

**King Saud University
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**A Study of the Grotesque Characterization of Parents and
their Children in Selected Short Stories of
Flannery O'Connor**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Master's Degree in Literature**

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Dedication

To my mother, husband, and children with love

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine Flannery O'Connor's grotesque characterization of parents and their children in some of her short stories. In these short stories, the grotesque creates a balance between the two contrary impulses of the comic and the tragic, and calls the attention of the readers to the moral deviations within the family unit. The readers are thus brought to a pinpoint of light which helps them to reach an awareness about deformed family relationships.

For this study, the researcher has selected five representative short stories of O'Connor. Chapter One examines the grotesque characterization of the Bailey family in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The grandmother is a self-righteous woman who represents ignorance and arrogance. Although the grandmother and The Misfit have little in common, both are egoistic, psychologically separated from family and spiritually isolated from religion. Before the grotesque grandmother faces death at the hands of The Misfit, she receives Grace for she reaches out to embrace him and humanity in general.

"The Life You Save May Be Your Own" is examined in Chapter Two. O'Connor here depicts a grotesque mother who offers her mute daughter to Shiftlet, a one-armed intruder, as a bride in return for his services on her desolate farm. He sees an old car in the shed, so he agrees in order to satisfy an old dream of owning a car. After the wedding ceremony is concluded, Shiftlet who has deserted his own mother, abandons his bride at a roadside diner, takes the car, and continues his journey without being touched by the harm he has done. The study suggests that both the mother and Shiftlet are grotesque characters who dehumanize the mute girl as well as themselves.

Chapter Three examines "Good Country People" in which O'Connor presents a grotesque self-centered mother. She is overprotective in her relationship with her daughter, Joy, who lost her leg when she was a child. The study shows that Joy's academic success enables her to forget

her leg when she was a child. The study shows that Joy's academic success enables her to forget her external deformity but has constructed in her a spiritual deformity. She is a grotesque intellectual who believes that she is independent and superior to her mother. She, however, realizes that she cannot live in isolation from others when she is duped by the Bible salesman in a tragi-comic scene in which he runs away with her artificial leg and leaves her helpless.

Chapter Four is devoted to "A View of the Woods" in which family relationships are structured in a grotesque way around property. Fortune is a materialistic grandfather who does not care for family ties with his daughter and her family, so he manipulates them with his property. His decision to sell a piece of land is strongly opposed by his little granddaughter who enjoys the view of the woods from the house. Maddened by this unexpected opposition, Fortune kills the little girl. The study draws attention to the grotesque characterization of Fortune who meets his end alone and unloved after he realizes the futility of his materialistic goals.

Chapter Five examines "Everything That Rises Must Converge" in which O'Connor presents a self-deluded mother and her cold grown up son who does not admit to himself his dependence on her and even enjoys being unpleasant to her. Both mother and son are grotesque characters who are equally responsible for the violence that suddenly erupts in the bus scene. The death of the mother shocks Julian into an awareness that he loves her. The study suggests that this painful awareness is intended to enable him, and eventually the reader, to gain a fresh insight into himself.

The Conclusion highlights O'Connor's achievements as a writer with a moral aim who is able to hold the interest of her readers by her grotesque characterization of parents and their children. It suggests that O'Connor's manner of exploring the self and the world is different from

sympathetic understanding. It is through violence that O'Connor invites her readers to confront their moral deviations and provide fresh avenues for a social and personal analysis of the grotesque they find in themselves.