywhere because:

Fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief. In other words, the modernist (pre-war writer) laments fragmentation while the postmodernist(post-war writer) celebrates it” (Barry, 2002,p.84).

1.2.1. Gothic Depictions of The American Mind

American Gothic literature emerged in the early 19th century and lasted to the mid of the 20th century as a response to a social, political, and cultural changes that were taking place in the United States (Ahmad, 2015, p.25). Gothic literature often portrays the darker aspects of the human mind, including fear, madness, and obsession; American Gothic writers use fiction as a mean to explore these social issues and critique because it is difficult to confront society in real life. One of the earliest examples of American gothic literature is “*The Legend of sleepy Hollow*” (1820) by Washington Irving (1783-1859).

Edgar Allan Poe(1809-1849), as many American Gothic writers, who offers a critique of American society during his time, highlighting some themes like materialism, corruption, violence, and the suppression of individuality (Ahmad, 2015, p.26). One of Poe’s main criticism of American society was its emphasis on materialism, for instance, in the story of “*The Gold Bug*” (1843), Poe portrays characters who are consumed by their desire for wealth and status (Ahmad, 2015, p.25).

Similarly, Nathaniel Hawthorne(1804-1864) was examining the American society in his story *The Scarlet Letter*(1850) which explores the theme of sin and hypocrisy in Puritan New England: “ The story deeply reveals not only the Puritan’s bitterness and the women’s hardship, but also the strength of the puritan consciousness and the lowness of the women’s status” (Ahmad, 2015, p.25). Overall, Gothic literature provides a powerful lens through which to explore the hidden, darker aspects of the American mind, and to delve into the psychological struggles of its characters. Through the use of horror, the supernatural, and other Gothic tropes, these works offer a unique perspective on the fears and anxieties that have shapes American society over time.

1.2.1.1. The Rise of Southern Gothicism in the Short Story

The southern Gothic short story emerged as a subgenre of American gothic literature in the early 20th century (Smith, 2007, p.123). With many writers drawing upon their experiences of growing up in the South to create works that explored the region’s unique

history, culture, and social issues (Fitzgerald, 1971, p.19). The Southern Gothicism characterized by its dark, haunting, and often macabre themes, and its use of symbolism, imagery, and a sense of the grotesque (Murphy,2013,p.168).

One of the key factors that contributed to the rise of Southern Gothic was the social and cultural issues that took place in the South (Crow, 2014, p.280). For the reason that, the region was struggling with the problem of slavery, economic decline, racial inequality (Brewer, 1983, p.146).

The issue of poverty has also provided a fertile ground for writers to explore themes of corruption, decay, and violence. Characteristically of cable, “Jean-ah Poquelin becomes darker and more macabre, as the narrator turns to violence and the gothic to reveal the “haunted heart” of this fictional world (Gray,2012, p. 284).

Southern Gothic writers had influence by Poe’s gothic legacy in terms of the Southern Gothic enables us not only to evaluate the extent of his influence on other writers, but also to:

Address some of the limitations of the category itself. It has often been said that the legacy of William Faulkner, like that of Poe, looms large over subsequent writers, but it is equally true that Faulkner is the inheritor of Poe and the gothic tradition” (Crow and Street, 2016, p.3).

In addition, the Southern Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, which saw a resurgence of interest in Southern literature and played a significant role in the rise of Southern gothic, its pioneers are William Faulkner (1897-1962), Eudora Welty (1909-2001), and Flannery O’Connor (1925-1964). The Southern gothic short story typically features characters who are struggling to come to terms with their past, their identity, and their place in society. Southern gothic writers often encounter strange and unsettling situations, such as haunted houses, abandoned plantations, and mysterious swamps. The settings of these stories are often depicted as decaying, neglected, and haunted by the ghosts of the past(Rangno,2006,p.58). Indeed, in so many gothic works, “the landscape represents more than just a setting; it is a threatening embodiment of the land itself, of that often abused supplier of our human needs. Such landscapes not only foster an important element of terror, but also represent a sort of warehouse of cultural and individual anxieties relating to the social issues in play” (Crow and Street,2016, p.84).

Overall, the Southern Gothic short story emerged as a distinct and influential literary tradition in the early 20th century, drawing upon a range of influences to explore the complexities of the American South and the human condition.

1.2.1.2. Famous Themes of The American Southern Gothic Short Story

The American Southern gothic short story is a subgenre of gothic fiction that focuses on unsettling and mysterious events that occur in the American South. Some of the American Southern gothic short story include: grotesque characters, family dysfunction, and religious hypocrisy.

Grotesque characters in which many stories often feature grotesque or weird characters who are haunted by their past. These characters are often isolated and struggle with their own identity and morality. Furthermore, in Southern gothic, physical deformity or disability is often used to symbolize the emotional and psychological trauma suffered by characters. The grotesque body might be a result of birth defects, disease, or injury, and often serves as a

metaphor to the disfigured American society. For example, *“Good Country People”*(1955), the nihilistic and intellectual Hulga still lives at home at the age of thirty-two. She has a “weak heart”, a wooden leg, and Phd in philosophy. When Hulga meets the salesman, she decides to demonstrate her superiority to seduce him, however at the end he betrays her and stole her wooden leg (Bjerre,2017, p.9). Additionally, grotesque characters are also used to critique the social and cultural values that exist in Southern society. These characters often represent the violent directions of the society.

Family dysfunction in Southern gothic stories explore the dark dysfunction within families, such as disbelief and mental illness. These themes are used to explore the concept of the “Southern Family” and the tension to maintain appearances and traditions. Moreover, family dysfunction is portrayed in Southern literature in many ways such: the generational conflict; many southern novels explore the pressure that exists between different generations within a family. These conflicts are often rooted in differences in social and cultural values, and they are used to explore the changing nature of the Southern family over time. Southern writers often use family dysfunction to explore the larger social issues such as race, class, and gender. Furthermore, many southern writers drew on their own experiences of family life to create stories that explore the relationship between the individual and his/ her parents. Both O’Connor and the character Hulga Hopewell have had their names changed. O’Connor was originally baptized “Mary Flannery”, and when she first dropped the Mary, her friends and family continued to call her Mary Flannery; similarly, Mrs. Hopewell continues to call her daughter Joy even after she has had her name changed to Hulga (Reed, 1990, P.11).

Religious hypocrisy in which the stories often criticize the hypocrisy of religious institutions and the attitudes of the Southern community. This theme is used to explore the conflict between traditional values and individual freedom. One reason that allowed Southern writers to write and mention about religious hypocrisy is the deep connection to Christianity and religion on the one hand, but on the other hand the actions of some individuals who do not stand with the teachings of religion and serve their needs what led to moral conflict and hypocrisy.

Overall, Southern gothic stories often explore the dark and unsettling aspects of human nature, while also struggling with the complex history and culture of the American South.

1.2.2. Religion, Its Presentation and Importance in American Literature

Religion and literature have played important roles in American culture since its outset (Roberts, 1998, p.62). Throughout history, religion has been a source of inspiration for many American writers, and literature has helped to shape the folk’s religious identity. Religion played a significant role in shaping the literary traditions of various cultures and societies (Halliwell, 2007, p.215).

In the 17th century, many American writers were puritans, such as Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Mary Rowlandson (1637-1711) who wrote about their religious experiences and beliefs (Gray, 2011, p.72). They also believed that literature should serve a religious purpose, to educate and instruct readers on how to live a pious life (Cofer, 2014, p.57). Their writings often focused “on their diaspora that following out the biblical types and tell the tale of God’s that he will reveal it in history” (Ruland&Bradbury, 2016, p.8). Moreover, they often explored the concept of predestination and the struggle between good and evil, and the role of God In everyday life (ibid).

Furthermore, in the 19th century, appeared a religious revolution called the Second Great Awakening that had brought a new sense to American society where writers wrote about religion and adopted it as a central theme. This religious revival inspired countless writers including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau to explore personal salvation, spiritual fulfillment, and social reform. For instance, many writers who were part of this movement saw their writings as a means of spreading their religious beliefs as in the novel "*Moby Dick*"(1851) where Melville expressed various religious ideas and themes, including the concept of God, the nature of evil, and the relationship between man and the divine. In addition to, this revolution had brought a new sense to American society what led many writers began to challenge the traditional religious hierarchies by advise people to rely on their own personal experiences and intuition (Strokes, 2014, P.22).

Religion has also been an important theme in American fiction, in the 20th century, writers such as Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy explored religious themes in their works and they often depict the struggles of individuals to find meaning and purpose in a world that seems chaotic and meaningless, for example in O'Connor's resistance to the traditional model of religious allegory is grounded in her realism of the Real-in the gothic matrix of violence and objection that abuts the possibility of the and objection that abuts the possibility of the "realistically" impossible (Street & Crow,2016,p.140). Religion has been a complex theme in America literature, because it reflects the beliefs and experiences of American people throughout history and also shape their cultural identity.

1.2.2.1. Religion and Literature before WWII

Before WWII, the dominant religious tradition in America was Christianity, particularly Protestantism (Layman, 1994, p.389). Religion had played significant role in American society. Accordingly, it was the common theme in literature when American writers engaged and explored the religious theme and ideas in their works. Thus, religion and Literature in American were closely related (Vransky, 2021, p.325).

Before the Second World War, religion played a more dominant and central role in American literature. Many writers, both religious and non-religious, explored religious themes and ideas in their works when religion was often a subject of exploration and criticism(Warner,1950,p.132).Moreover, many American writers, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), Herman Melville(1819-1891), and Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) explored religious themes in their works (Ghasemi &Abbasi,2009,p.10).

Religion also played a role in the formation of American literary movements, such as the transcendentalists; a group of writers and thinkers who believed in the power of individual soul, and who rejected the traditional religious institutions in favor of a more individualized worship(Roberts,2009,p.165). Additionally, other writers recognized the dark side of Christianity before the second world war include Mark Twain(1835-1910), who criticized religious hypocrisy and the abuse of power in his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) (Kallin,2007,p.4). when Twain exposed characters that are well-intentioned Christians, but their religion has deceived them into thinking that slavery is perfectly acceptable and that slaves are something less than people (Kallin,2007, p.8).

1.2.2.2. Religion and Literature after WWII

After the Second World War, there was a significant shift in religion and literature because writers started to neglect exploring the traditional religious beliefs and practices that affect their style and themes in writing (Bloom, 2006, p.118). For instance, the rise of secularism and individualism in American society allowed writers to explore and focus on the new modes of religion and moral values (Ahmad, 2015, p.27).

Many writers began to probe religious themes in their works, reflecting their interests in spirituality and religion in the post-war period (Martin, 2013, p.116). One major movement in this regard was the rise of a group of writers who rejected traditional American values and adopted alternative beliefs like Buddhism and Hinduism (Gray, 2014, p.33).

At the same time, there was a revival of Christian literature, with writers like Flannery O'Connor, Thomas Merton(1915-1968) and Walker Percy(1916-1990) who wrote about faith and redemption in their works (Vanspanckere,1926,p.25). These writers often struggled with the secular world they live in and reflect the complexities of the post-war. For example, O'Connor's own religious outlook did not cloud her vision of the modern south; she observed that as it left its religious traditions behind, it became increasingly secular (Norman,1977,P.2). Moreover, the growing of secularization and the decrease of church attendance during this period, led to other alternative beliefs as atheist or agnostic (Hogle, 2002, p.116).

Additionally, the appearance of Black writers who critique the role of Christianity, one example of this is the use of biblical passages to support the institution of slavery in the United States (Kallin, 2007, P.4). These writers, among others, helped to shape the religious landscape of postwar America through their thought-provoking and influential works.

1.3. Flannery O'Connor and her Religious Gothicism

Flannery O'Connor(1925-1964) was an American author known for her unique writing style that mixed Southern Gothic with a religious view(Chaplin,2007,p.31).O'Connor's religious faith, which is Catholicism, played a significant role in her writing and was a key element in her distinctive style(Hobson,2006,p.179).

O'Connor's writing has been described as "Religious Gothicism" because she combined the Gothic elements with her religious beliefs (Crow,2003,p.356).Her stories like Poe's gothic often featured haunted or decaying settings, strange or grotesque characters, and dark, unsettling themes (Murphy,2009,p.194).However, for O'Connor, the relationship between her fiction and the Bible is an analogical one, revealing the link between the known world and the supernatural reality embodied in Christ's incarnation, his redemptive death, and his resurrection (Bloom, 2009, p.56).

O'Connor's stories often expressed grotesque characters and situations that reflected the darker side of human nature, but her religious belief was always at the centre of her works that gave a sense of redemption. As Frederick J. Hoffman has written, "Her major subjects are the struggle of redemption, the search of Jesus, and the meaning of Prophecy" (Bloom,2009,p.119). Furthermore, Many of her characters were struggling with moral and spiritual dilemmas, and O'Connor used her writing to explore these issues in a profound and thought-provoking way (Murphy, 2009, p.194).

Shortly, O'Connor's work had a profound influence on American literature and continues to be widely read and studied today. Her unique style that she used, "Religious Gothicism", has inspired countless writers to critique and shape a view about American South society (Mackay, 2009, p.113).

1.3.1. Immoral Embodiment of Religion in The Themes of O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor's works often explore the theme of religion in the American South and the ways in which it can be embodied in immoral or hypocritical ways. O'Connor was a devout catholic, but she was criticizing the religious hypocrisy she saw around her (Rollyson Boswell, 2008, p.433).

O'Connor is know for her exploration of the darker aspects of human nature and the role of religion in the American South (Bjerre, 2017, p.11). Many of her stories feature characters who claim to be religious but who act in ways that are clearly immoral or hypocritical (Ruland & Bradburry, 2016, p.9). These characters often embody a misguided understanding of religious faith that O'Connor seems to be criticizing. For example, in "*A Good Man is Hard to Find*" (1953), the grandmother is a devout Christian (Stockes, 2014, p.133). However, her actions throughout the story reveal that she is selfish, manipulative, racist, and also responsible for her family's death (Edubirdie,2023).

In this and other stories, O'Connor suggests that religion can be mask for people. Moreover, she does not criticize the religious belief itself, but she does suggest that true faith requires more than simply act like pious or attend a church (Kallin, 2007, p.10). Instead, she suggests that faith is how to engage and treat others in a compassionate, empathetic way (Ghasemi, 2009, p.4). O'Connor's works examine the ways in which religion can both inspire and corrupt human behavior. By portraying religious notion, she challenges readers to think critically about their own belief and morals.

1.3.2. Embodiment of Religion in The Characters of O'Connor

Religion was a central theme in much of O'Connor's works, and her characters often embodied different aspects of religion; whether secular or religious, her most grotesque and unattractive characters are those who are "obsessed by religious fervor, inflicted with Bible Belt literalism in its most virulent, uncontrolled, and hysterical form (Griffin,1970,p.42).

In addition, O'Connor's characters often exhibit a profound and unwavering belief in their religious convictions (Cofer, 2014, p. 50). Their faith is not superficial but is deeply ingrained in their identity and shapes their actions and decisions, her fiction characters frequently grapple with moral dilemmas and spiritual crises (Cofer, 2014, p.62). They confront the tension between their religious beliefs and the flawed nature of the world around them. These struggles often lead to moments of revelation and transformation. As well as O'Connor's characters frequently embody the concept of sin and the possibility of redemption (Cofer, 2014, p.42). They are flawed individuals who often engage in morally questionable actions. However, O'Connor presents opportunities for grace and redemption, emphasizing the transformative power of religious faith (Cofer, 2014, p.50).

Moreover, O'Connor employs religious symbolism to convey deeper meaning in her characters. Symbolic elements such as crosses, baptism, or religious rituals serve as

metaphors for spiritual realities, emphasizing the underlying religious themes and the transformative power of faith (Stokes, 2014, p.197). Her exploration of religion often incorporates dark humor, she presents characters who may appear to be religious on the surface but possess hypocritical or misguided beliefs (Stokes, 2014, p.147). Through satire and irony, O'Connor challenges conventional religious attitudes and highlights the complexities of faith.

In summary, religion in O'Connor's characters reflects a profound engagement with questions of morality, sin, redemption, and the transformative power of religious faith. Her works provide a thought-provoking examination of the human condition and the role of religion in navigating the complexities of life.

1.3.3. The Deteriorating Religious Values: Results on the Individual Psyche and Behaviour

The concept of deteriorating religious belief and its impact on the individual psyche is a complex and multifaceted topic. When an individual's religious beliefs begin to deteriorate or weaken, it can have various effects on their psychological well-being and worldview.

Religion often provides individuals with a sense of meaning, purpose, and guidance in life. When religious beliefs deteriorate, individuals may experience a loss of the framework that gave their lives structure and direction (Crow&Street, 2016, p.408). This can lead to feelings of emptiness, confusion, and a lack of purpose. Furthermore, religion often offers comfort and answers to existential questions, such as the meaning of life, the nature of suffering, and the afterlife (Warner, 1950, p.143). When religious beliefs deteriorate, individuals may face increased existential anxiety as they grapple with these questions without the support of their previous religious framework. Also, religion often provides a moral compass and a set of ethical guidelines for believers (Cofer, 2014, p.67). When religious beliefs deteriorate, individuals may experience moral and ethical dilemmas as they navigate their actions and decisions without the certainty and guidance that religion once provided. This can lead to a sense of moral confusion and internal conflict (Cofer, 2014, p.118).

Additionally, religion often provides a sense of community and belonging. When religious beliefs deteriorate, individuals may experience a loss of connection with their religious community, which can result in feelings of isolation and a loss of identity. This can be particularly challenging if an individual's social network and support system were primarily based on their religious affiliation. As a result, deteriorating religious beliefs can lead to psychological distress, including feelings of grief, loss, and cognitive dissonance. The process of questioning and potentially rejecting deeply ingrained religious beliefs can be emotionally challenging and may require individuals to develop new coping mechanisms to navigate this transition.

Overall, the impact of deteriorating religious belief on the individual psyche can vary widely depending on the individual's personal circumstances, cultural background; and the specific reasons behind the erosion of their religious beliefs. Some individuals may find alternative sources of meaning and purpose, while others may struggle with the absence of religious belief. Seeking support from mental health professionals, engaging in personal

reflection, and exploring alternative frameworks for meaning can be helpful for individuals navigating this complex process.

Conclusion

To sum up, the Second World War had changed American society and human life into disarray. The twentieth century was the most important era in the American universe because it converted the human ideas and thoughts about life. As a result, the impact of WW II on American society led to the emergence of new literary genre which is Southern Gothic where writers start to critique in a daft way shaping their views on society.

Many writers began to question the traditional values and beliefs of American society to examine the darker aspects of human nature. Then, the most prominent theme that dominated the Southern Gothic works is religion where writers depict and express the American individual in relation to her/his moral values.

***Chapter Two:
Marxism and the Notion of
Commodity and Exchange value***

Introduction

This chapter reflects slightly on the principles and the key concepts of the Marxism theory. Before, the world had controlled by the capitalists power until the mid of the 19th century when the world started to change its view about capitalism. One of the leaders that contributed to this change is Karl Marx (1818-1883) who adopted Marxism in order to criticize and analyze the ideology of capitalism.

Marx came to show that the capitalism was a fundamentally flawed economic system that led to inequality, exploitation, and alienation where he claimed that capitalism creates a class-based society in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. He also pointed out that the pursuit of profit under capitalism leads to the exploitation of workers, who are paid wages that are lower than the value of the goods they produce. In Short, analyzing and comprehending a text from a Marxist perspective involves examining the economic and social relations that guide readers and critics to really understand the capitalist ideology.

2.1. Marxist ideology origins and motifs

Marxist ideology originated from the work of the German philosopher Karl Marx in the mid19th century. He developed his ideas in response to the economic and social conditions of his time, including the growth of capitalism and the exploitation of the working class.

Marxist ideology is based on several key concepts that help to explain the principles of the theory itself. According to Marxist theory, the ruling class (bourgeoisie) in any society exploits the working class, extracting their rights and keeping them in a state of subjection; as Marx (1844) claimed that if the wealth of society declined the only who going to suffer is the working class (p.22). Moreover, Marx and Engels (1948) stated that the ideology of Marxism also emphasize the importance of collective action where the proletariats revolt against the bourgeoisie to establish a communist society based on principles of equality and justice (p.30).

Marxism also played an important role in understanding the nature of capitalist society by identifying the key motifs such: class struggle, alienation, and means of production.

Firstly, class struggle, according to Marxism, society is divided into different social classes based on their relationship to the means of production; in capitalist society, there are two main classes: the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class) and the proletariat (the working class). The bourgeoisie owns the means of production, while the proletariat sells their labor power to the bourgeoisie in exchange for wages. Marx (1982) integrated that this fundamental division leads to a constant conflict or struggle between the two classes, as the bourgeoisie seeks to extract the proletariat's exertion also the proletariat seeks to improve their working conditions and wages (p.35). Secondly, Alienation, Marx observed that workers are alienated from their work, from the products, from their fellow workers and even from themselves and this because of the capitalist system which treats the work as a commodity to be bought and sold, rather than a meaningful activity to benefit from it. As a result, workers are forced to work in dehumanizing jobs, and produce goods that they will never own or use as Parker wrote:

“Today, we do not make our own Nikes or Levis, build our houses or apartments. Instead, people from around the world play a role in making those products, and therefore, they feel alienated from their labor” (2015, p.225). Lastly, Marx noted: “Capitalism is tied to the private ownership of the means of production, which allows private appropriation of produced commodities, thus private appropriation of surplus value , and thus private accumulation of capital”(1982, p.57). This creates a fundamental conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Instead, Marx believed that the means of production should be owned collectively by the working class in order to eliminate the exploitation of the capitalist system.

Overall, Marxist ideology has had a significant impact on economic and social thought throughout the world, and continues to be influential in many countries.

2.1.1. Marxism and Class Conflict

The appearance of social classes can be traced back to the earliest human societies, where people began to specialize in certain tasks and develop different skills, However, “ in France , Marx discovered the organized working class, in England, Engels discovered developed capitalism and a class struggle obeying its own laws and ignoring philosophy and philosophers” (Althusser,1965/2005, p.81).

As these societies grew, a hierarchy system of social classes emerged. One of these systems that adopt the concept of classes is Capitalism where the social classes are defined by individual’s relationship to the means of production. However, the appearance of the Marxism ideology that shows how the capitalist agenda works, everything had changed.

According to Marx, society is divided into different social classes based on their relationship to the means of production, and other resources. The two main classes in capitalist societies are the bourgeoisie, who own and control the resources, and the proletariat, who sell their work to the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is characterized by exploitation what led to the creation of class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (1844/1988 p.207).

Marxism argues that this class conflict is the force that changes history as the struggle between different classes that shape the society. For instance, in Capitalist societies, class conflict is based on the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Marxist critics also emphasize how the capitalist ideology immortalize the class conflict in a way that the ruling class uses their control over education, media, and other institutions to shape their beliefs and their power influence. However, Marxism sees that the resolution of class conflict as essential for the establishment of society.

In Conclusion, Marx (2007) sees that class conflict as an attendant feature of capitalist societies, and believes that the only way to overcome this conflict is through a revolutionary struggle to establish a socialist system in which the means of production are owned and controlled by the working class(p.216).

2.1.2. Economic Determinism

In Marxism, economic determinism is a concept which holds that the economic system of a society is the primacy determinant of its social and historical development. This means that the economic system of a society determines the way in which that society is organized and how it develops over time.

The concept of economic determinism can be traced back to the works of Karl Marx who developed a materialist perspective when he understood that the world was made up of natural, physical things, such food and shelter rather than idealistic or spiritual as Plato believed (Parker, 2015, p. 221).

Critics of Marxism argue that economic determinism oversimplifies the complexity of social relations by reducing everything to economic factors. They argue that it neglects the role of individual agency, cultural diversity, and the impact of non-economic factors on social change. Nevertheless, economic determinism remains a central tenet of Marxist analysis and a key point of departure for understanding historical and contemporary social systems from a Marxist perspective. Moreover, Marx argued that each social mode of production produces the material conditions of its reproduction that is ideology (which gathers all the political, law and cultural spheres). Thus, ideology permits the mode of production to reproduce itself, Marx did not believe that the same economic rules governed all of history, but that each new era brought with it new economic factors (Canete, 2020, 2:40).

In Conclusion, economic determinism is a central concept in Marxist theory, which holds that the economic system of a society is the primary factor of its social and historical development.

2.1.3. Bourgeoisie and Proletariat

The Bourgeoisie and the proletariat are one of the central concepts in Marxism. The bourgeoisie and proletariat are two different social classes that emerged during the industrial revolution (Aristocracy/ working class). Besides, the bourgeoisie are the capitalist class who own and control the means of production, while the proletariats are the working class people who sell their efforts to the bourgeoisie for a wage.

For Marx the division of labor where people joined together to produce food, shelter, and clothing led to different classes with competing interests (Parker, 2015, p.221). According to Marx, the bourgeoisie's control over the means of production gives them the power to exploit the labor of the proletariat. Thus, the latter are forced to work for wages in order to survive (ibid).

Furthermore, the bourgeoisie refers to the capitalist class who own and control the production. This includes factories, land, and other resources that are used to produce goods. The bourgeoisie also seek to increase their wealth by exploiting the labor of the proletariat. The Proletariat, on the other hand, refers to the working class people who sell their talents to the bourgeoisie for a wage. They do not own the raw materials and are as a result dependent on the bourgeoisie for their livelihood. According to Marx, the proletariats are exploited by the bourgeoisie, by keeping their wages low in order to maximize their profits.

Consequently, this exploitation would lead to class struggle, as Weber wrote between creditor and debtor classes, landlords and landless (2005), and then to a proletarian revolution as Lenin claimed where the proletariat would overthrow the bourgeoisie to establish a classless society and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible (2014,p.60).

In conclusion, the concepts of bourgeoisie and proletariat are central to Marxism theory. While Marxist theory has been criticized the capitalist societies, it reveals a clear understanding to social and economic inequality.

2.2. Subject and Subjectivity

The terms subject and subjectivity sometimes confuse the reader when the two concepts are put in a meaning that is critical. In Marxist theory, the subject and subjectivity refer to the understanding of human beings within the social and economic relations (Parker, 2015, p.237).

The subject refers to individuals or groups who participate in social and historical processes. However, Althusser uses the term subject to refer to having less power, as in being subject to the law or subject to a queen or king, or subject to a dominant ideology (ibid). In addition, Marxism emphasizes that individuals do not exist in isolation but are interconnected with a social structure. For instance, the working class in Marxism is often seen as the subject of historical change. Marx argued that the working class, due to their role in the capitalist system, they started to have a potential to establish a classless society.

Subjectivity, on the other hand, refers to people's thoughts, feelings, and self-awareness as they interact with society. Marxism recognizes that subjectivity is shaped by the social dominant ideas and values, which are often controlled by the ruling class, for example, "capital takes on a life of its own because the subjectivity of workers becomes subsumed by abstract labor. Neither the workers nor any other social force can therefore be considered subjects of liberation (Hudis, 2012, p.17).

Overall, the subject and subjectivity in Marxism are about understanding how individuals are both influenced in shaping their social environment. It emphasizes that our thoughts and actions are not separate from the society we live in, but are connected.

2.2.1. Ideology and Interpellation

Ideology and interpellation are central concepts in Marxist theory, which help to analyze and understand the relationship between individuals and society.

The term ideology refers to a set of an unconscious, belief, values, and assumptions (Parker, 2015, p.231). As Althusser's sense, he explained that human being cannot express his own ideologies; because they are unconscious what led most of us misunderstand the world around us and act the ways that we act (ibid). Moreover, ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (Althusser, 1970, p.36). For example, a flag is a material, pattern of colors, and geometrical shapes, but for citizens is a symbol of patriotism (Hanussek, 2021, 1:06).

Interpellation, on the other hand, was an idea introduced by Althusser (1918-1990) to explain the way in which ideas get into our heads and have an effect on our lives, so much so that cultural ideas have such a hold on us that we believe they are our own (Parker, 2015, p.234). In addition, it refers also to the process through which individuals are hailed or called into subjectivity by ideological apparatuses; such schools, media, churches, and entertainment culture and so forth (ibid).

To sum up, ideology and interpellation refer to the dominant set of ideas and beliefs that serve the upper system through which individuals are called or hailed into specific subject positions.

2.2.2. Agency and Relative Autonomy

In Marxism, the concepts of Agency and relative autonomy play important roles in understanding the dynamics of social change and the relationship between individuals and social structures.

Agency refers to the ability of individuals and groups to shape and change their social conditions (Parker, 2015, p.235). Marxists believe that individuals are not passive recipients of their circumstances. Instead, they have the capacity to act and transform the social order, for example, the working class who are seen as having potential to overthrow the capitalist system (Parker, 2015, p.237).

Relative autonomy, on the other hand, refers to the idea that individuals and social groups have a certain degree of independence or freedom (Parker, 2015, p.235). Moreover, relative autonomy recognizes that individuals and groups can exercise agency and pursue their own interests.

In summary, agency and relative autonomy are essential components of Marxism analysis. However, individuals are not entirely free what led Marxism to recognize the capacity of individuals to act within a strict structure.

2.2.3. False Consciousness

False consciousness, as the opposite of relative autonomy, is a concept in Marxism that refers to a state in which individuals are unaware of their own exploitation (Parker, 2015, p.238). Also, as Meyerson noted that the ruling class in society, which controls the means of production, also controls the dominant ideology and shapes the world view of the working class (2011, p. 5).

Furthermore, the ruling class uses their power to promote beliefs and attitudes that serve their own interests. However, Marxists argue that through developing class consciousness, which is awareness of their interests and against the oppressive ideology of capitalism, the working class can break easily from false consciousness (Meyerson, 2011; p. 6).

False consciousness sheds light on the complex relationship between ideology, power, and class struggle. It highlights how the ruling class manipulates their domination to maintain control of the working class.

2.3. Alienation and Commodification

Marxism analyzes the impact of capitalism on society, by highlighting the two significant concepts: alienation and commodification.

Alienation refers to the feeling of being disconnected or separated from the products of their labor, from the process of production, and even from our own human nature. It occurs because in a capitalist society, workers are treated as tools and their labor is used to make profits for the owners (Erickson, 1999, p.6). For instance, in precapitalist times, people made their own clothes, producing goods for the market, saw the process through from beginning to end and could see their completed product without feeling alienated. However, factory

workers work on only one small part of a product and let it alone to use it by the upper class (Parker, 2015, p.223).

Commodification, on the other hand, is a process of turning things, including people, into commodities that can be bought and sold in the market (Parker, 2015, p.224). In capitalism, everything is commodified, even workers because they let themselves sold and bought in exchange for a wage. In addition, Marxist theory often suppose that any valued object is commodity, but it has to be bought and sold, for example, a mountain is not a commodity unless you market it and sell it for someone to look at it or hike on it (ibid).

In conclusion, alienation and commodification are central concepts in Marxism that illuminate the dehumanizing effects of capitalism where they force individuals to work and turn them into objects.

2.3.1. Alienation of Labor

Alienation of labor refers to how workers feel separated and disconnected from their own work and the things they produce.

Under capitalism, workers do not own the means of production like factories or tools; they work for capitalists who own the resources. As a result, workers do not have control over what they make and this lack of control leads to four types of alienation. First, alienation from the product means that workers do not own or benefit from what they produce and they do not recognize their own work in the material outcome of their labor what led them feel alienated to the products they produce (Ollman,1996, p.142). Second, alienation from the process refers to a situation where individuals feel disconnected from the activities that involved in their work (Parker, 2015, P. 224). Moreover, it occurs when people lack control over processes used in their work environment (Heerikhuizen, 2015, 3:00). Third, alienation from fellow workers which capitalism promotes competition and workers see each other as competitor instead of cooperating what caused then to weaken solidarity among workers (Ollman, 1996, p. 149). Last, alienation from themselves, in a capitalist system workers are often treated as commodities and are separated from the products of their labor. This separation leads to a sense of disconnection and workers may feel like cogs in a machine, repeating tasks without a purpose (Heerikhuizen, 2015, 5:15).

To overcome alienation from a society, the work would be meaningful, fulfilling, and enable individuals to develop their own potential.

2.3.2. Use Value, Exchange Value and Sign Exchange Value

Use value, exchange value, and sign exchange value are concepts used to analyze the nature of commodities within capitalist societies.

Use value refers to the practical usefulness of a commodity. It is determined by the specific characteristics of the item that satisfy the needs or desires of the human being (Parker, 2015, p. 224). For example, a pair of shoes has a value because it covers the feet. Exchange value, in contrast, refers to the relationship between commodities that allows them to be exchanged or traded in the market (ibid). For instance, a given commodity is a quarter of wheat exchanged for silk or gold. In short, it is exchanged for other commodities in the most diverse proportions (Marx, 1982, p. 127).

Furthermore, sign exchange value is a concept introduced by Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007); it refers to the symbolic values that commodities acquire in a consumer society. It goes beyond the use and exchange values. For example, a luxury handbag may have a high sign exchange value because it indicates prestige or remembrance.

In summary, use value relates to the usefulness of a commodity, exchange value represents the relationship between objects that sell on the market, and sign exchange value emphasizes the symbolic meaning of the commodity.

2.3.3. Commodity Fetishism

Commodity fetishism is a concept in Marxist theory that refers to the orientation of social relationship in capitalist societies where the value of commodities is seen as a powerful object, rather than the usefulness product (Perlman, 1968, p.7).

In a capitalist society, people often perceive commodities as having a value of power, as if they possess special qualities. This perception can lead to a kind of obsession or worship of commodities, where their exchange value becomes more important than their actual usefulness of the product as Perlman noted,

The worker sells his commodity on the labor market in the form of value, and in exchange for a given amount of hid commodity, labor power, He receives a given sum of value, namely money, which he in turn exchanges for another sum of value, namely consumer goods (1968, p. 27).

As a result, people start treating commodities as they have value. They become fixated on the price, brand, or market value of a product, rather than considering the labor conditions that involved in the making of product (Perlman, 1968, p. 25). Through my interpretation of O'Connor's depiction of religion as a commodity, the character of the Misfit, for example, claims a religious affiliation but demonstrates a lack of genuine understanding or commitment to its principles. This viewpoint suggests that the story highlights the dangers of using religion as a mere façade or a means to gain social acceptance or moral superiority.

Overall, commodity fetishism is a central concept in Marxism that highlights how capitalism deform our understanding of value and make us perceive commodities as inherent work, while hiding the exploitative conditions under which they are produced.

Conclusion

To conclude, the emergence of the working class and class struggle was due to economic prosperity that contributed to creating a class division in a society. As a consequence, a Marxist theory which inspired by Karl Marx appeared to criticize the oppressive ideology through analyzing a literary text.

The purpose of Marxism in analyzing a literary text is to examine the social, economic, and political elements reflected in the text and understand how they relate to class struggle. By analyzing the text through a Marxist lens, scholars aim to reveal the ways in which the text reinforces the capitalist or oppressive systems, and how it represents class conflict, exploitation, and alienation.

Chapter Three
A Commodification of Feeling and
A Senselessness to the Word of God

Introduction

This chapter deals with the concept of materialism and religion in Flannery O'Connor's short stories "*A Good Man is Hard to Find*" (1953) and "*Good Country People*" (1955). They address the ways in which O'Connor criticizes characters in relations to their social values. This chapter is an interpretation of Marxist theory and the aspect of commodity and its influence on social and political lives. In it two corpora are analyzed to accentuate the influence of material culture on feelings and logic.

These selected stories are rooted in the religious tradition; a mode of writing that O'Connor intertwined with her sarcastic and didactic tone of the American South. Hence, in her Gothicism, she devises in constricting a familiar setting and a sedate lifestyle that embed beneath them, a horrific reality from that time.

3.1. Synopses of "*Good Country People*" and "*A Good Man is Hard to Find*"

"*Good Country People*" is a short story by Flannery O'Connor about a young woman named Joy Hopewell, who has a wooden leg due to a childhood accident. Joy changed her name to Hulga and considers herself an atheist and superior to others. She lives on a farm with her mother, Mrs. Hopewell. One day, a Bible salesman nicknamed Manley Pointer comes to their farm and Hulga becomes intrigued by him, attracted to his simplicity. However, Manley turns out to be manipulative till when he tricks her and steals her artificial leg.

"*A Good Man is Hard to Find*" is also a short story written by the same author, about a family on a road trip that takes a tragic turn. The story revolves around a grandmother who insists on her family to visit an old place. Along the way, she shares stories of an escaped criminal "The Misfit". After they had a hunting accident, the Misfit and his companions find the family. Despite the grandmother's request, the Misfit kills her and her family.

3.2. Hulga's Intellectual Benediction

Post-war American literature saw the emergence of several influential writers who explored the theme of intellectual struggle in their works. Besides, these writers reflected the cultural and social changes that occurred in the United States after World War II in order to explore the nature of knowledge and the challenges of intellectual engagement.

In "*Good Country People*" by Flannery O'Connor, the main character, Joy is described as unaffectionate, educated girl who chooses philosophy as a discipline to question and analyze the fundamental nature of existence, knowledge, values, and reality in life. In addition, Joy changed her name to Hulga as an act of rebellion against her mother and society because she felt that the name Hulga will bring the identity that she looked for which is to correspond her physical disability, her intellectual pursuits, and her desire for connection and meaning. Moreover, Hulga faces an intellectual struggle, she sees herself as intellectually superior to others, but as the story progresses, her intellectualism is revealed to be superficiality. For instance, Hulga and her mother in the story shaped an intellectual struggle, Hulga is educated and hold more intellectual worldview, while her mother represents a more simplicity "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” (O’Connor, p.4). This clash of intellectual ideology between mother and daughter creates a disconnected relationship between them. Also, another intellectual struggle can be observed between Hulga and Mrs. Freeman. Mrs. Freeman, the family’s resident represents a nosy, gossip woman. Hulga, on the other hand, with her education and philosophical beliefs, considers herself intellectually superior to Mrs. Freeman. This contrast leads to a sense of disrespect between them. After a period of time she encounters a Bible salesman named Manley Pointer, and she was kind of trusted him because she believed that he is naïve. However, he started to manipulate and deceive her. Hulga, through this experience, realizes that her superior intellectualism did not protect her from being deceived, as her mother said: “Hulga was brilliant but she didn’t have a grain of sense” (O’Connor, p.5). Thus, she was forced to reevaluate her beliefs about herself and other.

Flannery O’Connor’s decision to write about characters who were intellectually or religiously opposite to her reflects her artistic vision and her exploration of human nature to portray a different range of perspectives; it allows her to delve into the complexities of human being .For instance, Through the character, Hulga, O’Connor attacked those who thought themselves as intellectually superior and connected them in arrogance and selfishness (Guia, 2018, p.13). In short, the story as a critique of intellectual arrogance and the dangers of overestimating one’s own intelligence. Hulga’s downfall serves as a cautionary talz, highlighting the limitations and vulnerabilities that exist even for those who consider themselves intellectually superior. I saw also that the story explores the tension between Hulga’s intellectual nihilism and Manley Pointer’s religious beliefs. This intellectual struggle can be seen as a representation of the broader clash between reason and faith, raising questions about the role of belief systems in one’s intellectual and emotional life, the exploration of the limitations of intellectual understanding when it comes to human nature. Hulga’s intellectual prowess does not protect her from being deceived or manipulated by Manley Pointer, suggesting that there are aspects of human experience that go beyond mere intellectual comprehension. Additionally, from my perspective, Hulga’s reliance on her intelligence blinds her to the manipulations of others, leaving her exposed to betrayal and emotional turmoil. This viewpoint emphasizes the need for intellectual individuals to recognize their own vulnerabilities and consider the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of life; Hulga’s intellectual struggle can be interpreted as a search for meaning and purpose in life. Her nihilistic worldview and rejection of traditional values represent an attempt to grapple with existential questions.

3.3. Governed by Materialistic Wealth

In “*Good Country People*”, both economic and spirituality play significant roles in shaping people’s lives and culture. In particular religion, as Guia noted, what is unique about O’Connor’s writing is her particular approach. She is not what would be expected of a traditional Christian writer, but someone whose deep theological knowledge allowed her to be critical with how religion and its practice were understood (2018, p.18).

Economic control influences individuals by determining their material and social status, opportunities and lifestyles. For instance, Hulga, Mrs. Hopewell's daughter, is highly educated but lives on her mother's farm due to physical disability. As a consequence, her economic situation limits her opportunities and independence rather than pursuing her academic interests and career in rural environment.

Religion and spirituality, on the other hand, influence people's lives through their beliefs, values, and morals. In the story, characters' religious beliefs affect their behavior with others. For example, Mrs. Hopewell's Christian faith shapes her perspective on morality and influences her relationships with those around her. Despite she is Christian believer, but her actions with others reveal a lack of true compassion and understanding.

Moreover, religious beliefs and practices can influence economic circumstances. For instance, Mrs. Hopewell, who is more wealthy, is portrayed as a devout Christian, while the poorer Freeman family is described as a superficial humans to religion.

Furthermore, economic factors can be used to exploit individual's religious beliefs for personal gain; Pointer, sold Bibles could be a means to earn money or deception and manipulation as he did to prey on Hulga loneliness and manipulate her presenting himself as a religious person to take advantage of her. In addition, materialism, in the story, influences the portrayal of religion; with the Freemans who are portrayed as more materialistic, have a superficial relation to religion; they attend church for social reasons rather than faith.

Overall, the story suggests that both economic factors and religion impact people's lives and culture in different ways. Economic control can shape material conditions and social structures, while religion can shape individual's beliefs and morals.

3.4. Enslaved to Survive

Literature in the post-war era of American history often examined the concept of exploitation. It explored various forms of exploitation, including economic and social shedding light on the consequences of such exploitation on individuals and society as a whole. In the story "*Good Country People*", the concept of subjugation is explored through various relationships and power dynamics to critique the social norms and power imbalance that can lead to the subjugation of individuals.

Hulga's diminished power when she is with Manley Pointer is a result of her emotional vulnerability due to her physical disability. Manley Pointer manipulates her vulnerability by appealing to her desire for connection, creating an imagination of understanding and acceptance. For that reason, Hulga's emotional vulnerability makes her more liable to manipulation and undermines her sense of power. In addition, Manley Pointer presents himself as a naïve and innocent country boy, which allows Hulga to feel intellectually superior. However, it becomes apparent that he is not as simple-minded as he appears. He clearly manipulates Hulga's intellectual arrogance and takes advantage of her "If you want me, here I am-like I said, you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!"(O'Connor, p.16).

As well as, Pointer presents himself as an innocent and simple-minded individual "I know I'm not smart...but I think that if you don't believe in something, you'll fall for anything" (O'Connor, p.7).However, as the story progresses, his true manipulative nature is exposed. This manifestation undermines the trust and authority he initially held, making him less

powerful. Also, in the end of the story, pointer removes his artificial leg, revealing his own vulnerability and hidden secrets. As a cause of, this act diminishes his power as it shows that he has been hiding his true self, undermining his authority and control.

Furthermore, Mrs. Hopewell can be seen as a character who is portrayed as having less power within the story. Mrs. Hopewell lacks a deep understanding of her daughter, Hulga; she underestimates Hulga's intellectual abilities and dismisses her academic achievements "You could not say, "My daughter is a philosopher". That was something that had ended with the Greeks and Romans" (O'Connor, p. 6). Due to the fact, this limited understanding and belittlement of Hulga's intelligence diminish Mrs. Hopewell's power and influence over her daughter. Besides, Mrs. Hopewell's attempts to shape Hulga's life and relationships are largely unsuccessful. She cannot control Hulga's choices or prevent her from pursuing her own path. Consequently, thick lack of control over her daughter's actions further weakens Mrs. Hopewell's power and authority within the story.

Additionally, the Freeman's daughters, Glynese and Carramae, are minor characters who can be compared to Hulga in a few aspects. For instance, Hulga features from Glynese and Carramae due to her intellectual bravery and academic achievements. While the daughters of the Freemans are depicted as having limited education. As a result, Hulga's intellectual superiority sets her apart from Freeman sisters. Moreover, Hulga's social status; she comes from a more wealthy background compared to the freeman sisters, who are portrayed as belonging to a lower social class. Therefore, this contrasting social status of Hulga and the Freeman sisters highlight the differences in their life experiences.

In summary, "*Good Country People*" characters face subjugation within their social and economic realities. This examination of their struggles sheds light on individuals that are often forced by social and economic circumstances.

3.5. Defamiliarized Divinity

Religious alienation in American literature of the post-war era reflected a sense of disillusionment and questioning of traditional religious beliefs. Many authors began to explore themes of existentialism, the loss of faith, and the search for meaning in a seemingly chaotic and uncertain world. This exploration often involved a critique of organized religion and its inability to provide satisfactory answers to the existential raised by the war.

In "*Good Country People*", there is a notable absence of a religious aura that can be attributed to the characters' alienation from religion and the way religious symbols are manipulated in the story. The main character, Hulga, rejects traditional religious beliefs and holds a nihilistic worldview "She saw the word 'GOD' stenciled on the back of the blind and felt that the full weight of the name bore down on her" (O'Connor, p.12). Besides, she sees herself as intellectually superior to others and looks down upon the religious "good country people" around her.

Moreover, a Bible salesman named Manley Pointer enters the story; he initially appears devout and uses religious language to gain Hulga's trust. However, it becomes evident that he is not religious. He manipulates Hulga by pretending to share her intellectual interests and engaging in discussions about faith and salvation. As a consequence, this shows that the characters are distanced from authentic religious beliefs and instead encounter deceitful representations " He took off his hat and mopped his face slowly with his handkerchief, studying her as if she were a picture puzzle that had been worked on for a long time and had

him baffled”(O’Connor, p. 6) . As well, through the portrayal of Manley Pointer, the story suggests that the Bible itself can be used as a tool for manipulation; it implies that some individuals may exploit religious symbols and language to deceive others for personal gain or control.

Furthermore, Mrs. Hopewell’s religious alienation is rooted in her limited understanding of faith. Despite she attends church regularly, but her religiosity is superficial “Mrs. Hopewell liked to tell people that Gaullism and her family were all that she needed for salvation” (O’Connor, p. 14). For instance, this religious alienation is evident in her daughter, Joy/ Hulga, who embodies skepticism and intellectual superiority. Accordingly, Joy/ Hulga has rejected her mother’s simplistic religious beliefs, embracing a nihilistic worldview instead.

In summary, the characters in “*Good Country People*” are alienated from religion because they feel disconnected from its beliefs and values. Also, The Bible is depicted as a deceptive instrument that can be misused by individuals to manipulate others.

3.6. Useless in A Superficial Community

In the post-war era, the concept of sign value in Marxism became increasingly relevant as society experienced significant changes in consumerism, media, and cultural production. In a Marxist point of view, sign value refers to the cultural and symbolic significance that commodities acquire beyond their use value and exchange value. In the context of “*Good Country People*”, the concept of sign value is not explicitly discussed or explored. However, we can still examine the story in terms of signs and their symbolic meanings.

Throughout the story, various objects and symbols carry symbolic significance. For example, Hulga’s prosthetic leg is a sign of her physical disability and serves as a symbol of her vulnerability and alienation “ Her most obvious and much superior flaw was that she had only one leg, though this was something that didn’t matter to her because she had never had but one” (O’Connor, p.4). It represents her detachment from her body and the limitations she experiences in her daily life. Additionally, the Bible that Manley Pointer carries and presents to Hulga can be seen as a sign or symbol with multiple meanings. On the surface, it is a religious text, however in the context, the story becomes a sign of deception and manipulation as Manley uses it as a tool to gain Hulga’s trust and exploit her.

Moreover, in the story, the characters engage in various exchanges throughout the story. For instance, Hulga and her mother, Mrs. Hopewell, have an exchange of words and ideas throughout the story. They have differing views on life, faith, and education. Mrs. Hopewell, representing a more traditional and conventional mindset, tries to understand and connect with her daughter, but there is a disconnect between them due to their different perspectives “When the whiskey slipped into the sun, the old lady and the girl walked back to the house. Mrs. Hopewell pointed the toe of her shoe at the ground and made a little hole in the dust with it” (O’Connor, p. 15) – This quote uses Mrs. Hopewell’s shoe and the hole she makes in the dust as a sign of her superficiality and her tendency to dismiss deeper issues. It contrasts with Hulga’s search for meaning and authenticity. Besides, Hulga and Manley Pointer have an exchange of trust and vulnerability. Hulga, gradually opens up to Manley, sharing personal details about her life and even her perceived nihilistic beliefs. Manley, in turn, presents himself as an innocent and trustworthy individual, gaining Hulga’s confidence.

Furthermore, Manley Pointer presents himself as a devout and innocent Christian young man, carrying a Bible and engaging in conversations about faith. This external appearance holds great value for Hulga, who is mocked by his apparent sincerity and finds a sense of connection and meaning in their discussions. As well as, the symbolic value of Manley's role as a Bible salesman is reinforced by the contrast it creates with Hulga's intellectual skepticism and nihilistic worldview. He represents a potential source of faith and salvation for Hulga, someone who can challenge her beliefs and offer a different perspective on life. However, in the end of the story, the symbolic value of the Bible salesman sign is subverted, exposing the deceit and betrayal behind it "His eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it" (O'Connor, p. 2).

Overall, the purpose of O'Connor's use of symbols in "*Good Country People*" is to involve challenging assumptions, exploring moral themes, and critiquing society.

3.7. Commodified Religiosity and An Engendered Stupidity

The post-war era in American literature witnessed an exploration of the concept of religious commodity. During this time, American society experienced a revival of religious enthusiasm and a rise in the commercialization and commodification of religious practices and beliefs. This theme was reflected in various works of literature, where authors examined the intersection of religion, consumerism, and spirituality.

In Flannery O'Connor's short story "*Good Country People*", the concept of commodity is explored in relation to religion, particularly, through the character of Manley Pointer. In addition, Manley presents himself as a Bible salesman who uses religious language and symbols to manipulate others. He uses religion as a tool to gain trust and control over Hulga's emotions "I'll tell you another thing, Hulga, he said, using the name as if he didn't think much of it, "You ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!"(O'Connor, p. 16). By portraying himself as a devout Christian, he taps into Hulga's vulnerability and longing for spiritual connection. Manley reduces religion to a commodity that he exploits for personal gain, using it as a means to deceive and manipulate others. Moreover, feelings are also materialized in the story, particularly, Hulga's feelings of longing, vulnerability, and desire for connection. Manley exploits these emotions to his advantage. He pretends to exchange Hulga's romantic and emotional interest, knowing that her desires make her susceptible to his manipulation "She sat staring at him, her eyes furious, as if he had done her an injury in a business deal" (O'Connor, p.14).

Furthermore, Mrs. Hopewell is portrayed as a character who materializes religion. Mrs. Hopewell considers herself a "good Christian woman" and believes that she is morally superior to those around her "I always said she was a Christian", Mrs. Hopewell observed. "I think she must be a Christian. She's never lied to me but once"... (O'Connor, p.15). However, her religiosity is more of a social construct rather than a deep personal satisfaction. Besides, she values the appearances of religious piety and uses religious language and clichés in her conversations to present herself as a devout believer.

Overall, the concept of commodity in relation to religion in "*Good Country People*" highlights the themes of deception, manipulation, and the superficiality of religious appearances. O'Connor uses these characters to caution those whom use religion as a product to acquire their benefits.

3.8. A Stratified Social Status

The Second World War can have long-lasting effects on society and the lives of people; these post-war challenges can lead to economic hardship and further perpetuate class struggle among their families. As a result, many American authors such as O'Connor delve into class struggle of the American society. O'Connor explores the clash between characters from different social classes that reveal the different and various interactions between characters.

O'Connor's short story "*A Good Man is hard to Find*" can be analyzed through a Marxist lens to explore class relations. In the story, the main characters come from a middle class, while the Misfit and his companions represent a lower social class.

Besides, the grandmother and her family embody the values of the middle class, focusing on appearances, social status. This is evident through their clothing, discussions about their backgrounds, and the grandmother's desire to visit the place she remembers from her youth. She holds onto the notion of being a lady, emphasizing the importance of manners, propriety, and dress. Her desire to maintain appearances is evident in her insistence on wearing her best clothes during the family's road trip "She had on a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print" (O'Connor, p.2).

Moreover, the grandmother's sense of superiority is highlighted in her interactions with others "In my time," said the grandmother, folding her thin veined fingers, "Children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else. People did right then. Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!" (O'Connor, p.2). She frequently makes comments about people she thinks beneath her, criticizing their manners, clothing, or behavior "I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that a loose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did" (O'Connor, p. 1). She sees also herself the only one who knows culture and often impose her beliefs and values on others, including her family members "Listen, the grandmother almost screamed, "I know you're a good man. You don't look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from nice people!" (O'Connor, p. 8); in this quote, the grandmother attempts to flatter the Misfit and impose her beliefs about appearance and social class on him.

On the other hand, the Misfit and his gang are portrayed as outsiders; they are marginalized and poor individuals who resort to crime and violence to survive. In addition, the Misfit is a dangerous criminal who has escaped from prison. He questions traditional morals and sees the world as a chaotic and unjust place "I found out the crime don't matter. You can do one thing or you can do another, kill a man or take a tire off his car, because sooner or later you're going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it" (O'Connor, p. 10).

The encounter between the grandmother and the Misfit can be seen as a clash between different social classes. The grandmother's social status asserts her to be superior and authorized, while the Misfit's violent actions can be interpreted as a response to the oppressive structures of class society; his way of being criminal is a means to survive and rebel. In this sense, his actions can be seen as a manifestation of class struggle against the oppressive system.

By analyzing “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*” through a Marxist lens, we shed light on the social hierarchies, prejudices, and struggles between different classes.

3.9. Socially Hailed to Kill

The Second World War can create social divisions within societies and these divisions can be based on ethnicity, religion, or other factors. They may be exploited to manipulate by the ruling class, leading the lower class to be marginalized or oppressed. In Flannery O’Connor’s “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*”, the Misfit can be seen as a character who feels subjugated by society. His feelings of subjugation arise from his experiences of alienation, marginalization, and his rejection of social norms. The Misfit’s subjugation can be understood within the context of Marxist theory, which emphasizes the influence of society on individuals (Parker, 2015, p. 237). From a Marxist perspective, the Misfit’s subjugation can be attributed to the class inequalities within society. In addition, he represents a social isolated who has been excluded from it, leading to his feelings of rebellion “ I call myself the Misfit because I can’t make what all done wrong fit what all I gone through in” (O’Connor, p. 11). Throughout the story, the Misfit expresses displeasure with society and its values. He critiques the idea of superiority and questions the notion of grace “She would have been a good woman if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life” (O’Connor, p. 12); this quote reflects the Misfit’s rebellious nature and his rejection of social expectations. He believes that the constant threat of violence is what would have made the grandmother a truly “good” person, emphasizing his own perspective on morality. As a result, he challenges the grandmother’s attempts to impose her moral standards upon him and indicates his own philosophy of life which he expresses as meaningless and miserableness “It’s no real pleasure in life” (O’Connor, p. 12). These actions can be seen as manifestations of his feelings of subjugation, as he rejects the social norms that he believes have marginalized and oppressed him.

Furthermore, the Misfit’s subjugation also manifests in his criminal behavior, he has committed disgraceful acts that have isolated him from society and positioned him as an outlaw. In addition, his actions can be interpreted as a response to the oppressive conditions he perceives within the system that has treated him as an outsider “I ain’t a good man, but I ain’t the worst in the world neither” (O’Connor, p. 10).

In conclusion, the Misfit in “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*” can be understood as a character who feels subjugated by society; he experiences of alienation, marginalization, and rejection of social norms contribute to his feelings of rebellion.

During times of the Second World War, American society often experience a rise in nationalist sentiments and this is done through various means like propaganda, media, and education, all of which aim to “ interpellate” or call individuals into a specific understanding of the conflict (Parker, 2015, p. 234). This interpellation serves the interests of the ruling class, while the working class and marginalized often face the consequences.

Many American authors, such O’Connor explored the theme of interpellation in their works, examining how individuals are shaped and influenced by social structures and ideologies. In the context of Flannery O’Connor’s “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*”, Marxist

interpellation can be seen in the way characters are portrayed and how their actions and beliefs reflect larger social force.

Moreover, in the story, the characters are presented as ordinary individuals who are affected by the social and economic conditions of their time. The family, led by the grandmother, represents the middle-class, and conservative value of the American South. They are concerned with maintaining their status and adhering to traditional norms. In contrast, the Misfit represents the marginalized individual who has been left behind by society. In addition, he is an escaped convict who feels disconnected and alienated from the rest of the world and his actions are a direct result of his experiences with poverty, violence, and injustice.

Furthermore, through the interactions between the family and the Misfit, O'Connor explores how these characters are shaped by the larger social structures and ideologies. The grandmother, in her attempts to appeal to the Misfit's sense of morality and propriety, reveals her own prejudices and narrow worldview ("Jesus, Jesus" the old lady cried. "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 to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got!") (O'Connor, p. 11). Her desire to be seen as a "Lady" reflects the social expectations and hierarchies of the time. However, the Misfit questions the values and beliefs that have been imposed on him by society. He challenges the grandmother's notions of goodness, arguing that these are arbitrary and subjective. As well, his rejection of social norms and his embrace of violence can be seen as a response to the systemic injustices he has experienced.

Overall, Marxist interpellation in "*A Good Man is Hard to Find*" is evident in the portrayal of characters who are influenced by social and economic forces. The story highlights the ways in which individuals are shaped by the ideologies and structures of their time, and how these influences can lead to conflict and moral ambiguity.

3.10. A Fake Piety and A Miscalculated Civility

False consciousness, in the Marxist context, refers to a situation in which individuals hold beliefs or ideologies that are contrary to their own best interests, often resulting from the manipulation of their perception of reality by ruling class. In terms of false consciousness, WW II can play a role in shaping individuals' perceptions and ideologies. In addition, the story is set in the post-world war II era, a time marked by social revolution and changing values. The characters in the story are affected by the lasting effects of war, which can contribute to their moral confusion and disorientation.

In the story, the grandmother's outdated and romanticized notions of the past can be seen as a form of false consciousness. Her longing for a bygone era, where social hierarchies and manners were promoted as a response to the disorientation caused by the aftermath of war. In addition, she romanticizes that past and idealizes a time when southern gentility and traditional values were supposedly more prevalent. Her desire to visit an old house reflects this longing; she believes it validates her status and cultural superiority.

However, her idealized vision of the past blinds her to harsh realities of the present. As a consequence, her false consciousness prevents her from understanding the risks and prioritizing the safety of her family over her personal desires. Furthermore, the grandmother's false consciousness is evident in her judgmental attitude towards others. She looks down upon

the inhabitants, criticizing their manners, dress and behavior “Oh, look at the cute little pickaninny! She said, and pointed to a Negro child standing in the door of a shack” (O’Connor, p. 2). Her belief in her own moral superiority and adherence to social norms prevents her from empathizing with or understanding people who do not conform to her ideals “Why you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children!” (O’Connor, p. 12); the grandmother’s desperate plea to the Misfit reflects her attempt to appeal to his humanity based on her false consciousness of herself as a virtuous and caring figure. She believes her status and her claims of motherhood will extract compassion, even from a hardened criminal.

Additionally, the Misfit’s false consciousness is evident in his distorted perception of himself and others. He sees himself as a criminal and believes he is destined to lead a life of wrongdoing. He accepts and embodies the negative stereotypes imposed on him by society, which perpetuate his own self-image as a “Misfit”. Consequently, the Misfit’s false consciousness becomes a source of power for him. By accepting his own criminal identity and rejecting the dominant moral order, he gains a sense of control over his life, even though it comes at the expense of other. In a way, his false consciousness serves as a defense mechanism and coping mechanism in a hostile and oppressive world.

Moreover, the other characters in the story also exhibit forms of false consciousness. The grandmother’s family members are disconnected from the reality their actions and the consequences they face. They are self-absorbed and fail to recognize the potential danger they are in until it is too late. Their limited worldview and lack of self-awareness contribute to their tragic fate.

While O’Connor’s exploration of false consciousness in “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*” may not unite directly with Marxist theory, it does showcase characters who are misled by their own distorted beliefs. The story serves a critique of human foolishness, and the consequences that can arise from living in a state of false consciousness.

3.11. A Sloughed Off Spirituality

Post-war writers often explored the concept of alienation in their works, reflecting the crisis experienced by individuals in the aftermath of war.

In Flannery O’Connor’s short story “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*”, religious alienation, where it is a prominent theme that runs throughout the narrative. The story explores the complex relationship between morality, faith, and the modern world. Also, O’Connor deliberately presents a society that lacks a traditional aura. The story is set in a predominantly secular and morally disoriented society, where characters are detached from spiritual connection and alienated from the Bible itself.

One aspect of religious alienation in the story is the portrayal of the main characters as being disconnected from their own religious beliefs. The grandmother, for instance, claims to be a good Christian woman, but her actions and attitudes suggest a superficial understanding of her faith. She uses religious language to manipulate and control others, emphasizing external appearances rather than spirituality. In addition, she attempts to convince the Misfit, the antagonist of the story that he should save her life by appealing to his religious sensibilities “It’s not a soul in this green world of God’s that you can trust... I know you’re a good man. You don’t look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from

nice people!”(O’Connor, p.4), yet her attempts are unsuccessful, highlighting her own alienation from the true teachings of Christianity.

Moreover, the Misfit, as the antagonist, embodies the absence of a religious aura. He is a character who rejects traditional religious beliefs and questions the concepts of redemption and punishment “Jesus was the only one that ever raised the dead... and he shouldn’t have done it. He threw everything off balance. If he did what he said, then it’s nothing for you to do but thrown away everything and follow him, and if he didn’t, then 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” (O’Connor, p.12); His nihilistic worldview and violent actions further emphasize the lack of a divine moral framework in the story.

Furthermore, the story’s portrayal of characters being alienated from the Bible suggests a larger critique of modern Southern society’s detachment from religious value and the decline of traditional faith. Flannery O’Connor uses this theme to explore the consequences of a society that has lost touch with the moral and spiritual teachings of the Bible. The characters’ alienation from the Bible reinforces the overall sense of moral decay and chaos in the story. Despite the characters’ alienation from the Bible, O’Connor leaves a sign of grace and redemption. For example, in the final moments of the story, the grandmother’s gesture of reaching out to the Misfit with compassion and empathy hints a potential for spirituality, even in the face of alienation from religious teachings.

Overall, the absence of a religious aura in “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*” serves to critique the superficiality of religious involvement in a secular society while exploring the potential of grace in unexpected circumstances.

3.12. A Depleted Religiousness and A Deprived Humanness

The post-war era brought about a desire for comfort and material prosperity and this shift in values that could lead to a greater emphasis on materialistic pursuits, potentially resulting in the commodification of religion. Hence, writers of that time might have been prompted to examine how religious beliefs and practices were influenced or exploited by consumer culture.

In “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*”, the commodity of religion refers to how the characters treat religion as something they can use for personal gain or to assure their superiority. In addition, the grandmother, for example, claims to be a devout Christian “Pray, pray...It’s the only way to be” (O’Connor, p. 10), but her faith seems insincere; she tries to manipulate others by using her religious beliefs as a way to control their actions and decisions.

Moreover, the grandmother uses religion to convince her family to go to a different destination and persuades them to visit an old place with a hidden secret. She believes that her religious authority gives her the power to guide the family’s choices “Jesus...Jesus ...The children have been most disrespectful of you” (O’Connor, p.11). However, her superficial understanding of faith and her manipulative use of religion lead the family into danger, as they encounter the violent Misfit and his gang.

Furthermore, the Misfit himself also represents a distorted view of religion. He questions the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection and dismisses the idea of divine justice. His lack of belief in a higher power allows him to justify his violent actions and reject the moral consequences of his behavior.

In both case, religion is treated as a commodity to be used for personal gain or to justify one's actions. The story suggests that when religion becomes a tool for manipulation or self-justification, it loses its true spiritual value and can lead to destructive consequences.

Overall, in “ *A Good Man is Hard to Find*”, Flannery O'Connor uses religious commodities as a central theme in most of her works to explore the characters' moral struggles and the complexities of faith in a flawed world.

Conclusion

This chapter is an analytical study of Flannery O'Connor's short stories via Marxist theory by focusing upon the materialized feelings and religion by applying the Marxist theory which is based on commodification via the study of religion theme used by the author and the characters in terms of social beliefs and values. In these short stories, “*Good country People*” and “*A Good Man is Hard to Find*”, ways in which religion can be commodified or materialized within an oppressive system. It highlights the potential exploitation of religious beliefs and the consequences of materialistic pursuits on individual's spiritual lives.

General Conclusion

The Second World War created a climate that encouraged writers, as Edgar Allan Poe, to explore darker themes, including those found in Gothic Literature such as: supernatural, death, and macabre. While during the post-war era, American gothic literature continued to flourish and evolve. Many writers Like O'Connor explored the psychological aftermath of the war, the disillusionment of the American dream, religious faith and hypocrisy. As a result, O'Connor is deeply rooted in the Southern region of the United States; she deeply captured the unique cultural, historical, and social aspects of the South, addressing issues such as class dynamics, and the religious deterioration.

Flannery O'Connor was a famed American writer known for her distinctive stories. Her works were deeply rooted in the Southern gothic tradition and explored themes of morality, religion, violence, and the limitations of human understanding. Additionally, O'Connor's life had a profound impact on her writings. For instance, O'Connor was born and raised in the American South with its distinct traditions and social dynamics influenced the settings and characters in her stories. Moreover, she was a devout catholic, and her religious beliefs shaped the moral framework of her writings where her stories often explore themes of sin, redemption, and the complexities of human nature from a catholic perspective.

O'Connor's exploration of religion can be reduced to a Marxist analysis; it can provide valuable insight in to the critique of religious commodification. Marxism highlights the commodification of religion, where religious beliefs and practices can be manipulated and exploited for material gain. O'Connor frequently depicts religious characters who exhibit hypocrisy, using religion as a means to gain power, wealth, or control over others. Furthermore, Marxism argues that religion can act as a form of false consciousness, diverting attention from material conditions and perpetuating social inequalities. Hence, O'Connor's stories often feature characters who are alienated from their religious beliefs what prevent them from criticizing their social and economic circumstances.

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Résumé

Au cours du XXe siècle, le peuple américain a traversé une période difficile, car la Seconde Guerre mondiale l'a affecté négativement dans tous les aspects politiques, culturels et psychologiques, de sorte que les valeurs et la morale élevées étaient absentes et que la corruption se répandait. En conséquence, la société est devenue psychologiquement brisée, s'appuyant sur tout ce qui est matériel, bafouant les principes du mépris, et la religion n'a pas été épargnée par cela, de sorte qu'elle est devenue une marchandise destinée à gagner de l'argent et de la renommée. Dans les deux histoires, "*The Good Man is Hard to Find*" (1953) et "*The Good Countryside*" (1955) de Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964), il y a une représentation honnête de l'ennui, le meurtre est horriblement commun, et la religiosité et le respect sont facilement tolérés. Le sujet met en lumière la transformation de la société, de sa religion et de ses valeurs en une marchandise qui travaille à réaliser le matérialisme éphémère, ce qui est confirmé par le point de vue marxiste, qui reconnaît le matérialisme de la société, sur lequel cette recherche est basée à travers son accent sur la mesure dans laquelle les personnalités sont affectées par le matérialisme et leur traduction de leur réalité vécue dans un modèle dépourvu de concept religieux et moral.

Mots-clés : Amérique du Sud de la marchandise, aura, marchandise, religion, sentiment.

ملخص

خلال القرن العشرين ، عاش الشعب الامريكي مرحلة عصيبة فقد اثرت الحرب العالمية الثانية عليه سلبا من جميع النواحي السياسية و الثقافية و السيكولوجية فغابت القيم و الاخلاق السامية و انتشر الفساد. نتيجة لذلك اصبح المجتمع محطما نفسيا متكالبا على كل ما هو مادي ضاربا بالمبادئ عرض الحائط ولم يسلم الدين من ذلك فصار سلعة الغاية منها ربح المال و الشهرة . في القصتين "الرجل الصالح من الصعب ايجاده" (1953) و "الريفيون الطيبون" (1955) للكاتبة فلانري اوكونور(1925-1964) هناك تصوير صادق لتبليد المشاعر فشاع القتل بطريقة فظيعة و اصبح التدين و احترام غير امرا يسهل التهاون به . يسلط الموضوع الضوء على تحول المجتمع و دينيه و قيمه الى سلعة تشتغل لتحقيق ماديات زائلة و هذا ما تؤكد و جهة النظر الماركسية التي تفر بمادية المجتمع والتي يستند اليها هذا البحث من خلال تركيزه على مدى تأثر الشخصيات بالمذهب المادي و ترجمتهم لواقعهم المعاش في قالب مجرد من المفهوم الديني و الاخلاقي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجنوب الامريكي ، الدين ، بضاعة ، شعور ، هالة .