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MASTER'S THESIS

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMOR IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH: WILLIAM FAULKNER,FLANNERY O'CONNOR, AND THE COEN BROTHERS

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APPROVAL PAGE

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this master's thesis titled "The Philosophy of Humor in the American South: William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and the Coen Brothers" has been written by myself without applying the help that can be contrary to academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that all materials benefited in this thesis consist of the mentioned resources in the reference list. I verify all these with my honour.

04/03/2022

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ABSTRACT

Master's Thesis

The Philosophy of Humor in the American South:

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Humor has become an important component of American oral literature and narrative long before American humorists such as Mark Twain and George Washington Harris. While a genuinely American phenomenon, American humor retains its originality as a literary form, breaking away from Europe. Although Twain and other Southern writers have contributed to the genre, the Southern Renaissance is where its originality lies. During this period, Faulkner builds his own unique narrative with many humorous genres such as humor and dark/grotesque humor, especially the economic and racial problems of the country and region.

Following the Great Depression (1929-30s), Flannery O'Connor in manifestation of her literary genius, especially through humor as a literary genre, brings forth from indisputable social norms, and shallow religious beliefs of the South a new critical dimension. Subsequently, the Coen Brothers' filmography confirms the long-standing influence of Southern humor as a literary genre expanding to the north of the United States and across the world.

Originating prior to the American Civil War, Southern humor, evolved from oral to written tradition and eventually became a genuine breakthrough in American literature: especially in response to changing economic and cultural circumstances. Although Southern humor has been analyzed in numerous ways through time, in this thesis it has been studied by means of various philosophical and cultural theories of humor allowing to reach at an understanding for its

favorable position in helping reconcile differences among people in the world in contemporary times.

Keywords: Humor, Dark Humor, The South, American South, Southern Literature, Southern Humor, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, The Coen Brothers.

ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Amerikan Güneyi'nde Mizahın Felsefesi:

William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor ve Coen Kardeşler

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Mizah, Mark Twain ve George Washington Harris gibi Amerikalı mizahçılardan çok önce, Amerikan sözlü edebiyatının ve anlatısının önemli bir bileşeni haline gelir. Gerçek bir Amerikan fenomeni olan Amerikan mizahı, Avrupa'dan koparak ve özgün bir edebi form olarak benzersizliğini korur. Twain ve diğer Güneyli yazarlar türe katkıda bulunsalar dahi, Güney Rönesansı özgünlüğün beşiğidir. Faulkner, bu dönemde mizah ve kara/grotesk mizah gibi birçok mizahi türü, özellikle ülke ve bölgenin ekonomik ve ırksal sorunları başta olmak üzere, kendine özgü anlatısını inşa eder.

Büyük Buhran'ın (1929-30'lar) ardından Flannery O'Connor, çalışmalarında Güney'in özgünlüğünü farklı bir boyuta taşır. Kendisi mizah türü ile Amerikan Güneyinin tartışılmaz toplumsal normları ve sığ dini inançlarına yönelik eleştirilerden edebi dehasının gereği yepyeni bir eleştirel boyut geliştirir. Takiben Coen kardeşlerin filmografisi, bir anlamda, bu uzun soluklu edebi türün etkisini yerelden başlayarak Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin kuzeyinde ve tüm dünyada doğrular.

Amerikan İç Savaşı öncesinde ortaya çıkıp, sözlü gelenekten yazılı geleneğe evrilerek tarih içinde değişen ekonomik ve kültürel değerlere özgün anlamdaki edebi cevabı haline gelen Güney mizahı, seçilmiş örnekleri ile bu tezde çeşitli felsefi ve kültürel mizah teorileri ekseninde çalışılmış olup, her çağda çeşitli başlıklar altında incelenmiş olsa dahi, çağdaş dünyadaki

farklılıkları uzlaştıran bir köprü görevi üstlenmiş olması nedeni ile değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mizah, Kara Mizah, Güney, Amerikan Güneyi, Güney Edebiyatı, Güney Mizahı, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Coen Kardeşler.

PHILOSOPHY OF HUMOR IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH:
WILLIAM FAULKNER,
FLANNERY O'CONNOR, AND THE COEN BROTHERS

CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE		ii
DECLARATION		iii
ABSTRACT		iv
ÖZET		vi
CONTENTS		viii
ABBREVIATIONS		xi
INTRODUCTION		1
CHAPTER ONE		
ON HUMOR		
1.1.	WHAT IS HUMOR?	9
1.2.	PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF HUMOR	12
1.3.	THREE THEORIES OF HUMOR	15
	1.3.1. The Superiority Theory	15
	1.3.2. The Relief Theory	18
	1.3.3. The Incongruity Theory	20
1.4.	DARK HUMOR	23
1.5.	HUMOR IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH	27
CHAPTER TWO		
WILLIAM FAULKNER		
2.1.	A LONG JOURNEY FROM TRAGEDY TO HUMOR	34
2.2.	THE GENERAL CONCEPTS OF	

WILLIAM FAULKNER'S HUMOR 43
2.3. THE USE OF HUMOR
IN SOME OF THE MAJOR WORKS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER 50
2.3.1. *The Sound and the Fury* 50
2.3.2. *As I Lay Dying* 56
2.3.3. The Snopes Trilogy 66
2.3.3.1. *The Hamlet* 67
2.3.3.2. *The Town* 78
2.3.3.3. *The Mansion* 84
2.4. CONCLUSION 91

CHAPTER THREE

FLANNERY O'CONNOR

3.1. LIFE, THEMES, AND HUMOR OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR 94
3.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMOR
IN SOME OF THE MAJOR WORKS OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR 109
3.2.1. *Wise Blood* 109
3.2.2. *The Violent Bear It Away* 116
3.2.3. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" 119
3.2.4. "Good Country People" 127
3.2.5. "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" 132
3.2.6. "The Artificial Nigger" 136
3.2.7. "Everything That Rises Must Converge" 140
3.2.8. "Revelation" 142
3.2.9. "The Enduring Chill" 145
3.3. CONCLUSION 148

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COEN BROTHERS

4.1. HOW (AND WHERE) EVERYTHING STARTED? 151

4.2. THE ROOTS OF THE SOUTHERN GOTHIC IN THE CINEMA OF THE COEN BROTHERS 154
4.3. THE EFFECTS OF SOUTHERN LITERATURE ON THE HUMOR OF THE COEN BROTHERS' FILMS 155
4.4. SOUTHERN HUMOR IN THE COEN BROTHERS' FILMS 157
4.4.1. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* 157
4.4.2. *Barton Fink* 163
4.4.3. *No Country for Old Men* 166
4.4.4. *A Serious Man* 169
4.4.5. *Fargo* 172
4.4.6. *Raising Arizona* 176
4.4.7. *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* 177
4.5. CONCLUSION 178

CONCLUSION 180
REFERENCES 187

ABBREVIATIONS

CW Flannery O'Connor, Collected Works. 1988.

MM Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose. 1969.

KJV The Holy Bible: King James Version. (2004).

INTRODUCTION

Humor has been discussed from different perspectives over the years, which are outside of most philosophical disciplines. While focusing primarily on philosophical approaches to humor, this debate inevitably moves into other fields such as cultural studies, literary theory, psychoanalysis, psychology, religion, and so on. The general focus on humor hopefully supplies a richer explanation of humor and its impact on the human condition. In addition, from Plato's era, and probably earlier, there have been theories of humor, laughter, and the comedy, first from poets and philosophers, then from psychologists, sociologists, neurophysiologists, and semioticians from the beginning of the 20th century and into the 21st century.

The philosophical study of humor has focused on the development of a satisfying definition of humor that until recently expanded with laughter. The main task is to develop an adequate theory of what humor is. There is no single reason a why a joke is funny and humorous, instead the thesis tried to dwell on the many ways in which humor occurs.

The field of humor, as extensively covered in the thesis, is a surprisingly comprehensive, and majority of empirical and academic studies are huge amount of fun. There is more to see in the disciplines of history and literary history, as well as philosophy, theology and religious history, sociology, and anthropology, the farther one studies.

Since the early times of the American Nations' establishment, as Robert Sklar shows in his "Humor in America" essay, there were people who sensed that humor was different in the United States of America from humor in the Old World (European nations), and they always singled out extravagant and grotesque exaggerations. Even the British people who were most reluctant to make any tribute to a distinctive American culture and literature, set the home country's seal of approval in the 1830s in a distinctly humorous style, a "national American humour" (Sklar, 1970: 107).

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, colonial and post-revolutionary American writers in all spheres of intellectual life—largely from England—faced the accusation that there was nothing "original" in American culture

and literature. From this point of view, everything that American philosophers, poets, and novelists produced should be low-level imitations of European culture, because the writers of that period are all educated according to the European tradition. In the nineteenth century, however, Britain's monopoly weakened, causing Americans to favor regionalism above British sophistication. As a result, American authors established a purely original national literature: inclusive of humor focusing entirely upon the American phenomena of the New England "Yankee," the "backwoodsman and hillbillies" of the South, and the "frontiers" of the Western. Especially the South produced the first original, humorous literary materials during that time. Between 1830 and 1867—and the writings of such names such as Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Davy Crockett, William Tappan Thompson, C.F.M. Noland, Madison Tensas, Johnson Jones Hooper, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Joseph Glover Baldwin, Joseph M. Field, John S. Robb, H.E. Taliaferro, and George Washington Harris may be given as major examples. These writers established a standard and set many patterns in Southern humor followed to this day.

It is a well-known fact that the American South is a unique region in the United States of America, and the general view is that the American South looks more like a foreign country than any other area within national borders. As a product of the region, Southern studies, especially Southern humor studies, is essential for the continuity of Academic studies in the area.

For the last hundred and fifty years, although often overlooked, humor, laughter, and comics have been an important part of the Southern literary imagination. Southern humor allowed all coarse, unbearable or intolerable aspects of the region become more palatable and enjoyable. For Southern literature is indeed full of weird, odd, and sarcastic comedy, and often people miss the humor, comic, and the humorous sides of Southern literature, as they focus heavily on deep-fried grotesque and dark sides of the stories.

Unlike early Southern humorists, the South began to create its own unique characters and narratives, especially with the Southern Renaissance.[1] While early humorists were mostly concerned with racial and ethnic humor in the South, later writers such as William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor included the grotesque,

[1] Southern Renaissance was a period in the 1920s and 1930s when American Southern literature was revitalized.

gothic, regional, religious, traditional, ethical, minimalist, allegorical, sardonic, and sarcastic subjects to their literary works in a humorous way. William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor, two of the most important American literary figures of the 20th century, were eventually granted their respective place in anthologies. One of the most striking features of these writers constitute their use of local dark humor. They employ dark humor to perplex their readers and generate an awakening. Their sense of humor and touch of comedy sets them apart from any predecessors' use of stereotypes already familiar to readers. Their sense of humor can at times be associated with gothic and grotesque elements, especially in the depiction of Southern people and landscapes. Their humor localizes upon people's deficiencies and the parody of unexpected circumstances, fictive characters' experiences. Eventually classical American Southern humor finds venue not only in American novel but also in cinema.

Therefore, the first name that the thesis focuses on in the context of Southern humor is William Faulkner. What is discussed in "William Faulkner" chapter is that Faulkner's profound love for his homeland crystallizes in the American South, especially in the Mississippi region; in an almost divine touch, he tried to recreate it as a microcosm, and have it gain recognition by the rest of the world. He deserves to be recognized as one of America's greatest humorists, for hundreds of humorous characters, scenes, moments, incidents, and notable memorable passages that stand out throughout his works. Since the early days of his career onward, Faulkner had occasionally commented on humor—both his own concept of humor and that of others—yet there is no comprehensive assessment, definition, categorization or taxonomy of his humor.

The range and methods of his humor, however, remain captivating subjects for exploration. Faulkner's debt to the Old Southern and Southwestern humorists, is clear throughout his canon but most prominent in his *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), and The Snopes trilogy—*The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957), and *The Mansion* (1959). Additionally, his personal desire and disposition for comic self-glorification and self-mockery, are well-known.

Faulkner's dark and grotesque humor stems from his association with the heritage of Southern or Southwestern tall tale humorists, as well as the American

cultural practice of exaggeration. Stereotypical characters such as dandies, crooked politicians, naïve rural kids, nice prostitutes, lunatic preachers, and respected "negro" workers; and dark, subversive, morbid, and forbidding matters, such as death, decay, darkness, and doom play a critical role for this humor.

Most of his work includes both dark and grotesque humor with dark, grotesque, uncanny, evil, immoral and stereotypical characters. All kinds of humors' purposes in his work are to ridicule the manners and ignorance of certain classes, in Faulkner's native land, namely, the American South. At this stage, his humor offers unique opportunities to smile and laugh, even in a cosmos tainted by toxic racism, sexism, classism, guilt, and all manner of moral ambiguity.

Secondly, in this thesis Flannery O'Connor will be discussed within the context of Southern humor. Doubtless, O'Connor is one of the twentieth century's most influential, talented, and self-aware Christian short story writers. Her depictions of poor white people in central Georgia and Tennessee have acquired so much attention, and the secret to her humor has been the subject matter of much research. However, as a highly pious person, she considers the inhabitants of the region to be part of a certain eternity. Thus, she is extremely concerned with their spiritual and religious deprivations experienced in result of their unmet thirst for God. O'Connor as a Catholic writer living in a Protestant world, viewed fiction writing as a sacred and Christian duty.

O'Connor's concise, clever, humorous, and direct style succeeds admirably in portraying the South as a microcosm. In her fictions, she blends tragedy and humor with the dialect and style of her culture; meanwhile grotesque exaggerations and distortions characterize her style. In terms of compassion, affection, assurance, and self-awareness, her novels' characters are neither perfect. She reveals in a simplistic style the truth about events and individuals. Those grotesque and hideous characters are often employed as satirical peons in illustrating social, political, economic, and religious concerns. Thus, through exaggerated characters and distorted situations, she skillfully sets up the satirical effect. As a result, Southern culture lends itself oddly well to the construction of the grotesque in her writings. Her characters and settings are inspired by her hometown Georgia, and she has a keen ear for Georgian rural folk's vernacular language.

Intrinsically, polite, gentle, middle-class ladies who are full of decent and virtuous counsel are O'Connor's favorite targets. These ladies, on the other hand, lie about grace all day. They make false statements about Christ while attempting to create a utopia of contentment. But that is precisely the primary aim. O'Connor just stands for the priorities of Christ. He has a milder stance toward criminals, prostitutes, and murderers than he does toward the polite, dignified middle-class Pharisees and hypocrites. Grace pursues her characters in O'Connor's writings.

Readers of O'Connor's work notice her easygoing humor and sense of humor; an artistic talent that instigates effortless laughter. Every one of her stories holds clearly humorous and entertaining features. She particularly enjoys satirizing modern academic secularists, but no story is complete without irony and brilliant humorous lines. Her humor, however, goes a step further, to have the reader grasp O'Connor's close relationship with the grotesque to appreciate and understand her humor.

Since she has a remarkable personal insight into the foibles of the people around her, O'Connor makes modern Southern culture and society the core of her satire and humor. Her characters are inclusive of ranchers, peasants, property owners, deputies, sheriffs, and clergymen who already live in her home country. In her short stories, she mocks the arrogance of phony intellectuals and academics. She ridicules the hypocrisy of some of her ostensibly intelligent characters, who seem to be modern and sophisticated in approach. Her sarcasm neither overlooked maternity nor motherhood; widowed or divorced mothers, and their disgruntled children, were all common phenomena to her stories. Regardless of subject matter, the underlying humor is supported at almost every condition with the literal world's precise description.

Nearly all of her characters, are physically deformed, spiritually perverted, or both on occasions. Many modern writers such as O'Connor, are known for merging the incongruous styles of the humorous and the horrible to generate a single impact. With a scathing criticism of human flaws, her humor feeds on the sardonic incongruity between illusion and reality. The unsettling contrast between what the characters think they are and what they are in actuality elicits laughter as their foibles are exposed to the reader.

In O'Connor's work, humor functions as a mirror with an almost profound mystery, not just as a narrative decoration or a mere accessory to serious spiritual subjects. O'Connor with her satirical humorous style managing the grotesque quite successfully sends hints at her Christian community: as a statements of faith, hope, compassion, and decency.

Finally, this thesis includes the Coen Brothers within the context of Southern humor. In Minnesota, the Coen Brothers' boyhood was enriched in book reading and film watching at home thanks to the region's severe climate. Joel and Ethan have always shared a great interest in literature. Unlike many other filmmakers; prior to the production of their scenarios, they have always been extremely sensitive to the writing process.

The two brothers have a distinct interest for dark/noir, hard-boiled detective fiction, pulp Westerns, dime novels, and Southern literature, which influences their films in many ways. Despite all the incongruous, idiotic, cartoonish, grotesque, slapstick, or ludicrous behaviors—which mostly involve violence—of the characters in the Coen Brothers' films, there's usually something intellectually serious going on. Most of their films simply portray the comic side of existential absurdity.

It is true that the Coen Brothers have consistently offered stylish, clever, and highly eloquent efforts on distinct genres: comedy, drama, film noir, gangster thriller, crime thriller, screwball comedy, black comedy, romance, musical, etc. They were almost concerned about American values while elaborating through these genres. They most definitely produce Americana films; the context of which is deeply related to the American way of life.

The Coen Brothers' obsession in the combination of violence with comedy is clearly inherited from Flannery O'Connor's artistry. O'Connor's detached social commentaries; dark humor (especially in her short story "A Good Man is Hard to Find"), and Biblical leanings resonate in the Coen Brothers' films such as *A Serious Man* (2009) (which is also based on *The Book of Job*), while O'Connor's sense of Southern psychology is essential to *Raising Arizona* (1987), and her short story "The Enduring Chill" is explicitly referenced in *Barton Fink* (1991)—especially in the scene, where the protagonist obsessively stares at the stain in his hotel room ceiling, recalls a similar obsession in the story.

Aside from Homer's literary influences and inspirations, the Coen Brothers' numerous geographical settings have reflections from William Faulkner's dark and gloomy Southern social landscapes. In their films such as *Fargo,* and *Barton Fink,* Southern inspired settings full of despair and alienation are drawn directly from the psychological misfortunes and struggles of Faulkner's most memorable characters. The W. P. Mayhew character of *Barton Fink,* for example is said to be an inspiration for Faulkner's writer's block.

Many of Faulkner's stories undoubtedly nurture the atmosphere that the Coen Brothers set in their films. The Coen Brothers particularly handle location and environment in a Faulknerian precision. The environment surrounding their characters becomes just as important as the characters themselves.

Similar to Faulkner and O'Connor's characters', the Coen Brothers' characters are utterly mundane, ordinary, common, full of clichés, yet as much genuine. They openly discuss this situation in David Edelstein's "Invasion of the Baby Snatchers" in the following lines: "If characters talk in clichés, it's because we like clichés. You start with things that are incredibly recognizable in one form, and you play with them" (Edelstein, 2006: 24). Almost all of the Coen Brothers' main characters are fools, or individuals who assume they are smarter than they actually are. Andy Lowe draws attention to this point in his "The Brothers Grim" as he states: "Most of the characters in our movies are pretty unpleasant—losers or lunkheads, or both. But we're also very fond of those characters, because you don't usually see movies based around those kinds of people. We're not interested in burly super-hero types" (Lowe, 2006: 97). Simply said, their characters are uncharismatic, weird, and morally corrupt.

Lastly, through these Coenesque characters a sensation of the Gothic mystery and the grotesque are supported and often used as comic relief or for a demonstration of dark humor: serving as an excuse to refer at the country's violent past: such as frontier justice and vigilantism. To some degree, those characters allow the directors to reclaim the Gothic and Southern grotesque as crucial elements in American cinema. Giving them a key role in their films is also a method of paying tribute to the literary traditions of the South and Southwest. While the issues Coen Brothers' films address may have similarities, each are distinct from any of their earlier work. In

Kristine McKenna's "Joel and Ethan Coen" interview, Ethan once stated: "We don't generally worry about repeating ourselves. Being original and always doing the new thing is incredibly overrated" (McKenna, 2006: 181). Whether original and innovative or not, the Coen Brothers pursue the tradition of writing and creating scenes and characters that look like they have never been written before.

Once and for all, what seems certain and undeniable throughout this thesis is that there exist a great deal of written or visual content suggesting that William Faulkner was influenced by Mark Twain; Flannery O'Connor by Faulkner; Cormac McCarthy from both Faulkner and O'Connor; and the Coen Brothers by all these writers. Sometimes the resemblances between the works of those names are so remarkable that they hardly seem coincidental. When brought together in one place, their many references and allusions to each other and each other's work confirm what we might have expected: that they often had their names in mind while creating their works. Despite the differences of the texts or genres they work in and around (novels, short stories, essays, letters, and so on), the influence of these Southern writers on each other is undeniably massive. Meanwhile, the cinematic perspective and humorous narratives created by Minnesota-born directors based on these writers are an indication of how these Southern writers have influenced the American South, the United States, and the world outside the United States from past to present, and at the same time, it is also an indication of how the narratives of these writers and the characteristics of the South will influence the literary and cinematic works in the future.

CHAPTER ONE
ON HUMOR

1.1. WHAT IS HUMOR?

Humor has traditionally proven difficult to theorize. Though there have been several notable philosophies of humor—like Henri Bergson's or Sigmund Freud's—it is not quite possible to reach a definitive judgment. Theorizing humor enables us to grasp what humor reveals about subjects and the society that they inhabit. Humor does not simply reveal the hidden truth of society but rather exposes the connections that everyday life keeps at a distance. Definitions of humor inevitably appear to be too wide or too narrow. Todd McGowan, who is a professor at the University of Vermont, defends his ideas in his *Only a Joke Can Save Us: A Theory of Comedy* by dissenting, Gerald Mast's refusal to sanction a "single definition" of humor. According to McGowan, it may seem judicious given the difficulties that confront such a definition, but this position is untenable. And the immediacy of humor and comedy renders theorizing about it almost impossible (McGowan, 2017: 4).

Indeed, humor is a phenomenon that has been considered seriously for so long, while Umberto Eco references Aristotle's Ethics in his historical novel *The Name of the Rose* (1980), Eco mentions that Aristotle's second book of the Ethics is devoted to humor and laughter as an instrument of truth (Eco, 1994: 120). Subsequently, over the generations, humor and laughter have been revisited and studied from a wide array of disciplines, some of which are not related to philosophy. While this topic first focuses on philosophical and theoretical frameworks to humor, it unavoidably expands to include cultural studies, literary theory, psychoanalysis, psychology, religion, and other disciplines. The enlarged scope should culminate in a more comprehensive view of humor and its impact on the human condition. Additionally, from Plato's era, and probably earlier, there have been theories of humor, laughter, and comedy, first from poets and philosophers, then from psychologists, sociologists, neurophysiologists, and semioticians from the beginning of the 20th century and into the 21st century.

It is indeed worth saying a few words about what humor is and what it has represented throughout history. It has its origins in the Latin "umor/humor," which means body fluid. Paul McDonald refers to this situation in his *The Philosophy of Humour* as, it refers to the liquids and body fluids that were supposed to constitute individuals in medieval medicine, and which needed to be in balance in order to be healthy and happy. Blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile were the four different types of bile (McDonald, 2013: 9). From the point of medieval people's view, too much blood made people ruddy, cheerful and ecstatic; too much phlegm made them insensitive, lazy and lethargic; excess yellow bile made them angry and impatient; while too much black bile caused misery, melancholy, rage and depression (9).

The Olympians ridiculing the disabled Hephaestus' walking clumsily seems to be the oldest known indication to laughter and humor in the Classics. A decent satire from early medieval to 15th century Ireland may leave sores on the victim's face and embarrass him into insanity, suicide or banishment. Plato believed that laughter derived from enjoyment in others' sorrow; Aristotle believed that the humor may be met in another's deformity, flaw, or ugliness; and Cicero considered that mental pain was a significant source of humor. More than sixteen centuries after the death of Jesus in 1651, Thomas Hobbes characterized laughter as a form of "sudden glory" at another's sorrow in his *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 1996: 43). Even in our own century, Bergson's *Laughter* (1900) sees humor and laughter as primarily a discipline or at the very least a reprimand of ignorance directed at the unsocial (Bergson, 1911: 138-39).

Even when humor is perceived as largely a protective and reactive rather than an offensive demeanor, its roots are often perceived to originate in sadness and suffering rather than sheer delight. In the midst of this nihilistic and existential misery, Nietzsche, also known as the "philosopher of laughter" in the French academia, pursues redemption via laughter. Laughter is an expression of acceptance of contradiction, paradox, ambiguity and lack of meaning, as well as an acknowledgment of one's own insignificance. Nietzsche states in his *The Will to Power*, "Perhaps I know best why man alone laughs: he alone suffers so deeply that he had to invent laughter. The unhappiest and most melancholy animal is, as fitting, the most cheerful" (Nietzsche, 1968: 56). Nietzsche's discourse, according to Gilles

Deleuze's "Nomad Thought" article, aims to elicit not just intellectual but also emotive philosophical change by giving paradoxical and contradictory hermeneutic approaches. Deleuze identifies this as the cause of laughing, saying, "When the codes are confounded, one cannot help but laugh," which is compatible with incongruity-based theories of humor (Deleuze, 1977: 147). Then Lord Byron states, in terms of humor, in his epic poem *Don Juan*, "And if I laugh at any mortal thing, 'tis that I may not weep" (Byron, 2004: 315). And Mark Twain remarks in his *Following the Equator*, "The secret source of Humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven" (Twain, 1897: 121).

No wonder Freud, as we may guess, emphasizes on the deeply disturbing dynamics behind humor. According to him, in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, humor might, at first blush, arise in the form of a jest or another type of humorous reaction; in such case, its goal is to eliminate the probability of the occurrence that an impression will be formed in the circumstance, interfering with the pleasant conclusion. Secondly, it could completely or partially cease the generation of an affect; the latter is the more usual situation since it is simpler to do, and it results in numerous types of broken humor—humor that grins through tears. It takes a tiny quantity of energy away from the impact in return for a minor amount of humor (Freud, 1960: 168).

One of the other important subjects in humor is as follows: two unrelated factors become necessarily connected; eventually the unlikely nature of this connection generates the comic effect. In this respect both Todd McGowan and G.W.F. Hegel agree over this opinion. For Todd McGowan, Hegel contends with the idea that comedy appears in the conjunction of nonsense and self-assurance (McGowan, 2017: 5). And in his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, Hegel supports this concept by showing, what is humorous and funny is a personality or subject who makes his own deeds inconsistent and therefore reduces them to almost nothing, while staying calm and confident in the process. As a result, humor has as its base and starting spot what tragedy may end with, namely an entirely reconciled and joyous heart (Hegel, 1975: 1220).

1.2. PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF HUMOR

The philosophical study of humor has centered on the construction of a coherent interpretation of humor, which has been seen as tightly correlated with laughter until recently. The main assignment is to develop a sufficient theory of just what humor is. There is no single reason why a joke is funny and humorous, but rather we must look at the variety of ways in which humor occurs. Mark Twain shares his thoughts on humor and its association with philosophy to his close friend, journalist Opie Read's, in *Mark Twain and I* as: "Laughter without a tinge of philosophy is but a sneeze of humor. Genuine humor is replete with wisdom" (Read, 1940: 17). Despite the enormous number of participants in the discussion, the phenomenon of humor is still underappreciated and inadequate in the field of philosophy.

In philosophy, the continental side has been first to return to the study of humor. That may be expected, since thinkers associated with this tradition, such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Bergson and several others; and in addition to continental philosophy, analytical philosophers, for instance, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein spoke of the topic long time ago. This topic also attracted the attention of contemporary philosophers, academics and thinkers, such as Simon Critchley, Slavoj Žižek, John Morreall and Paul McDonald.

Philosopher Simon Critchley begins his fascinating and funny book *On Humour* with a simple question: Why do we laugh? Other creatures, such as hawks and grouse, do not appear to have this problem. However, depending on the analogy and metaphor, "reducing" a human to an animal or vice versa tends to make us grin or, at the very least, feel disgusted. Anthropomorphizing animals appears to get humans going, as Critchley points out in his book, humor is an anthropological and evolutionary parameter that exists across all civilizations and cultures (Critchley, 2002: 28). Anthropologist Henk Driessen; on the other hand, supports Critchley's this argument in his essay "Humour, Laughter and the Field: Reflections from Anthropology" in Bremmer and Roodenburg's *A Cultural History of Humour*: *From Antiquity to the Present Day* as the core method of defamiliarization is paralleled by anthropology and humor: rational thinking is disturbed, the unanticipated is aroused,

and familiar themes are placed in unfamiliar, even disturbing circumstances to make the people or readers aware of their own cultural and traditional preconceptions (Driessen, 1997: 227).

According to Simon Cirtchley's book *On Humour*, we are far funnier than any animals. We discover ourselves at the heart of humor. For Critchley, humor is one of the main aspects in distinguishing the human from the animal; it is a result of culture, and therefore of civilization (Critchley, 2002: 28). He claims that humor is characterized by a metaphysical uneasiness at its core, which explains why the loudest laughter and the mirthless laughter, get stuck in our throats. In his opinion, existential discomfort can cause laughter and it seems that we are well aware that the jest is on us (52). The book discusses humor from a broadly philosophical perspective and these perspectives might come up with new ways to look at humor that are inspirational. The book's main premise is that humor stems from philosophical and intellectual considerations, and that such perspectives can lead to existential anxiety.

Humor includes cultural and social limits in addition to subjective and objective aspects. It promotes and supports a specific mindset and worldview. In this respect, most of the jokes, humorous gestures and facial expressions are ineffective outside of their cultural context. Humor can both uplift a culture and discredit those outside of it. This appears to be the root of "Ethnic humor," which is shortly covered in Critchley's book. Laughter can lead to a change, and all these ideas generally lead Critchley to his own two-point theory of humor. Initially, humor allows us to recognize our surroundings, or how circumstances are really for us in our culture. Furthermore, humor suggests that we may enrich that same reality by employing rational thinking to help us in recognizing the humorous aspects of our lives.

A jest is just funny if it is comprehended, and comprehending its wit is based on a set of shared standards and underlying principles, or ways of life. In his *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein once implied that humor is a method of perceiving the world, not a sentiment. So, if it is accurate to claim that laughter was suppressed in Nazi Germany, this does not imply that people are upset or anything like that; rather, it implies something deeper and more significant (Wittgenstein, 1980: 78). Philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek gives us a harsh, anti-Semitic, but a

funny joke example in his *Žižek's Jokes: Did You Hear the One about Hegel and Negation?* to make us familiar with the farcical comedy. He states in the book:

> *Two Jewish friends pass a Catholic church on which a large poster addresses non-Catholics: "Come to us, accept Catholicism, and you instantly get $30,000 in cash!" While walking away, the two friends become engaged in a debate about whether the offer is meant seriously. A week later, the two friends meet again in front of the same church, and one of them confides to the other: "I still wonder if that offer is serious." The other replies condescendingly: "Ah you Jews, all you think about is money!"* (Žižek, 2014: 21)

With this example, Žižek supports Wittgenstein's and Critchley's ideas about humor: according to Žižek humor involves cultural bounds, common knowledge and assumptions behind the historical backgrounds. Žižek relates farce and comedy elements to the stereotypical knowledge about Jews. Without knowing Jews' historical background and their good relations with money and financial affairs, the humorous and comical sides of the joke will be meaningless and nonsense.

Once again if we go back to Wittgenstein, humor is a form of linguistic game, just like any other. In the same manner the comprehension of humor requires a certain shared heritage. Thus, "a manner of perceiving the world" carries persistent parallelism with this understanding of humor. That is, the purpose of humor is to make the mundane seem extraordinary. According to Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, since humor is a peerless linguistic mechanism, from supplying instructions to describing colors, sharing stories, asking questions, providing feedback, etc., it could only be evaluated in its own position (Wittgenstein, 2009: 15). Since our linguistic features are varied functions in and of themselves, Wittgenstein argues that humor is a peerless linguistic mechanism that must be evaluated properly from the numerous ways we are trained to assess the linguistic elements broadly. Reducing humor's function to the detection of their fun effect, will be reductive, and resulting in erroneous readings. For Wittgenstein readers should evaluate jokes from a variety of perspectives. Given his philosophy and humor having a functional equivalence—both trying to show the uncanniness and oddity of our everyday experiences—it follows that they can eventually perform the same function. As William James—an admirer of Wittgenstein—once noted in his *Some Problems of Philosophy* the following: philosophy has the ability to foresee anything other than what it is. It perceives the known as unknown, and the unknown as known

(James, 1979: 11). I think this might be applied equally to humor—it enables us to dwell on our patterns and perceive known occasions as unknown, and unknown occasions as known. As American philosopher Norman Malcolm points out in the *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, which is collected into a book from Wittgenstein's letters to one of his closest friends Malcolm, "A serious and good philosophical work could be written consisting entirely of jokes" (Malcolm, 2001: 27-28).

1.3. THREE THEORİES OF HUMOR

Research on humor reveals a varied range of highly enjoyable academic works produced in the area. Aside from philosophy, academic disciplines such as history, literary history, theology and religious history, sociology, and anthropology also chose humor as a study area. From among several theories explaining laughter and humor, John Morreall's does quite an excellent work by separating them into three categories: superiority theory, relief theory, and incongruity theory.

1.3.1. The Superiority Theory

Thomas Hobbes and René Descartes bolstered the intellectual argument for laughter. Human beings are innately individualistic and competitive, according to Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). As a result, we are more aware of indicators that we either win or lose. The former makes us feel terrific, whereas the other one makes us feel horrible. Our positive sensations are likely to burst forth in laughter if we rapidly see some hint that we are better. According to Hobbes, "sudden glory" is the feeling that creates those grimaces known as laughter, and is generated either by some sudden deed of their own that delights them, or by the comprehension of some malformed thing in another, by contrast of which they praise themselves. Thus, it is more likely to happen to those who are aware of their own inadequacies; those who are driven in supporting themselves in excellent condition and in scrutiny of others' flaws. While laughter at other people's flaws is a sign of "Pusillanimity," great minds' duty is to assist and liberate others from contempt, and to measure themselves exclusively to the most capable (Hobbes, 1996: 43).

The emphasis on suddenness is substantially important in distinguishing feelings of superiority which generate laughter, from feelings of superiority which do not. It is only when eminence is abruptly and unexpectedly revealed that it has the desired/wished effect. Hobbes also states that in his *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, when people laugh at their own jokes, they are laughing at their skill in making that joke, and the sense of superiority they derive from that "a sudden conception of some ability in himself."[2] A resembling interpretation of laughter at the same time is brought into being in Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*. He asserts that three of the six major sentiments are accompanied by laughter—love, hatred, wonder, joy, desire and sadness. Though acknowledging that there are other reasons of laughter than anger, in 3rd part of this book, "Of Particular Passions," he thinks laughter only as a term of disdain and mockery. Descartes assumes that disdain or contempt is a mixture of sheer delight and hostility that results from our noticing a minor malfeasance in someone we believe is certainly worthy of it; we have resentment for the improper conduct, but delight in seeing it in the person who is befitting of it; and when it happens to us suddenly, the shocking revelation of curiosity is what causes us to burst out laughing. And we discern that the people with glaring flaws, such as those who are cripple, blind in one eye, hump, or who have been publicly humiliated, are especially prone to ridicule; for, desperately wanting to see all others kept in the same total contempt as themselves, they take delight in the misfortunes that happen them, and they believe they are certainly worthy of these (Descartes, 1911: 178-179).

We have a weak psychological theory defining the perspective of laughter that derived from Plato and the Bible and dominating Western thought on laughter for two millennia with Hobbes and Descartes' opinions. The Superiority Theory was the name given to this concept in the twentieth century. Simply put, when we laugh, we are expressing our feelings of superiority over other individuals or an earlier state of being. According to Morreall's *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*, a similar effect of Superiority Theory can also be observed in ethnic humor as well, since the Superiority Theory puts "humor" in a position where the Hobessian "laughter of superiority" or "sudden glory" is set to the benefit of the superior one's

[2] Thomas Hobbes, The Elements of Law Natural and Politic (1650), chapter IX.

dignity, while placing the other one at a less fortunate position. This condition defines the dislike from being laughed at, since it debases its object in the viewpoint of the subject (Morreall, 2009: 6).

When Francis Hutcheson (1750) developed a criticism of Hobbes' account of laughter, the Superiority Theory's influence began to wane in the 18th century. In his *Laughter, and Remarks on the Fable of the Bees*, Hutcheson claimed that superiority feelings are neither essential nor sufficient for laughter. When we laugh at pretty weird figures of speech, we may not be comparing ourselves to anybody. If self-comparison and sudden glory are not required for laughter, they certainly are not adequate. We can feel superior to inferior creatures without laughing, according to Hutcheson, dogs and monkeys' intelligence, which directly corresponds to some of our own talent and skills, sometimes makes us laugh; but their duller behaviors, whereas they are far below us, are not humorous and funny at all (Hutcheson, 1750: 11). He also mentions instances of sympathy. When a gentleman in a carriage passes by tattered beggars on the street, he may feel better off than they do, but such emotions are improbable to delight him. In such circumstances, we run the risk of sobbing or mourning rather than laughing (11).

To these counter examples to the Superiority Theory, we could easily add more. In his *Taking Laughter Seriously*, Morreall states that, absurd or nonsense humor can make us laugh without involving us in any self-evaluation. We sometimes take pleasure of these kinds of absurdities not just when we have no sentiments of superiority, but even in circumstances where we appear to be inferior in some way (Morreall, 1983: 11). And if we look another discipline besides the literary works, some examples from cinema can also be given as a negation to the Superiority Theory. When a funny character demonstrates unexpected abilities that we lack, we laugh. The character in the silent films of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Harold Lloyd are frequently stuck in a predicament that appears to be fatal. But then he pulls off a brilliant acrobatic maneuver that none of us would have considered, brought into existence, or even done. We don't appear to need to laugh at such situations in order to compare ourselves to the characters; and even if we do, we don't perceive ourselves superior.

1.3.2. The Relief Theory

The Relief Theory, which is first used and depicted in Lord Shaftesbury's 1709 essay "An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor," attempts to depict humor along the lines of a tension-release model. Rather than defining humor, the Relief Theory discusses the major structures and psychological processes that create laughter. This essay is also the first publication in which "*humor"* is used in its modern sense of funniness and close to the concept that we use now. Over the next two centuries as studies in psychology evolved, thinkers and theorists such as Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud revised the biology behind Relief Theory but kept the idea that laughter relieves pent-up nervous energy on the axis of Aristotelian catharsis.

Spencer's argument in his work "On the Physiology of Laughter" is built on the presumption that sentiments manifest as restless energy in the body. According to him, restless energy generally strives to stimulate muscle activity, and it really does when it reaches a particular degree. When a sentiment approaches a specific level, it usually manifests itself in bodily activity (Spencer, 1911: 299-302). When we are upset, for instance, restless energy causes us to make minor offensive and hostile motions like squeezing our fists, and if the energy builds up to a certain point, we attack the offender. Anxiety creates low-level motions in prepping for leaving, and we flee if the anxiety becomes severe enough. The constructed restless energy is later released or discharged through emotional motions. According to Spencer, laughing also discharges and relaxes restless energy, but with one major distinction: the physical motions in laughter are not the early phases of larger practical movements like escaping or assaulting. Unlike other reactions, laughing does not elicit a strong impulse to act. Spencer claims that laughing has no object and it is simply a discharge of restless energy (303).

John Dewey developed a comparable version of the Relief Theory in the twentieth century. He observes that laughter indicates the end of a moment of tension or anticipation. It is a sudden release of tension, as far as it occurs through the respiratory and vocal mechanism. Therefore, the laughter is a phenomenon similar to the feeling of relief (Dewey, 2014: 558–559). We can consider that there are two

different variations of the Relief Theory: The first is a powerful one, which argues that all laughter is the outcome of a discharge of excessive tension and energy; the second is the weak form, which asserts that humorous laughter frequently entails a release or discharge of tension and energy. Although Freud enhances a more detailed explanation of the energy transmission mechanism, the procedure he specifies is not necessary to the Relief Theory's main assumptions.

One criticism of Spencer's energy release hypothesis is that it does not appear to account for the majority of quick bursts of laughter. Countless punch lines, witty repartee, and caricatures do not appear to have a build-up of tension that is ultimately discharged. Spencer may believe that the best interpretation for laughing, which is otherwise a pointless waste of energy, is that it releases the energy created by humor. Moreover, although most of our humorous interactions do not appear to require an energy construct, and since humor does not appear to approach when we are usually disturbed, a stronger argument might be that laughter is not as utterly pointless as it appears, or that all energy expenditure, whether intentional or not, usually requires a construction. Spencer might certainly respond that everyone is always generating up energy just by dealing with everyday life stress. By this way, most people have extra energy, or energy potential, which is ready to be released through humor. For instance, it is commonly stated that humor encourages one to let off steam after a long, tiring and grueling day at work. The difficulty with this concept and line of reasoning is that individuals who are the most exasperated appear to be the least amenable to humor.

In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud enhances a better detailed interpretation of the Relief Theory of laughter, and that stands for a reinterpretation of Spencer's theory with the inclusion of a new method. He depicts three main types of laughter—joking, the comic, and humor—which all involve the accumulation of some physical energy that is then released via laughter (Freud, 1960: 115). Joking saves energy that would otherwise be needed to suppress sexual and aggressive impulses, which may then be released via laughter. Cognitive energy that would have been employed to deal with an intellectual problem can be discharged with humor. Because what may have been a provocative circumstance turns out to be something we should cope with non-seriously, the humor implies a preservation of

emotional energy. The accumulated energy can be released in the form of an intense affective reaction. The specifics of Freud's discourses on the energy-saving procedure are generally considered questionable. His concept of energy preservation is ambiguous, as it is unclear what difference it makes to argue that energy is preserved rather than wasted. Take, for example, his hypothesis of humor, according to which joking preserves energy that would otherwise be needed to suppress a desire, allowing anger or aggression to be released (98). Similar criticisms of this kind of energy management paradigm are made by Noel Carroll and John Morreall. We may know how it feels to discharge pent-up energy, but we have no concept how it feels to discharge energy that has been employed to suppress a desire. Aside from the claim of weirdness, this humor hypothesis does not supply the expected empirical evidences. According to Freudian theory, the most constrained and repressed individuals take pleasure from joking the most, even though the contrary is true (104).

Relief Theories of laughter do not provide us with a way to separate humorous from non-humorous laughter. The preserved energy of Sigmund Freud is imperceptibly indistinguishable from other sources of energy. Relief Theories, as we saw with Spencer, must be considered in conjunction with another explanation of humor. Freud's attempt to describe why we laugh is also an attempt to clarify why we find particular provocative jokes extremely funny, still it is unclear what he is going at in his explanation of energy saving. He makes the basic Relief Theorist error of presuming that because cognitive energy is frequently released by body exertion, any muscle exertion must be explained by an overabundance of nervous energy.

1.3.3. The Incongruity Theory

Incongruity Theory appeared in the 18th century to challenge the Superiority Theory. While the Superiority Theory says that the sentiments of superiority are the source of laughter, and the Relief Theory claims that nervous energy is released, the Incongruity Theory claims that it is the interpretation of something incongruous—something that goes against our mental and cognitive configurations, mindsets and preconceptions. If we think in terms of the Incongruity Theory, a certain spontaneous

humorous laughter, according to Derrida in his *Writing and Difference* (1967), bursts out solely on the ground of an utter rejection and abandonment of meaning (Derrida, 1978: 256). This sophisticated theory has also been discussed by Aristotle, James Beattie, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard, Gilles Deleuze, and many other philosophers and psychologists later on. It is now the reigning and dominant theory of humor in philosophy and psychology.

Although Aristotle did not use the phrase of *incongruity*, he gives a hint that it is the basis for at least some humor. In the *Rhetoric*[3] Aristotle puts forward the earliest flickers of the Incongruity Theory of humor, and reveals that the best and easiest approach to make a reader laugh is to create an anticipation and then break it by supplying something unexpected (Aristotle, 2004: 139). According to Cicero, in his *De Oratore (On The Orator)*[4], the most prevalent type of joke is one in which we expect one thing and get another; we laugh because of our own disappointments and blunders (Cicero, 1967: 389). After describing the potential of metaphors to shock the audience and reader, Aristotle claims that the impact may be generated even by jokes based on word alterations; this, too, is a surprise. This can be found in both poetry and prose. The word that is spoken is not what the audience expected (Aristotle, 2004: 139). These descriptions seem close to René Descartes' subsequent surprise theory of humor, but Aristotle goes on to explain how the surprise should somehow suit the facts and circumstances (139). Alternatively, as we may say nowadays, the incongruity must be resolvable.

The first intellectual using the term of incongruous to define humor was James Beattie[5]. According to him, when we see something funny, we laugh because of a sensation or feeling that is triggered in the mind because of particular things or thoughts being shown to it (Beattie, 1779: 304). Our excitement and laughter appear to stem from the juxtaposition of incongruous elements in the same assembly. According to the source of humorous laughter, two or more contradictory, improper, or incongruous components or situations are considered to be combined into a single

[3] Aristotle's *Rhetoric* consists of three books. Book III, Chapter 11 discusses the things about incongruity theory, jokes, and humor.
[4] *De Oratore* (*On the Orator*) is a dialogue set in 91 BC and written by Cicero in 55 BC.
[5] James Beattie was a Scottish poet, moralist and philosopher who lived between 1735-1803 in Scotland.

complex object or assembly having a kind of interrelationship from the unusual way in which the consciousness notices them (318-320).

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant gives a more precise statement of the role of incongruity in humor. According to Kant's assumptions, there must be something ludicrous in everything that makes people burst out laughing (in which the comprehension, thus, can find no fulfillment). Laughter is an emotion that arises from the sudden and unexpected dissolution of a stressed anticipation (Kant, 1987: 203). Furthermore, a more precise form of the Incongruity Theory is offered by Arthur Schopenhauer, who claims that humor arises from a concept's inability to describe an object of thought. We are confronted with an incongruity when the specific reaches the general. Schopenhauer also stresses the factor of surprise in his *The World as Will and Representation*, saying that: "The greater and more unexpected this incongruity in the apprehension of the person laughing, the more violent will be his laughter" (Schopenhauer, 1969: 91). The Incongruity Theory of humor, as asserted by Kant and Schopenhauer, specifies a required condition of the object of humor. Concentrating on the humorous component leaves something out of the consideration of humor because there are several things that are incongruous but do not generate fun and excitement. The pleasure one gets from humorous objects would need to be included in a stronger articulation of the Incongruity Theory. By concentrating on human reaction, John Morreall strives to uncover appropriate conditions for detecting humor. He describes humorous enjoyment as taking pleasure in a cognitive shift. The Incongruity Theory is a response-oriented theory which asserts that humor is a specific type of response to perceived incongruity.

One of the most important, strong, prominent, and profound theories of humor is Henri Bergson's *Laughter*.[6] Bergson's theory of humor is difficult to categorize since it combines elements of Superiority and Incongruity Theories. In a well-known phrase, Bergson defines the root of humor as "mechanical encrusted upon the living" (Bergson, 1911: 49). According to Bergson "the comic does not exist outside of what is strictly human" (3). Humor, he says, is the product of an incongruous connection between human intelligence and regular or mechanical behavior. Thereby, humor serves as a social corrective, aiding people in recognizing

[6] *Laughter* (It was written in French and the original title is *Le Rire*) is a collection of three essays by French philosopher Henri Bergson, first published in 1900.

behavior that are harmful to their development. Acknowledging our superiority over the subhuman is a significant source of humor. One of the fundamental sources of humor is anything that threatens to turn a human to an object, whether animal or mechanical. Bergson's theory does, without a doubt, attempt to explain physical comedy and bodily humor, although he appears to exaggerate the importance of mechanical function. It is difficult to understand how his theory can be applied to most jokes and wit-based forms of humor.

The Incongruity Theory has been criticized for being too broad to be particularly meaningful, for failing to distinguish between non-humorous and fundamental incongruity, and for failing to grasp why certain things are amusing and humorous while others are not. As previously stated, it combines the subject of humor with reactions. It is the concept of humor, or how to identify humor, which is at stake here, not how to design a humor-producing formula. The Incongruity Theorists offer a counterargument to this objection, claiming that humor delights in incongruity.

1.4. DARK HUMOR

Though "dark humor," also known as black humor, dark comedy, gallows humor or morbid humor, is a term which nowadays comes up suddenly in everyday conversations as well as in literary criticism, there is overwhelming consensus on what exactly dark humor is. This is, of course, not surprising, since there is no general agreement either as to what humor is, but most people believe that they recognize it when they encounter with it. Is it serious? Is it funny? Does it make fun of critical issues, or does it take humorous situations too seriously? Dark humor is a subgenre of humor in which gloomy, grotesque and hideous elements are mixed with comedy to create a disturbing and unpleasant effect and reflection upon life's absurdity. Often, the serious topics are being discussed under this genre, but the approach towards it is very gentle and humorous. Based on these facts, Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier's absurd comedy film *The Boss of It All* (2006) is a brilliant example for addressing the seriousness of humor. Given by the voice of Trier, the film "is a comedy, and harmless as such. No preaching or swaying of opinion. Just a cozy time. So why not poke fun at artsy-fartsy culture?" (Trier).

These lines, which Trier expresses at the very beginning of the film, and the issue that he focuses on in terms of the essence of the film, is a journey he embarks on to liberate art and artistic activities from the forms of seriousness and boredom. Throughout the film, he makes fun of this seriousness and boredom.

Furthermore, the dark humor focuses on topics that are generally regarded severe or painful to discuss. In the context of dark humor, Danish physicist Niels Bohr, who made fundamental contributions to understanding atomic structure and quantum theory and received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922 for these contributions, utters very crucial words on humor and its seriousness: "Some subjects are so serious that one can only joke about them"[7] (Pais, 2000: 24). Within the framework of all this information, the dark humor criticizes the conventional ways of the society with a satirical, cynical and sarcastic tone. It is wise, intelligent, witty, humorous and it mocks the normative, approved behavior. It reveals the horrific nature of the things by managing them in most unaccepted way possible.

The concept of dark humor (from the French "humour noir") was first introduced by the Surrealist theorist André Breton in 1935 while interpreting the writings of Jonathan Swift. Breton's priority was to define some of Swift's writings as a subgenre of comedy and satire in which laughter occurs from cynicism and skepticism, often relying on subjects such as death and the macabre. Breton introduces this term as black humor in his *Anthology of Black Humor* (*Anthologie de l'humour noir*), in which he credited Jonathan Swift as the inventor of the concepts of black humor and gallows humor. Breton states in his book that everything points to him as the genuine pioneer when it comes to black humor. Essentially, coordinating the ephemeral remnants of this style of humor before him is hard or impossible. Swift is often credited as the pioneer of "savage" or "gallows" humor (Breton, 1997: 3). But he didn't use black humor as a separate genre of literature. He rather saw it as a stance or an attitude towards specific things. In drama or fiction, dark humor is a tone that is both entertaining and threatening at the same time. In that style, the comic uses the audience as a joke and taunts their cherished values.

[7] These words, often attributed to the German theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg, who was also one of the key figures of quantum mechanics corresponds to Niels Bohr; as quoted by Abraham Pais in *The Genius of Science: A Portrait Gallery* (2000).

Dark humor is offensive by nature. In fact, that's as offensive as it gets. It perplexes the audience by laughing at serious and important subjects like morbidities. It constantly alters perspective in order to depict real-life paradoxes and dilemmas. However, underneath this haughty and witty demeanor, dark humor is attempting to address a number of important social life concerns. Patrick O'Neill[8] identifies the genre in his study of dark humor in literature, covering a certain amount of writers who use "black" humor, as O'Neill refers to it. Though some now consider the phrase "black humor" to be pejorative, O'Neill uses it to discuss "black" or "gallows" humor, referencing pivotal studies on the topic and attempting to argue in his "The Comedy of Entropy: The Contexts of Black Humour."[9] He claims that, instead of lamenting and mourning, black/dark humor allows us to contemplate the bleakness of the abyss while laughing and rejoicing (O'Neill, 1983: 100).

Typical dictionaries and encyclopedias are not much assistance, and the word "dark/black humor" is not even mentioned in most of them. One of the few exclusions is *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, which describes it as grotesque or gloomy humor used to portray the absurdity, callousness, contradiction, and brutality of the modern world in its 1975 edition (Harris, 1975: 306). Characters or events are frequently exaggerated beyond the boundaries of conventional mockery or sarcasm. Dark humor frequently employs tragic elements, and it is sometimes compared to tragicomedy. For instance, Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1963) is an extremely funny portrayal of the events following the dropping of an atomic bomb, while Jules Feiffer's comedy *Little Murders* (1965) is a depiction of the horrific events of modern city life, concentrating especially on arbitrary mass killings (O'Neill, 1983: 80). The novels and short stories of such writers as Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Vladimir Nabokov, Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Joseph Heller, Raymond Carver, John Kennedy Toole, David Foster Wallace, George Saunders, David Sedaris, Katherine Dunn, Ottessa Moshfegh, and Philip Roth hold elements of dark humor.

[8] Patrick O'Neill is an emeritus professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Queen's University.
[9] Patrick O'Neill's this essay published in *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* in 1983 at first then added to Harold Bloom's Literary Themes *Dark Humor* in 2010.

According to Patrick O'Neill, we can briefly say that there are five primary styles of articulation for black humor: grotesque, parodic, ironic, satirical, and ridiculous (91). Even though Beckett never used the terminology of "black/dark humor," his novel *Watt* (1953) has one stunningly accurate description of their interplay; he mixes the modalities of communication that O'Neill brought out with the dark humor aspects. Watt meets the leaving Arsene as he enters Mr. Knott's residence in the novel, and Arsene remarks on: "The laugh that now is mirthless once was hollow, the laugh that once was hollow once was bitter. And the laugh that once was bitter? Eyewater, Mr. Watt, eyewater . . . The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh . . ." Then Arsene goes on to say, "But the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh . . . It is the laugh of laughs, the risus purus, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs—silence please—at that which is unhappy" (Beckett, 1959: 48).

There is also a "Humor is tragedy plus time"[10] phrase which is used by several humor and comedy theoreticians. A graph illustrating the possibility of what people could find offensive would be a basic bell curve with tragedies at its pinnacle, while humor is perfect blend of darkness and light, good and evil.

Humor, especially the dark humor, and jokes are anti-traditional and anti-rituals. They criticize, mimic, or ridicule a society's ceremonial customs, as Milan Kundera points out, when someone's cap falls on a freshly dug tomb, the burial loses its significance and laughter arises (Kundera, 1983: 232-33). The component of enjoyment in language, form, and style may be found throughout modern literary dark/black humor, despite its origins in sorrow, formlessness, and stillness. Martin Esslin references one of the main exponents of French Avant-garde theater, Eugene Ionesco, in *The Theater of the Absurd*, to become cognizant of what is dreadful and to laugh at it, this is to become master of that which is terrifying (Esslin, 1969: 158).

In short, dark humor cannot be defined solely in terms of its particular subject; it must also be considered to be part of its mode of expression, and the existence of a wide range of what is commonly referred to as dark humor, spanning from the meaningless to the harrowing, delivers us with a preliminary step for a

[10] Although this expression is generally attributed to Mark Twain, there is no written document or evidence about whether he said that or not.

contrasting definition. Dark humor, in contrast to other varieties of humor, may be both harmless and derisively violent. Dark humor, which is ultimately understood as a reinforcement of the controversial tensions inherent to all humor, occurs in numerous methods and forms, and our laughter may involve various amounts of mirthlessness, hollowness, bitterness, mockery, and agony; but in the end, we do laugh, and there is always hope while we do laugh (O'Neill, 1983: 100).

1.5. HUMOR IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in all areas of intellectual life, colonial and post-revolutionary American writers faced the charge—coming largely from England—that nothing "original" existed in American culture and literature. From this point of view, everything that American philosophers, poets, and novelists produced must be inferior imitations of European culture, since the writers were all educated in the European tradition. In the nineteenth century, however, England's monopoly weakened, leading to the Americans who, generally, abandoned the sophistication of British wit and intelligence in favor of regionalism. As a result, scholars of American literature have discussed that humor writing, with its focus on the entirely American phenomena of "Yankee" of New England, the "backwoodsman and hillbillies" of South, and the "frontiers" of Western could have been the embryo of a completely original national literature. And the South produced its first original, humorous literary materials in that time. Between 1830 and 1867—the writings of such names as Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Davy Crockett, William Tappan Thompson, C.F.M. Noland, Madison Tensas, Johnson Jones Hooper, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Joseph Glover Baldwin, Joseph M. Field, John S. Robb, H.E. Taliaferro, and George Washington Harris can be given as examples. These writers established a standard and set many patterns followed in Southern humor down to the present day.

Southern studies, especially Southern humor studies, with stronger interdisciplinary and highly collaborative foundations developed within American Studies maybe more effective. Thus, an academic understanding embracing various courses in various departments that work together to present a coherent, view of the

South, its peoples, and its cultures may contribute to the study area considerably. Cleanth Brooks, for instance, identified the three most significant topics that he felt closely relate to the changeless aspect of Southern culture in his "Southern Literature: The Past, History, and the Timeless." The first one is a sense and perception of location, the second one is a particular notion of time that encompasses both the past and the timeless, and the third one is an interest in and ability for narrative, which includes both oral and formal storytelling traditions (Brooks, 1983: 5). Based on this knowledge, we may very easily place Southern humor within the four eras that commonly apply to American humor: (1) 1830 to 1860, (2) 1860 to 1925, (3) 1935 to 1945, and (4) 1945 to the present.

The period between 1830 and 1860 was a creative and inventive time for exclusively humorous work in the history of Southern literature, though not the most reputable and prestigious. The establishment of the primary humorous clichés, that served Southern humor more or less, was grounded initially in that period. The key figure was the frontiersman, and he is the literary ancestor of the redneck-hillbilly who still exists today. In this period, the minstrel shows[11] also showed up. Some of the significant writers who can be classified as primarily humorous (the Southern and Southwestern storytellers), were Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*, William Tappan Thompson's *Major Jones's Courtship*, Thomas Bangs Thorpe's *The Big Bear of Arkansas*, Johnson J. Hooper's *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, and maybe the most important one was George Washington Harris's *Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spun By a Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool*. Like others, Harris was among the seminal writers of Southern humor, and he has been called by Michael Dunne[12], "the most original and gifted of the antebellum humorists" (Dunne, 2007: 8). His works influenced writers such as Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor.

Despite the fact that they were usually educated in the North, these early Southern humorists were native Southerners who were advocating the status quo that provided them comfortable lifestyles at the expense of poor whites and black slaves. They share a lot of qualities in common. The writer, whether as an individual or as a

[11] These shows were a form of entertainment developed in the 19th century America and they put on the stage by white people in make-up or blackface for the purpose of playing the role of black people.
[12] Michael Dunne is professor emeritus of English at Middle Tennessee State University. He is the writer of several books, including *Intertextual Encounters in American Fiction, Film, and Popular Culture*.

literary persona, typically belongs to a socioeconomic stratum that is considerably different from and above to that of the frontier local wildlife s/he recounts. These writers' principal method was a clear and realistic depiction of a flamboyant and wild existence, conducted with fairly significant passion and a truly unique pleasure in the dynamism and weirdness of vernacular language on the Old Southern and Southwestern frontier. The trashy and grotesque characters in their stories were commonly referred as "clayeaters" and they generally tended to reside near dirt. The writers strategically used aristocratic narrators, occasionally in first person, combined with the instantly recognizable vernacular of poor white archetypes, to facilitate their readers to take a superior and privileged position against these characters and correlate the economic and social problems of the South with savage cultural predispositions of the masses of unsophisticated and undereducated white people. And almost all of these Southern writers were regarded as subliterary in their times.

From 1860 to 1925, Mark Twain, who is now considered as a Southern humorist, but during his time was regarded as a Southwestern humorist (Southwestern is being Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, Louisiana and East Texas in here), was the prominent figure of this period. He was labeled as a literary humorist and local colorist in his own day, strongly associated with writers like Artemus Ward, Kate Chopin, and Bret Harte, and it took some time for the brilliance of his synthesis of humor and local color to be acknowledged and recognized as serious literature.

Following the Civil War, the region's general mood shifted decisively toward plantation recollections of moonlight and Southern magnolias, and the author, who was able to combine nostalgia for the good old days with humble and friendly humor, certainly succeed. Professor and humor theoretician Steadman Mark remarks in his "Humor in Literature" essay that, Mark Twain "combines and transcends the best aspects of local-colorists and southern humorists" (Steadman, 1989: 354). It's interesting and ironic that the situations in Southern humor are not always as humorous and funny as they seem. Death, tragedy, violence, renunciation, betrayal, character deficiencies, addictions, and other more serious subjects abound in the lines of Southern humor, yet readers seem to be able to confront these problematic phenomena with a sense of humor. This enigma is only feasible because of the

creativity of the Southern writer, who uses vibrant characters, distorted and exaggerated dialect, sarcasm, dramatization, hyperbole, contradiction, and satire to make actual events into humorous narratives. In reality, readers may find themselves laughing at these folks' circumstances because they are aware that these people and loathsome situations are not unique to the South; but as Steadman points out, the South is the only territory where unique humorous characters may still be found (Steadman, 1989: 856).

Narratives using a black vernacular, as well as other pre-established methods such as exaggerated characters and clichés of black and poor white people, began to appear after the Reconstruction Era. In the early 20th century, Stephen A. Smith argues in his work "Humor as Rhetoric and Cultural Argument" that Southern humor bolstered the sociopolitical authority of the dominant white culture while further denigrating and subordinating the weaker groups of the South (Smith, 1993: 53). This may be seen in Twain's fictional character Jim, who is treated as a second-class citizen by his white masters, as seen by the disparaging term "nigger."

The "Southern Renaissance," which spanned from 1920 to 1945, was the golden era of Southern writing. The best Southern writers began to combine serious literary components with extremely humorous factors. Southern humor—at least that written by Southerners—would henceforward be a leaven in the harsh region of literature. William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell and Zora Neale Hurston were among the finest creators of art, but essential humorous elements can be found in the work of nearly all notable Southern during that time. Especially Faulkner was the most important writer in that period. He employs humor in his works, but he is mostly not recognized and evaluated in this regard. Although there are some humorous elements in his early writings, his real success in terms of humor appears in his later works.

Many artists employed humor in the period between the wars, because it was a golden era and great milestone for American humor—in books, journals, cinema, theater and broadcast—at the time. The New Yorker magazine, however, had the most impact on written humor. Even though it quickly set up itself as the primary medium for serious literature, papers, and journalism following WWII's end, it never lost its sense of humor. Southern writers such as Truman Capote, Eudora Welty, Joseph Mitchell kept writing in this magazine. In motion pictures—films, TV series

and TV shows—and on the radio, Southern characters did appear, but mostly, they were only parodies and caricatures of existing Southern stereotypes.

From 1945 to the present, Flannery O'Connor, John Kennedy Toole, Ralph Ellison, Cormac McCarthy, Eudora Welty, James Dickey, Carson McCullers, Truman Capote, Harper Lee, William Gay, Alice Walker and Walker Percy are among the renown and well-known writers of the South in this period, and they are all writers with advanced humor skills. Despite the fact that they are all considerably more than humorous, humor is an essential component of their work. Mostly, humor in their work have its roots in something that is not funny at all. And in addition to these facts, religion in the works of Flannery O'Connor especially, more than just a leisure time experience, and a theological or ecclesiastical trademark for the Southern characters, becomes part of their personalities.

In popular works by comic Southern writers, such as James Wilcox's *Modern Baptists*, Harrison Scott Key's *The World's Largest Man: A Memoir*, Barry Hannah's *Geronimo Rex*, William Price Fox's *Southern Fried*, Guy Owen's *The Ballad of the Flim-Flam Man*, and Mac Hyman's *No Time for Sergeants*, the humorous stereotypes remain to be what they had been before—poor whites (hillbilly, redneck, and rural) and black people. Lastly, there are some significant films to understand the Southern humor, gothic and culture in general. Even there are numerous examples for this situation, at least such films; Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Richard Brook's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1958),* Martin Ritt's *The Long, Hot Summer (1958),* Mark Rydell's *The Reivers* (1969), Hal Needham's *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977), John Huston's *Wise Blood* (1979), Michael Apted's *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980), Colin Higgins' *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (1981), Walter Hill's *Southern Comfort* (1981), Bruce Beresford's *Tender Mercies* (1983), Herbert Ross' *Steel Magnolias* (1989), Bruce Beresford's *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), Jon Avnet's *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), Robert Zemeckis' *Forrest Gump* (1994), Billy Bob Thornton's *Sling Blade* (1996), Andy Tennant's *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002), Tim Burton's *Big Fish* (2003), James Mangold's *Walk The Line* (2005), Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011), James Franco's *Child of God* (2013), *As I Lay Dying* (2013), *The Sound and the Fury* (2014); Jeff Nichols' *Shotgun Stories* (2007), *Take Shelter* (2011), *Mud* (2012), *Loving* (2016); and most importantly the Coen

Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000) can be given as an example to understand the ethos of the American South.

In conclusion, it is a known fact that the American South is a unique region in America. General opinion is that it is more like a foreign country than any other areas included within the national boundaries for the last hundred and fifty years, humor and laughter have been a key, albeit often overlooked component of the Southern literary imagination. In the South, humor was used to make depictions of the harsh, unpleasant, or repulsive features of tough life palatable and appealing, rather than horrific and nauseating, since it could easily have been a Gothic theme. Too often, people miss the humor, comic, and the humorous sides of Southern literature as they focus heavily on deep-fried grotesque and dark sides of the stories.

Southern fiction is indeed full of odd, weird and wry comedy. And especially after the Southern Renaissance, the South started to create its unique characters and plots different from the early Southern humorists. While early humorists mostly dealt with the racial and ethnic humor in the South, subsequent writers, such as William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor, put the grotesque, gothic, regional, religious, traditional, ethical, minimalist, allegorical and sardonic subjects to their literary works in a humorous way. One of the most striking features of these writers is using dark humor in a vernacular way. They employ dark humor to perplex their readers and keep them alert. Their understanding of humor and comedy stands somewhere different from the stereotypical understanding we know. Their sense of humor can occasionally be related to the gothic and grotesque elements by including the Southern people and landscapes. Shortly, their humor is based upon people's deficiencies and the parody of situations they find themselves in.

Langston Hughes[13] for example who places black people at the center of his work defines humor in the following lines of *The Book of Negro Humor*: "Humor is laughing at what you haven't got when you ought to have it ... what you wish in your secret heart were not funny, but it is, and you must laugh. Humor is your own unconscious therapy. Like a welcome summer rain, humor may suddenly cleanse and cool the earth, the air, and you" (Hughes, 1966: vii). Langston Hughes' opinion on

[13] James Mercer Langston Hughes, from Joplin, Missouri, was an American poet, civil rights activist, novelist, dramatist, and columnist. One of the first pioneers of the literary art form known as jazz poetry, who also played a key role in both the Southern and Harlem Renaissances of the time.

humor is in parallel with William Faulkner's and Flannery O'Connor's sense of humor which also values the South's ethos.

CHAPTER TWO
WILLIAM FAULKNER

2.1. A LONG JOURNEY FROM TRAGEDY TO HUMOR

William Faulkner, who had completed the most of his major works by 1942, was regarded only weakly as a gifted and notable writer by the American public during that time. By 1945 only one of his books, the infamous *Sanctuary*, remained in print, and he had already begun to slip into an ambiguity as a minor expert of what was commonly called Southern Gothic. He was born on September 25, 1897, as William Cuthbert Falkner (the "u" in his name would come later) in the northern Mississippi town of New Albany, until the age of five when his family had settled at the university town of Oxford, close by Mississippi, which remained his home for the rest of his life. The first thirty years of his life were a period of self-education and experimentation.

In one of his interviews, William Faulkner proves to be a reference to his fictional and imaginary land, which he discovered and loved to call "Yoknapatawpha County," the land of his dream, the land which is the perfect place for him to author his novels. According to Jean Stein's interview with Faulkner, Faulkner realized, commencing with *Sartoris*, that his native soil was interesting to write about and that he would never live long enough to exhaust it; and that by sublimating the real into the apocryphal, he would have complete freedom and autonomy to use whatever skill he might have to its highest echelon. It led to the discovery of a treasure trove of new individuals; he created his own unique universe. He has the ability to move people like God.[14]

As a result of this dream, his desire is visualized in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and so on. Faulkner as much as he admired his homeland, he was highly appreciative of his imaginary Yoknapatawpha County, which he also coined as the "little postage stamp." His profound love for his homeland was crystallized in the American South,

[14] "Faulkner's Interview with Jean Stein," *Paris Review*. 1956.

especially in the Mississippi region; in an almost divine touch, he tried to recreate it as a microcosm, and have it gain recognition by the rest of the world.

Throughout his continuous experimentations with this fictional and imaginary land, he has generated it as a solid foundation for most of his literary works. Relatedly, Windham Lewis states about William Faulkner in his *Contemporary Literary Criticism* that he is regarded as one of the most significant authors in contemporary American literature. His writings, in particular, highlight the unique history of the American South. The historical and cultural background for Faulkner's novels and short stories was the northern regions of Mississippi, where he spent his entire life (Lewis, 1984: 135). It is obvious that the grand Southern author of the Yoknapatawpha County, is clearly identified with the American South, and it is pretty natural that his fiction is filled with references to the geography, its history, customs, traditions with a prose often employing its vernacular idiom: as such the American South has become an affluent setting for his novels and short stories.

The microcosm he had generated allowed Faulkner, to write such works that helped him scrutinize the collapse of old ideals, and the difficulties of keeping a certain level of dignity, and meaning especially, throughout the post-war era, the Great Depression until the Second World War; an era which can also be named as the modern void. The literary world recognized these works as his "modern tragedies"[15] (Wadlington, 2019: 68). Just like his ancient predecessors, Faulkner reveals a sense of pity and terror enabled by such themes as familial loss, tattered facts, and self-destructiveness all and all inspiring further empathy, fulfillment, and catharsis. What more could one ask from a writer?

Written in an age contemporary with Sigmund Freud, to look back at Faulkner's novels predominantly engaged with characters and narratives with familial and personal decline, and ruin will allow also for a better comprehension of the author's own emotional struggles.

His liquor addiction is not adequate to explain Faulkner's temperamental and changeable condition. Evidence exists to suggest chronic depression which occurred early in his life. Such an interpretation helps to illuminate his gothic tendencies and his compassion for wounded, alienated creatures, stricken with either despair or futile

[15] Warwick Wadlington writes broadly about this situation in his article, "A Logic of Tragedy: The Sound and the Fury," in his book *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy*.

repression of it. Faulkner was especially convincing in his portrayals of young men like Jason Compson, Quentin Compson, Joe Christmas, Charles Bon, Henry Sutpen, Popeye, and even the half-wit Benjy. In any case, they are lost souls, or, like Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!: The Corrected Text*, they might resemble "an empty hall echoing with sonorous" voices or, to change images, "a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts" (Faulkner, 1990: 7).

No less important than being busy with the fact of death reversed by art was Faulkner's dread of emotional castration, psychic emptiness, and sharp pain. Faulkner had channeled his dread of emotional castration, psychic emptiness, and sharp pain through his art, and this was no less important than death.

As T. S. Eliot once saw in his *Four Quartets*, humankind cannot stand so much reality (Eliot, 2014: 40). In some sense, reality was what Faulkner looked to evade and replace with a world of his own making—superior, grander, more grotesque and more intense than ordinary, dullish living. His characters are thus given to all kinds of extreme temperament, behavior, and physique. The words of outrage and despair are often used in a subtle manner in Faulkner's fiction as if to conceal actual Southerners' experiences of terror. Instead, in Faulkner's world such unrestrained emotions, ruling his characters' actions, translate into their behaviors as compulsiveness, resulting in a tragedy of great magnitude.

For example, when Faulkner asked in 1959 to explain the Compsons and Sartorises, he replied in Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner's *Faulkner in the University* that, they were the kind who strove for the heroic but "failed through lack of character or absence of things in their character which [should] have been there but at least they tried" (Gwynn and Blotner, 1959: 204).

Faulkner once raised the issue in this way: "I myself am inclined to think it was because of the bareness of the Southerner's life, that [the artist] had to resort to his own imagination, to create his own Carcassonne" (Gwynn and Blotner, 1959: 136). By Carcassonne, an analogy also used as the title of an early short story, Faulkner had in mind the kingdom of imagination of which the author was sole sovereign. The short story, or, more descriptively, prose poem, has a speaker who talks to himself while looking down from a transcendent position. Imagination and death are metaphorically juxtaposed. Death, though, is not solely void and

annihilation but the consequence, the outcome of life itself, an eternal space that the artist's achievements can fill.

As far as records demonstrate, Faulkner never attempted suicide. He dwelt in his own kingdom of the mind, which, though filled with gothic fancies, was too exciting to be killed at his own hands. Instead, writing liberated the most destructive aspects of his misery, depression and despair; but it was a troubling practice because of the urgency to strive for excellence. He says in James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate's *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962* that, "I don't think any author can be satisfied with his work. If he were, there'd be nothing left for him to do but cut his throat" (Meriwether and Millgate, 1980: 220). Instead of suicide, he just gradually destroyed himself with liquor that eventually led to significant problems in his life. Faulkner's inner life was dominated by alcoholic captivity and intense melancholy.

His mother's, Maud Falkner's, strengths were many, but her legacy, while helpful, came at a price. She had brains and discipline. Early on, she started reading books to her sons, especially the classics. "Billy," as he was called, took to the literary feast with pleasure, but even though much reading helped his later creativity, it took him further away from other boys. Furthermore, he inherited her artistic talent and established a sophisticated approach to art that was an outstanding intellectual resource. However, his talent won him mockery from classmates. Maud Falkner was not to blame, of course. She was a strict Methodist and sought her son's development as of his ability and potential. But the community in which the Falkners lived rewarded learning and artistic interests truly little.

Late in his youth, Faulkner had become locally notorious for his drinking, idleness, and reclusive habits, all of which further alienated him from his social life and his incompetent father. Such announcements reinforced Faulkner's own sense of self-disgust even as he was also developing the literary depressive conflicting sense of omnipotence—a no one understands my genius sentiment. Years later, L. D. Brodsky had an interview with Al Bezzerides, a Hollywood screenwriter—Faulkner's sometime occupation—had the objective distance to assess his colleague's nature in a way that Oxford friends and Faulkner's own family could not. About a visit to Faulkner's home in the 1940s the screenwriter later reminisced in

Brodsky's "Reflections on William Faulkner: An Interview with Albert I. Bezzerides" about, "I can recall my feeling of amazement that these people didn't know who he was" (Brodsky, 1985: 387). They treated him with an almost undisguised scorn and mockery.

In addition to these alienating components in Faulkner's growth, the oversensitive child and teenager had to deal with the oppressive Southern cultural attitudes and traditions that gave the intellectually gifted young person so little space. Of course, twentieth—as well as nineteenth—century American writers have generally complained that their intellectual interests offended the folks around them. In the North, those who read and wrote at the expense of more practical pursuits were thought hunters. In the South, the young intellectuals faced with the risk of being called effeminate.

Undoubtedly, the imaginary lies he told about himself, the fiction he wrote, the bottles of whiskey he drank were all partly designed as a means to escape these unpleasant experiences and the crises that arose in his life. In 1930, for instance, his daughter Alabama was born prematurely and died a few days later, the young father and his wife Estelle were distraught. They were extremely unhappy about the loss of their first child.

Drinking was to show a claim for masculinity, but due to his mother's intense disapproval, it was a guilt-ridden choice and placed him in the unwanted company of a father who loved and respected him too little. It might be presumed that Faulkner benefits from his dislike of his father for portraying Jason in *The Sound and the Fury*. Even Faulkner's mother stated that Jason talked and gestured just like her husband, Murry. Jason resembled him also in his gruff temper, unloving character, and resentment at not having a job that paid him handsomely (Wittenberg, 1979: 84-85). As a result, with so many words from which to draw conclusions, one can recognize the fiction writer's primary positions.

Faulkner's heroines, some of them alcoholics, others fanatically religious or non-believers, are rarely admirable in most respects. Even though they are not very reliable; they are properly obedient at some level. Joe Christmas, Ellen Douglas argues in her "Faulkner's Women," can fornicate as much as he likes without authorial comment, but Joanna Burden in *Light in August*, enjoyed the "wild throes

of nymphomania" and the hearing of dirty language. Joe Christmas has the last say on her because he thinks at least he has turned her into a lady, and now she despises him. At the very least, he considers he has helped to teach her that (Douglas, 1981: 154-156). And the most sexually sensitive scene in all of Faulkner's work is not the sexual love of man and woman but man and cow—the mentally retarded Ike Snopes' passion for a cow standing in a stream (157-58). Ellen Douglas is convincing that Faulkner's men, none of them perfect, may be evil but their offenses are not seen as a function of their maleness but their individual weakness. Part of the problem, by all means, was the misogynistic features and characteristics of Southern culture itself.

Once when he was asked about the habit, Faulkner replied defensively according to Blotner's *Faulkner*, "I consider drinking a normal instinct, not a hobby. A normal and healthy instinct" (Blotner, 1974: 1556). Unluckily, Faulkner's excessive indulgence in alcohol eventually eroded his creative gifts. Such was also the case with fellow Southern novelist and William Styron, who also suffered from depression, but the difference in their approaches is substantial. Regarding his forty-year devotion to hard liquor, Faulkner's contemporary wrote in his *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*, "I used alcohol as the magical conduit to fantasy and euphoria." Later he realized that he drank primarily "to calm the anxiety and incipient dread that [he] had hidden away for so long somewhere in the dungeon of [his] spirit" (Styron, 1990: 40).

Faulkner's years in New Orleans under the influence of Sherwood Anderson, his return to Oxford with his unfortunate marriage to Estelle, and his time in Hollywood in the mid-1930s were filled with astonishing originality and creativity—and weighty psychological stress. Whereas Faulkner worked at screenplays in Hollywood, for example, Meta Carpenter, who worked in the film industry at that time, kept an almost idyllic relationship with him. Away from home, he was free of any constant commitment, and she had at her feet a man of literary powers exceeding any others in that cinematic desert.

In 1935, based on P. R. Broughton's "An Interview with Meta Carpenter," Faulkner's worst attack of delirium tremens appeared in her presence, not back in Oxford, Mississippi under the eyes of neighbors and a disapproving wife. He hallucinated that German pilots were attacking him from the air like angry wasps. It

was an echo of a boastful fiction that he used to hide his fewer exciting experiences in the Royal Air Force in Canada during World War I. After her marriage, an event that significantly upset her former lover, Meta Carpenter found him extended naked on a New York hotel bathroom floor and arranged for his instant hospitalization. In a drunken stupor he had fallen from the toilet and burned himself seriously by lying against a hot radiator. The off-and-on relationship with her satisfied well his need for both sexually and mothering while he was away from Oxford and his wife Estelle. This situation continued well into the 1940s (Broughton, 1982: 776-801).

The loss of his brother in a plane accident on November 10, 1936, when Faulkner was in the middle of drafting *Absalom, Absalom!* was no less painful than the almost fatal burn. The story, strangely, is about Henry Sutpen's brotherly rivalry with his mulatto half-brother Charles Bon, whom Sutpen kills; the same issue keeps popping up in the life of young Quentin Compson, the suicidal revealer of their tragic fates. Over learning the cheerless news of Dean's death in nearby Pontotoc County, Faulkner felt particularly guilty because he had encouraged and supported his younger brother to fly. In this incident, besides his brother, Dean and three young farmers perished during an air show flight. Faulkner mourned this event throughout his life. John Wharton Lowe refers to this tragic incident in his *Bridging Southern Cultures: An Interdisciplinary Approach* by giving Faulkner's own speech, "I taught my younger brother to fly, and he crashed and was killed. My mother wanted to see him, but he was so badly disfigured that I spent the whole night with the mortician at the side of a bathtub trying to put his face back in some shape. Since then, I have never been able to get into a bathtub" (Lowe, 2011: 95). A pregnant wife and a sense of obligation to the mourning mother, Maud, kept him working on *Absalom, Absalom!* and away from drinking for a while. However, after finishing the novel and returning to Hollywood, he finally felt free of responsibilities and became heavily involved in a growing addiction, which was exacerbated by his remorseful reaction to his brother's death.

One of his early novels *Flags in the Dust* copes with the almost suicidal death of Bayard Sartoris, a reckless and careless driver and aviator, who seeks to exorcize demons that haunt him for pushing his twin brother John to risk his life in air duels over Germany in World War I. The novel (while remained unpublished for a long

time) was written years before Dean's accident, a fact that evokes an uncanny resemblance in fiction of that later event. But that kind of a reading of sibling competition as an imaginative constant in Faulkner's work, says Karl, F. R. Karl in his biography, makes the author into little more "than a collection of anxieties, guilt feelings, hostilities, and aggressions, and denies he had the power to transcend them" (Karl, 1990: 566-68).

During the time when his always rocky relation to Estelle Franklin almost collapsed in the early 1950s, Faulkner had another alcoholic collapse at Princeton, where he was trying to finish *A Fable*. Dr. Eric P. Mosse, the only psychoanalyst ever to see him professionally, specialized in the treatment of artists. Mosse was satisfied after only one session that his patient was struggling to recover from "drinking and depression," and he ordered Electroconvulsive therapy. Faulkner, like many others, responded well to therapy, but he claimed he was enraged by the therapy's cost. His concern, on the other hand, was very certainly a fear that any change in his habits or perspective would imperil his creative abilities and cast doubt on his lifetime image of himself as an artist and a man. Such experiments, therapies and treatments were never repeated on him (Blotner, 1974: 1442). Like many of Faulkner's Mississippi acquaintances, the nephew was concerned about his uncle's drinking problem and said in another interview of Sally Wolf and Floyd C. Watkins' *About William Faulkner: Interviews with Jimmy Faulkner and Others*, "Brother Bill did not drink as much as people said he did. He drank a lot but in spurts. He had a set time to drink and a set time to sober up." He did concede, though, that Faulkner was drunk and stoned as more often as he was sober (Wolff and Watkins, 1996: 11-12).

Back in America, Faulkner felt even more isolated and lonely than ever. "What a commentary," he later wrote to his friend Philip E. Mullen; "Sweden gave me the Nobel Prize. France gave me the Legion d'Honneur. All my native land did for me was to invade my privacy over my protest and my plea" (Blotner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, 1978: 354). It was an "indignity" hard to stand.

Although *The Town* followed *A Fable*, by March 1961, Faulkner had come to a conclusion that he no longer had the old magic in writing. "Since I ran dry three years ago," he told Muna Lee, "I am not even interested in writing anymore" (Blotner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, 1978: 452). There followed *The*

Reivers: A Reminiscence, a story of outdated concepts and notions of honor and Faulkner family members long since dead. The novel proved wrong his statements and the critics' concerning his literary bankruptcy; eventually it won a Pulitzer Prize. Nevertheless, this bildungsroman about an eleven-year-old boy learning the dignified and gentle rules belongs to an era of Edenic innocence, 1905. Cleanth Brooks acclaimed and praised its comic and humorous spirit, but with its "sententious gentlemanly pronouncements," grotesque characters of Black people, anti-modern modern crankiness, assumptions of white supremacy, and misogynistic remarks, *The Reivers* fails to engage neither show the power of it to the contemporary reader (Brooks, 1989: 349-68).

Shortly after the publication of his last novel, Faulkner fell from his horse. Even though not seriously hurt, he tried to ease the pain with heavy drinking, along with Darvon, Demerol, Seconal, and other drugs. Under these circumstances his physical decline accelerated swiftly. How long can liver, heart, and kidneys stand a "normal gait," as he called it, of two bourbons for lunch, a couple more in the afternoon, followed by a Martini before dinner, a few glasses of wine with the meal, and generally another whisky or so took a sip slowly until bed? (Linscott, 1963: 36-38).

Besides these facts, according to Joel Williamson's *William Faulkner and Southern History,* repeated shocks to the spine from the series of falls, related to his alcoholic habits, caused to unutterable back pain that induced still more drinking. On July 5, 1962, his wife Estelle and nephew Jimmy Falkner, worried by his behavior, drove him to Byhalia for his usual sojourn at Wright's Sanatorium. He awakened, sat up, and then nearly knocked over dead from a heart attack just after midnight, until a nurse or doctor could reach him (Williamson, 1995: 349-50). Faulkner's pathetic pathology was notable for how little it had impacted his productivity and creativity. In contrast to the very unsatisfying Walker Percy, who only wrote six big works, Faulkner authored seventeen.

2.2. THE GENERAL CONCEPTS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S HUMOR

Faulkner deserves to be recognized as one of America's greatest humorists, for hundreds of humorous characters, scenes, moments, incidents, and notable memorable passages that stand out throughout his works. Since the early days of his career onward, Faulkner had occasionally commented on humor—both his own concept of humor and that of others—yet there is no comprehensive assessment, definition, categorization or taxonomy of his humor. Per Hans Bungert's "Faulkner's Humor: A European View," one of the most serious issues is the lack of a totally satisfying comedy or humor theory (Bungert, 1986: 141). Perhaps the idea that there is, or should be, a unified field theory of humor that can or should organize each of Faulkner's character types, characterizations, humorous storylines, narratives, or rhetorical devices into a single coherent interpretation is an even more difficult issue. Comprehending Faulkner's humor, on the other hand, typically involves recognizing a specific moment in a specific text; attempting to apply a single theory to explain all of Faulkner's humor, like attempting to explain all of Faulkner'' other works, are always unsatisfying, inadequate and reductive.

Thadious Davis provides a relevant argument in his *Games of Property: Law, Race, Gender, and Faulkner's Go Down, Moses* for dealing with Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, and asserts that the text encompasses features of genres that should not be seen as mutually exclusive. The issue of genre for *Go Down, Moses*, according to Davis, does not have to be managed in either-or/neither-nor criteria. Indeed, if claims of unity are resolved by an awareness to the reader as self-authorized to create a reading experience out of interaction with the passage, and asserts of separation (that is, story sequence) are delayed by an awareness to the arrangement of games indicating the passage as both contest and contested site, whereupon Faulkner's authority and power over his text becomes tightly bound and the concern of its genre surmountable (Davis, 2003: 11). Likewise, if we can understand Faulkner's humor in both/and instead of in either/or terms—it may be orthodox and subversive (as the most precise of *The Sound and the Fury's* Jason Compson's section); it may be "humorous" to some readers and "horrible" to others (as evidenced by *As I Lay Dying*); it may be, in some places, traditional "high"

comedy (as in Philip's flirtation of Melisandre in "My Grandmother Millard") or, in other places, "low" comedy, in the same story, where the Yankees take the privy down that Melisandre is occupying; and it may be direct and straightforward (like Ikkemotubbe rescuing David Hogganbeck from the cave in "A Courtship") or mock-epically oblique and ironic (as in the mud hole section of *The Reivers*)—if we can appreciate the extent and assorted variety of Faulkner's humor, then we may be able to get beyond one-sided, simplified and reductive interpretations of his innumerable humorous work.

The range and methods of his humor, however, remain captivating subjects for exploration. Faulkner's debt to the Old Southern and Southwestern humorists, apparent throughout his canon but most prominent in his The Snopes trilogy—*The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957), and *The Mansion* (1959)—onward, besides his related personal desire and disposition for comic self-glorification and self-mockery, are well-known. Nevertheless, there has been relatively little study of how the Old Southern and Southwestern strains, the predisposition to adjust self-mythologizing stories, and the modernist urge to try out new things with language coincide in Faulkner's classic period in the 1930s fictional stories, which is known more for its tragic ethos than a humorous perspective. This part of the thesis will concentrate on how these dimensions of Faulkner's life and art come together to create a self-referential aesthetic that finds comic, amusing and humoristic elements in the artistic excesses and idiosyncrasies of Faulkner himself and the modernism he practiced, by including the traditions and conventions of Southern literary humor in his works.

Faulkner's humor, both approves and undermines the dominant hegemonies within the societies he portrays; and therefore, it is rarely easy to isolate his humor within his texts written in complex manner. To support these claims, this part of the thesis will look at components of humor theory in general, as well as essential conceptions of American and Southern humor—which was mentioned in more details in the first chapter—and to see how these principles might help us to comprehend Faulkner's humorous and witty works.

Among modern theorists of the subject, Henri Bergson, who has crucial ideas on Superiority and Incongruity Theories and a special favorite of Faulkner, observes that humorous and comic characters are generally funny due to their ignorance of

themselves. The humorous or comic individual is unconscious. As if wearing the ring of Gyges[16] with reverse effect, he becomes invisible to himself while remaining visible to the rest of the world (Bergson, 1911: 171). Therefore, from the beginning to the present, Western humor theory put emphasis on the incongruity between what an individual is and what he ought to be and accepts that humor may deal with both the powerful and the powerless. Moreover, Thomas Hobbes' famous commentary on laughter assumes a state of superiority: "the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory" resulting from a sudden realization of some superiority in ourselves, as compared to the weakness and deficiencies of others, or our own; because individuals laugh at their previous follies and blunders when they suddenly recall them, unless they carry some current disgrace and shame with them (Hobbes, 1996: 43). Hobbes here states the concept that individuals may laugh at themselves, is a crucial element of our current comprehension of what it means to have "a sense of humor." Sigmund Freud emphasizes the ways in which humor shows "hostile aggressiveness": by rendering our external threat insignificant, inferior, repulsive, or funny, we obtain the pleasure of defeating him in a circuitous way—which the third person, who makes no efforts, testifies with his laughter (Freud, 1960: 55). His use of the term "enemy" highlights the difference between those who ridicule and those who are ridiculed. More recently, Jacques Lacan has expanded and modified Freud's analysis by considering and handling humor as a linguistic tool of the expression of the repressed.

In addition to these facts, Faulkner's humor in general and in various details has been persuasively discussed to derive from the techniques and traditions of the American Southern and Southwestern humorists, and Faulkner himself acknowledged his appreciation to these predecessors but he also frequently persisted that his works in general, and, consequently, his comic and humorous works in particular, were influenced by European traditions, particularly mentioning Cervantes, Shakespeare, Balzac, and Dickens. In 1934, Aubrey Starke began the discussion in his important article, "An American Comedy: An Introduction to a Bibliography of Faulkner," by stating that Faulkner's comedy derived from both Mark Twain and Balzac (Starke, 2013: 170) and Malcolm Cowley in "William

[16] "The Ring of Gyges" is a mythical, bewitched item mentioned by the philosopher Plato in book 2 of his *Republic*. It gives its owner the power to become invisible at will.

Faulkner's Human Comedy," noted that Faulkner employed two major themes in American literature have existed since the beginning: the psychological thriller and horror story, as explored by Hawthorne, Poe, and Stephen Crane, amongst many others; and realistic frontier humor, as best exemplified by Mark Twain (Cowley, 1944: 4). Reviewing Malcolm Cowley's *Portable Faulkner*, Robert Penn Warren pointed out that "the most important strain" of Faulkner's humor takes its source from the frontier tradition, but he also stated other varieties: a "Dickensian" humor, a repressed humor "sometimes sliding into pathos" in the representation of the dialogue of the black characters, and irony (Cowley, 1946: 234).

In their analysis and explanation of American humor, Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill depict two different types of humorous writing in their *America's Humor: From Poor Richard to Doonesbury*: For them, regardless of who created it, certain wit tends to elevate conventional values. It promotes order over chaos, decency over uncontrolled freedom, and a fixed class structure over the frontier's flexible equality. Its prejudices are fundamentally orthodox and restricted, whether authored by an author from the Atlantic Coast, New England, or the tidewater "South," or a "Southwesterner." It may employ a colloquial character as a pathetic illustration of disorder or as a gold mine of common wisdom. It may make gentle mockery of its pedants' self-importance and knowledge. Despite its nearly infinite modifications, it ultimately advocates for an ethical and deterministic cosmos. It has a good reputation. "Anti-Establishment" humor is also created by authors from both the East and the West. It's the product of a scared prude who recalls his astonishment and anger at the wild and raunchy personalities he depicts, at least in some cases. The characters in this subversive humor are vividly etched, and their approach to ethics endorses disarray, brutality, and amorality. The ethical disorder embodied by its primary characters, as well as the deadly rationality with which they sustain it, fascinates and charms the author—as opposed to the narrator (Blair and Hill, 1978: 162–63). These two kinds of tendencies in humor are regarded to bring together opposite values. While the humor of a subversive author generally attacks the established values of the society, an orthodox writer's humor defends and expresses the established orders of institutions. Blair and Hill indicate in their discussion of Washington Irving, an author may produce both orthodox and subversive texts, as

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and *Rip Van Winkle* respectively shows, it has been suggested that an author may apply for both orthodox and subversive humors within a single text (165). The comparable situation shows up in Faulkner's works as well, and at this point, it will be possible to reiterate that Faulkner takes his place with his European masters and with his American predecessors.

Thomas L. McHaney, reviews Faulkner's gratitude to American tall tale tradition in his "What Faulkner Learned from the Tall Tale" by combining Faulkner's practices with the humor of George Washington Harries, A. B. Longstreet, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Johnson J. Hooper, Henry Clay Lewis, and Mark Twain, along with the writings of Emerson, but he also claims that Faulkner's tall tales are "carefully filtered through a consciousness created by absorbing Conrad, Eliot, Freud, Frazer, Bergson, Einstein, Joyce, Jung, Anderson, Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse" (McHaney, 1986: 116). What Faulkner found out was "a good modernist tool" in the tall tale, McHaney brings to a conclusion, with "its rhythms, its fund of distancing devices (narrators within narrators, ironic voices, self-interruptions, false innocence), its deliberate exaggeration to get to the truth, and its appropriateness to his own place and experience" (133).

As a matter of fact, Faulkner offered a flawless comprehension of European and American traditions in his interview with Jean Stein in 1955. According to the interview, Sarah Gamp—a nasty, merciless woman, a drinker, opportunist, untrustworthy, much of her character was terrible, but at least it had character; Mrs. Harris, Falstaff, Prince Hal, Don Quixote, and Sancho, of course—are among Faulkner's favorite characters. Faulkner has always admired Lady Macbeth. Bottom, Ophelia, and Mercutio—both he and Mrs. Gamp dealt with life, never complaining, never asking for favors. Of course, there's Huck Finn and Jim. For Faulkner, Tom Sawyer was an obnoxious scumbag. Then there's Sut Lovingood, a character from a tale set in the Tennessee highlands penned by George Harris in 1840 or 1850. He had no misconceptions and delusions about himself and did the best he could; he was a sissy at times and didn't hide it; he never blamed and criticized others for his troubles and never blamed God for them (Stein, 1968: 251). Nonetheless, the persistence on Faulkner's gratitude and appreciation to American humorous traditions has such a long and respectable family tree, beginning with Faulkner himself, that it deserves a

thoughtful and considerate attention. According to M. Thomas Inge's "Faulkner as Humorist," Faulkner is so extensively in the American grain as a humorous writer and draws so severely on the entire body of specifically American humor methods and forms that an understanding of American humor is almost necessary for a full appreciation of his comic talent. The whole corpus of Faulkner's literature, Inge argues, is imbued with the spirit of American humor (Inge, 1992: 3).

Another characteristic figure in Faulkner's humor, the trickster, not only comes into existence from identifiable American folklore and literary sources but from basically all cultures and all times. Peddler types like Pat Stamper and V. K. Ratliff are tricksters in the American humor tradition. Faulkner's tricksters vary from intriguer "servants," like Tom-Tom and Tomey's Turl of "Centaur in Brass" and Ernie of "Fox Hunt," to Lucas Beauchamp, who scorns the servant role but stays a clever, witty and successful trickster. Villains like Flem Snopes and Jason Compson, are fully tricksters, as are murderers such as Ikkemotubbe, Crawford Gowie, Ernest Cotton, and, possibly, Linda Snopes Kohl. Other female tricksters include Miss Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, Narcissa Benbow in "There Was a Queen," and "Granny," Rosa Millard, in *The Unvanquished*. While most of Faulkner's tricksters may be demonstrated to originate from specific or common American prototypes, they may also be understood to derive from a timeless and worldwide multi-cultural tradition (Jacobs, 1973: 307–09).

So, although Faulkner's humor is entirely based on American conventions and traditions, it also comes from English and Continental—European—sources, and while individual moments in his fiction can be described as either "orthodox" or "subversive," his general sense of humor is completely comprehensive, and humor itself—and the comic and humorous vision toward which it tends—is an inseparable part of his fiction. Likewise, Faulkner's humor is persistent with a primary tradition of humor theory, beginning with Plato and extending through Hobbes, Freud, Bergson and Lacan. By identifying as ridiculous those who fail to know themselves, Plato offers the concept of humor manifesting itself in incongruity, between what an individual believes and what he is, between what he claims and what he does, between what he says and what he considers, between what he hopes for and what he achieves, or between and among other people "discrepancies and contradictions," as

Faulkner called them on his *The Mansion*'s preamble. Therefore, Plato's distinction between humor directed at the "strong" and against the "weak" predicts Blair and Hill's differentiation between "orthodox" and "subversive" humors in American literature, which, in that case, enables some crucial perspectives on Faulkner's humor. When Hobbes follows Plato in placing laughter in our "sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others," he further points out that men may laugh at "the follies of themselves past" (Hobbes, 1999: 54). And this is a significant aspect of Faulkner characters such as Ratliff in *The Hamlet* and Gavin Stevens in *The Town,* where Manfred De Spain beats Gavin Stevens, Stevens's brother-in-law grumbles at him:

> *"You fool," Father said. "Dont you know you cant fight? You dont know how." "Can you suggest a better way to learn than the one I just tried?" Uncle Gavin said.* (Faulkner, 1957: 76)

Freud's humor of "hostile aggressiveness," directed toward an "enemy," links the humorist, the humorist's enemy, and a "third party" (the reader), who supports with his laughter the humorist's attack on the enemy, as in the event of Mrs. Littlejohn's curse followed by her striking of the wild pony in that has invaded her boarding house *The Hamlet: The Corrected Text*, "'Get out of here, you son of a bitch,' she said. She struck with the wash-board; it divided neatly on the long mad face and the horse whirled and rushed back up the hall" (Faulkner, 1991: 335).

In short, Faulkner's humor follows the tradition of depicting and enjoying the illustration of human folly by aiming to the incongruities of the individuals. Faulkner's humor is neither entirely orthodox nor entirely subversive. He makes orthodox jokes beside the lines of race, gender, sexuality, and social class; and he makes subversive jokes on each of these topics as well and he can make both kinds of jokes at the same time. He was well-versed and capable in tradition of humor both at the American mainstream and American South, and he urged upon comprehensively and exquisitely on both written and oral forms of his native heritage, but he was also well-read in the range of Western literature and he took an interest in subjects, themes, forms, and figures of speech from European traditions as well. His humor is rarely "mere," appears all by itself and for its own sake; it comes out, rather, as an inextricable part of his numerous texts. When one sees, as Faulkner did, beyond the plain contradictions of "American" and "European," "orthodox" and

"subversive," "serious" and "comic," one may begin to understand the comprehensive humor of Faulkner.

2.3. THE USE OF HUMOR IN SOME OF THE MAJOR WORKS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

2.3.1. *The Sound and the Fury*

The humor in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) expresses the roles of the four Compson siblings, Quentin, Caddy, Benjy and Jason IV, in the fall of the family following the Civil War. The novel's humorous force is evident, especially in the third part, which is told in Jason's viciously sarcastic and sardonic perspective. When Jason makes a comment against Caddy's daughter Miss Quentin in the first sentence of the chapter, the tone shifts dramatically; "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (Faulkner, 1990: 180). The determinist overtones of this judgment penetrate Jason's narration as he makes fun of almost every character he meets. Jason's caustic humor serves as a main symbol of Jason's general hatred against life, according to Faulkner.

Jason, who takes and peculates money from his own mother, constantly taunts decent and industrious people, and prevents his own sister from seeing her daughter, may be tough to sympathize with. In fact, Jason's directs his anger almost at anybody while explaining his philosophy on relationships: He believes he never makes a commitment to a lady or tells her what he is going to provide her. He keeps people guessing all the time. Give them a punch in the jaw if you literally cannot think of any other method to shock and surprise them, according to his ideas (193). It indicates that physical or psychological violence is the sole option for his restless energies.

Jason has the ambition and determination that Quentin lacks, but he is also a self-destructive character. He seems to be a different manifestation of the collapse of the Compson family's—Jason's satirical thoughts expose his own disappointments and mistrusts, but more importantly display that he is aware of how thoroughly dysfunctional his family is. The Compsons feel confined and trapped by their family's history and heritage; for instance, Benjy who was already castrated in 1910 (revealed in the narrative's appendix) for fear that he was a threat to the community.

This mentally disabled child had become the "shameful" character of the town for he used to scare the neighborhood girls. His mother, Caroline Compson, sees him as a penance for her sins and for agreeing to marry her "children's father." Quentin kills himself at Harvard by reason of his sister Caddy's ruin of the family honor and dignity with her promiscuity, among other things. Humor is the tool that Jason uses to isolate himself from the weight of his family name. He is the only one who realizes he ought to go away from his family but lacks the courage to do so at the very beginning of the novel.

There is no single text better illustrating and showing the extensity and sophistication of Faulkner's humor than the third section of the novel where Jason proves to be a success not only in taking over the family business, but also in becoming master-like in his attitudes. This section where Jason is the narrator, also serves as an encyclopedic source for Faulkner's humorous techniques as both orthodox and subversive. Eventually Jason's promising personal fulfillment as an individual will continue to be narrated in the fourth section through Dilsey, where a wide range of humor theories are applicable. Jason Compson makes dozens of evil, sinister and mean-spirited jokes centered on gender, race, ethnicity, social class, or some combination of these. He frequently announces himself a moral man, at least the equal of his employer, Earl, and superior to his niece, his mother, and the rest of the Compson family.

Jason first scolds Earl for having a conscience that is too "nice," and he says, "I'm glad I haven't got the sort of conscience I've got to nurse like a sick puppy all the time" (Faulkner, 1990: 228). He puts forward that Earl's conscience makes him indifferent to his employee's need to eat, but we know that Jason has already been at home and eaten dinner, and has lied to Earl about that (227). Jason has also used the home visit to trick his mother and embezzle money from his niece. Moreover, we know that Jason is on the defensive because Earl knows that Jason has bought himself a car with Mrs Compson's $1,000, who wants to invest in the hardware business. Jason, on the other hand, lies to his mother that he doesn't like or profit from possessing the car. He remarks, "I says you think I'd fool with that dam car at all if it depended on me. I says I can get along without one I've learned to get along without lots of things but if you want to risk yourself in that old wornout surrey with

a halfgrown nigger boy all right because I says God looks after Ben's kind" (236). Hereby, while Jason introduces himself as a moral man, what he does contradicts what he says, and we see him at best as the kind of hypocrite he has just criticized and condemned "If there's one thing gets under my skin, it's a dam hypocrite" (228–29) and worst of all, as a criminal. Jason, who deals with Earl for the moment, does a harsh contemplation on his family, paying his first attention to his mother, whom he criticizes particularly for not making any effort to control either Caddy or the girl Quentin. He despises and expresses contempt for what he identifies as his mother's phony sorrow over hearing that Caddy was kissed by a boy "all next day she went around the house in a black dress and a veil and even Father couldn't get her to say a word except crying and saying her little daughter was dead" (229–30). Caddy was "about fifteen then," and Jason envisions his mother's later atonement for Caddy's eventual promiscuity: "in three years she'd been wearing haircloth or probably sandpaper at that rate" (230). As Jason strikes his mother while blaming himself for his present conduct against his niece, one is reminded of Sigmund Freud's "hostile aggressiveness" (Freud, 1960: 97). Jason follows Freud's approach to the point, taking pleasure in his momentary triumph over his mother and niece by making them weak, inferior, worthless, contemptible, or ridiculous.

The same mechanism unfolds on a larger scale when Jason expands the scope of his rage against family honor to include the Compson servants and his "despicable" sister, a kitchen full of "niggers" to nourish and depriving the state asylum of its star freshman (230). Here Jason enjoys in his own articulated humor, as Hobbes explains, taking pleasure in the "sudden glory" of his sense of superiority within himself, by comparison with the weaknesses of the others. Ironically, he boasts of his own lack of pride, indirectly contrasting his own so-called realism with his mother's vain commitment to her family's heritage: "Thank God you are not a Compson, because all I have left now is you and Maury and I says, Well I could spare Uncle Maury myself" (200-01). Jason, who has shown his contempt for Uncle Maury i.e., Benjy, wonders how mental and unbalanced his mother might have become and were there any genuine hereditary nobility or virtue in her family.

It must be said here that Jason's nonsense and self-contradictory conversations are, in itself, funny. He accurately identifies his mother's clear

mistakes and he exaggerates them to the point of absurdity and nonsense, so that we may take pleasure from his wit while we simultaneously realize that he himself has more, diverse defects and deeper flaws, than anyone he presumes to criticize. His niece, Quentin, is an example of this situation. Jason consistently bullies her, and although he thinks he is acting in manners on his side, his hostility towards her is obviously part of his hostility towards his mother. In the name of decorum, for instance, he follows Quentin up one morning and spy on her; if her behavior is suspicious, his behavior becomes indisputably insulting and mean (Faulkner, 1990: 48). However, his hostility towards Quentin is the remnant of his anger and resentment of her mother, Caddy.

Among the most explicit events of Jason's day is his exchange with old Job, another employee of Earl's, instantly following his ironic boast that "I haven't got much pride" (230). Jason informs Job that the carnival people are taking money out of the community. "I don't begridge um," old Job replies:

> *I kin sho afford my two bits." "Two bits hell," I says. "That dont begin it. How about the dime or fifteen cents you'll spend for a damn two cent box of candy or something. How about the time you're wasting right now, listening to that band." "Dat's de troof," he says. "Well, ef I lives twell night hit's gwine to be two bits mo dey takin out of town, dat's sho." "Then you're a fool," I says. "Well," he says, "I dont spute dat neither. Ef dat uz a crime, all chain-gangs wouldn't be black.*(231)

Job's answer here combines some of the best features of Faulkner's humor. Although the exchange begins in Jason's scornful, sardonic and essentially racist abuse of Job, it ends, surely, as a prime example of Ralph Ellison's "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke."[17] When he cheerfully admits his vulnerability to the attractiveness of the carnival, Job overrides Jason's criticism, and by implying to the racist tendencies of the dominant society, Job acts devastatingly to undermine the position of so-called moral authority from which Jason pretends to speak. Jason, Job

[17] Ralph Ellison's "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" essay is a rebuttal to Stanley Edgar Hyman's arguments regarding the "darky entertainer" role in American society. Ellison responds by arguing that the minstrel's humorous image serves to flip white America's guilt over slavery into laughter, therefore exonerating the culture via identification (Ellison, 1972: 45-59). Ellison's formulation also has special relevance to Faulkner, but Faulkner not only created African American characters that seek out the human truth and challenge the stereotypical representations of the black people in the literature of the South, and who "changed the joke and slipped the yoke" long before Ellison wrote his analysis, he also adapted this figure to a wide range of others, such as for women, poor whites, Native Americans, Jews, etc. For Ellison, Faulkner was an example for the writers to follow. In Faulkner's work technique, he has put once more to the task of creating value (43).

implies, may be among the "fools" with whom he himself stands condemned, while Job's sharp answer or rejoinder may remind us that it is Jason who is the actual criminal, and a candidate for the chain gang himself. Job's subtle speech on Jason's status as a fool becomes much more obvious and straightforward in a later conversation:

> *I been tendin to my business," he says. "Mr Earl knows whar I been." "You may can fool him," I says. "I wont tell on you." "Den he's de onliest man here I'd try to fool," he says. "Whut I want to waste my time foolin a man whut I dont keer whether I sees him Sat'dy night er not? I wont try to fool you," he says. "You too smart fer me. Yes, suh," he says, looking busy as hell, putting five or six little packages into the wagon. "You's too smart fer me. Aint a man in dis town kin keep up wid you fer smartness. You fools a man whut so smart he cant even keep up wid hisself," he says, getting in the wagon and unwrapping the reins. "Who's that?" I says. "Dat's Mr Jason Compson," he says. "Git up dar, Dan!* (250)

Then, the joke is on Jason, who is just about the only one who doesn't understand it. Jason begins to annoy old Job in some degree. He always makes excuses for disguising his racism; as he segregates black people elsewhere, though in a more brutal and bullying manner, with Luster. However, Jason was scolded at the end of the conversation with Job.

Jason Compson's authoritarianism is clear in his intimidating demeanor toward everyone from his immediate and extended family and servants to complete strangers. His narrative, as a result, provides extensive examples of his hypocrisy, self-ignorance, immoral behaviors, tyranny, and bullying—all of which leave Jason, in the end, the most extensively tricked of all of Faulkner's tricksters. He hypocritically condemns his sister Caddy for making money through prostitution, and he severely condemns his niece Quentin's promiscuous behavior; however, he keeps his own prostitute in Memphis and shows no guilty conscience about stealing and embezzling Caddy's earnings from Quentin. All these contradictions are linked to the same double standard that allows him to condemn in the Compson women what he pretends not to see in himself: "I've got every respect for a good honest whore because with Mother's health and the position I try to uphold to have her with no more respect for what I try to do for her than to make her name and my name and my Mother's name a byword in the town" (233).

Some of the biggest disappointments and frustrations for Jason derive from with his niece, Miss Quentin is possibly the most apparent, pathetic, and miserable

victim of Jason's tricks. Early in the section Jason scolds Quentin for skipping the school—"I want to know what you mean, playing out of school and telling your grandmother lies and forging her name on your report and worrying her sick" (184)—and her obvious promiscuity: "'Everybody in this town knows what you are. But I wont have it anymore, you hear? I dont care what you do, myself,' I says. 'But I've got a position in this town, and I'm not going to have any member of my family going on like a nigger wench. You hear me?'" (189). Despite Jason's violent threats, Quentin once again skips the school in that afternoon by "playing out of school" and secretly runs away from Jefferson with a young man from the carnival. Jason follows the couple, trying to surprise them, but then, he comes across with a muddy farmed field, tramps through unfamiliar woods and comes across ditches with weak legs, a terrible headache, the sun in his eyes, and being in danger because of a dog's threat; for some readers, Jason experiences a moment that is among the most pleasing and satisfying in all of American literature: "I had gotten beggar lice and twigs and stuff all over me, inside my clothes and shoes and all, and then I happened to look around and I had my hand right on a bunch of poison oak." Then he goes on, "The only thing I couldn't understand was why it was just poison oak and not a snake or something. So I didn't even bother to move it. I just stood there until the dog went away. Then I went on" (241). Quentin and her companion come to know Jason is spying on them and damage his vehicle by emptying the air from one of the car's tires in this sequence. They flee and taunt him by repeatedly blaring their car horn.

Jason's last reversal, being tricked despite being a criminal trickster, takes place in the concluding section of the novel when he finds out what Quentin has done with the money that he has been stealing from her. Jason poignantly utters the irony of his situation:

> *What do you aim to do with that girl, if you catch them?" [the sheriff asks]. "Nothing," Jason said. "Not anything. I wouldn't lay my hand on her. The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life every day and made my name a laughing stock in the town. I wont do anything to her," he said. "Not anything.* (304)

And the impersonal narrator intensifies the irony, sarcasm and the source of Jason's anger in similar terms: "...then he thought of the money again, and that he had been outwitted by a woman, a girl. If he could just believe it was the man who had robbed him." Then his anger arises, "But to have been robbed of that which was to have

compensated him for the lost job, which he had acquired through so much effort and risk, by the very symbol of the lost job itself, and worst of all, by a bitch of a girl." (307).

Humor converts Jason from a cruel antagonist into the tragic still triumphant center of the novel. In the novel's appendix Faulkner types that Jason "assumed the entire burden of the rotting family in the rotting house" before he "was able to free himself forever from the idiot brother and the house." Faulkner brings to light Jason's selling of the Compson property and putting his brother in a mental hospital—effectively destroying his family's history. While some readers might think of this ending to be tragic, it is also victorious in a way. Towards the end of the novel while writing about Jason in the appendix, Faulkner adds: "He was emancipated now. He was free" (309). As the individual approaches modernity, the final remnants of upper Southern white society disintegrate into tiny bits. Jason destroys one universe in order to enter another. Jason's pessimistic outlook causes him to forego his family's noble, respectable and aristocratic legacy, but it also allows him to discover personal redemption.

2.3.2. *As I Lay Dying*

Many characteristics of William Faulkner's works of literature pay homage to nineteenth-century American humor from the South and Southwest. There are not many or obvious correlations between Faulkner's work and humor, but *As I Lay Dying* (1930) holds an unfamiliar blend of traditional indigenous humor with relatively new types of elements that came forward about the time Faulkner began to publish. *As I Lay Dying* has a lot of humor concerning psychological glimpses, and Faulkner provides some radical approaches to psychological characterization forms that were prevalent in American humor in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The way the novel's characters confront their problems often reminds us of the dark and grotesque humor, and the many offbeat influences in *As I Lay Dying*, and some of the novel's potentially one-of-a-kind humor, are the direct consequence of ascribing the cultural sensitivities and habits of thought worthy of typical New Yorker heroes. Illiterate and uneducated hill farmers in a setting and condition that could have been taken from George Washington Harris' Sut Lovingood character.

As I Lay Dying has passages that use exaggeration, humorous analogies involving animals, incongruous and dissonant visual imagery, and anti-climax, all of which are prominent in American mock-oral humor. However, in addition to being amusing in and of itself, this traditional vernacular language and humor reveals inconsistencies between the characters' deep, abstract and conceptual contemplations and their primitive manner of life, as well as psychological disparities between these characters and their frontier forefathers.

Like the typical grotesque heroes, the Bundrens are quite incompetent in practical matters. The funeral journey is completed at the cost of one horse, two mules, a broken leg, a barn full of hay, some hunger, the anger of most of the neighbors, a lot of pain and anguish, and the loss of one robust farmer to the local madhouse. The Bundrens bury Addie as she wishes and, in the bargain, get a set of store-bought teeth, a sack of bananas, a gramophone, and a new Mrs. Bundren, but the relationship between the amount of effort and sacrifice in relation to what has been achieved must make the ending of *As I Lay Dying* one of the most shocking anticlimaxes in American literature. And the following passage in *As I Lay Dying: The Corrected Text* sets a good example for the Bundrens who are being incompetent in practical matters. Darl describes the family that made the cement mold for Cash's broken leg:

> *If it'll just help you," pa says. "I asks your forgiveness. I never foreseen it no more than you." "It feels fine," Cash says. If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time. We replace the splints, the cords, drawing them tight, the cement in thick pale green slow surges among the cords...* (Faulkner, 1987: 193)

While Darl fantasizes about how lovely it would be "if you could just ravel out into time," the rest of the family forgets to lubricate the leg before putting cement on it. With a sledgehammer, the "cast" must finally be removed.

Some of *As I Lay Dying*'s internal monologues appear to be nothing more than linguistic gibberish; "[Darl] went to Jackson. He went crazy and went to Jackson both. Lots of people didn't go crazy. Pa and Cash and Jewel and Dewey Dell and me didn't go crazy. We never did go crazy. We didn't go to Jackson either." Vardaman then goes on to say, "He went to Jackson on the train. He didn't go on the train to go crazy. He went crazy in our wagon . . . Jackson is further away than crazy" (233-34). Vardaman Bundren puzzles with a few word configurations that

excite him in this paragraph, and the outcome is absurdly ludicrous and gibberish. But there is no evidence that Vardaman does not take his contemplations seriously, and there are similar passages elsewhere in the book such as: "I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not" (72) that makes us think that these passages are not that ridiculous at all. And when reading such passages, it is difficult to be sure whether complex concepts arise or whether a character is hypnotized by just the sound of a few words.

The question of how to distinguish philosophy and poetry from gibberish has dominated critical debate over *As I Lay Dying*. There is a lot of disputes on what should be regarded seriously in the work, how its humor interacts to non-humorous aspects, and how the work as a whole should be considered seriously. Walter J. Slatoff writes in his *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner* that one is unsure what the book is primarily about, and one is also unsure if one has been experiencing an epic, tragedy, satire, or farce (Slatoff, 1960: 159).

In American humor, contrasts between pretentious language and the vernacular are typical, yet Faulkner allocates both "high" and "low" patterns to single characters with no obvious rationale. Faulkner distinguishes his characters from stereotypical and conventional low-life characters by giving them a depth that is not only funny. Faulkner delivers an uncommon and highly humorous blend of elements of grotesque and dark humor while offering some fascinating alternatives to established patterns of psychological characterization. The combination of "highbrow" and "lowbrow" elements in Faulkner's writing is particularly noticeable in the humor of *As I Lay Dying*. While humor is sometimes confusing, it is also provocative.

As I Lay Dying deals with so many catastrophic disasters that the overall impression is humorous rather than mournful. The grotesque humor of the novel stems from the conflict between the Bundren's belief that their deeds are plausible and their neighbors' faith that these Bundrens transcend all logic and rationality, as amply demonstrated by Anse's behaviors on his deceased wife, such as having to borrow a shovel and having a new wife. The juxtaposition of two contradictory

reasonable and unreasonable thoughts causes the tension between joy and misery. The reader is made to chuckle at the supremacy of stupidity, hate, and ugliness, creating a conflict between the grotesque and dark humor. Anse's stupidity triumphs when he chooses a new wife, but the reader laughs.

As I Lay Dying is extremely hideous, with horrible and terrifying laughter filling every paragraph and chapter. It's impossible to list the grotesque aspects since the work is so dense with them; all of the characters, activities, tactics, and ideas contribute to the grotesque humor's effects. Every character tells, behaves, or perceives something grotesque, but Anse is perhaps one of Faulkner's most persistently hideous characters. The whole funeral and burial journey is grotesquely funny, but specific interactions, actions and events within it are particularly so. While the novel's mood includes elements of traditional folk tale comedy or humor, it is a darkly, tragicomic treatment of the subject, and the novel's mock-epic character contributes to part of its grotesquery. The novel is at once disturbing, humorous, tragic, and ludicrous, as grotesque and dark humor ought to be.

Because he combines parts of humor and tragedy in his attitude and deeds, Anse Bundren is a key element of grotesque humor in the book. In *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, Cleanth Brooks refers to Anse as "the human buzzard" (Brooks, 1989: 155) and compares him to the genuine, terrifying buzzards, a humorous but accurate parallel.

The buzzard is hideous in its roughness and instincts on its own, but when juxtaposed to a man, the grotesque humor is amplified. In the novel, the buzzard and Anse cohabit and offer horrible humor. We see Anse sitting down on the front veranda, waiting for his meal and, by the way, for his wife to die, a scene that becomes even more funny when we consider the buzzard's parallel. Anse rubs his hands slowly on his knees, as though he is rubbing his hands in anticipation of the carcass, according to Darl (Faulkner, 1987: 15). Darl's father continues to be alluded to in the portrayals. The shirt over Pa's hump, according to Darl, is faded lighter than the rest of it. His clothing is devoid of sweat stains. Darl thinks he has never seen a sweat stain on his shirt before. Anse once became unwell after working in the sun, and he claims that if he sweats again, he would die. Darl assumes Anse believes that because as he descends, his mouth drops in a gradual, repetitive manner. Anse's

lower face has the look of an old dog thanks to his beard judging from this Darl's descriptions (15-16). Anse's hunch contributes to his power, earning him the moniker "buzzard." The flabbiness of his lower face due to his lack of teeth adds to the laughter; if Anse's face seems like that of an old dog to Darl, imagine how ugly Anse appears to the reader. The argument that Anse has never perspired and will never perspire adds to the character's humor by rendering him extremely sluggish.

The man's tragedy comes to an end once they go to bury Addie and discover they have forgotten their shovel. While the Bundrens fight over whether they should buy another shovel, Anse says he will go and borrow one since he believes there are true "Christians" out there who will help a man in need but borrowing will not make him "beholden." The grotesque and dark humor is continually generated by the contradiction between speech and behavior. While Anse is unlucky and completely irresponsible, he believes he is a skilled trader. When he bargains for a new team of mules with Snopes, Anse is really taken in an almost humorous, tall tale[18] bargaining style. Anse pays the team a huge amount of money while thinking he got a fair bargain, and his evasive, vague and hesitant response when asked if he gave Jewel's horse is equally amusing. When we see the genuine pain Jewel is in because of his silly father's loss of his horse, the grotesque and dark humor collide.

When these humorous characteristics are combined with the rest of his persona, he becomes grotesquely humorous. Anse is a human vulture who is never satisfied with getting anything for nothing; his attempts to gain something for nothing lead in more losses than wins. Slatoff, too, sees Anse as a witty figure. According to Slatoff, Anse seems like a simple stereotype of shiftlessness, incompetence, miserable and self-pity for most of the time. Otherwise, how can one imagine a figure whose discourse is mostly comprised of the type of restatements that characterize a minor Dickens comedic foil? (Slatoff, 1960: 169). The fact that Slatoff refers to Anse as a caricature is crucial because exaggerating Anse's characteristics results in the portrait of him as a human vulture and the readers' grotesque laughter. "Pa stands over the bed, dangle-armed, humped, motionless. He

[18] Tall tales are folk tales that exaggerate the wild adventures of folk heroes. They are essentially a form of verbal entertainment; the readers appreciate tales' exaggerated tone rather than the actual event or literal meaning. These stories are one of Faulkner's most important sources of inspiration, and they have particularly influenced *The Snopes Trilogy*—which will be elaborated in detail later in this part of the thesis.

raises his hand to his head, scouring his hair, listening to the saw. He comes nearer and rubs his hand, palm and back, on his thigh and lays it on her face and then on the hump of quilt where her hands are." Then Darl continues his speech as, "He touches the quilt as he saw Dewey Dell do, trying to smoothe it up to the chin, but disarranging it instead. He tries to smoothe it again, clumsily, his hand awkward as a claw, smoothing at the wrinkles which he made and which continue to emerge beneath his hand with perverse ubiquity, so that at last he desists, his hand falling to his side and stroking itself again, palm and back, on his thigh." Finally, Darl states that, "The sound of the saw snores steadily into the room. Pa breathes with a quiet, rasping sound, mouthing the snuff against his gums. 'God's will be done,' he says. 'Now I can get them teeth'" (Faulkner, 1987: 48). The entire paragraph is funny but especially the last line of Anse's remark is grotesquely humorous since there is no sense to his revelation at first. It's unclear how death should bring to teeth till we learn later that Anse's teeth have been deferred due to money and a town visit.

"It was a fact," Cash continues after Jewel states that father "got them teeth." We noticed her behind him, holding the other grip—a sort of weird duck-shaped woman all gussied up, with those type of hard-looking pop eyes, as if she were challenging a man to say nothing—and it made him appear an inch taller, hangdog and proud (241). Anse's presentation contributes to the hideous impression, with his slicked-down hair, lanky limbs, scent, hump, and new teeth. The woman is also grotesquely humorous in her "duck-shaped" appearance, complete with pop eyes, all suited up for the event.

In their own modest ways, the remainder of the novel's characters are as hideous as Anse. Because Anse is the catalyst for the story's actions and circumstances, he takes on a larger role as a weird, grotesque and funny figure. Addie, Dewey Dell, Vardaman, Cora, and Peabody themselves all have grotesque characteristics that add to the novel's overall grotesque humor.

Addie's closest friend, Cora Tull, emerges to be amongst the reader's finest resources of grotesque and dark humor. Cora is very much a humorous gossip character, but the content and tone of many of her utterances push them into the obscene realm. According to William Van O'Connor's *The Tangled Fire of William*

Faulkner, Cora is a "scatter brain … treated humorously," (O'Connor, 1954: 52) a virtuous hypocrite who is inquisitive but hides it under the garb of care.

In general, all the story's characters speak directly from their own perspectives, however the Bundrens occasionally make comments about each other. According to C. J. McCole's essay "William Faulkner: Cretins, Coffin-worms, and Cruelty," in *Lucifer at Large*, *As I Lay Dying* virtually becomes a succession of monologues, each intended to explain a different facet of the horror and grotesque sequence (McCole, 1937: 209). McCole is implying that almost nothing we overhear from any character improves anything; rather, what we witness contributes to the characters' fear and grotesque humor. In her book *The Novels of William Faulkner, A Critical Interpretation*, Olga W. Vickery discusses the detachment required for horrific comedy to work with these characters; because the Bundrens' deeds are noticed rather than their thoughts and feelings, they become grotesques. For others who are not personally engaged and only see with the physical sight, what is tragedy and anguish for the family becomes humor. The trip is rife with unresolved issues for the Bundrens, but it is only a ludicrous or grotesque display for the residents of Mottson. The Bundrens' guilty verdict that their behavior is extremely sensible, and the readers' judgment that the Bundrens and their casket have long since carried far beyond bounds of reason, rationality, or even simple common sense, result in this intermixing of humor and tragedy, which is core component of the very texture of *As I Lay Dying*. The combination of the two perspectives creates an ambiguous and complex sense of laughter and melancholy (Vickery, 1964: 65). Especially the last implications of Vickery's comment, give us traceable clues for the humor of *As I Lay Dying* which also can be associated with the dark humor and Incongruity Theory[19]. While the readers can be cheered up by reading the book on the one hand, they can also be full of sorrow on the other hand.

As actions typically emerge out of characters, the novel's deeds hold grotesque and dark humor, just like the novel's characters. In addition to this expression, the humorous action is frequently excessive, a perversion of what is intended, according to Dorothy Tuck in her *Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner*. When

[19] The Incongruity Theory, which was explained in more detail earlier in the first chapter of the thesis, can be found in the "1.3.3. The Incongruity Theory" section. Please see pages 10-13 for more information.

taken to its logical conclusion and given an uncomfortable or even revolting outcome, the humor frequently devolves into horrific territory (Tuck, 1964: 36). We are aware of the peculiarity of exaggeration in the grotesque; many everyday behaviors become grotesquely humorous when stretched to the point of being unpleasant. To illustrate this dilemma from the novel, one of the most humorous, grotesque and hideous moments is the effort to cross the river with the coffin. Because Anse, Vardaman, and Dewey Dell are ineffective in this quest, they are allowed to go across the partially flooded bridge while Darl, Cash, and Jewel try to cross the bridge with the wagon (Faulkner, 1987: 134-41). While the act of carrying a coffin is very normal, it turns into an extreme; a grotesque, and funny action under the circumstances in which the characters exist.

The whole journey ends only ten days later when they mourn and bury Addie Bundren in Jefferson. Indeed that last moment is so grotesquely funny because Anse must borrow the tools so that Cash's leg is taken care of properly. The narrative is completed when Anse arrives with his new bride, and we witness how both of them used the trip for their own greedy purposes. What began as an ordinary death incident and funeral ceremony, ends with the grotesque laughter of the readers when the readers are struck by the tremendous folly and heinousness of the things they have just experienced. Then Thomas M. Inge supports this idea in his "William Faulkner and George Washington Harris: In the Tradition of Southwestern Humor" essay by remarking that the subject is dealt in such a dark and gloomy manner that it is just grim humor. In this way, *As I Lay Dying* is similar to the tale in that it, too, deals with Southern and Southwestern humor transformed into a solemn and grotesque memorial ceremony that becomes a funny or grotesque show. Both "Well! Dad's Dead" and *As I Lay Dying*'s excursions turn into odd parodies of what such spiritual quests should be like, but the preponderance of humorous pessimism saves it from being comical (Inge, 1962:54). The funeral ceremony is described by Inge as a peculiar caricature, and his choice of phrases is particularly significant when considering the requirement for displacement and deformation in hideous, grotesque and dark humor; clichés typically emphasize and exaggerate the ordinary till it becomes absurd and funny.

When Ward L. Miner mentions about the novel's literary mode in his *The World of William Faulkner*, he simply states that the story is a folk humor full of sorrow, melancholy, and hopelessness. These connotations are especially suited to Southern and Southwestern folk humor, which is known for its brutality and ferocity. (Miner, 1959:116). The comment about brutality and ferocity is especially important since we often encounter with such themes in the novels of Faulkner. In one sense, the story alternates between a cheerful depiction of rural life and grotesque savagery.

Another feature of grotesque and dark humor is the strain created by circumstances and how that strain is managed. The darkly comic aspect of the story, according to Peter Swiggart's *The Art of Faulkner's Novels*, raises the intensity and strain because Faulkner makes humorous elements out of the substance of human sorrow (Swiggart, 1962: 60). Since Faulkner has blended the components of sorrow and humor in the grotesque, what looks to be tragedy becomes comical all throughout narrative. Because of the suspense and strain, readers may find it difficult to figure out how to react to the work. The reader is still not quite sure what to take seriously and what to make fun at, according to Swiggart. The whole framework looks to be inherently funny rather than sad, as a mock-epic instead of just epic, due to these false tone contrasts. The humorous structure is enabled by the inconsistency between the main characters and the situations in which they find themselves (57). However, one of the most important components of grotesque and dark humor is the attitude of the readers, since if the reader does not understand and is frustrated instead of delighted, the grotesque and dark humor perform poorly and collapse.

The entire novel almost turns into a warning from Faulkner against stupidity, stubbornness and hypocrisy, and a critique of the traditional, hollow but pious rituals of death. In his *William Faulkner, From Jefferson to the World*, Hyatt Waggoner has an excellent way of putting the matter. According to Waggoner, even with his acute understanding of social reality, Faulkner's humor is, in the end, religious humor rather than social comedy. Man's pretensions and foolishness are humorous not so much because he disregards and misunderstands his position in nature, but because he irritates against traditions, customs, conventions, social norms, taboos, and common sense (Waggoner, 1959: 211).

Eventually, the theme is perhaps the most essential aspect of the work, and the foregoing discussion reflects how dark humor grotesquely contributed to the development of that theme. It is only a matter of figuring out what that theme is. The separation between rhetoric and practice, as shown in Anse's and the family's behavior, is a major subject. The disingenuousness of society's customs, and how these constitute a reflection from Faulkner about the South and the world, appears to be a more prevalent issue among critics.

The tragic and touchy subjects cause grotesque laughter of the novel. Relatedly, Faulkner might be encouraging the reader to question normalized and superficial behavior patterns recognized as traditional values in a society. Thus, he is expecting an individual sensibility to develop. In his "William Faulkner: Comedy and the Purpose of Humor," Charles Allen gives presents a notable argument that he makes a compelling case that these horrendous incidents have a comic character, owing to the incongruous violation of religious norms. (Allen, 1960: 62). Although this is a very brief statement, it is an extremely important one which refers to the entire novel and its concerns regarding humor. In this respect, although Addie's funeral and death cause tragic events and bad experiences throughout the journey, Faulkner creates humorous elements by attacking the values of American South incongruously.

Nothing can be more essential and eternal than death which is inevitable to us all. Yet, Faulkner puts the death in a grotesquely humorous position as well in his handling of the Bundrens. In his work "Folk Humor in the Novels of William Faulkner," Frank M. Hoadley describes the topic as "cosmic pessimism," which characterizes the whole work as the concept of "cosmic pessimism" effectively nullifies the comical deeds of the Bundrens and keeps the plot from deteriorating into pure comedy. Likewise, their humorous efforts and deeds alleviate a rather tragic incident. Surrealistic comedy or humor is created by the excessive and incongruous impact (Hoadley, 1957: 79).

When a character is in a state of struggle, both intellectually and during interaction with nature, the resolution Faulkner provides, is grotesque humor. This can be clearly observed in the condition of Anse Bundren who anticipates marriage as an occasion to a new life and a new set of false teeth, in the death bed of his wife

Addie. Thus, Anse falls no different than those buzzards circling his wife's casket on their way to Jefferson. His opportunism recognizes neither creed nor convention. This aspect is also an embedded critique of a patriarchal mindset in the novel. Eventually, Faulkner makes use of the grotesque in order to reflect a criticism of the American South.

To recapitulate, regardless of all life matters the novel, *As I Lay Dying* critically portrays about the American South, as Richard S. Adams indicates in his *Faulkner: Myth and Motion*, that after reading *As I Lay Dying*, we are struck with the mournfully comic belief that life carries on regardless of what happens (Adams, 1990: 83). This statement is basically true, for Faulkner despite his attacks over established values of the American South, he also offers unique opportunities to make us smile in a universe tainted with racism, sexism, poverty and all kinds of moral ambiguity.

2.3.3. The Snopes Trilogy

The Snopes trilogy is Faulkner's most totally extended comic effort. Together, the three novels encompass more humorous scenes than any of the earlier works. Both dark and grotesque humor abound throughout these novels. *The Hamlet*, is possibly Faulkner's one of the most humorous novels. It combines dark humor scenes and characters with grotesque humorous ones for a totally humorous novel. *The Town* and *The Mansion* are more serious and less apparently humorous than *The Hamlet*; but there are still so many comical and funny scenes in both novels.

Faulkner uses the tall tale, burlesque and anecdotal styles, to create the structure of this trilogy. However, the author's genuine goal is shown by his use of these tales' brilliant humor. Simply put, Faulkner's humor in these stories serves as a challenge to the distorted grotesque conditions to which individuals are subjected.

Additionally, the story of the Snopes has been produced for the cinema screen many times under the title *The Long, Hot Summer*, which is also one of the chapters of the *The Hamlet.* However, the most important of these films, which made the name of William Faulkner and his work even more popular, is the film directed by the famous director Martin Ritt in 1958, starring Paul Newman—he was also

awarded the Academy Award for Best Actor for his role in the film—Orson Welles, Joanne Woodward, Lee Remick, and many other famous stars.

2.3.3.1. *The Hamlet*

In *The Hamlet* (1940), so many things are humorous. The characters are all comic and funny types; Even Ratliff, who is often considered the moral standard of the novel, is a comic figure of a peddler. To thoroughly study the workings of the humor, most lines and pages of *The Hamlet* would need to be studied. Also, this chapter of the thesis will unfortunately focus on only a few of the humorous occurrences in the novel in order to discover how Faulkner employs humor, including the characteristics of the South. The wit and humor of *The Hamlet* is not just evident, but it is also occasionally understated. The stories contain so much wit that critics are taken aback by their magnitude. The moral of the novel is humorous as well: if life is a joke as the theme might demonstrate, then we laugh and the process is complete.

The Hamlet's setting and structure are inextricably linked to economic instability, turmoil and depression. The novel takes place from 1902 to 1908, a period that includes the panics of 1903 and 1907. The novel was also written in tough times. Faulkner began writing *The Hamlet* in 1926-27, when the South was already suffering from the decline that was to become the Great Depression; and during the depression he published several stories that were later included into the novel. Faulkner discusses some of the crucial economic problems of his epoch in the book, which was published in 1940. *The Hamlet* portrays the economic concerns of the early twentieth century and foreshadows the impending Great Depression. The more typical humorous narratives of the first half of the book, however, have been captured by portents of dark humor under the strain of economic collapse. And one of the best examples for this situation is the incident that Eck Snopes names his baby "Wallstreet Panic," so that the infant may be wealthy like the people who went through the panics of 1907, provides us with a humorous vision of the South (Faulkner, 1991: 295).

The action of the novel often occurs in the past; we receive it in tall tale form from one of the characters. The conflicts are absurd love affairs and wily trade deals. *The Hamlet*'s multiple structure incorporates multiple tall tales, and William Van O'Connor claims in his *William Faulkner* that a good deal of The *Hamlet*'s incidents are directly inspired on tall tale humor. At least three important passages in *The Hamlet,* according to him, are drawn from the tall-tale narrative: the incident of the horse exchanging, Flem Snopes' outsmarting of the devil, and a horse savagely charging through the house. (O'Connor, 1959: 34). Flem's deception of the devil is reminiscent of tales in which men sell their souls to the devil in exchange for monetary gain. The devil fights and loses Flem and offers him Paradise simply to get rid of him.

Besides O'Connor's statement, most reviewers and critics agree that *The Hamlet* is one of Faulkner's most funny books, referring to the folk kind, tall tale humor that is clear throughout the book; yet, grotesque humor is also abundant, particularly in the scenes with Ike Snopes and his affection for the cow. The horse-swapping affair with Pat Stamper is the most notable example of tall tale humor. O'Connor in another work of his *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner* also states that *The Hamlet* is a folk humor that makes extensive use of tall tales and ludicrous deeds. The basic purpose is humor in the traditional way: man overcomes his own greed, covetousness, idiocies, folly, and stupidity. Many of Faulkner's work have delightfully humorous passages, but *The Hamlet* is the only one that is humorous in both aim and topic (O'Connor, 1954: 162). *The Hamlet*'s primary purpose may be humorous, but only to the extent that part of the humor is grotesque, and the purpose of grotesque humor is to criticize through laughter.

The humorous characters' voice or acts demonstrate humor as a defense mechanism. In her essay "William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*: A Study in Meaning and Form," Viola Hopkins expresses it as: "Within the novel, humor is the means by which the characters find it possible to face the terror and pain of living it" (Hopkins, 1955: 141). For Ratliff combines these functions: he provides humor for readers which is a relief while setting the moral standards of the world of Frenchman's Bend. Ultimately and humorously Ratliff becomes the moral standard for the reader, even he seems more than simply a humorous figure when he gets busted in somebody

else's prank; he offers much of the novel's topic and the ethical code for conduct. This dual function of Ratliff manifests itself in the extreme of his characteristics. In this context, Ratliff is the peripatetic sewing-machine salesperson and the farcical character of the Yankee merchant. He is an intelligent salesperson who is not beaten in any deal until he is caught at the end of the novel. T. Y. Greet discusses in his essay "The Theme and Structure of Faulkner's *The Hamlet*," the figure of Yankee merchant and how Ratliff easily fits the type casting. Since these elements are so easily relevant to Ratliff, Greet associates him with traditional American humorists and satirists like Sam Slick, Seba Smith, and Sut Lovingood. He was mostly impressed by G. W. Harris' *Sut* and Augustus B. Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*, according to reviewers and critics. Nevertheless, an examination of both of these resources reveals that the inspirations are merely broad, indicating that more emphasis should be paid to the essence of Ratliff's humor, instead of just the birth of his strongest point, the amusing and funny storytelling (Greet, 1960: 334).

Admittedly, Ratliff is accountable for most of the opening section's storyline. He tells Jody and Varner about the Snopes family's stories and background, notably about Ab's alleged barn burning. Ratliff embodies the traits of a salesperson in that he trades sewing machines on credit to everyone who wants one, including those who don't.

Ratliff's mannerisms, tone, and demeanor add to his funny and humorous persona. Until towards the end and climax of the book, when one of the folks says that he feared something was awry all day at the horse auctions since Ratliff was not present to give anybody guidance, he is continuously cynical, caustic or sharp. (Faulkner, 1991: 331). Even the townsfolk appear to have learned to appreciate or at least expect Ratliff's guidance. They notice when it is gone and guess as to why, which is resolved in the last moments, but the conjecture now contributes to the climax's excitement and tension. In his *The Snopes Dilemma: Faulkner's Trilogy*, James Gray Watson remarks that Ratliff's observations take the shape of sardonic rural humor when he is influenced by furious indignation, as is always the situation with him (Watson, 1968: 43). With this approach, readers can see how laughter and humor are required and essential for both the characters and the readers to retain a harmony and balance in their perceptions. Since humor aids to keep individuals

under control, it is intricately connected to Relief Theory[20] characteristic. Humankind, it appears, is doomed to lunacy if he lacks humor.

Ratliff's distinctive characteristics set him apart from the remainder of the novel's figures. In his "William Faulkner: Comedy and the Purpose of Humor," in contrary to most of Faulkner's witty characters, Charles Allen endorses this viewpoint by stating. Ratliff is emotionally adaptable, cognitively nimble, intellectually humorous, and compassionate rather than resentful as he embraces his misfortune with a sense of humor. (Allen, 1960: 64). Ratliff's wit has reached the stage in which he can simply chuckle at himself. And instead of being outraged, irritated, or wanting vengeance, Ratliff laughs at himself for being duped by Snopes, just like we do. Ratliff's caring attitude is also clear when he hands Mrs. Littlejohn the money that he believes rightfully belongs to the fool Ike Snopes. Even though Mrs. Littlejohn eventually spends the money to purchase Ike's precious cow for him, the authenticity of the act is not diminished. Ratliff is also described by John Lewis Longley in his book *The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes*, who illustrates him as the most able, incisive and skillful of the Faulkner humorous characters simply because he is the most intellectual, sophisticated, perspicacious; the least tricked and self-deceptive of all each of the humorous characters devotes himself to a challenge of some type; for the prominent figures, it is usually a long and continuous struggle to defend the weak, vulnerable and innocent people from evil powers (Longley, 1963: 24). Ratliff is the least self-deceptive of the characters, yet the Snopeses still fool him since he believes he is outsmarting them.

The Snopeses, too, somehow become simply funny characters; they become emblems for the sickness of hubris, vanity, ignorance, depravity, hypocrisy and evil that is sweeping the South and the world. The Snopeses represent all that is nastier, less pleasant, and obnoxious in the South and across the world. When Flem Snopes comes with the spotted horses, he is depicted as a scary, ostentatious circus performer, and the horses that go with him to the auction are not quite alive and symbolize pure depravity. Ratliff supports this situation as, "What Ratliff had called

[20] According to Relief Theory, which was discussed in detail in the first chapter of the thesis, laughter and humor are the result of the release of nervous energy, and humor is mainly used to overcome sociocultural barriers and reveal repressed desires. See, "1.3.2. The Relief Theory" section and pages, 8-10 for more information.

'that Texas sickness,' that spotted corruption of frantic and uncatchable horses, had spread as far as twenty and thirty miles" (Faulkner, 1991: 356). These horses, which Flem Snopes sold to the poor people at the auction in Frenchman's Bend, represent pure corruption and evil, which later results in the poor people losing their money to Flem Snopes, and their horses running around wildly.

The very first member of the Snopes family we encounter in *The Hamlet* is Ab Snopes. We don't understand why he is offended to the world until Ratliff gives us the narrative, and Ab becomes the source of much of the novel's tall tale humor. Varner perceives Ab as a threat due to his notoriety as a barn burner, and so tries to defend himself by aiding Ab. Ab pops up with some witty statements, which he doesn't believe are comical, but the readers do. For instance, when Varner tries to find out how Ab got along with prior landlords in order to avoid him from causing Varner any harm, Ab can get along with anyone; he has had fifteen or twenty different landlords since he started farming. He departs when he cannot agree with them, according to himself (Faulkner, 1991: 23). Ab has no idea how Varner would react to his remark and hence does not find it laughable. Varner is also caught up in the moment and is unable to perceive the humor; quite the opposite, he feels intimidated. The reader, on the other hand, is unconcerned with the conditions and so sees the man's and the confrontation's humor.

I.O. Snopes might be one of the funniest figures of the characters in the novel. He does not know how to speak; instead, each time he opens his lips, he repeats proverbs and idioms which labels him as an intelligent and intellectual guy in the sight of many of the town's residents. He is a minor character in the novel's plot, but his appearances are always humorous because of what he keeps saying. His verbal dilemma with Ratliff over the cow in the book is a good example for this situation:

> *All right," Ratliff said. He looked at the two others—cousins, nephew and uncle, whatever they were. "It will cost you sixteen dollars and eighty cents." "Sixteen dollars and eighty cents?" I. O. said. "Hell fire." The little quick pale eyes darted from face to face between them. Then he turned to the minister. "Look here. A cow is a heap of different things besides the meat. Yet it's all that same cow. It's got to be, because it's some things that cow never even had when it was born, so what else can it be but the same thing? The horns, the hair. Why couldn't we take a little of them and make a kind of soup; we could even take a little of the actual living blood so it wouldn't be no technicality in it——" ... "But sixteen dollars and eighty cents," I. O. said. He looked at Ratliff. "I dont reckon you aim to put up none of it." ... "But sixteen-eighty," I. O. said. "Hell*

> *fire." Ratliff watched him—the eyes which were much shrewder than they appeared—not intelligent; he revised that: shrewd.* (Faulkner, 1991: 224)

Although I. O. Snopes knows nothing about bargaining, he thinks that he will get a result by repeating the same sentences over and over, but both Ratliff and the reader realize that the efforts of I. O. Snopes were futile, and the bargaining was ridiculous.

Mink and Ike are two more prominent Snopeses in *The Hamlet*. In his effort to get rid himself of Houston's corpse after he has slain him, Mink is the resource of the novel's major grotesquely humorous occasions. With his desire to make love to Houston's cow, Ike also sets off the book's following most grotesquely funny occurrence. Mink is a mammal, just like his name suggests, and a wily, sly, tricky, and crafty one at that. Mink also murders Flem in *The Mansion*, propelled by despair. When Ratliff forgets Mink's name, he recalls a name that sounds like a description of an animal: "Fox? cat? oh yes, mink" (Faulkner, 1991: 99). Because they all pertain to a carnivorous animal, any of these labels might be acceptable.

The other important humorous character of *The Hamlet* is the figure of Eula Varner. Eula is clearly the humorously overstated fertility deity, according to Richard K. Cross' essay "The Humor of *The Hamlet*," and all her deeds, or rather her lack of them, reveal the humor of her character (Cross, 1967: 207). She attends school and yet never acquires anything, and she never has to make an effort to learn anything. She is inexcusably sluggish, and this is part of the cause. She is described by Faulkner as it was not that she demanded to be carried wherever she went. It was as if she realized there was nowhere she wished to go even as a child, that there would be nothing particularly new or original at the end of any advancement, that every location was the same as the last (Faulkner, 1991: 106).

When Eula is at her most alive, we are treated to a situation that is almost grotesquely humorous. Labove is a schoolteacher who has yearned for Eula's affection for years but never shows it to the outside world. He suddenly expresses his love in an unusual way. When Eula has walked out of the classroom and her desk, Labove would walk right up to her seat and rest his palm on the wooden plank that was still hot and cozy from the effect of her seating, or he would bend and put his face on the wood, burying his face against the solid, insensitive plank, till the warmth was faded (132). His behaviors are excessive, and they make up the scene's initial source of humor. Eula returns to the school one day while Jody is late picking her up,

and she notices Labove standing and kneeling at her seat. She just asks him what he is doing there, and his demeanor and terrible situation may appear hysterically humorous to the readers. She does seem to be unafraid when he "attacks" her. They waltz around like dancing couple, and when she eventually breaks free from his grip, she leans over him and delivers the novel's most complete line: "Stop pawing me … You old headless horseman Ichabod Crane[21]" (135). The ridicule and sarcasm are infantile, and they depict Eula's dullness and lethargy in comparison to the seeming attraction which has entrapped Labove.

The story's primary events present a section-by-section structure, as if it were a collection of interconnected tall tales. *The Hamlet* is divided into four parts, each overshadowed by one of four distinct but connected modes: humor, fantasy, romance, and what may be termed black/dark humor, or the macabre, as stated in Dorothy Tuck's *Apollo Handbook of Faulkner*. Nonetheless, the overall tone of the novel is one of restrained humorous realism. This is partly due to two tools: the juxtaposition between occurrences and the responses they evoke from readers, and Ratliff's aloof, sarcastic observations, which transcend realism into comedy, and frequently even farther into mockery and satire, through his common language and objective scrutiny (Tuck, 1964: 74). Ratliff's role has already been addressed, and Tuck just reiterates it here. She also discusses the other qualities of all types of humor throughout his book, including the difference between occurrences and their judgments, where much of the humor is based on hyperbole and misunderstanding. *The Hamlet*'s framework virtually moves from milder humor to the potentially harmful grotesque and dark humor of Ike and his cow, as well as the spotted horses moment, via Labove's hideous but futile deeds.

The horse-trading affair with Pat Stamper has all the necessary ingredients of a classic tall tale, filled with dark humor. Since all the readers are familiar with Pat Stamper, the trade rivalry is recognized even before the story's contents are disclosed. "He was a legend," (Faulkner, 1991: 32) we are told. Pat is aided by a

[21] Ichabod Crane is a fictional character, and he is the protagonist of Washington Irving's short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." He is a slim and unattractive school principal. He is quite poor, and his main interest is self-improvement. He tries to advance his purpose by impressing the daughters of wealthy families with his learning. He is also very impressionable, however, and his belief in ghosts and other supernatural phenomena—including the legend of the headless horseman—ultimately overcomes him (Ichabod Crane. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ichabod-Crane).

“negro” servant who could take any chunk of horse flesh that still had life in it and disappear to whatever secured building or barn was empty and accessible, then reappear with something that not even the beast’s dam—let alone his prior landlords—would recognize (33). This is precisely the trap and mistake that Ab Snopes slips into, albeit we don't realize it yet.

Meanwhile, Ab goes to town with his wife’s carefully earned money wrapped in a rag to purchase a separator for her and to sell his exhausted and dead tired horse for something better. Ab does not win, yet he appears exactly after regaining control of his own team. Ab is first concerned that the horse will not make it and survive to town and that he would have to smuggle the animal in through back routes; nevertheless, he devises a scheme to resuscitate the dying animal by burying a fishhook beneath the horse’s skin and provoking the animal into movement by releasing the reins. The horse sweats like hell and becomes nearly vivacious and stunningly beautiful with the fishing rod and some saltpeter put into the animal’s jaws. Stamper gets the best out of Ab when he thinks he’s being cool and reveals that he wants to get rid of the horse since it’s so energetic and lively. Stamper says he won’t sell a mule unless it’s in a pair because of Ab’s excitement, therefore Ab surrenders and trades his horse and mule for the matched set of mules from Stamper. The mules haven’t even arrived in town when they start to exhibit signs that they won’t be able to make it all the way home without dying. As a result, Ab becomes outraged and pledges to reclaim his own mule from Stamper, who alleges to have already sold Ab’s horse which included the mule in a transaction with another horse. Under duress, Ab renounces and trades the matched pair of mules with Stamper for a horse and mule. We assume Ab has returned to where he began, but we are unaware of the veracity of that perception.

On the way home, it starts to rain and the horse begins to change colors. Now Ab actually begins to comprehend how much money Stamper actually earned. The horse turns out to be Ab’s old horse which the “nigger” painted and blew up with a bicycle pump to make the horse look healthy, and fat. The “nigger” does not bother to remove the fishhook that Ab had inserted beneath the horse’s skin, which is why the horse looked to be so energetic. The image of the huge horse differs with the image of the horse changing colors in the rain in a humorous way. The following is

an explanation of the occurrence mentioned in the book: The horse is not fat like a horse, but like a pig: it is fat up to its ears and tight as a drum; it is so thick that it has trouble walking; it places his feet firmly on the ground as if he does not have any weight or feeling (45). Besides losing the color, the horse also deflates, and Ab is left without a horse at all; "Then there was a sound like a nail jabbed into a big cycle tire. It went wishhhhhhhh and then the rest of that shiny fat horse we had got from Pat Stamper vanished" (48).

Ike's love for Houston's cow leads to one of the most grotesque and quirkiest sequences of all of Faulkner's novels. The concept of love—in both Ike's and Eula's case— is grotesquely funny although with different handling. There is a structural need for the conditions to come where they do. In his *William Faulkner*, Frederick J. Hoffman argues that the conquering of Eula is accompanied by one of the most extensive parodies and burlesques of the romantic vision of nature's abundance and attractiveness in literature. This part of the book is alternatively humorous and profoundly overstated (Hoffman, 1966: 91). Hoffman makes some important points about the sequence. Its location balances Labove's relationship with Eula, but it pushes the notion of love and passion to absurd levels, resulting in grotesque or dark humor. Ike's enthusiasm for the cow corresponds to the other grotesque or dark humor parameters. An key part of surrealist humor, according to Richard K. Cross, is the subjugation of one component that is traditionally the subject of veneration to another incongruous feature in a way that profoundly affects our regular feelings towards both (Cross, 1967: 210). A boy's affection for a mammal, even a cow, is a sentiment we can tolerate and even respect. Even yet, when Ike and the cow are combined, the outcome is what Cross refers to as "surrealist," or in other words "incongruous" humor.

At the point where we feel sorry for Ike's situation or sympathize with his lack of affection, when we learn about his peculiar behaviors with the cow, we just have mixed feelings as scandalized, insulted or amused instead. Whenever the profundity or ornate style of a paragraph leads us to embrace the case, Faulkner switches to some humorous, extreme phenomenon to remind us that the entire idea is hideous and, since we always have an alibi, not to be considered seriously. When Ike rescues the cow from the burning barn, our mood and responses change dramatically.

At that time, we're inclined to accept that Ike's enthusiasm leads to some good deeds. The cow, in its panic, relieves its full intestines all over Ike, who has fallen underneath the cow during the struggle, but Faulkner pushes the situation to an excessive degree that we honestly did not predict. When Houston comes, he rewards Ike with a coin as a gratitude for rescuing the cow. When we remember the feces sticking to Ike's face, we remember Houston, just like us, is disturbed and scandalized by the boy's behavior. After these situations, we are about to embrace the boy's commitment and behavior as human and genuine once again. The imposition of excessive grotesque humor on readers following this constant preparation for acceptance is component of the morbid humor's signature tone. The morbid humor of the scene comes from taking the mundane to an excessive degree with a twist.

Since Faulkner does not allow us to sympathize or approve, the genuine and cruel part of grotesque humor is also clear. Rather, we laugh at the grotesque and recognize the underlying criticism. Faulkner condemns the town and its residents for failing to show Ike the care and attention he need in order to make him feel loved; instead, disregarding his needs—love and compassion—forces Ike into his grotesquely humorous behaviors.

The community, and particularly those like Ike Snopes' relatives, are then chastised by Faulkner, who tries to benefit from the boy's actions. Ratliff despises the townsfolk for peering through a break in the barn wall at Ike and the cow, and he begins to wonder whether they were paid to do so. Because it is both grotesque and crucial to the novel's concept, the scene is quite funny. In his book *The Achievement of William Faulkner*, Michael Millgate analyzes the conditions as regarding the intensified language, the mythic allegories, and Ike's unconditional compassion and benevolence, it would be absurd to say that Faulkner endorses Ike's devotion for the cow; what ultimately seems to be more repulsive and perverted than Ike's own position are the serious efforts of his family members to manipulate his compassion and, Ratliff suspects, to transform it into profit (Millgate, 1963: 187). We grow to sympathize with Ike to the point that we almost loathe the Snopeses and aggressively oppose his family's maltreatment. The Snopeses' nasty, selfish natures are revealed in a grotesquely humorous way, revealing both Faulkner's sarcasm at Ike and the

sincere and well-deserved criticism he is presenting for the Snopes family. Furthermore, we must remember that the situations seem amusing to us because we are distant from them, but they are distressing and scandalous to those concerned. The actions of Ike frustrate Houston and Ratliff, but the readers are pleased by the grotesque humor.

The "spotted horses" sequence, which is the last scene to be discussed, has been covered with so many incidents that only a superficial review can be made here. The scene is a blend of weird and dark humor. In her essay "William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*" Viola Hopkins asserts that the brutality, misery, oppression and injustice that are unavoidably a part of a totally effective realistic parody are underneath the humor and inexorably a part of it (Hopkins, 1955: 137). The violence and the pain are what make the scene grotesquely humorous. What begins as realistic parody for the individuals involved in the grotesquely humorous antics with the wild horses, moves through our laughter at their adverse conditions because we are detached and uninvolved with the incidents. The stereotypical figures and the realistic parody of the situation provide the scene's dark and incongruous humor. As Charles Allen observes, that part of the story strikes him as peculiarly frontier comedy. In this narrative, one sees a brilliant use of universal patterns and a cunning combination of inconsistencies. The use of frontier wit, such as the manipulation of the awful ludicrousness, the trick circumstance, folk and ethnic humor, the antagonism of casual and vernacular language, exaggeration and parody of dialect, and so on, is particularly appealing (Allen, 1960: 65). All these factors are visible in the scene, which we are aware of.

Apparently, the awful ludicrousness is a characteristic of some frontier and folk humor, but it also serves as a bridge to the scene's grotesque humor. In Melvin Backman's *Faulkner, The Major Years*, the juxtaposition of two methods of humor is portrayed in a unique way. According to Backman, in Faulkner's work actual, phenomenal humorous energy attempts to take over and turns grief into mirth and drags everything down to the ground. However, the humorous energy is unable to entirely overcome a tense, unfortunate aspect that disrupted the humorous atmosphere. Faulkner creates his own "tragicomedy" effectively converting his obsession with his humorous genius and incorporating to life the individuals for

whom he had such a great affection and empathy (Backman, 1966: 181-182). Grotesque humor is characterized by suspense and a tragic aspect. Backman refers to this as "tragicomedy," yet it may just as easily be described as grotesque humor. It stems from Faulkner's criticisms of injustice and ignorance in this situation. The reader is led to evaluate and criticize the situations, as well as the book's message, by combining agony and laughter in the tension of the tone. This critique expresses Faulkner's assessment of what is partly wrong with such injustice in the South, and, more broadly, with the world.

2.3.3.2. *The Town*

The Town (1957) is the second novel of the Snopes trilogy. Unlike *The Hamlet*, *The Town* is not as excessively or as obviously humorous. The humor in *The Town* is milder and slower paced than in *The Hamlet*, which has a lot of humorous passages. Cleanth Brooks simply summarizes the situation of comedy in *The Town* in his *William Faulkner, The Yoknapatawpha Country* as some of the humor in *The Town* is nearly grotesque; some of it is quirky hyperbole, particularly in Ratliff's chapters; some of it is a sort of social parody. Moreover, understanding the many types of humor in connection to one another is a prerequisite for comprehending this work, as is avoiding misreading one funny aspect for the significant topic to which the other humorous components function as foils (Brooks, 1989: 216). That quirky hyperbole is obvious in the grotesquely humorous character types, and the social parody stems from Flem's continual ascent to success. This so-called social comedy may be sarcastic, dark or grotesque since the purpose of social comedy is to reveal the human weaknesses, and such weaknesses are fair subjects for these types of humor, depending on the way they are handled. Brooks is correct by drawing attention to how these two styles of humor function as foils and are pitted against one another. The dark humor may help to relieve stress that has arisen as a result of a severe or tragic event, or from earlier to more destructive grotesque humor.

The humor in *The Town* comes partly from the same comic characters we have in *The Hamlet*. Ratliff again provides humor, especially in his stories and anecdotes. I.O., Flem, Montgomery Ward, and all the Snopeses keep bringing humor

and laughter, while Eula Varner Snopes, in addition to these characters, serves a similar purpose.

In the "Christmas Ball" scene where all the ladies are dressed in corsages, Gavin and De Spain both are intimately involved in the action and therefore do not find the whole thing fun. The dynamics of obtaining Eula a corsage without disrespecting each other, their partners, companions, acquaintances, the community, are generating those problems. However, distanced readers will find the situations humorous in a ridiculous and overstated sense. When Charles Mallison, Jr.—also known as "Chick"—,who is another new comic character, arrives at the dance hall the night of the Christmas Ball, he remarks that one could scent all of the corsages even before heading up the stairs, and once inside the hall, it appeared as if they should have been capable to see the fragrance from them as well, like fog in a marsh on a chilly morning (Faulkner, 1957: 72-73). The terms in the narrative accentuate the scene's extreme nature and make the readers laugh.

When the situations are recounted from Chick's perspective, we always get a funny reaction. Particularly the anecdotes about Chick trying to earn a quarter or a dollar from Gavin for the errands Chick conducts between Gavin and Linda (the daughter of Eula and Flem). When Chick recounts the incident of Eck Snopes' death, the humor becomes even more obscene, ludicrous and grotesque. Eck is blown up as he foolishly places a lit lantern in the town's oil tank. The twisted and shattered neck brace that Eck used to wear is the only thing they can ever discover on his body. They put the neck brace in the ground in a nice tomb and give it all the respect it deserves in a haphazard attempt at decency. This situation is recounted by Faulkner in the book as follows: "Besides, he was a Mason too. He has been a Mason such a long time that he was a good one even if he wasn't very high up in it." Chick then continues, "So they buried the neck-brace anyway, in a coffin all regular, with the Masons in charge of the funeral, and more people than you would have thought sent flowers, even the oil company too…" (110). Chick does not really appear to think burying a neck brace is odd. Generally, items that hold significant place in a person's life are buried with them, but in this case, the burial of the object that was a burden to Eck throughout his existence is an ironic reflection of grotesque humor. Even if

Chick is oblivious of what he is saying, the readers sense the oddity and know that it is the extreme nature of the circumstance that generates the grotesque humor.

The dark and macabre humor becomes more than just entertainment or relaxation, it is relevant to or becomes the topic itself. The grotesque humor is less apparent in *The Town* than the other two novels of the Snopes trilogy, but it still exists. A few of situations in specific emphasize the repulsive humor. The Snopeses not only create dread, aggravation, and guffaws, but they also cause Gavin's disappointments and Eula's suicide, among other things. These reasons show the cruelty of man against man. The way people behave cruelly at each other deserves criticism; in this criticism, Faulkner uses to express his displeasure and occasional repulsion towards the hypocrisy of the normative values of the Southern people. And that, along with the resulting hypocrisy, becomes one of the themes of the novel.

The novel is summarized with a single short grotesquely funny occurrence. Flem does not allow Linda to leave Jefferson until he erects a monument to Eula. The monument is hideously comical; having been hauled all the way from Italy after tremendous effort. On the headstone is an exaggerated and stylized image of Eula in the shape of a medal. One of the most grotesquely humorous phrases in the novel is carved on the stone: "A virtuous Wife is a Crown to her Husband/Her Children rise and call Her Blessed" (355). We ponder what could have motivated Flem to evaluate such a eulogy in such a heinous manner, and then we realize how repulsive he is and find his behavior comical. The absurdity of the statement is only revealed after a thorough analysis. Eula is far from a nice and noble wife, she is portrayed paradoxically, and this is not her fault because Flem is weak and impotent. The grisly humor of that particular instance alone contributes to the understanding of the circumstances of the book. He possesses her by tyranny, rather than by right or merit, as a true monarch would. He owns her for his efforts to buy material wealth. Eula has only one child and therefore the "children" of the inscription basically turns the eulogy into a direct deceit. Until we recall the details again, we can excuse this lie for the sake of style or the idealism of the message. Linda arrives at the graveyard but unwilling to look at the headstone or the grave. She only wants to complete the appropriate rites in order to avoid the funeral ceremony. As we can see from this scene, and most other Faulkner' works, especially in his *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound*

and the Fury and *A Rose for Emily*, facts and themes such as deaths, burials, funerals, gravesides, which are also extremely important in the theme of Southern literature, have great importance in the grotesquely humorous elements in Faulkner's works.

In *The Town*, as in most Faulkner's works, the characters make use death for their own personal gain. Flem wants only the prestige which he gets from this showy monument. Out of curiosity, the whole town walk out of their houses to see the monument. Death merely becomes an opportunity perpetuating the townspeople's hypocrisy. Thus, through the Snopeses, and the handling of "death," Faulkner enables a criticism of hypocritical attitude by means of grotesque humor.

Once again, Byron Snopes' unknown kids (they are unknown at first, then we learn that these four children are half-Snopeses and half-Jicarilla Apache Indians) also are subject to horrendous humor, who appear in the narrative for only about the last twenty pages of the book but the fact that they are given that prominent place is significant. These kids are grotesquely humorous, as they first appear. They were, after all, kids: the tallest was a girl, though we never knew if she was the eldest or merely the tallest, followed by two boys, all three dressed in overalls, and last a small child dressed in a single outfit down to his heels, like a man's shirt made out of a flour—or meal—sack or perhaps a remnant of an old tent. A shipping tag scribbled in pencil was attached to the front of each of them: "From: Byron Snopes, … To: Mr. Flem Snopes …" (359). At first glance, we assume Chick is just being nasty and malevolent or overly dramatic in his depiction, as kids are prone to doing. Yet afterwards, just as we are about to condemn Chick rather than the Snopeses, Chick provides us more details, and our perspectives begin to shift: They don't resemble human beings, according to Chick. They have a snake-like appearance about them. Perhaps it, too, is too strong. Anyway, they don't look like kids; if there is one thing they don't look like, it is kids, with pitch black pale faces and dark hair that look like someone had put a bowl on top of their heads and then style their hair up to the edge of the bowl with a blunt knife, and flawlessly black flawlessly still eyes that nobody in Jefferson (or Yoknopatawpha County) ever asserted to have seen blink (360). Faulkner draws us a grotesquely humorous family portrait with these children's characters. We are indeed distanced from the quick response and, as a result, we might find the events much more humorous than those involved.

These four demonic and grotesque kids then go on to wreak havoc on Jefferson. They break into the Coca-Cola bottling factory and consume the whole supply of coke and beverages. There's an exquisite and valuable little dog in town who travels in a Cadillac and sneers through the window not only at other dogs but also at humans; and it eats special food that Mr Wall Snopes' butcher buys from Kansas City since it's too expensive for ordinary and poor people to buy and eat. The dog vanishes one day, and the small kid shows up in town wearing the dog's gold collar. On these events, the children find themselves at the police station, while standing in front of the town's sheriff. Chick Mallison depicts their appearance, in the following lines:

> *And the four Snopes Indians or Indian Snopeses, whichever is right, standing in a row watching [Sheriff Hampton], not looking dangerous, not looking anything; not innocent especially and nobody would have called it affectionate, but not dangerous in the same sense that four shut pocket knives dont look threatening. They look like four shut pocket knives but they dont look lethal.* (363)

We eventually understand that the kids ate the dog and threw his bones into the cave where they spent so much time. Flem pays the dog's owners for the dog in another attempt to acquire credibility. Whereupon he feels compelled to get the kids out of town, sending them to some kinfolk in Frenchman's Bend—Dewitt Binford and his wife—who planned to help them in return for a dollar per week. Till we have the rest of the facts, that may appear to be an acceptable compromise.

Dewitt Binford spends a lot of time with the kids. The kids don't sleep in their beds; instead, they sleep on the floor, curled up under a blanket. They are grotesquely spooky and uncanny since they never make a noise or appear to blink. Dewitt becomes preoccupied and shows obsessed behaviors by the idea that they never close their eyes, so one night he snatches a glimpse at them using Vernon Tull's flashlight. He never gets the chance to turn on the flashlight since the kids are so fast. Two swift slashes down the sides of his face are all he perceives. Dewitt's cheeks have been slashed from eye to chin by one of the kids, and he is bleeding out of the room. As self-defense, he tries to shut himself and his wife in their bedroom till daylight. And the kids eagerly wait to be fed in the morning in the yard as if nothing happened.

Doris Snopes makes an effort to look after the kids as well. Doris attempts to educate them by deceiving them by putting dirt into candy wrappers or muddy water into coke bottles. But as a result of his action, Doris is bound to a stake and a fire is set around him as a form of retaliation by the kids. We literally cannot believe what we have read is real at first! We also cannot believe Faulkner expects us to think such demonic figures exist. Then, we discover with great shock and terror that this is precisely what Faulkner anticipates from the readers; and he is right. These kids are not disembodied or lost spirits from Gothic horror stories or surreal fiction; they are quite real and terrifying, even while they do such grotesquely funny and peculiar things.

Flem finally returns the kids to Byron. They board the train as the community comes together, but not too intimately and closely. When the townspeople try to provide the kids with sustenance for the road trip, they offer fruit and vegetables to them from afar so that they do not get wounded or attacked, much like feeding feral animals. The town has no idea what to do with these Snopeses, or any other Snopeses for that matter. The majority of conventional treatments fail when it comes to dealing with this particularly special organism known as Snopes.

The Snopeses defeat Gavin and Ratliff in a desperate fight. No matter how hard you try to preserve the truth and the rule of law against corruption and organized crime, the Snopeses multiply quicker than you can clean up the damage. The problem and dilemma with Jefferson, and hence with the rest of the world, is that they do not really see or understand the full scope and consequences of what the Snopeses are doing to them until it is too late. In the same way that the Snopeses try to attain tangible prosperity in *The Hamlet*, Flem tries to earn reputation and respect in *The Town*. Those traits and virtues must be earned, not bought, and *The Town* serves as a dire warning and a morality tale about the potential consequences of selling our souls to the metaphorical devils of hypocrisy and supposed artificial dignity. Due to these reasons, *The Town* displays a small universe in Jefferson; it soon evolves to stand for the entire South, country, and subsequently, the entire world. What ails Jefferson—selfishness, hypocrisy, bought respectability, and so on—ails the South and the rest of the world as well.

2.3.3.3. *The Mansion*

The humor and the wit of *The Mansion* (1959), like the other two novels in the Snopes trilogy, comes from the grotesquely humorous character representations and various tall tale story structures. Nonetheless, grotesque humor is interwoven into the novel's theme rather than serving purely as comic relief. Per the critics, the theme and the concept of the novel is came to the realization as Stevens argues at the end of *The Mansion*; there are no ethics, values and principles; folks simply do the finest they can (Faulkner, 1965: 429). These crucial issues, on the other hand, require additional study and can be addressed or debated in the subsequent conversation. In fact, the humorous sequences are sparse and somewhat outdated. Indeed, the humor in both *The Mansion* and *The Town* has been moved to a narrower level from the comprehensive level in *The Hamlet* (Vickery, 1964: 199). However, although it does not penetrate every particle of the novel, the humorous and comic aspect of the novel is not irrelevant to the content of the story.

The best part of the *The Mansion*—in terms of both comedy and tragic aspects—deals with Mink Snopes. Mink is a small, child-like moron, who goes to prison when he is 25 for murdering a big cattleman, Jack Houston in 1908. Mink thinks that he will escape punishment and has the idea of hiding his only crooked cow in the cattleman's herd; but in a way, he feeds his cow in vain. Since he goes to jail and cannot get out of prison until the age of 63. Mink blames Flem for a lot of his troubles, and he has reasons. His long-suffering, confused, betrayed, violent story and how he got his revenge on Flem, is a funny and pathetic incident.

Furthermore, the alleged compassion for Mink seems questionable. We wouldn't be able to appreciate the absurdity and humor of his struggles when he was released from prison, or his attempts to murder Flem, if our compassion for him was so strong. In fact, we don't actually find it odd that Mink murdered Flem; but not because we are sympathetic with Mink. Rather, we welcome Mink on in the murder because we actually acquainted with the fact that Flem is the villain, and we feel he deserves to be punished. We take this kindly because of the novel's victory over Snopesism, which is another major subject. When "Snopesism" is dealt such a setback in the story, the reader feels temporarily relieved. However, Faulkner deftly

negates that relief in a subtle and vague way when we—as Ratliff (standing like the consciousness of the novel and the reader)—notice several new and unfamiliar Snopes faces at Flem's burial. Faulkner appears to be arguing that Snopesism's potency is limitless, and there's a certain joy in that awareness. Therefore, the central idea is that what is wrong with the world is its dishonesty, superficiality, greed, and hypocrisy which are all characteristics of Snopesism. As a result, the novel's humor is mostly grotesque, particularly when Mink and the rest of the Snopeses are around.

Byron's four demonic and grotesque kids from *The Town* are only briefly mentioned in *The Mansion*, but other members of the Snopes family evoke comparable grotesque emotions and reactions in readers. According to Lawrence Thompson's *William Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation*, the readers have the ability to find something genuinely humorous in the weird but completely human members of the Snopes family, yet behind the laughter, beneath the humor, there is also an extremely critical use of humorous and sarcastic aspects for sardonic reasons. (Thompson, 1967: 133). We should emphasize that humor is not just used for comic relief, but also for thematic, analytical, and philosophical goals. It's as though Faulkner preferred sarcasm to sheer grotesque humor, which is a kinder critical approach.

The inconsistency between what we expect and what we get from Faulkner raises laughter. The scene where Clarence Snopes (the son of I.O. Snopes) goes door to door in elections and speaks the cliché words we are used to hearing from politicians, and then he loses the race for the House of Representatives, but instead of giving up, he becomes a candidate again at the next election, and joins the Ku Klux Klan after becoming Senator, which almost takes the form of a tall tale and gets its humorous effect from the grotesque themes. Clarence is a corrupt, ruthless, immoral, greedy, and dishonest Southern politician who is opposed in his election by Devries, a clean, virtuous war hero, medal winner, and family guy, as described in the background of the events.

Eventually through the Ratliff character, Faulkner argues his dissatisfaction of governmental rule, declaring his wishes for tranquility, decency, respect, and confidentiality in politics: since in its current model it is a nationwide sanctuary for imbeciles who have ended in failure at every other profession through which they

might make a decent living for themselves and their family members. The best and only way to be elected to congress in America is to have raised 7-8 kids and then ended up losing an arm or leg in a lumber mill mishap. The irresponsible positivity that resulted in 7-8 kids with almost nothing to eat but a lumber and the unbelievable incompetence that would put an arm or a leg into a running saw, should have already disqualified them from holding any position of public confidence (Faulkner, 1965: 310). For Ratliff is extremely right in criticizing the inadequacy and incompetence of the people, getting certain positions and being elected in an American office, rather than being competent. Obviously, Ratliff speaks for Faulkner as well as the reader in that part of the book. The laughter that emerges from the scene, however, is generated through the readers' insufficiency. Clarence manipulates the campaign in such a manner that the war hero is transformed into "a nigger lover who had really been decorated by the Yankee government for it," as he puts it (313). This is precisely what the townspeople expected of Clarence, but they couldn't figure out how he'd manipulate events in his favor. The community, particularly Ratliff, regrets the disclosure of Clarence's strategy.

The following words of Gavin best explain that Snopesism poses a threat to both Jefferson and the world, as per the theme of the book: It is a dark and dreary situation. Even before you could even walk around and get rid of one Snopes, another one is prowling behind you (Faulkner, 1965: 349). While this is correct and relevant to the anti-Snopesism theme, it is not the pretty much the entire story. In return, Ratliff responds to Gavin in these words: That really is correct; the moment one looks at it, one at once sees it is nothing but another Snopes (349). Whatever the townspeople do, there is no way to get rid of the Snopes, and they pop up at every corner. Throughout most of the Snopes trilogy, Ratliff underestimates the threat posed by the Snopes, even though he admits it. Gavin is the one who expresses the situation's despair, while Ratliff tries to oppose it for himself, the community, and the world. Thereby, Faulkner appears to argue that using humor to resist Snopesism is a reasonable solution. Gavin is preoccupied with the ethics, morality, and legitimacy of his circumstances because he tends to take the world and himself so seriously. Ratliff, on the other hand, is a more objective observer of the occurrences and can provide a more accurate assessment of them. Overall, Faulkner knows best,

and he uses humor to transmit his ideas and guidance to the readers. Gavin and Ratliff both make important points about the dangers and consequences of Snopesism, but they do it in quite unusual ways. So, the humor's success is amplified because it appeals to both Ratliff and Gavin's proclivities. When we look at the personalities and settings in more detail, we see that they stand for not simply Jefferson and the South, but the entire world.

Lastly, the scenes portraying Mink Snopes being released from prison are humorous. Mink is a funny character in itself. Mink's wit and humor stems from his struggles to reintegrate into society after spending 38 years in jail, separated from civilization. He is exceedingly funny when it comes to his approach toward money and the potential obstacles that keep him from getting it. When he comes out of jail, he has a ten dollars bill pinned to the watch pocket of his overalls, and a few dollar coins and bills in his pocket. With the ten dollars, he plans to purchase a gun, plenty food, and then go to Jefferson with the rest. However, he cannot manage to acquire such necessities, due to certain obstacles laid on his way at every turn, providing further humor for the readers. Mink goes into a store to purchase sardines but is astonished by the price; when the owner of the business offers him "lunch meat," Mink has no idea what it is. This stands as an immediate occasion for laughter, due to his innocence. Thereafter Mink's purchase of a coke which he guzzles, adds more into the humor. Acting as such, he thinks he will take it up and chew it up before asking for the cost, because he might not be able to reach it otherwise (260). Furthermore, to help him on his way to Jefferson, Mink intends to earn some money. For the purpose, he plunders a yard, and eventually is dispatched to a clergyman down the road for more labor. Mink just plans to work for a day or two, which would help him to acquire only sufficient money to move on. Unfortunately, he finds himself laboring for a preacher who is cash-strapped and won't be able to pay him until the Sunday church gathering. The fact that the preacher was also a sergeant in World War II changes or intensifies this portrayal, as he transfers his command skills to the civilian administration of his temporary labor. Mink is at once assured by the preacher that he is now laboring for the God rather than mammon, (267) but his obstinacy leads him to doubt that situation, and he simply works there for money and lodging. When Mink is imprisoned in the sleeping chamber at night, he realizes that

the window is wide open so that the people may leave if they wish, but they are unable to grab anything at all on the way out. The wittiest turn of events here is when Mink gets robbed of the ten dollars fastened to his overalls, which is particularly ironic given that Mink might have had $250 in his pocket if he had retained the money the warden had handed him before he was released from the prison. Instead of losing all $260, Mink had actually saved $240, according to Mink's logic.

Another example to Mink's humorous incident maybe in the following instance of preacher's pleading to God. The preacher Goodyhay also a former sergeant, while running away from a ship under attack he had returned at it rescue an invalid soldier. During the rescue operation underwater, he happens to receive a revelation from God. According to the preacher, he is already gone and pleasantly out of it on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean when Jesus stands over him and says, "Fall in," which he does, and Jesus says, "TenSHUN, about-FACE," and assigns him to this new permanent position located on the outskirts of Memphis, Tennessee. He's got something, enough of whatever it needs to recruit this new-faith boot camp to require the use of a church (268). The statement that God would request followers like an Army sergeant is a ludicrous exaggeration, as is the assumption that the preacher Goodyhay relies on he was specifically summoned by God, despite the fact that the preacher strongly considers that he is already dead to this life. The parallel between Jesus and the sergeant progresses to the point that the preacher leads the congregation, just as he was ordered, and exactly as an Army sergeant would lead soldiers. Preachers frequently use the metaphor and comparison of a private soldier in the military and a private soldier of the Lord in significant contemplations and discussions. This fact is twisted by Faulkner for his own humorous purposes. Instead of being a convincing pattern for action or apologist for Christ, Mink and the preacher become humorous, interesting, entertaining, and absurd as a result of the twist. Once the preacher supervises the ritual and practice of patronizing those who have served and worked for him, he takes his army directives a step further. Goodyhay instructs, "Kneel down" (271). Then he gets down on his knees and blesses the men. The invocation is interestingly funny in terms of its dissonance and incongruity with our expectations; "Save us. Christ, the poor sons of bitches," Goodyhay shouts out (271). The difference between prayer and the preacher's

discourse makes us laugh. Then we are informed of the preacher's metaphor with a sergeant, and the laughter grows as we witness the repetition of the patterns and conversations.

Mink eventually escapes and heads to Memphis to acquire his gun. In this regard, the scene in Memphis offers more humorous factors, owing to Mink's misunderstandings about the city. Mink is snuggled up to sleep on a park bench when he is woken up by a police officer who asks him to go on. Mink has nowhere to go and no money for a lodging, so the police officer grants him fifty cents. This is an extremely incongruous and rare occurrence, and readers genuinely have no idea and wonder how Faulkner would use it. It does not take much time for readers to figure out what is going on. Instead of being humble and appreciative, Mink is manipulative, immoral, and selfish, believing that this is a method to extort more money from more police officers. Mink recalls hearing about this new system called "WPA (Works Progress Administration)" in Parchman, Mississippi and assesses it as follows: Relief, or W P and A, was a program in which the same authorities that would not allow you grow cotton or silk on your own property would provide you a bed, food, supplies, or even cash, but only after you swore you didn't own any possessions and could prove it (287). So, Mink decides to take advantage of WPA by simply placing himself in a similar position in a different region. As anticipated, another police officer approaches him and asks him the very same questions, but this time the outcome is dissimilar. Mink is rather arrogant when he responds to the police officer's query about what he is waiting for by stating that he wants another half dollar. This time, the police officer takes a novel approach and pursues Mink. Mink notices the situation and uses it to his advantage; he was becoming increasingly aware that the railway police officers were not subject to the W P and A free-relief statutes (289). Mink generates humor for the readers by continuing his clumsy and foolish blunders, rather than actually realizing what is happening to him. Possibly, Faulkner ironically approaches that era with the manipulative mindset of the Mink with the police. Faulkner may be critically explaining through Mink how the WPA, which was established for the development of the country during the Great Depression, was used by people for their own benefit at the time this new system was initiated.

When Mink prognosticates on the Lord and his omnipotence, he provides one of the finest examples of humor in the novel. Mink thinks that the "Old Moster" might undoubtedly shoot since the ancient gun only destroys; it does not have a sense of humor and there is no laughing matter (398). Until Mink shoots and murders Flem, these feelings and grumbles echo throughout the scene like a loop. These lines' humor stems from the readers' knowledge that Mink is faulty, as well as Faulkner's inference that the Lord, too, is a trickster. The gun does not go off when Mink tries to shoot Flem at first. Then Mink thinks as he cocks the gun again, "Hitt'll go this time: Old Moster dont play jokes" (416). The joke in this case consists of the humorous scenes that arise from the recurring situations. Mink having to cock and shoot the gun many times is humorous in and of itself. Flem then refuses to flee or make any attempt to avoid his destiny. Mink then attempts to depart the house. Linda comes down as he fumbles with a doorknob. Mink then tosses the gun at Linda in fury, knowing that the gun will not go off again.

The whole Snopes trilogy has been basically humorous, albeit by the third volume, the humor has grown less harsh and less obvious. In her *Apollo Handbook of Faulkner*, Dorothy Tuck states that, unlike *The Hamlet*, which has a widely comedic tone, the two subsequent works are predominantly serious and less dramatically striking—excluding the passages of pertaining with Mink in The Mansion (Tuck, 1964: 73). There are a couple additional humorous scenes recounted in addition to the ones involving Mink. Throughout much of the book, the humor, whether dark or grotesque, has been related to a specific subject of people's and systems' evil and hypocrisy, as well as the risks and dangers posed by the growing prevalence of Snopesism. The struggles have placed Snopesism's demonic, wicked, and ravenous impulses against polite Jefferson's conventional but inevitably corrupt powers of law and ethics. All three novels' dark, repulsive and hideous characters have offered considerable humor as they resist the Snopes family's more deceitful powers and dare to condemn the Snopeses as evil and wickedness incarnate. In the end, there is no victor; the dispute gets into a vicious circle.

Jefferson maintains to resist the family, but towards the end of the novel, Gavin and Ratliff are elderly men, and their endeavors are compromised. Presumably, the townspeople had come to approve of the Snopeses and had to

choose between admitting evil or giving up the war. The Snopes are not as vicious and cruel on the surface as they are on the inside; Flem has earned respect and appreciation through time. Despite several attempts to fight the forces of greed, injustice, hypocrisy corruption, and evil, Faulkner appears to suggest that they are always there. Nonetheless, the trilogy's fundamental precept, which emerges from the confrontations, is that each man is morally responsible for his actions; and Edmond L. Volpe supports this idea in his *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* by stating that, "he [each man] has a moral responsibility to himself and to those around him" (Volpe, 1964: 341). Flem has fully complied with his responsibilities for everyone around him throughout the trilogy. And after Flem dies, the townspeople of Jefferson begin to realize that Flem's death changed almost nothing; as more and more Snopes family members emerges and establishes in Jefferson. Both the Snopeses and the Jefferson community have an ethical code, but their assessments are quite different. The central subject is Gavin's assertion that there are no values and that folks simply do the finest they can (Faulkner, 1965: 429). In short, what Faulkner generally implies in the Snopes trilogy is that; what is wrong with the Snopeses is what is wrong with Jefferson, and the world as well: evil, greed, hypocrisy, selfishness, irresponsibility, etc. The solution to such worldly corruption and evil, according to Faulkner, lies in the never-ending struggle, and his fight is most visible in his books and literature.

2.4. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Faulkner's wisdom and attic wit is all over the place. Even though Faulkner's stories are not often regarded as humorous, they include humor based on careful study, albeit humor may not be his novels' primary instrument. When you look at all of Faulkner's oeuvre, you will see that all of his humorous occurrences are largely dealt with two categories: dark humor or grotesque humor.

Faulkner's dark and grotesque humor stems from his association with the Southern or Southwestern heritage of tall tale humorists, as well as the American cultural practice of exaggeration. Stereotypical characters such as dandies, crooked politicians, naïve rural kids, nice prostitutes, lunatic preachers, and respected "negro"

workers; and dark, subversive, morbid, and forbidding matters, such as death, decay, darkness, and doom play a critical role for this humor.

In Faulkner's work, dark or gallows humor emerges from circumstances of misidentification, divergent perspectives, hyperbole, tall tales—particularly those involving horse auctions and the negotiating procedures—embarrassing failures, and farcical practices. Dark humor in Faulkner frequently serves as comic relief, but it goes beyond that since, in addition to serving as comic relief, dark humor is always linked to the subjects of the novels in some manner. Faulkner might communicate his viewpoint on the characters or their behavior through his use of humor by relating dark or grotesque humor to the novel's subject. Often, those characters involved in a grotesque scene feel that the incidents are scandalous or disgraceful, while the readers are removed from the action by the statement that it is just a novel, and not reality; and therefore, the readers can realize and respond to the grotesque humor.

Grotesque humor is potentially a rude and repulsive type of humor, and it usually results from someone's suffering. Dark or grotesque humor has an uncanny and unnatural aspect to it, which is why monsters, ghouls, villains and deformed or defective characters may be humorous. Another feature of dark or grotesque humor is that it deals with sensitive topics like death, romance, sexuality, ideology, and theology. A characteristic sense of tension develops in readers due to the nature of the subject and the excessive use of grotesque humor. That is, the tone of grotesque humor might hover between disbelief, awareness, denial of awareness, and reinforcement of an awareness. The readers are tense as a result of this variation, or succession of emotions, till they recall their distance from the situation and may laugh rather than just being offended by the grotesque. In grotesque humor, criticism certainly arises because of the detachment of the readers and the writer since the purpose of grotesque humor is to criticize. Faulkner uses dark and grotesque humor to criticize the American South, and to express his discontent and occasional hatred for it, and the people who live there.

Most of his works includes both dark and grotesque humor with dark, grotesque, uncanny, evil, immoral and stereotypical characters. Yet, *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, his last novel *The Reivers*, which will not be included to this study, and the Snopes trilogy, especially *The Hamlet*, are oriented much more as

witty novels than *Sartoris, A Rose for Emily, Sanctuary, Dry September, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, Go Down Moses, A Fable,* and the rest. The purpose of all kinds of humor in these works is to ridicule the manners and ignorance of certain classes in Faulkner's homeland; namely, the American South.

Lastly, the humorous elements in Faulkner's fiction are integrated parts of an intricate yet coherent attempt to show "man in his constant struggle," (Gwynn and Blotner, 1959: 239) and to show how people, within the borders of his imaginary land, should respond to hypocrisy, ignorance, greed, and such problems of the South and the world. Faulkner's criticism about hypocrisy and shattered norms mirrors his own feelings about the South, as well as his condemnation of its artificial belief systems and immoral people.

He was despaired of writing over and over, and often depressed because of life itself. The frequent use of tears and laughter in his fiction proves the power of both writing and being human. And at this stage, his humor illuminates literary technique as we read, without necessarily resorting to dogmatism, and it offers unique opportunities to smile and laugh, even in a universe tainted by toxic masculinity, racism, sexism, classism, guilt, and all kinds of moral ambiguity.

CHAPTER THREE
FLANNERY O'CONNOR

3.1. LIFE, THEMES, AND HUMOR OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Mary Flannery O'Connor was born on March 25, 1925, in Savannah, Georgia, the only child of Edward Francis O'Connor and Regina Cline. She lived from 1925 to 1964, a short life with full of hardships and tragedies. O'Connor delineates herself as a "pigeon-toed child with a receding chin and a you-leave-me-alone-or-I'll-bite-you complex" (Sharp, 2011: 11). On her first date with celebrity, O'Connor said to Rosemary M. Magee in Magee's *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor* that, "When I was six I had a chicken that walked backward and was in the Pathe News. I was in it too with the chicken. I was just there to assist the chicken but it was the high point in my life. Everything since has been anticlimax" (Magee, 1987: 38). Her father died of systemic lupus erythematosus when she was fifteen years old, the same illness that would be the cause of her death at the age of thirty-nine. O'Connor struggled with faith and belief as a devout Catholic, and her fiction is largely defined in the following terms and themes: dark humor, tragedy, grotesque, sardonic gothic, Christian realism, violence, grace, racism, alienation, loss and human struggle, and her spiritual contemplations.

Flannery O'Connor is without a doubt one of the twentieth century's most influential, talented, and self-aware Christian short story writers. Her depictions of poor whites in middle Georgia and Tennessee have gotten a lot of attention, and the essential to her humorous method has been pursued numerous times. However, as a genuinely religious person, she considers them in the context of eternity and is seriously concerned about the spiritual deprivations they experience because of their unmet thirst for God.

According to G.W. Koon's *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, theology has always been a source of concern for Southern authors; nonetheless, no other successful writer in the area has covered it as precisely and comprehensively as O'Connor (Koon, 1989: 891). In a Protestant milieu, she was a Catholic storyteller who regarded fiction writing as a Christian calling and mission. She illustrates this

perspective more clearly in her *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* in the following: "I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in relation to that" (*MM*, 1969: 32).[22] What gives distance and a funny outlook to her worldview is fundamentally a religious distancing, and it stems from her confidence of her own salvation in a world of those vainly seeking surety. As St. Augustine specifies in his *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, "Our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee" (Augustine, 2013: 5). The world she depicts is full of frantic, yearning souls, primordial in intellect and Protestant in faith, all of whom have a profound common and personal sense of God's horrific and magnificent existence and might in the universe. They are aware of its strength and existence, yet they refuse to embrace it. These individuals become grotesque and monstrous when they strive to reject the God or twist their thirst for the God because they live in a world that lacks a sufficient sense of the God's omnipotent power and existence. O'Connor can take a glance out with a kind of enjoyment at a universe that is still troubled and seeks redemption from its godlessness from the viewpoint of one who has made solace and relies in one's own wisdom.

Though theological and philosophical in origin, the aesthetic impact is not unlike to the class distinction, political position, or economic standing that has been crucial to the sort of realistic humor characteristic of the South for the past 150 years. And this conviction of hers, this knowledge that the absolute truth transcends the material world that she depicts with clarity and straightforwardness, makes everything that happens inside that world significant only in the context of what can come after it. Therefore, throughout her writing, there are several instances where not just bodily disgrace or shame, but even the death of physical existence, proves to be an open path to spiritual triumph. People die with grace bestowed upon them in their ultimate moments, as if death were a success for the creator.

The relationship with death that O'Connor puts in her perspective gives her a tremendous freedom, which she consciously exercises as a comic writer. In the "Author's Note to the Second Edition" of her novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), she says, "The book was written with zest and, if possible, it should be read that way. It is a

[22] *MM*: It's the abbreviation of Flannery O'Connor's *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, (1969).

comic novel about the Christian *malgre lui,*[23] and as such, profoundly serious, for all comic novels that are any good must be about matters of life and death" (O'Connor, 1964: 8). This kind of comedy is a function of a tone which finds its basis in the author's own religious security.

Flannery O'Connor was a descendant of a long Southern heritage of detached humor, and she craved salvation for the people in her world, but the salvation she wanted was transcendental, and it could only be found in God. She once stated in her "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Literature" that, a Southern novelist's challenge will be determining how far he can distort without ruining his work, and in order to avoid ruin, he will have to delve deep enough within himself to find the subterranean sources that give his work life. At the same time, this dive inside himself will be a plunge into his zone. It will be a journey from the familiar darkness into a realm where, like the blind man recovered in the Scriptures, he sees men strolling as if they were trees (*CW*, 1988: 821).[24]

O'Connor's literature is thematically similar to William Faulkner's fiction. Faulkner and O'Connor construct and distort reality in quite different ways, but many of the effects they generate are similar; like O'Connor, Faulkner employs humor and violence to emphasize and magnify his distortions and draw the imaginary closer to the real.

Indisputably, she is obviously one of the most significant writers that creates a connection between her works and her region. And as she states in her *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* as, "To know oneself is to know one's region" (O'Connor, 1969: 35). Following these words, by reading her stories, the readers may easily have an idea of life, ethos, way of living and literature of the South.

In her fictions, O'Connor blends tragedy and laughter with her society's lingo and characteristics, and she attempts to demonstrate the methods of deformation and repulsive exaggeration. In terms of benevolence, affection, dignity, and self-awareness, her characters are not perfect. She constantly reveals the truth about events and people, thanks to her unique form of simplicity. Her repulsive and hideous characters are commonly employed to depict social, economic, political, and

[23] It simply means that Hazel Motes, the protagonist of the novel, seeks spiritual redemption "despite himself," and despite the fact that he opposes and dissents from this fact throughout the novel.
[24] *CW*: It is the abbreviation of Flannery O'Connor's *Collected Works*, (1988).

religious concerns as sarcastic, sardonic, and satirical devices. By exaggerating and distorting the characters and incidents in her works, she masterfully employs satire. As a result, Southern life lends itself oddly well to the development of the grotesque in her writing. Her characters and settings are inspired by her native Georgia, and she has a keen ear for Georgian farm folk's dialect.

On one level, realism was O'Connor's ultimate concern. Her aim was to present "mystery through manners" (*MM*: 1969: 125). If the manners are unrecognizable to the readers, then the mystery stalls in the driveway; that is, if we do not believe what happens in the story—if we do not recognize it as familiar to life—then we have no basis for believing the ideas behind the story. According to O'Connor, realism is the lowest common denominator of fiction, the first step on the staircase; without it, nothing else happens. If the "writer hopes to reveal mysteries, he will have to do it by revealing truthfully what he sees from where he is" (150). Many of the bizarre elements in her novels were influenced by real events. O'Connor called herself a realist, although one pushing "toward the limits of mystery" (40). The artist was interested in "the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality," (157) which is to say, the divine's intervention in human affairs, in the framework of mystery.

Yet another significant theme for this part of the thesis definitely concerns race issues on O'Connor. Alice Walker,[25] in her essay, "Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor," argues the following, regarding O'Connor's views, in her book *In Search of Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose*: According to Walker, O'Connor's writing was so flawless that Walker did not realize at the time that no black Southern writers were taught. The other authors we looked at—Faulkner, McCullers, and Welty—seemed fixated on a racial history that refused to leave them alone. On each and every page, they appeared to address the question of their characters' humanity. Walker was both surprised and pleased by O'Connor's characters, who take their decency, if not their rationality, for granted, and who are wretched, hideous, repulsive, narrow-minded, irreligious, and full of deep ethnic condescension and hubris, with not a stylish, elegant, attractive one in sight who is

[25] Alice Walker is a novelist, short story writer, poet, and social activist from the United States. She is also the author of *The Color Purple*, which received both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

not also a joke (Walker, 1983: 51). As can be seen from Walker's arguments, one of the most prominent factors affecting O'Connor's genuine readers, especially Walker, is that she expresses the facts in a genuine way in the context of race, without speaking in circles and playing on words, with all harsh and unvarnished facts. Then in the same essay, Walker further emphasizes O'Connor's subtle approach to race issues in character construction; stripping them away from any blatant racial baggage: O'Connor's white male characters fare no better—they are all misfits, criminals, crooks, disfigured lunatics, moronic children, illiterates, sociopaths, and murderers—and her black male and female characters are equally shallow, deranged, and ludicrous (52).

According to Walker, O'Connor is the first genuinely great Southern writer, and the only one she had read who produced such subtle, demystifying words about white women as: "'The woman would be more or less pretty-yellow hair, fat ankles, muddy-colored eyes'" (52). As it is also understood from Walker's statements, essentially, O'Connor's stories are not just about race at all; her work consists of many components. That is why they are so stimulating.

Racial hierarchy was also one of the core principles that governed Southern life. The economic and social foundation of the South was based on black slaves. The slave labor on large plantations accounted for a substantial portion of the Southern economy. However, a relatively small number of wealthy white landowning families owned these plantations. In *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, Bertram Wyatt-Brown quotes the economic historian Gavin Wright, who found that "90 to 95 percent of all agricultural wealth was in the hands of slaveholders by 1860. Most of the rest of Southern whites simply farmed or raised cattle and hogs" (Wyatt-Brown, 1983: 176). The most affluent Southern families were those who could afford to own slaves.

Slave ownership was therefore synonymous with economic prosperity and social class differentiation in Southern society. Even poor whites who could not afford slaves developed a feeling of racial superiority because of the slavery system. In his article, "An Old South Morality Play: Reconsidering the Social Underpinnings of the Proslavery Ideology," Michael Wayne explains his thoughts in the following sense: Whites were essentially leveled by defining Black people as lower and

inferior. Because many landowners, particularly those considered to be among the elite, had obvious aristocratic delusions of grandeur, a justification of slavery based on race benefited the common people considerably more than the farmers (Wayne, 1990: 841). The ideology of slavery was based on black slaves' innate inferiority, which gave even the poorest whites a sense of social, if not economic, superiority. While many lower-class whites were similar to black slaves in terms of economics than wealthy slave owners, "poor [white] folk were never supposed to identify their personal interests with those of the black underclass" (Wyatt-Brown, 1983: 380). Even after slavery was abolished in the South, these views of racial supremacy continued throughout social groups.

Slavery's abolition in the South only heightened racial tensions in the area. Following the Civil War, Southern society struggled to recover and adjust to the social and economic changes that had arisen. Racism in the form of Jim Crow laws and lynching became a way for white supremacy to be reasserted. As Steven Hoelscher states in his article "Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South," to be quite certain, states like Mississippi methodically mandated equivalent but separate accommodation facilities in sleeping cars (1888) and trolleys (1904); Mississippi made biracial education unconstitutional (1890) and supposedly legal channels sealed polling places to blacks (1891); and, of course, the state made it illegal for the two races to intermarry or simply live together. Yet, racial segregation in Mississippi was mostly dependent on custom beyond those legislative restrictions for the acknowledgment of caste and hierarchy (Hoelscher, 2003: 659). These laws tried to create not only a physical but also a psychological barrier between black and white Southerners. Jim Crow laws were a way of continually stressing Black people's inferiority, not only to demoralize the black community but also to remind Southern whites of their innate dominance. Jim Crow laws, according to Hoelscher, were largely based on and implemented by old South social customs.

Lynching became part of the national tapestry in the New South, which aimed to restore social hierarchy. While the underlying factors were much more nuanced, accusations of rape involving a black male suspect and a white woman were usually at the forefront of these acts of mob violence. In *Southern Horrors: Women and the*

Politics of Rape and Lynching, Crystal Nicole Feimster argues that the racial and sexual dynamics that had undoubtedly made lynching such a prominent element of the postbellum Southern political field had deep connections in both the slaveholding and white Southern imaginations. Slavery was founded on a basis of racial aggression and sex abuse, which both white and black Southerners were well aware of (Feimster, 2009: 7). Once again, Southern men used the virtue of white women to justify brutality against black people. Southern men conveniently avoided their own sexual harassment of black women and the injustice endured by white Southern women in their own homes by doing so. However, white fear of black equality was at the core of brutality and lynching. In *Southern Womanhood, 1865-1920: An Intellectual and Cultural Study*, John Carl Ruoff posits, "[Southerners] saw blacks making an assault upon the order of the South in both political and social areas and sought to return them to their 'proper place'" (Ruoff, 1976: 118). Ruoff goes on to clarify that after Jim Crow laws had succeeded in disenfranchising blacks and poor whites, Southern whites became afraid that by marrying whites, black people would develop social equality, resulting in a fear of miscegenation. As a result, lynching black men was seen as a barrier to inter-racial marriage.

For generations, Southern whites have developed their individual and collective identities around hostility to the black community. They were regarded as innately different and inferior to whites in Southern society. Southern whites had to assume that black people were less than human in order to describe themselves as superior. The black community in the South was the dehumanized Other in a culture where race was characterized in dualistic terms of black and white.

The labels also irritated O'Connor, as often everything that came out of the South came across a grotesque attitude. She was also very sarcastic most of the time, and used to make small statements using her sharp tongue: "Of course, I have found that anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic" (*MM*, 1969: 40). Despite this casualness, O'Connor was acutely aware of the grotesque's significant role in her writing and was adamant about defending it. Her own condition as an author *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), she expresses her dissatisfaction with labeling: "This is all very depressing. The general reader is going

to think that violation [Tarwater's,[26] in *The Violent Bear It Away*] is a piece of arbitrary grotesquery. I was once mentioned in an article as belonging to the 'School of the Gratuitous Grotesque'" (*CW*, 1988: 1119).

The grotesque is more difficult to define than humor or violence, but it is just as intuitional to recognize. The grotesque character is somehow distorted, recognizable as a human being, but some basic patterns are deformed. These characters are sometimes physically deformed, but this deformity is usually reflective of the more common distortion in some theological, emotional, or intellectual capacities. Joy/Hulga, the one-legged atheist with a PhD in "Good Country People," "believes in nothing but her own belief in nothing, and we perceive that there is a wooden part of her soul that corresponds to her wooden leg" (*MM*, 1969: 99). We can identify grotesque figures, themes, and motifs in almost all of O'Connor's stories even though she does not explicitly say so.

Thus, O'Connor required such an intermediary to enter the wholly mysterious and created world of her vision and judgment. O'Connor believes that grotesque fiction authors accomplish things in the simplest way possible since the distances in their work are so wide. They are seeking for an imagery that will link, merge, or encapsulate two points: one is a tangible point, and the other is a point that is not apparent to the human eye but is just as real to them as the one that everyone sees (42). Such an illustration must be drawn in a bold manner: "…you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures" (34).

To put her points together, O'Connor uses the following sentences against clichés about the nature of grotesque: "It's not necessary to point out that the look of this [grotesque] fiction is going to be wild, that it is almost of necessity going to be violent and comic, because of the discrepancies that it seeks to combine" (42). Also, readers who disagree with her theology and message, such as myself, are astounded

[26] The main character of *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). Abducted at an early age by his great uncle, he grew up under the single-minded assertion that his destiny was to become a prophet. At first, greatly disappointed with the idea of being forced to subscribe to a predetermined destiny, he vows to do everything in his power to prevent this from happening. Francis is a borderline schizophrenic, to explain it in clinical terms, and he doesn't quite fit the role of a hero, but he is the main figure in the novel.

and fascinated by her boldness in gripping the world like a snow globe and shaking it violently.

Most of her stories focus on grace; and that is what irritates many readers. The readers don't want their grace dark. It feels like an alien belief or faith to them, and they stand up to it. This complaint was heard by O'Connor herself. In her essay, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," she opposed the typical piety of Christian readers: "The reader wants his grace warm and binding, not dark and disruptive" (*CW*, 1988: 862).

O'Connor thinks that everything, good and bad, comes from God, and that humanity should receive it as a grace. He aims to convey to his readers that devotion to God is not only limited by the good things that come from him, but also a lesson and grace to be learned even in the face of events that we attribute as evil. As O'Connor once explained in her *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*: "I have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace. Their heads are so hard that almost nothing else will work" (*MM*, 1969: 112). Whenever something bad or evil happens to O'Connor's characters, it makes the reader feel that nothing can get that sinful person on the right path except this case of violence. And it is not just limited to the stories and the characters in her stories, O'Connor thinks this is the case in real life as well.

Christians have a tendency to imagine grace as cotton candy, particularly since the Victorian era. Grace often calms and soothes the furrowed brows of those who need it. Grace and niceness become interchangeable at this stage, according to O'Connor, this is one of (if not the) primary sources of wickedness in the modern world. It is a deception about grace. The biblical theme is repeated by O'Connor: "grace cuts with the sword Christ said he came to bring" (*CW*, 1988: 864). Grace makes a cut. It stings, slices, and makes us bleed. It "is never received warmly. Always a recoil," (1150) she claims, and her narratives prove this repeatedly.

In fact, sweet, gentle, middle-class ladies who are full of good and righteous advice are O'Connor's favorite targets. These women, on the other hand, lie about grace every day. They lie about Christ when attempting to create a utopia of pleasantness. But that is precisely the argument. O'Connor simply represents the

priorities of Christ. He had a softer stance toward robbers, prostitutes, and killers than he did toward the polite, middle-class Pharisees. In O'Connor's stories, grace chases and preys on her characters.

Grace tends to be bad in Scripture as well. It also swoops down in the shape of serpents. God's people grumbled vehemently on the way to Mount Hor. Not criminals, just nice middle-class people. God's dark grace, on the other hand, is defined in "Numbers 21:6" of *The Holy Bible: King James Version* as, "The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died" (*KJV*, 2004: 83).[27] Noah received dark grace in the form of an ancient tsunami; Abraham received it in the form of an insane command to execute; Isaac received it in the form of faux hairy arms; Jacob received it in the form of a midnight wrestling assault; and Joseph received it in the form of a deep pit. The list goes on; and as O'Connor observes in her "Letters" to Cecil Dawkins that, "all human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful" (*CW*, 1988: 1084).

In addition to these discourses on evil, another important thinker who puts emphasis on the term of evil and helps this part of the thesis to evaluate it broadly is French writer Georges Bataille. He dealt with the concept of evil throughout his life in his works and especially his *Literature and Evil* is a significant source to understand the evil and its relations with the other concepts. He writes very radically on evil in the context of religion, literature, life, etc. He even begins to break the taboos and stereotypical knowledge at the beginning of his writing. He states in the preface of the book, "I believe that the Evil—an acute form of Evil—which it expresses has a sovereign value for us. But this concept does not exclude morality: on the contrary, it demands a 'hypermorality'" (Bataille, 2012: Preface). Undoubtedly, Bataille's rhetoric parallels O'Connor's concept of evil. We can also give a quotation from O'Connor's *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* to tighten this parallelism and make it more visible. O'Connor observes in her work that; "evil is not simply a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured" (O'Connor, 1969: 209). If we evaluate the perspectives of these two writers on evil, we may conclude that not all evil is harmful. Some evil comes to jolt us out of our

[27] *KJV*: It is the abbreviation of *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, (2004).

sin; some also suddenly come to set us free. Some evil is a blessing of grace, and this grace does not seek "morality," but rather "hypermorality."

Flannery O'Connor has dealt extensively with tortured, traumatized, and distorted characters in her stories; and she approached them with both humorous and compassionate perspective. In American writing, O'Connor manages a rare blend of detachment and compassion. She herself suggested in her "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South" that, "Whenever I am asked why Southern writers particularly have this penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one. To be able to recognize a freak you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still in the main theological" (*CW*, 1988: 861). These "freaks" are such because they are far from whole. As an author of humor, O'Connor is marvelous both in the novel and short story forms, and her most notable endeavors here are in such stories *Wise Blood* (1952), *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1955), *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), *The Complete Stories* (1971).[28] Her method is exemplified very well in these stories.

O'Connor probably best expresses the concepts of violence and dark sides of her artistic style in the context of humor, literature, religious faith, and life. For O'Connor, although violence has always been thought of as a dreadful thing, violence is a power that may be employed for good or evil, and it has seized the kingdom of heaven among other matters (*MM*, 1969: 113). Whether or not Flannery O'Connor considered violence as a bad thing, she must have seen it for something unlike most people; as critic Walter Sullivan noted in his "Flannery O'Connor, Sin, and Grace: *Everything That Rises Must Converge*" that: "Of the nineteen stories … nine end in the violent deaths of one or more persons. Three others end in, or present near the end, physical assaults that result in bodily injury." Then Sullivan continues, "Of the remaining seven, one ends in arson, another in the theft of a wooden leg, another in car theft and wife abandonment. The other four leave their characters considerably shaken … all this, performed by characters who are neither bright nor beautiful, is the stuff of O'Connor's comic view" (Sullivan, 1972: 33-34). People often complained to

[28] *The Complete Stories*, which is published in 1971 after Flannery O'Connor's death, won the 1972 U.S. National Book Award for Fiction and it is considered to be one of the best collections of short stories.

O'Connor that her work was too violent, to which she replied: "With the serious writer, violence is never an end in itself. It is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially ... the man in the violent situation reveals those quantities least dispensable in his personality, those qualities which are all he will have to take into eternity with him" (*MM*, 1969: 114). Flannery O'Connor desperately believed that "what we are essentially" meant something—that human beings have an essence, a soul—though the notion might seem irreversibly gauche today.

Every story in O'Connor's collection is punctuated by a disruptive violent outburst, and the resultant punctuation mark is an exclamation point. As critic Frederick Asals has written in his *Flannery O'Connor: The Imagination of Extremity*: "In all of O'Connor's work, the moderate center will not hold" (Asals, 1982: 115). She jumps all over the place, from the usual to the completely unexpected, attempting to make us see all images at the same time. Accepting two diametric opposites is referred to as accepting a mystery by O'Connor. According to her, when fiction authors portray mystery via manners and elegance through nature, there must always be that sense of wonder left over, which cannot be explained by any manufactured formula (*MM*, 1969: 153). The room shared by both opposites is where O'Connor's "sense of mystery" can be found: if she can make us see the familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, she can convey the mystery.

Despite all her violent, extreme, and grotesque imagery in her stories, O'Connor does not accept that life is a tragedy. O'Connor wrote in a letter that, "Naw, I don't think life is a tragedy. Tragedy is something that can be explained by the professors. Life is the will of God and this cannot be defined by the professors; for which all thanksgiving" (*CW*, 1988: 928). She finds dark grace in cosmic joy, which springs from the Trinity's victory. The devil is always a stooge in the Trinitarian world, always a fool tricked by Father, Son, and Spirit. O'Connor's stories are rife with devils. In her belief, in one way or another, the Devil may always be an area of study for her type of humor. She believes this is because the Devil is continually achieving goals that are not really his own (1119). The Devil is usually the straight man, and he is always employed to get to the core of the matter. However, some Christians are disturbed by this type of comic world; it is too lighthearted and chaotic for them.

After Mark Twain and William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor came in the twentieth century—who is also well known for her use of Southern humor. As Thomas Frazier points out in "O'Connor, Flannery," O'Connor has left a lasting impression on Southern authors in three areas: her use of the grotesque, often referred to as Southern Gothic, which is linked to the use of ostensibly unwarranted violence to make ethical statements; her strong religious belief, which renders some of her fiction readable as Christian analogy; and eventually, her affluent humorous perception, which is often depicted through ordinary people's conversation (Frazier, 2001: 600). Her humorous perception and mindfulness in her character's conversation are especially relevant in the context of this study. Mostly, what is said is not as humorous as it is said, and the characters' share of reality, and the humorous aspects of the stories not only makes us laugh, but also leads us to serious thoughts. Just a few authors have been able to match O'Connor's ability for authentic character dialogue in the decades since. As Frazier mentions, O'Connor's most creative gift, the use of a character's idiosyncratic discourse to solve ethical as well as physical difficulties through humor, is attributed to many Southern authors (601). Many of Southern writers owe their knowledge of this technique to O'Connor. They employ their character building, as shown by her discourse patterns and reasoning, as well as her growing comprehension of the moral problems that pervade her environment as she explains them.

Many writers associate humor with a skeptical perspective on life, but Flannery O'Connor's humor stemmed from creed, not skepticism. I am not referring to a creed in broad sense, but rather creed in the Christianity. This creed was evident, and the fact that it was not always obvious to some she saw as a misjudgment at times, but more often as deliberate perversity. This perversity was associated with the notions of comedy and humor in her writings and life. The most ordinary form is seen in the life and philosophy of a person who has elevated an idea to an undeserved significance but still prevents one from seeing life as the unity of the Christian faith. One of the main sources of her humor was the fact that the individual who makes this mistake is frequently an intellectual. In her fiction, a person may have a lot of information but still fail to comprehend a fact that is so simple that it is often obvious to people who do not have a lot of intelligence or education. "Everybody is

ignorant," famous actor, performer and humorist Will Rogers once said, "only on different subjects" (Rogers, 1961: 138). On these statements by Rogers, Flannery O'Connor's humor supports that it is based on the fact that ignorance can occur in the most unexpected places and among the most unexpected people.

O'Connor's humor and intelligence are relatively easy to understand if the reader is familiar with the themes she uses, and her letters illustrate that O'Connor is someone who laughs and makes others laugh easily. Each one of her stories contains explicit comic elements. She enjoys satirizing contemporary academic secularists in particular, but none of her stories are complete without irony and brilliant comic lines. Her comedy, however, goes a step further. And the reader must recognize O'Connor's intimate association with the grotesque in order to appreciate her comedy or satire. To comprehend how her grotesque and grotesque humor works, one may have to return to O'Connor's stories repeatedly. As for O'Connor, even if the author of grotesque literature does not think his characters to be any more bizarre than the average fallen and sinful man, his audience will, and they will wonder why he has chosen to bring such crippled souls to life. The common reader in the United States of America has managed to link the grotesque to the emotional in some way, since if he speaks of it positively, he appears to correlate it with the author's sympathy. The author's current level of foggy sympathy makes it tough for him to be anti-anything. When the grotesque is managed properly, the intellectual and ethical judgments it contains will undoubtedly take precedence over feelings (*CW,* 1988: 816-817).

There is a prevalent misconception that if the writer does not care about a character, the reader will not either. It is a form of writing that is intangible. When you stand back from O'Connor's handling of her worst protagonists and villains, you realize that she loves and embraces them all; serial killers, hypocrites, and Pharisees equally. This is a truly a remarkable literary achievement that she completed. This can be seen in contrast to someone like Walker Percy, a another Catholic writer who is often compared to O'Connor. For example, in Percy's *Lancelot*, there is no question that Percy despises his protagonists and characters from beginning to end, and the reader cannot help but feel the same way. For a writer, that is almost too easy.

Since O'Connor did not hate herself or her life, her sympathy for her characters came naturally as she identified with them. Her stories, she casually noted, contain "lack of bitterness," (*CW*, 1988: 942) which is unfathomable to those who read her too quickly. She once penned a letter to a friend about her characters, "Hulga is like me. So is Nelson, so is Haze, so is Enoch" (1000). Her sympathy for herself is palpable in them. Her characters all demonstrate symptoms of being loved. O'Connor's work imitates divine compassion for the ugly and self-righteous in this way.

Since she has a fantastic particular insight into the idiocies of the individuals around her, O'Connor makes modern Southern society the focus of her satire. Her characters are mostly farmers, property owners, or sheriffs from the countryside. In most of her stories, she mocks the arrogance of phony intellectuals. She mocks the hypocrisy of some of her ostensibly intelligent protagonists, who pretend to be innovative and forward-thinking in viewpoint. Her criticism and sarcasm did not spare maternity or motherhood, as bereaved or divorced mothers, as well as their disgruntled children, are some of the common features of her stories. The basic comic or humorous method remains unchanged. Despite the fact that the seriousness of her intention deepens, she remains true to her accurate depiction of the literal world. Elizabeth Bishop, an American poet, and short story writer properly observed O'Connor's books. As for Bishop, O'Connor's characters they are sharp, precise, and vibrant, with snippets of descriptions, expressions, and a peculiar insight. Bishop believes that critics who accuse her of hyperbole are mistaken. For several years, Bishop resides in Florida near a thriving "Church of God" and after that, nothing written by Flannery O'Connor could ever appear overdone to her according to her speech.[29]

Almost all of her characters are either physically deformed, spiritually distorted, or sometimes even the two of them combined. O'Connor is known for combining disparate styles of the laughable and the deplorable to create a single effect. Her humor, which is sharply satirical of human flaws, is fueled by the ironic incongruity between claim and fact. The alarming disparity between what the

[29] Quoted by O'Connor's longtime editor and friend Robert Giroux's introduction to *Complete Stories*, pp. xvi-xvii.

characters think they are and what they really are evokes laughter, as their follies are revealed before the reader.

Some of her stories end at such a grotesque climax that it becomes ludicrous. Her fiction is afflicted by extreme clarifications resulting from absurd situations, as well as undercurrents of hilarity rising amid tragedy. Physical aggression is a necessary component of this paradigmatic conflict. Subsequently, in her short stories, conflicts over individual identity, societal order, and living standards often culminate to bloodshed.

Finally, in O'Connor's tales, the primary conflict factor, which inevitably leads to brutality and bloodshed, often serves as a road to the Christian aspect of grace or redemption. Her success of the subjects/topics/themes she deals with, especially such theological, violence, grace, salvation, and redemption themes, contains such a high level of mastery that Kurt Vonnegut, who is one of the most aware of her authorial genius, writes in the introduction to *Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction*, which consists of 23 short stories published in 1999, offers some advice on creative writing, and honors the Southern writer with his thoughts on her: "The greatest American short story writer of my generation was Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964). She broke practically every one of my rules but the first. Great writers tend to do that" (Vonnegut, 1999: 10).

3.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMOR IN SOME OF THE MAJOR WORKS OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

3.2.1. *Wise Blood*

Flannery O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, was published in 1952. *Wise Blood*, like Faulkner's *The Hamlet*, was a novel that was originally published as a collection of short stories.[30] From an early age, O'Connor sought to develop herself

[30] "The Train" (*Sewanee Review*, April, 1948), "The Peeler" (*Partisan Review*, December 1949), "The Heart of the Park" (*Partisan Review*, February 1949), and "Enoch and the Gorilla" (*New World Writing*, April 1952). These stories available in *The Complete Stories* (1971).

as a writer, and her first published story came when he was just twenty years old[31]—her themes deepened her perspective on the world and took on a more solemn and serious tone while maintaining her comic and humorous point of view.

"It is a comic novel," she writes in the preface; 10 years after the first publication of the book in 1962, "and as such, very serious, for all comic novels must be about matters of life and death," and for her, that means "belief in Christ." Then she questions how people are so cruel, brutal, unchristian, murderer, deeply liars and attached to the earthly things throughout the book.

We may begin our analysis by noting that O'Connor's novel has strong religious overtones. As Frederick J. Hoffman has written in his essay "The Search for Redemption: Flannery O'Connor's Fiction" that, "Her major subjects are the struggle for redemption, the search for Jesus, and the meaning of 'prophecy;' all of these in an intensely evangelical Protestant South . . ." (Hoffman, 1977: 33). Hoffman's argument is supported by specific instances. In *Wise Blood*, for example, her main character, Hazel Motes, says to Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock in the book's first chapter, "I reckon you think you been redeemed … If you've been redeemed … I wouldn't want to be" (*CW*, 1988: 6-7). But Motes does not stop here, he keeps attacking Mrs. Hitchcock by saying, "Do you think I believe in Jesus? … Well I wouldn't even if He existed. Even if He was on this train (7). Motes meets Asa Hawks, a false prophet, and Onnie Jay Holy, a religious hustler later in the book, before blinding himself in a desperate act of religious atonement. Indeed, in a letter to Carl Hartman dated March 2, 1954, O'Connor states that *Wise Blood* is "written by someone who believes that there was a fall, has been a Redemption, and will be a judgment" (*CW*, 1988: 919). And, as Louis D. Rubin, Jr. points out in an appropriately titled essay, "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt" that, "Both her novels and most of her short stories are directly concerned with religion" (Rubin, 1977: 51).

Wise Blood's plot clearly shows O'Connor's debt to inflected religion. Hazel Motes has a Christ complex and according to O'Connor, the infidels will misunderstand the book and they will think that she degrades Hazel Motes. However, the belief in Christ is some kind of a matter of life and death in Motes' life. Hazel

[31] Flannery O'Connor, "The Geranium," *Accent, 4* (Summer, 1946), 245-253. It was submitted on February 7, 1946, forty-five days before her twenty-first birthday; see "Notes," *The Complete Stories*, p. 551.

Motes constantly struggles against Jesus in the book. His struggle against Jesus shows that, no matter how hard he tries, he cannot actually forget and get rid of Jesus, and this is exactly what makes him blessed. Hazel Motes is actually a profoundly serious atheist. The people around him think he is a preacher. He is a serious and intense young man, with his appearance resembling at a pastor, and he swaggers all the time on the streets. O'Connor shows the basis of things that progress to people getting serious and killing someone with this character type, like the attitude of religious extremists. Motes takes Christianity very seriously. His soul is not comfortable in the world without Jesus. Motes discloses his genuine engagement in the spiritual realm that he declares to deny when he says, "If I was in sin I was in it before I ever committed any. There's no change come in me" (*CW*, 1988: 29).

According to O'Connor, we cannot talk about just one free will, on the contrary, people carry a lot of wills within themselves. People are intrinsically prone to evil, and O'Connor takes this as a natural phenomenon. There are people with murderous, suicidal inclinations, or some become rapists; thus, she tries to show us the conflict between these wills and the phenomenon of evil arising from them.

The novel tells the stories of two main characters Hazel Motes and Enoch Emery. Hazel Motes, unlike the others, is a preacher. He establishes "The Church Without Christ." He's on a mission to disprove Jesus' existence to himself and others. Enoch Emery is an eighteen-year-old man looking for success at the same time, he seeks to follow his instincts, which he calls "wise blood."[32] Both characters arrive at shocking ends in the story.

One of the techniques that O'Connor uses very well in this novel is vivid descriptions. For instance, she characterized Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock—O'Connor makes fun of this type of triple naming and abbreviations, which are associated with sweetness in the South but are actually quite banal—as a "fat woman with pink collars and cuffs and pear-shaped legs that slanted off the train seat and didn't reach the floor" (O'Connor 3). In this sentence, O'Connor depicts a vivid picture of Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock. The term "fat" is ambiguous, encompassing a wide range of

[32] Enoch Emery is the person who introduced the concept of "wise blood" to Motes as an idea of birth, worldly knowledge about which direction to go in life and does not require spiritual or emotional guidance. It is a pathological impulse and Enoch Emery believes that he feels that impulse in his blood, and when the impulse comes, he has to act and do it.

shapes. O'Connor offers to the audience a straightforward and fascinating illustration of the character by employing imagery of a pear and the gap between her legs and the floor.

Hazel Motes' imagination is another example of this outstanding and hilariously amusing use of description. "He saw Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning to him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on the water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown." (11). The depiction of Jesus as a wild man deep in the jungle, trapping Hazel Motes and causing him to drown, demonstrates Hazel Motes' disconnection from Jesus, as well as his fear of Jesus and the unknown. This image provides audience a fascinating and vivid picture into the mind of Hazel Motes. According to O'Connor, it is as if people who constantly worship, do charity work, go to church are not truly religious people in the book; for her, truly religious and acceptable people are those who are in extreme cases. Those who experience crises of faith like Motes are at the center of Christianity. O'Connor is against the simple perception of religion. Those who are struggling show what the true religion is. It shows some parallels with Kierkegaard's philosophy. According to Kierkegaard, those who continue to practice "Christendom (Institutional Christianity)"[33] are not true Christians. Like the true Christian O'Connor herself, those who do extreme things, struggle over faith, are true Christians.

Animals are also depicted throughout the book by O'Connor. When Hazel Motes sits on a dining carriage with three young looking ladies costumed as parrots, this is an illustration of this kind of animal depiction. Their hands, red-speared at the tips, were lying on the table. The audience can see that the women are dressed in colorful apparel with red nail varnish on their fingers from this view. Animal iconography is also used to portray the waiter. His hair was greased black, and his outfit was greased black as well. He hops from table to table like a bird (6-7). This depicts the character's look and movement in great detail.

The depiction of Hazel Motes also inheres another excellent use of animal imagery. Motes has a shrike's beak for a nose and a big vertical furrow on either side

[33] In his book, *Attack Upon Christendom*, Søren Kierkegaard gives a religious speech written from within the Church, possibly against the settled order in "Christian" land.

of his lips; his hair appears to have been squashed permanently beneath the thick hat (3-4). This depiction provides readers with a detailed physical definition of Hazel Motes as well as details about his personality.

When discussing Hazel Motes' grandfather, O'Connor uses this animal imagery once more. Motes' grandfather is a circuit preacher, a waspish old man who had traveled through three countries with Jesus buried like a stinger in his head (9-10). This statement conjures up an impression of a solemn man. It also demonstrates that Hazel Motes' grandfather used Jesus as a weapon against others, much like a wasp uses its stinger. The grandfather's position as a preacher also provides a psychoanalytic hint. Motes' obsessive dealings with Jesus, as well as his rejection of him, is oedipal in a psychoanalytic and social sense. His reactions to grandfather, Jesus, God—in other words, authorities—are basically his reactions to his current position, social institutions, and the establishment in the society.

The character of Enoch Emery is another example of O'Connor's use of animal imagery. "He looked like a friendly hound dog with light mange" (23). This imagery conveys to the reader that Enoch Emery is a friendly young man with a messy look. He works in the zoo and is obsessed with animals, yet he does not like them. Later in the book, he kills someone wearing a gorilla costume then he takes the costume. Wearing the costume can also be a reference to both animalistic and human aspects. He is in between; he acts primitively, like the archaic humans. His hatred for animals is related to closeness to the animals. He is both attracted and repulsed by it. All these contradictions generate a comic effect in the novel. The former imagery also suggests that he trusts his intuition rather than making logical decisions. Enoch Emory, like a hound dog pursuing the smell of the hunted, follows his "wise blood" (44) and allows it to direct his decisions.

While O'Connor's novel is full of vivid imagery, one of the novel's most interesting features is its use of mimicry. Hazel Motes and his church are an example of this mimicry. Hazel Motes imitates his grandfather and other religious figures (evangelical preachers). The grandfather of Hazel Motes has a specific disdain for him since the child's visage is virtually identical to his own, as if mocking him. Hazel Motes not only resembles like his grandfather, but he also sermons from his car's rear bumper, exactly like his grandfather (10-11). Hazel Motes' church, "The

Church Without Christ" (58), promotes salvation apart from Jesus. In that church, Hazel Motes tells people that they are not sinners and Jesus did not die for them. People are not responsible for the crucifixion and death of Jesus. In this way, it resembles evangelical preachers' churches, which preach that Jesus is the only way to salvation.

Through the usage of characters like Hoover Shoats and Solace Layfield, O'Connor extensively examines this mimicry in a humorous manner. For financial gain, Hoover Shoats wants to take over the "The Church Without Christ." He is the main capitalist figure in the book. He renames the name of the church to the "Holy Church of Christ Without Christ." He also employs Solace Layfield to act the role of the "True Prophet" (94). Solace Layfield has the same appearance as Hazel Motes, wears the same clothing, and drives the same car (94). Thus, O'Connor generates a mimicry and parody of Hazel Motes and the "Church Without Christ" through Solace Layfield, and the "Holy Church of Christ Without Christ." In addition to these details, C. Hugh Holman claims that O'Connor's description of the Southern area, its culture, and the mores of the Southern ethos is accurate.[34] He claims in his "The View from the Regency Hyatt" essay that, "within two blocks of the Regency Hyatt [in Atlanta] you can find street evangelists extolling their primitive religions in tone and manner that make you think Hazel Motes of *Wise Blood* has come back to life" (Holman, 1972: 107).

The mummy is yet another interesting example of O'Connor's use of mimicry. For the "Church Without Christ," the mummy takes on the role of Jesus. Hazel Motes announces to the public that his church is in desperate need of a new Jesus. He informs them that they want a person who is all man, has no blood to squander, and does not resemble any other man (*CW*, 1988: 80). The mummy is subsequently stolen from the museum and given to Hazel Motes as the new Jesus by Enoch Emery (97). The mummy is totally naked and of a pale yellow hue, with his eyes nearly close as if a massive piece of steel were crashing down on him (56). The

[34] C. Hugh Holman was an American literary scholar, academic administrator, detective, and crime novelist. He worked as an English professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was the founding co-editor of the Southern Literary Journal and the author of several books on Southern literature. He has received many awards.

shriveled-up mummy imitates the resurrected Christ as the new Jesus for Hazel Motes' mock church.

The portrayal of Sabbath Lily Hawks expands on the imitation of Jesus. Sabbath Lily Hawks seduces Hazel Motes despite the name Lily implying purity (10-11). Sabbath Lily Hawks answers the door, takes the mummy, and cradles it when Enoch carries it to Hazel Motes' house. Sabbath Lily Hawks imitates the Virgin Mary holding Jesus as she grabs and rocks the mummy. These examples of inverse imitation are both funny and grotesque, and they further immerse readers in the story.

While O'Connor's use of vivid depiction and imitation is intriguing, the most powerful tactic she employs to lure readers is her use of violence. When Enoch Emery takes Hazel Motes to see the mummy, he gets so scared that he forgets the address of Asa Hawks' house. Over this instance, aggravated Hazel Motes throws a rock at him, and here is how Enoch Emery reacts. Enoch looks over his shoulder to see a droplet of blood on the ground, which spread like a small spring as he looked at it. He sits up straight, frozen-skinned, and stuck his finger in it, and in the middle of the city, he could barely hear his blood pounding, his hidden blood. Then he realizes that whatever is required of him is merely the beginning (57). This brutality is shocking and successfully captures the interest of the readers. This violent scene also serves as a foreshadowing mechanism, attracting readers further into the story.

Another evidence of O'Connor's skillful use of violence is Hazel Motes' unlawful killing of Solace Layfield. With his vehicle, Motes runs across Layfield. He then drives approximately twenty feet before stopping the car and starting to back it up. He wraps it around his body. He spills a lot of blood, which produces a pond around his head (115). This surprising act of violence keeps the reader's interest while still offering more detail about Motes' character. In a final effort to kill his own conscience, Motes murders Layfield. The fact that Layfield is also an imitation of Motes puts emphasis on that Motes is trying to kill a part of himself, namely his conscience.

The tragicomic story of Hazel Motes comes to an end. Motes blinds himself with lime after discovering that Asa Hawks did not blind himself with lime to show his commitment and belief; he slips into the hands of Mrs. Flood, the greedy landlady; and he is battered to death by officers who are purportedly transporting him

home to Mrs. Flood. When police officers bring Motes to Mrs. Flood's home, she asks to Motes the following: "Or were you planning to find you another rooming house? … Maybe you were planning to go some other city!" and Motes responds to her probably with the most tragic lines of the book, "That's not where I'm going … There's no other house nor other city" (129). There is that kind of feeling in these lines like, wherever he goes, he will be bothered with people like Mrs. Flood and it is pointless to go anywhere. The world is such a place where people like Mrs. Flood nags at people like Motes. He actually wants to disappear and get away from such people. Despite his doctrinal disagreements, Motes eventually finds redemption. In her introductory note to the second edition of *Wise Blood*, O'Connor identifies Motes as "a Christian malgré lui."[35]

Wise Blood is chock-full of humorous descriptions, vivid depictions, intriguing mimicry, and shocking violence, all of which help to keep readers completely immersed in the story. This novel definitely reflects Flannery O'Connor's artistic, and effective writing skills very well.

3.2.2. *The Violent Bear It Away*

The Violent Bear It Away, Flannery O'Connor's second and final book, was published in New York in 1960, and it is a darkly humorous Gothic novel about a Southern boy's spiritual awakening. It follows the spiritual and physical path of Francis Marion Tarwater, a fourteen-year-old boy raised by his great-uncle in the backwoods of Alabama to be a prophet. Tarwater goes to the city where he struggles against the need to reject his divine inheritance and God's call. O'Connor paints an eerie picture of Southern life and theological fundamentalism, criticizing the blind self-esteem of modern secular thought. The novel is disturbing because it does not provide easy facts; the protagonist of the novel is an unusual child who learns that doing God's work requires violence, irrationality, and even madness. It is a psychological study of the mysterious, terrifying, and sometimes violent nature of the religious call, rather than a parody of religious fanaticism, as one would anticipate.

[35] It basically means, he finds his religious salvation "despite himself," although he rejects and dissents with this fact throughout the book.

Fierce religious symbolism and biblical allegories come together to explore themes of spiritual hunger, faith versus reason, and war for the soul.

Despite suffering from lupus, O'Connor worked on the novel for more than eight years and published the first chapter in 1955 as a story called "You Can't Be Poorer Than Death." *The Violent Bear It Away*, her last major story to be written during her lifetime, incorporates themes that can be found in most of O'Connor's fiction.

The key action of *The Violent Bear It Away* is simplistic and takes place over seven days, but most of the book is made up of flashbacks that recreate moments from the main characters' lives. The writer offers insight into different individuals' psychological and spiritual natures as incidents are recalled by their experiences, revealing the reasons underlying their actions, and providing an intimate family history clouded by personal emotions, theological and intellectual beliefs, and emotional ambiguity. The novel is divided into three parts, each of which depicts a different stage of Francis Marion Tarwater's quest of spiritual self-discovery.

The novel's title is based on Matthew 11:12. At the beginning of Matthew 11, Jesus preaches to the masses about the prophet John the Baptist, who will not wear "soft robes" or preach a benevolent sermon, as he claims. Christ proceeds in the passage that functions as the novel's epigraph: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (*KJV*, 2004: 462). There are two ways to understand this passage. The first contends that the kingdom of heaven has been rapidly expanding from the time of John the Baptist and Christ's ministry, and that the "violent," i.e., the eager, impassioned throngs of virtuous men, will seize it via compulsion, displaying their strength in motion. The implication is that the devout will one day join the heavenly kingdom. Another interpretation is that nonbelievers, such as the Pharisees (the "violent" in this case), attempt to destroy Christ and John the Baptist's work, thus bringing violence to God's kingdom. Both interpretations are discussed in the book, and the tension centers around the attitudes of the faithful and the skeptic, the believer and the godless, as they struggle for the life of young Francis Marion Tarwater.

Kidnappings, assaults, arson, a drowning, a shooting, and a rape are among the many incidents of violence and crime portrayed in the story. Violence is never

cherished, but it is used to shock readers into appreciating the seriousness of the theological concepts under discussion. For example, Bishop's drowning relieves the intense nature of baptism, which has become an insignificant ritual for many people. The stranger's raping of Tarwater emphasizes in a cruel way the devil's abuse of his soul and body. In her novel, O'Connor incorporates aggression many times to demonstrate that faith, theology, and religion are not gentle, sweet or pleasant, that God's will can be terrifying at times, and that ordinary human moral norms cannot be applied when it comes to understanding God and his ways. This controversial thematic motivation also appears in Gilbert H. Muller's[36] *Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque* as, that the story explores ethical and religious issues such as the essence of good and evil, the origin of sin, the reality of temptation, and the weight of free choice in a unique way (Muller, 1972: 61).

The apparent topic of *The Violent Bear It Away* is Francis Tarwater's spiritual transformation and path of self-realization. To highlight this essential theme, the novel contains images of roads, streets, paths, vehicles, boats, and travel. Tarwater flows from Powderhead to the city, then inside the city (to a revival meeting, to a museum) and to the Cherokee Lodge, and eventually back to Powderhead in each of the three sections of the novel. Along the way, Tarwater has different guides: his great-uncle, who attempts to drive him down the challenging road to redemption; Rayber, who wants life to be predictable and devoid of emotion; and other devil incarnations who try to lead Tarwater away from his purpose and away from the pursuit to righteousness. It is noteworthy that Tarwater is born in a car accident, that three of the devil's incarnations lure him are drivers, and it is his own silhouette in the moonlight that helps to clear a rough way toward his aim in the end (*CW*, 1988: 479). It is clear that the path to God is not an easy one. O'Connor's interpretation of this subject provides a unique grotesque vision of the divine's beauty and terror. Furthermore, Professor Martha Stephens[37] reflects her opinions shortly in her *The*

[36] Gilbert H. Muller is currently an English professor and Special Assistant to the President at the City University of New York's LaGuardia campus. He has also lectured at Stanford University, Vassar College, and a number of other universities around the world. Dr. Muller is the writer of the award-winning *Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque*, *Chester Himes*, and other critical works.

[37] Martha Stephens was Professor of English at the University of Cincinnati for many years. She is the author of *The Question of Flannery O'Connor*, and such novels *as Cast a Wistful Eye* and *Children of the World*.

Question of Flannery O'Connor on *The Violent Bear It Away*, as the story tries to communicate the sorrow and glory of actual religious experience in more genuine and appealing ways (Stephens, 1973: 98).

All of this is observed by O'Connor with a stunning combination of irony and compassion, humor, and pathos, culminating in a novel where the complexity and variety exhibit remarkable and creative writers keenly aware of where the sacred things flourish and where they do not.

3.2.3. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"

Flannery O'Connor describes why she wrote such oddly violent, grotesque, and darkly humorous fiction in one of her most notable and often cited remarks: "When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it;" Then O'Connor remarks, "when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures" (*MM*, 1969: 34).

Most likely, no story by O'Connor better demonstrates these methods than her tragically comic (or comically tragic) masterpiece "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." This short story, which was written in 1953, tells the story of a Georgian family's unfortunate vacation to Florida, which includes a sprightly old grandma, her bad-tempered son Bailey, Bailey's quiet and obedient wife, two grossly ill-mannered kids named John Wesley and June Star, and a sweet and innocent toddler. The journey goes relatively well until the family comes across a trio of escaped convicts consisting of a clever and thoughtful murderer known as the Misfit and his two moronic henchmen, Hiram, and Bobby Lee, on a deserted road. Despite the fact that the humor is always sharp and ironic, the first part of the narrative is continually absurd, weird, and amusing. By the end of the story, though, the formerly farcical Georgian family suddenly seems miserable and almost tragic characters (except for the little girl June Star). This is particularly true for the grandma, who must be a mere spectator and lament while her son, daughter-in-law, and three grandkids are all abducted and shot in the jungle. The grandma is then executed in the final paragraphs

of the story, which is full of dark humor and disturbing brutality but still has (ironically) a strongly humorous, ludicrous, or exhilarating ending.

Few literary works show the impact of dark humor better than this one. One of the reasons O'Connor uses such strikingly dark humor is to draw a strong distinction between her own style of writing and the other, much more conventional, traditional, and foreseeable patterns in which speech is commonly used, particularly in modern society. She makes a point of contrasting her own unique narrative approach (and creative ability) with the types of narratives that inhabit the minds of the characters in her work. Those characters are prone to use banal, corny, and stereotypical terminology, as well as appreciating outdated, familiar, and extremely traditional writing and art. O'Connor, on the opposite side of the spectrum, uses her own style of dark humor to shock her readers up and keep them on their toes.

"A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (like most of O'Connor's stories) is concerned with satirizing traditional and clichéd uses of language, as the title implies. The characters who express stereotypical phrases in many of O'Connor's work (such as Julian's mother in "Everything That Rises Must Converge," or Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation," or Mrs. Hopewell and her daughter Hulga in "Good Country People," with its clearly hackneyed title) are all characters who have a tendency to talk (and, more specifically, to think) in extremely traditional and inauthentic ways. Since O'Connor's characters use stereotypes (and plenty of them do), it is normally an indication that they have lost their ability to think rationally for themselves, and if they ever had any authentic thoughts in the first place. One of the ways O'Connor prevents her own fiction from being banal and boring is with the use of dark humor. It is one of the reasons she wants to keep her readers on their toes and encourages them to contemplate.

The grandma and Red Sammy Butts, the proprietor of a fusty barbecue restaurant with whom the grandma converses during the journey, are the characters who most clearly speak clichés in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." Indeed, the meeting of these two characters is a massive festival of stereotypes that started with Red Sammy's first words: "'You can't win,' he said. 'You can't win,' and he wiped his sweating red face off with a gray handkerchief. 'These days you don't know who

to trust,' he said. 'Ain't that the truth?'" (*CW*, 1988: 141). Every one of his opening words is a cliché, but they all manage to convey more about Red Sammy's persona than he actually expects. Therefore, "You can't win" indicates that he considers himself to be in a rivalry with other people; "you don't know who to trust" implies that he is innately suspicious of other people, probably because he is not completely reliable to himself; and "Ain't that the truth" also indicates that he turns to other people merely to confirm what he already believes rather than to question him in some way.

Of course, O'Connor's aim is to compel and provoke readers, and one of the ways she accomplishes this is by imitating (and therefore mocking) the stereotypical words, thoughts, and ideas of her own characters. When she replies to Red Sammy, the grandma, on the other hand, has no such offensive intentions; she is able to actually comply with almost everything he utters. Her first reaction to his barrage of stereotypes is to suggest one of her own: People are no longer as polite as they once were (141). She then praises and butters Red Sammy up by saying, in yet another stereotypical statement, that he is a "good man," but Sammy's wife rapidly deflates such an optimistic hope with her own observation: "'It isn't a soul in this green world of God's that you can trust,' she said. 'And I don't count nobody out of that, not nobody,' she repeated, looking at Red Sammy" (142). Red Sammy's smarty wife has a deeper, sharper, and better perspective of Red Sammy's selfish nature than the grandma who has only recently met him. By letting his wife talk, O'Connor typically—and wittily—undermine the grandma's sloppy praise with a touch of gruesome and sharp humor. This approach, which is the approach of piercing indifferent stereotypes, is one that O'Connor has used over, and over again throughout the narrative. As a matter of fact, one of the most crucial goals of the grandma's encounter with Red Sammy is to contrast the old woman's completely foreseeable discussions with Red Sammy with her subsequent annoying and creepy arguments with the Misfit, whose words, actions, and behaviors are constantly shocking and completely out of her control.

Meanwhile, Red Sammy is more than content to say more clichés: "'A good man is hard to find,' Red Sammy said. 'Everything is getting terrible. I remember the day you could go off and leave your screen door unlatched. Not no more'" (142).

Additionally, the grandma claims that Europe was largely responsible for the current state of the world. She stated that the way Europe chose to act, you'd think we were surrounded by idiots, and Red Sam replied it was pointless to argue about it since she was completely right (142). Each of her lines, as well as Red Sammy's answer, is a cliché, and the vital statement is the assertion that it is pointless to argue it. Since they have stopped thinking, the grandma and Red Sammy do not see the point in debating their statements. They basically reiterate words and thoughts that they (and most of their contemporaries) take it naturally. The main goal of the story is to shake most characters (particularly the grandma), as well as O'Connor's audience, from this kind of pretentious complacency. Ironically, at the end of the story, the grandma would have gained a great deal (at least spiritually) as she realizes that she will not be able to cope with the Misfit with conventional thinking and stereotypical phrases.

The unforgettable humorous interaction between Red Sammy's wife and June Star is one of the most blazing instances of O'Connor's use of dark, unpredictable humor to break stereotypes. When June Star first encounters the girl (whose venomous voice has already been directed towards her grandma), Red Sammy's wife attempts to be polite by articulating the typical stereotypes: "'Ain't she cute?' Red Sam's wife said, leaning over the counter. 'Would you like to come be my little girl?'" But June Star replies with the same sort of ruthless righteousness frequently used by O'Connor: "'No I certainly wouldn't,' June Star said. 'I wouldn't live in a broken-down place like this for a million bucks!'" (141). Red Sam's wife can only answer by restating her stereotypical expressions, but with more apparent tension this time: "'Ain't she cute?' the woman repeated, stretching her mouth politely." Undoubtedly that, the righteous response to the woman's question is that June Star is far from "cute," and the whole conversation is a notable example of O'Connor's use of dark humor to break the stereotypical traditions. Inevitably, as the story is revealed, June Star's words gets one of the biggest laughter, simply because it is so sudden, shocking, genuine, and wickedly impolite. June Star does not play games and absolutely does not follow anyone else's rules. O'Connor portrays her (and, to a lesser degree, John Wesley) as a vicious, arrogant, disrespectful, and callous girl, thus violating the traditional fictional norm that kids should be depicted as innocent,

genuine, and "cute." When it comes to kids' behaviors, O'Connor is always darkly humorous—and brutally frank.

O'Connor is continually drawing attention to literary works, fiction, or storytelling whose goals are contradictory to her own. For example, it does not seem like a coincidence that Grandma and Bailey are both shown reading the newspaper at the beginning of the narrative. Bailey is described as perched on the edge of his chair at the table, leaned over the orange sports pages of the *Journal*, in the fourth line of the story (137). Bailey seems to read mostly for fun and pleasure. For example, he does not read the opinion pieces (which might also make him think) but rather reads statements about superficial, ultimately insignificant parts. He most likely reads about baseball, leisure activities, and pastime. To tell the truth, Bailey lives the most of his life doing nothing except passing the time. However, shortly before he dies, he is represented with the following words, which might be seen on the sports section in the newspaper: He was crouching in the posture of a sprinting runner, yet he did not move (147). Bailey, on the other hand, is already reading one of the most amusing but largely insignificant parts of the newspaper. There is nothing darkly humorous or funny about sports journalism, but O'Connor starts to draw a line between the type of writing people like Bailey admire and the type of writing she wants to do.

The fact that the grandma reads the newspaper indicates a considerable difference between her and her son: the grandma is a more serious character than Bailey, not just because she is more obsessed with notable events but also because she has (essentially) the ability to think meaningfully. Nonetheless, the fact that she focuses on the most exciting sides of the day's news—a killer's breakout from the "Federal Pen" (137)—indicates that she reads the paper partially to add some spice to her somewhat dull life. Undoubtedly, when the family confronts with the fugitive, the grandma is currently reading about, her life becomes even more thrilling and interesting than she might have expected; and O'Connor already gets into her typical dark humor as she makes the grandma declare that she would not really send her kids in any location if there was a thug like that in it. If she did, she would have to account to her consciousness (137). It comes as no surprise that it is the grandma who unintentionally direct her family to the Misfit and therefore to destruction and havoc—a fact that is supposed to be both humorous and agonizing.

In the meantime, the two kids seem to be focused on superficial and shallow forms of reading and entertainment just like their grandma and father. When John Wesley is first addressed, for example, John Wesley and the tiny girl, June Star, were perusing the comical papers on the carpet, according to O'Connor (137). The kids read to keep themselves busy and entertained. The result would be remarkably different if they were learning Sunday school courses or Scripture. The kids, just like their father, see reading as a way of having fun, not as a way to stimulate real thought. June Star is no stranger to another popular type of entertainment: the quiz show "Queen for a Day" on TV (and/or broadcast). When John Wesley rudely remarks that if his grandma doesn't want to go to Florida with the rest of the family, she may as well stay at home alone; June Star objects it even more bluntly: "She wouldn't stay at home to be queen for a day" (137). Thus, June Star alludes (in her darkly humorous style) to a popular broadcast and TV show in which elderly women contend against one another, counting each other's miseries and agonies. The person with the worst luck (as measured by the audience' applause) is crowned "Queen for a Day," and awarded numerous prizes, including refrigerators and furniture. This allusive reference to "Queen for a Day" is relevant to the rest of the plot in a number of ways, but one of the most obvious components of its relevance is how it reveals how June Star and the others spend most of their time: They sit in front of the TV (or listen to the radio) and dream about worldly wealth. At the very end of the story, the grandma attains (by means of Misfit's shocking provocation) a completely more real and higher kind of gentrification than the one achieved with the "Queen for a Day." But for now, nevertheless, allusive reference—associated with the reference to the "funny papers"—reinforces our impression that this family considers reading and other types of entertainment as sources of simple amusement rather than provocative thinking. While neither the "funny papers" nor "Queen for a Day" are darkly humorous, but the references and figures of speech to these two leisure time activities are part of O'Connor's story's underpinning dark or gallows humor. Over the course of her story, O'Connor frequently hints at types of entertainment that much less serious, investigative, and disturbing than her own.

Thereafter, O'Connor underlines that John Wesley and June Star waste most of their time reading "comic magazines" (139)—that is namely, magazines that

might be funny but not in a dark, morbid, or disturbing way. Similarly, just after the grandma points to poor black kids as "little niggers," O'Connor immediately claims that the kids swapped comics (139). This juxtaposition of a vulgar and insensitive (albeit historically accurate) remark and an exchange of "comic books" is intended to allude to the superficial, shallow essence of much of the entertainment (and much of the thinking) prevalent in contemporary culture. The grandma and the rest of her family have a habit of seeing each other, particularly other people, as uncomplicated, two-dimensional figures of the kind that can be found in comics. The grandma has no idea how much misery and deprivation the nearly naked "little niggers" are going through. In fact, as she sees the little black boy standing outside his shack, she suddenly exclaims, "Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!" (This assertion comes after her remark that people used to "did right" in the good old days). And, having treated the child as a grotesque stereotype (rather than a real human being), she then declares, "If I could paint, I'd paint that picture" (139). Of course, the kind of picture she would draw would illustrate the child as shallowly "cute." It is easy to picture him wide-eyed, laughing, and waving in her painting. It really looks like this in O'Connor's story, but the effect of her appearance is sarcastic, satirical, and darkly humorous in the story. In the story, the boy, by his mere presence, and depiction as a "cute little pickanniny," and "little nigger," is a reminder of a racist and unjust society. Further in the narrative, near the very end, the grandma is so shocked by her indifference that she even treats the villain Misfit as though he is one of her own kids (152). At that moment, somehow, she can still only think of the little black child as "cute" (and inferior).

The grandma's worldview is influenced and shaped by her recurring exposure to the exciting yet unrealistic mainstream culture just as Margaret Mitchell mentions in her famous and enormously popular novel *Gone with the Wind* (139). The book, of course, has become one of the most iconic and classic films of all time, and it (along with other examples of nostalgic pop culture) seems to have influenced the grandma's self-perception and public image. The grandma is actually amusing because she effectively represents a personality type. She dresses primly, and neat, and wants to be treated and considered as "a lady" in case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know right away that she was a lady (138).

The grandma eventually dies, and no one seems to notice that she is "a lady." She recalls being courted affectionately when she was a maiden lady, and she fantasizes about returning to an old ranch she encountered as a young girl (142). To put in a different way, the grandma nearly considers herself as an old and overlooked lady from a Southern lower-middle-class household and almost as the protagonist of an old-timey romance story instead of just a disposition to live in a seductive fantasy world. Even when the family's car reacts to the pain she feels after it runs off the road and believes she has seriously hurt an organ, it is alluded to catchy (and pretty funny) rather than facing the truth straightforwardly (145). Scarlett O'Hara could not have stated it any better on her own, and indeed it is not really possible for the grandma to gradually dodge all her romantic pretensions, and all her alluring fantasies preoccupy her mind constantly, until the introduction of the Misfit character to the slow and meticulous murder of every single member in grandma's family.

Contrary to popular culture, O'Connor's fiction undermines and destroys illusions rather than confirms them. Almost until the end of the story, the grandma believes that her life will end like a script of the traditional happy endings she so desperately wants. In this desired alternative ending, the grandma at least survives and returns to her old way of life more or less unchanged (even if the rest of her family is killed). Considering her dark humor, O'Connor, on the other hand, has a different ending in mind—one in which the grandma suffers a harsh, gory, and tragic death; but the humor and joke, ironically, is on the Misfit. One of the most blazing and devastating lines of O'Connor, in her whole corpus, are expressed through Misfit at the end of the book. The Misfit says to the grandma that, "She would of been a good woman . . . if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (153). O'Connor gives us a hypocritical and banal old lady and a killer who is in O'Connor's extraordinary view an instrument of Catholic grace. This is meant to be and certainly is outrageous, because being damned, the idea of damnation is outright outrageous for the reader. O'Connor thinks; we would be good, "if it had been somebody there to shoot [us] every minute of [our lives]." The story of O'Connor starts with worldly satire and humor but concludes with celestial and spiritual enlightenment. Mortality strikes the grandma, as it does every one of us, but by suddenly (and perhaps inadvertently) deviating from the normal scenario, the

grandma transforms into a true "lady" in ways neither she nor we could have anticipated it to happen.

The reader is surprised and shocked at the end, however, as Marion Montgomery[38] indicates, O'Connor's comic distortions force a confrontation with reality, and she turns naturalistic situations into reflective moments through violence (Montgomery, 1971: 14). The concept of surprise and the sudden occurrence of violence are typical of O'Connor's endings. O'Connor invents a new kind of sight and humor. Almost every story she writes ends with a radical transformation. In his "Comedy and Humor in O'Connor's Fiction," Carter W. Martin[39] claims Northrop Frye's "comic catharsis," which "raises sympathy and ridicule on a moral basis, but passes beyond both," (Martin, 1975: 10-11) referring to O'Connor in a unique way.

3.2.4. "Good Country People"

Characters in Flannery O'Connor's stories are rarely who we think they are, or even who they believe they are. Published in 1955 in O'Connor's short story collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, "Good Country People" puts a new spin on an old theme: events and people are fairly as straightforward and obvious as they appear. O'Connor highly enjoys the peculiarities of personality. She creates a story which involves three powerful characters like Joy (Hulga), Mrs. Hopewell, and Manley Pointer. Joy Hopewell, the daughter of a widowed Mrs. Hopewell, declares herself as an out of the ordinary person, to anybody she encounters in her town, while referring at them as "good country people." Joy who has an artificial leg (one of her legs was shot off when she was a child), is 32 years old, has a PhD in philosophy, and a bad heart condition. She changes her name to Hulga for the resentment she feels against her mother and keeps living together with her. Hulga is an atheist who confidently and proudly reveals her rejection of any religious beliefs.

The whole premise of her short story, "Good Country People," is the idea of a family and household with conflicting views on religion, Mrs. Hopewell is the

[38] Marion Montgomery was an American poet, novelist, educator, and critic. For more than 30 years he was a professor of English at the University of Georgia. He was born the same year as Flannery O'Connor, and he was one of her close friends and most insightful interpreters.
[39] Carter W. Martin is a professor emeritus of English at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He is also the author of *The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor*.

mother who brought the bible into the living room, but her daughter Hulga, an educated woman, questions the veracity of religion, belief, faith, and spiritual matters. When a so-called Bible salesperson enters their lives, the mother and daughter's conflicting viewpoints cause even more conflict. When a young Bible salesperson among the "good country people" pays them a visit, Hulga attempts to seduce him into atheism. She takes him to the hayloft in the barn and finds out that he is far from "good country people." One of his Bibles is hollowed and contains a bottle of whiskey, a set of playing cards with pornographic pictures, and a box of birth control pills. He grabs her eyeglasses, removes her prosthetic leg, and carries it with him, leaving her behind in the barn's hayloft without her leg, and as he walks away, he says to her, "Hulga you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" (CW, 1988: 283). When he entices Hulga and removes her artificial limb, he draws attention to a sense of religious hypocrisy. According to G. W. Koon's essay "O'Connor, Flannery" in the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, O'Connor's characters hint at a godless world and existence with casual remarks as "the life you save may be your own" (Koon, 1988: 891). The story is shocking, disturbing, and humorous; the humor stems from the fact that Hulga thinks that she has found precisely in the young Bible salesman what she has been looking for her entire life, but he tricks her and leaves her unable to move or see.

On one level, this story is a parable of nihilism and atheism, however, on the other hand, it is a humorous and satirical masterpiece, owing to the wry, hard, and sardonic quality of her style. A few examples from the story demonstrate her humorous aspect, such as: Mrs. Hopewell possesses no flaws of her own, but she is able to harness the strengths of others in such a manner that she never feels shortchanged, (*CW*, 1988: 264) and Mrs. Hopewell's thoughts on her daughter, Joy (Hulga) Hopewell, revealed in the following: Mrs Hopewell believes that Hulga had experienced sense of shame as a kid, but that education had eliminated the last remnants of that, and that as a competent doctor scrubs for cancer, she would have had no more embarrassment about what he was asking than she would have believed in his Bible. She, on the other hand, is as sensitive to the prosthetic leg as a peacock is to his tail (281). These subtle humorous lines take us to the "Superiority Theory" of humor, which was described in detail in the first chapter of the thesis, within the

context of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Henri Bergson. Furthermore, as it can be understood from O'Connor's lines, that very feeling of superiority and condescension against another person determines the reading of this quotation above where Mrs. Hopewell posits rather ironically upon her amputee daughter's tragedy in a satirical manner.

O'Connor's humor can be described in terms of Bergsonian humor, as discussed in J. P. Steed's article "'Through Our Laughter We Are Involved': Bergsonian Humor in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction." According to J. P. Steed in the Bergsonian theory, the main purpose and function of humor is to "provide and provoke self-examination, self-understanding, and self-criticism" (Steed, 2005: 299). Steed sees parallels between O'Connor's humor and the ideas of Bergson, who claims that humans are humorous when they act mechanically. According to Steed, "by recognizing the humor in O'Connor's fiction as chiefly Bergsonian, we are able to reconcile and explain the coexistence of humor and horror" (312). The use of comic violence by O'Connor to shock readers into acknowledging mystery often contributes to readers' recognition of "the presence, or the real threat of the presence, of those flaws and vices within ourselves" (313). O'Connor uses the circumstances in which her characters find themselves, together with the "inflexibility" of her characters who portray this "obstinate and foolish vanity" that we can all see a little bit of in ourselves. These characters' arrogance often prevents them from seeing beyond their own prejudiced conceptions of the world until they meet the more sophisticated, worldly, and experienced men who join their lives. In O'Connor's story, Hulga Hopewell, although considers herself to be superior and sophisticated; in the condition where a cunning bible dealer robs her and gets her exposed in her vanity. Thus O'Connor, through such illustrations of the human condition enables readers to see the more serious weaknesses and flaws in their own lives as they are invited to analyze themselves and make parallels with the characters that appear in her works. Instead of being explicitly criticized by the writer, readers can turn what they read into a self-criticism. Throughout Southern humor, from Twain to Faulkner, O'Connor to John Kennedy Toole, the readers tend to get to know themselves and their families in the lives of the characters they read.

Another theme in O'Connor's story "Good Country People" regards Southern women's oppressive sexual customs. The protagonist, Hulga, as an amputee, embraces her own body's grotesqueness and uses it to protect and isolate herself from the demands and pressures of Southern femininity. Nevertheless, the goal of exploring her sexuality through a sense of agency fails. She eventually realizes and discovers that she embodies the passivity, and vulnerability she seeks to destroy through her subversive use of the grotesque. In terms of both appearance and behavior, Hulga's identity defies the norm of expectations for women. Hulga embraces her crippled body and uses it to create a new persona that takes pleasure in its own ugliness, despite the fact that the loss of her leg makes her physically and socially disadvantaged and handicapped.

Hulga's leg is a phenomenon that represents her personality and identity. It is, indeed, more complicated than a mere symbol. Her leg is a part of her physicality that completes her, but at the same time, it is artificial and mechanical, and in this sense alien to her body. Many of Hulga's identity's binaries are symbolized by this paradox. Representing both a grotesque power and a vulnerability, the leg is also a sign of her defiance of femininity, society and a source of existential vanity and pride.

Hulga flaunts and shows her leg as an escape mechanism against the socializing forces and pressures of her mother, Mrs. Hopewell, and the mockery of their tenant, Mrs. Freeman. For instance, "Hulga stumped into the kitchen in the morning (she could walk without making the awful noise but she made it—Mrs. Hopewell was certain—because it was ugly sounding)" (*CW*, 1988: 267). Instead of trying to hide her artificial leg, she uses its grotesqueness to repel those around her (most notably her mother) and withstand their influence. When we find out that she officially changed her name from Joy to Hulga when she left home for college, we also find out that, for the protagonist, the name Hulga refers to her most innovative effort. Her mother had not been capable of changing her dust into Joy, but she had been capable of making it into Hulga herself, which was one of her big victories (267). Her attitude toward her name demonstrates the deliberate creation of a persona. It also implies that "her dust," (267) or her essence, is not fixed, but rather flexible and fluid.

It becomes apparent that Hulga created her grotesque persona to shield herself from her mother's pressures to socialize her, as well as possibly of her own transgressive impulses. Hulga's grotesque persona is a weakness, not a strength, to her mother. Her education and intelligence, in a way, makes her a kind of grotesque Other. Hulga's PhD in philosophy "left Mrs. Hopewell at a complete loss. You could say 'My daughter is a nurse,' or 'My daughter is a school teacher' or even, 'My daughter is a chemical engineer.' You could not say, 'My daughter is a philosopher'" (268). Mrs. Hopewell's mindset shows that, aside from a few traditional suitable occupations such as nurse or teacher, higher education is still relatively uncommon for women in the society where Hulga lives. Furthermore, philosophy is an abstract field that has no place in Southern culture and is not historically a female-dominated field of study. This makes Hulga feel out of place in Southern society, and she accepts her "otherness" to the point of rejecting romantic desires she believes are associated with a lower culture.

When she insists that Manley Pointer—which also sounds like a phallic name and unlikely to be heard—and put her leg back on he replies, "'Not yet' … setting it on its foot out of her reach. 'Leave it off for a while. You got me instead'" (282). Just as the Southern culture in its conceptualization of femininity prefers to see women helpless and dependent on men, Pointer also makes the Hulga unable to stand on her own feet by taking her artificial leg away and leaving her ensnared in the haystack and vulnerable to Pointer's whims. By taking Hulga's leg, Pointer removes her sense of agency and exposes just how vulnerable and fragile her protective identity really is. During the caresses that follow the removal of her leg, Hulga's demeanor shifts drastically. She feels completely reliant on Pointer without her leg. Her brain appears to have stopped thinking and is focusing on another function at which is not particularly good. Pointer's eyes are like two steel points, and every now and again, Pointer casts a peek behind him, where the Hulga's prosthetic leg stood (282). The language here is wild and brutal, in contrast to the gentle, passionate, and intimate encounter of the previous scene. Hulga loses control once Pointer removes her leg, and she is unable to reason her way out of the situation. When it becomes apparent that Pointer was just seducing her in order to snatch her leg as a hideous and grotesque prize; Hulga is forced to confront yet another shocking contradiction: it is

she who is the innocent and naive "good country [person]," and Pointer is the actual nihilist.

Despite the fact that Hulga fails to defy the norms and traditions of the South, O'Connor's story is a criticism of Southern culture and society, not a cautionary tale for powerful, independent, free-spirited intelligent women. This is especially apparent in Manley Pointer and Mrs. Freeman's characters. O'Connor especially demonstrates the extent of patriarchal cruelty against Southern women via Manley Pointer. Both of these characters emphasize that cruel, repressive, and patriarchal side of Southern society; a side that truly takes pleasure in its own violent aspect and tends to require oppressive control and power over Others in order to maintain their existence.

3.2.5. "A Temple of the Holy Ghost"

"A Temple of the Holy Ghost" (1954) is probably one of O'Connor's most symbolic and profound works. It is a story surrounding the prevalence of pride, the quest for love and acceptance, and the soul's obedience to God's will. "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" is possibly the most "Catholic" work of O'Connor's stories in the book, as it encompasses not only the sins of the soul but also the redemptive and spiritual power of faith.

Like the majority of her stories "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" takes place in contemporary Georgia of the 1940s-1950s. The protagonist is an unnamed twelve-year-old girl, and her toxic, corrosive, malicious behavior toward those around her acts as the catalyst for this story. The plot of the story starts with the girl's mother picking up the girl's two twin fourteen-year-old cousins for the weekend from a convent school forty-five miles away. At first glance, the twins seem to be superficial, arrogant, boy-obsessed girls with their own malicious tendencies.

When the mother is at a loss about what to do with them, and how to entertain them for the weekend, the girl offers two spoiled male companions with a cheerful grudge. Changing the subject, the mother asks them why they gave themselves the nicknames "Temple One" and "Temple Two." She inquires as to why they are referred to as "Temple One" and "Temple Two," and they burst out laughing.

Finally, they are able to provide an explanation. Sister Perpetua, the oldest nun at the Sisters of Mercy in Mayville, have given them a lesson on what to do if a teenage boy should—here they laugh so hard they couldn't continue without going back to the beginning—on what to do if a teenage boy should—they eventually are about to shout it out—on what to do if a teenage boy should behave in an impolite sort of way with them in the back of an automobile. "Stop sir! I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!" they are supposed to say, according to Sister Perpetua, and that would be the end of it. The child straightens up off the ground with a dull face. She does not find this funny at all. The notion of Mr. Cheatam or Alonzo Myers embellishing them was particularly humorous. That is the final straw for her (*CW*, 1988: 199). At this point, the story may easily have turned into a shame of the twins (Susan and Joanne) for their relatively immoral and repugnant behavior, but O'Connor is up to something bigger. The center of attention is the twelve-year-old girl, who is often overlooked by her older cousins.

When the twins are introduced to two farmer boys who are likely to be preachers of the Church of God—following the girl's observation that they are going to be so "because you don't have to know nothing to be one" (200)—and they mischievously make fun of their ignorant fundamentalism and religious extremism by performing their singing of songs like "The Old Rugged Cross," with an a capella singing of "Tantum Ergo," but it is the twelve-year-old girl's behavior that draws attention, not her cousins'. Out of sight, the girl's yelling of "You big dumb ox! … You big dumb Church of God ox!" (202) causes her to be scolded by the cook:

> *Howcome you be so ugly sometime?" the cook asked.*
> *"Those stupid idiots," the child said.*
> *The lanterns gilded the leaves of the trees orange on the level where they hung and above them was black-green and below them were different dim muted colors that made the girls sitting at the table look prettier than they were. From time to time, the child turned her head and glared out the kitchen window at the scene below.*
> *"God could strike you deaf dumb and blind," the cook said, "and then you wouldn't be as smart as you is."*
> *"I would still be smarter than some," the child said.* (203)

The pride of the child can be seen here. She turns down a seat at the garden table with her cousins and the two boys she has just teased and ridiculed while in hiding. Rather than accepting that they do not want her company, she would rather believe that she is superior to them, and that she is refusing them. She proudly disguises

herself, believing and asserting that her loneliness and isolation stem from her superiority rather than her character's ugliness.

Outside of the forthcoming fair and the tent set for young school-age children, she thinks about how she was prevented from visiting the tent of "adults." She becomes suspicious about the fair's "adult" tents contain medical supplies, thus exposing her own ignorance of the brutal malevolence of things like the "freak show." She thinks about the events and activities of the evening, especially the parts about the "temple of the Holy Ghost" and the cook's lecture:

> *She would have to be a saint because that was the occupation that included everything you could know; and yet she knew she would never be a saint. She did not steal or murder but she was a born liar and slothful and she sassed her mother and was deliberately ugly to almost everybody. She was eaten up also with the sin of Pride, the worst one. She made fun of the Baptist preacher who came to the school at commencement to give the devotional. She would pull down her mouth and hold her forehead as if she were in agony and groan, "Fawther, we thank Thee," exactly the way he did and she had been told many times not to do it. She could never be a saint, but she thought she could be a martyr if they killed her quick.* (204)

The real nature of the child is revealed here. A sense of insecurity lurks behind her robe of pride, a sense that she is fundamentally tiny, mean, rude, and maybe unimportant when the sums of her life are totaled. She is not completely hopeless, though.

When the twins come back around midnight, they are almost breathless and panting as they describe the "freak" (a hermaphrodite) they saw, crossing a curtained chamber from a male to a female audience, revealing her body and exclaiming: "God made me thisaway and if you laugh He may strike you the same way. This is the way He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way. I'm showing you because I got to make the best of it." And then the "freak" continues, "I expect you to act like ladies and gentlemen. I never done it to myself nor had a thing to do with it but I'm making the best of it. I don't dispute hit" (206). The girl is struck by this and imagines a conversation between the "freak" and the people, in which the body, in whatever form it takes, is encapsulated as "a temple of the Holy Ghost." Following morning, as she, her mother, and the twins go to Mount St. Scholastica convent, the child's mind reverts to this thought. When they arrive at the convent and the nuns rush them into, as the blessing and benediction begin, the twelve-year-old girl is stunned by the mystery of the rite and how it relates to her anxious thoughts:

> *The child knelt down between her mother and the nun and they were went into the "Tantum Ergo" before her ugly thoughts stopped and she began to realize that she was in the presence of God. Hep me not to be so mean, she began mechanically. Hep me not to give her so much sass. Hep me not to talk like I do. Her mind began to get quiet and then empty but when the priest raised the monstrance with the Host shining ivory-colored in the center of it, she was thinking of the tent at the fair that had the freak in it. The freak was saying, "I don't dispute hit. This is the way He wanted me to be."* (208-209)

Flannery O'Connor's admiration for freaks is well-known to all her readers. Her statement in her *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* on the concept of the "freak" is a good example for understanding her fascination: "Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one" (861). The hermaphrodite is also a powerful and striking metaphor of physical grotesqueness, reflecting the child's indecisive state of mind. When Susan and Joanne tell the girl about the "freak with a particular name" that they could not recall (206). The hermaphrodite, like the girl, has no name, and is referred to as "freak," a term that implies physical and social abnormality. The freak, as Susan states, "was a man and woman both" (206). They reluctantly attempt to clarify to the girl that, a black curtain separates the two sides of the tent where it was hold, one for men and one for women. The freak walks from corner to corner, speaking to the males first and then the ladies, but everyone could hear him (206). The show's set is a representation of the hermaphrodite's liminality. The hermaphrodite, who possesses both male and female organs, does not belong to one of the two traditionally defined categories of gender and sex, but is free to switch between them. Nevertheless, in the strict order and rigid system of Southern society, this talent is a burden rather than an opportunity and advantage. The hermaphrodite is not offended by their physical judgment on himself/herself, but instead he/she embraces what others would consider a grotesque and hideous birth defect in order to discover their own identity, and the only place the hermaphrodite can disclose the true nature of their personality is at an exhibition in a carnival freak show.

The hermaphrodite, like the other freaks and grotesque figures in O'Connor's stories, stands for us all, broken and in search of the indulgence, compassion—and the grace for some of us—that can fill our flaws. The people who anticipate seeing a sub-human creature at the freak show are now encouraged and forced to be more compassionate and humane. The story of the hermaphrodite confronts the girl with

the reality that she is living in the middle of mysteries she cannot comprehend. For her, the story of the hermaphrodite is "the answer to a riddle that was more puzzling than the riddle itself" (206). That, perhaps, is the key position and most important role of the hermaphrodite in the story. When the girl ultimately realizes how little she knows about the world around her, she is one step closer to obtaining the grace that can compensate for her flaws.

When the girl looks out the car window at the end of "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," and sees the sun was a gigantic red orb, like a raised Host bathed in blood, and as it fell out of eyesight, it left a line in the sky like a red clay path dangling over the trees (209), there is a feeling that this character may find some semblance of redemption on the way of salvation. Undoubtedly, this is a deliberate situation, unlike the numerous Protestants and former Christians in her stories who attempt (and fail) to find forgiveness, repentance, or redemption in their deeds, O'Connor ends her story with a glimmer of hope, not with a grin or sad sigh, in the mystery of the rite; and the use of the word "freak" to emphasize just how "freakish" unredeemed humanity is. Though religious symbolism, biblical references and allusions may be off-putting to some readers, its use in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" is powerful and poignant. It's one of her best-written stories because it captures a lot of her own personality in these pages, not to mention that the twelve-year-old young and nameless protagonist reminds us of our own flaws and desires to change and improve.

3.2.6. "The Artificial Nigger"

In "The Artificial Nigger," O'Connor discusses the construction and concept of race and its social role. Mr. Head and his grandson Nelson are the two main characters in the short story, which first published in O'Connor's short story collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* in 1955. They travel a relatively short distance from their small rural town of Georgia to the big city of Atlanta. Nelson is a young and stubborn boy; wishing to demonstrate his grandfather that he can make his own way in the world, while Mr. Head wants to maintain his authority and dominance over Nelson by telling him that the city is a dangerous place and where

the evils and dangers of the urban environment come from, in the hope that his grandson will never want to return. O'Connor also writes humorously about Mr. Head's plan for Nelson: "Mr. Head meant him to see everything there is to see in the city so that he would be content to stay at home for the rest of his life" (*CW*, 1988: 211-12). Nelson begins the journey attempting to declare his freedom from his grandfather, but the journey ultimately leads to their reunion and his own entrance into the Southern order and system. Mr. Head and Nelson are grotesque versions of one another that reflect the fractured identity of poor and disadvantaged Southern whites. The writer compares and contrasts the two as they are grandpa and grandchild, but they appear to be siblings and siblings not too far apart in age, for Mr. Head has a youthful face in daylight, whilst the child has an old look, as if he already knows everything and would be content to forget it (212). Even in this brief definition, we see the blending of dichotomy; young/old since Nelson's expression and attitudes are linked to an old man, whereas Mr. Head's is portrayed as young and energetic.

The two portray the mindset and spirit of poor whites torn between preserving the Old South's order and welcoming the progress and transformation after the Civil War. The protagonists likewise contradict each other because Nelson wishes to flee the confined rural life represented by his grandfather, while Mr. Head wants to crush the boy's resistance and make him realize his position within the Southern order. Mr. Head takes offense at Nelson's pride and arrogance of being born in Atlanta; this situation also demonstrates the rivalry between the agrarian Old South and the highly industrial New South. However, Nelson and Mr. Head have a common distrust, fear, and ignorance of the outside world. Nelson feels a surge of pride in his grandfather as the two examine the train. He thinks the old man will be his main source of support as they reach the unusual location they are approaching. Nelson thinks if he ever lost his grandfather, he would be completely alone in the world (218). This newfound reliance soon proves to be reciprocal. Mr. Head tries to entice Nelson closer to him by inculcating a fear of the city in him, which is primarily based on bigotry. Nelson is constantly warned by Mr. Head that the city is "full of Niggers" (212).

The scene in which Mr. Head openly rejects Nelson during a frightening encounter with the police officers is perhaps the most amusing and humorous part of the story. When Nelson bumps into a woman on the street, she threatens them both to call the police officers. Mr. Head responds with the following statement: "'This is not my boy' … 'I never seen him before.' … The women dropped back, staring at him with horror, as if they were so repulsed by a man who would deny his own image and likeness that they could not bear to lay hands on him" (226). Mr. Head, fearful of being confronted by the police officers, refuses Nelson, and shows himself to be a coward in the presence of the crowd, and more importantly, Nelson. Mr. Head is ostracized from the society for lying so carelessly and leaving his terrified grandson to his faith. Meanwhile, both he and Nelson understand that Mr. Head is the most despicable thing in the world, not the racial Other. Throughout the rest of their trip through the city, Nelson ignores his grandfather, and they get lost once again. Mr. Head could sense the boy's constant hatred as they walked, and he knew it would last for the rest of his life. He realized he was now rambling through a dark weird realm where nothing was the same as it had previously been (228). Mr. Head is well-aware of the effect of his cowardice on Nelson's thought of himself, and this leaves him feeling lonely not just because he wants the boy's respect, but also because his behavior disrupts the order in which he lives. In Nelson's eyes, his show of fear undermines his own position as a supreme moral authority, which he sought to establish. Thereby, he becomes a source of contempt for both Nelson and himself. On the part of Nelson, his triumph over his grandfather is poignant because he was able to show him to be a flawed authority figure, but he now faces the terrifying challenge of trying to make sense of the world on his own.

Rambling through a suburb after being given directions to a local train station, they encounter a mysterious plaster figure, an ornament of a black boy eating a watermelon, about Nelson's size from which the story takes its title: It is impossible to figure out if the artificial image is supposed to be adolescent or mature; he appears to be both. Because his lips is extended out at the corners, he is supposed to appear cheerful, but the smashed eye and the angle he is bent at give him a crazy appearance of sorrow instead (229). Mr. Head then adds, "They ain't got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one" (230). In the story, this apparently

humorous, farcical, and caricature like character serves as a racial symbol. The plaster figure standing on the lawn stand for the artificiality and constructed nature of racist stereotypes. The portrait is meant to depict a satisfied slave, but the weathered condition of the statue shows that the character is miserable. And therewithal the grotesque dehumanization and marginalization of the black community by Southern whites, in order to assert their own dominance and superiority, is reflected in the grotesque depiction of the lawn statue.

According to Julie Armstrong's essay "Blinded by Whiteness: Revisiting Flannery O'Connor and Race" in *The Critical Response to Flannery O'Connor*, O'Connor was chastised by some people for both this figure and the title of the story, and even the editors of *Kenyon Review* John Crowe Ransom, when asked to change the O'Connor's story's title to something a little less offensive to "black folk's sensibilities," just before its first publication; however, O'Connor replies that she prefers to protect both the title and the figure, arguing as "much more damaging to white folk's sensibilities" (Armstrong, 2004: 298). Her aim appears to be to draw attention to white supremacy, not to insult or offend African Americans, particularly that of Mr. Head, whose dullness and hardness determine the narrative structure of the story.

In her *Letters*, O'Connor writes in a letter to "A." that, "I suppose 'The Artificial Nigger' is my favorite" (*CW*, 1988: 953), and it is easy to see why. The story resonates with many theological and satirical remarks. Just like in her other stories, O'Connor satirizes the racism of the South in "The Artificial Nigger" as well. O'Connor employs humor to expose racism as a nonsense and ridiculous construct. The grotesque cultural attitudes of the South that O'Connor reveals in her story are amplified by her wry wit. And as readers laugh at the circumstances in which the characters fall into, they feel a pang of guilt as they realize that O'Connor's, and her characters' conditions are not all that dissimilar and exaggerated from those of women in the Old South; or even today. In this sense, O'Connor employs humor to expose racism as a ludicrous construct, which is contrasted with the brutal effects of the racist ideology. Mr. Head and Nelson are amusing characters in the story who are shown as illiterate and weak. Even so, the racism and discrimination that helped

them heal their identities with each other has serious, violent, and devastating ramifications for the black community.

3.2.7. "Everything That Rises Must Converge"

The title of O'Connor's short story collection *Everything That Rises Must Converge*[40] (1965) comprises of nine stories and its title is borrowed from the French paleontologist Teilhard De Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man*. O'Connor's book was published posthumously in 1965, one year after the death of this talented Southern writer at the young age of 39 from the debilitating complications of the disease lupus erythematosus.

Giving its name to the collection of stories, the short story "Everything That Rises Must Converge" takes place in the American South shortly after racial integration becomes a land law. In this respect, the narrative depicts a time where individuals of all races are interacting in new ways, while racism and prejudice continue to influence every character's perspectives. More specifically, the story depicts the ways in which characters of various races share fundamental similarities. However, these similarities are often overlooked due to racism's emphasis on difference. Therefore, building connections becomes much more difficult as a result of this.

The basic plot of the story appears to be very simple. One evening, following the implementation of the racial integration of public buses in the South, Julian Chestny accompanies his mother, Mrs. Chestny, to the exercise class at "Y." They converse with a number of folks on the bus as they travel downtown. Then a black woman gets on the bus wearing a hat that looks exactly like Mrs. Chestny's. Mrs. Chestny strikes up a discussion with the black woman's little boy, and when they both get off the bus, Mrs. Chestny gives the little black boy a shiny penny. Mrs. Chestny's surprise to the youngster has offended the black woman, who slaps her with a large handbag, knocking her to the ground. Julian, who feels his mother has been taught a good lesson, begins to speak with her mother about the emergence of black people in the new South. Julian is the one who sees that the black woman who

[40] It is the title of both the short story and the second collection of short stories of Flannery O'Connor.

smacks Mrs. Chestny in the face with her handbag represents “the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies” (499). While Julian is talking to his mother, she suffers a stroke (or a heart attack) as a result of the strike, and she dies, leaving Julian disconsolate and seeking for help.

In the story, O’Connor makes it noticeably clear that Mrs. Chestny is a racist. She is a bigot who feels that blacks should rise, “but on their own side of the fence” (*CW*, 1988: 488). After the buses are racially integrated, she refuses to take buses alone, and when she gets on the bus and there are no black passengers on board, she says aloud that she prefers it that way. Moreover, she is a fervent believer that black and white people are fundamentally different and that integration is abnormal and unnatural. The story, on the other hand, implies that black and white people are not inherently different, and that they can, indeed, be incredibly identical.

O’Connor sets her perception of Georgia of the 1950s and 1960s through the grotesque. Mrs Chestny and the black woman’s identical hats during their encounter on the same bus adds further into the humor and irony of the short story. Furthermore, the word “hat” is a symbol, which represent black peoples’ economic status in comparison to that of white people. Mrs. Chesnty stares at black woman as if she is a creature who had snatched her hat. Thus, O’Connor employs her characters as satirical instruments to depict her society's political and economic situation. Meanwhile the violence in the story enfolds gradually. Therefore, the story holds an odd mix of humor and brutality, as well as a certain demonic grotesque touch. Whereas thematically O’Connor outright emphasizes the rampant racism in society.

O’Connor illustrates the central male character, Julian, both sardonically and humorously as standing with his wrists behind him, he seemed stuck to the door frame, expecting for the arrows to start piercing him like Saint Sebastian (485). Julian’s misperception of himself is captured in a clever and funny way in reference to Saint Sebastian. Julian has a love-hate relationship with his mother since he relies on her, but he also despises her because of her beliefs. Thereby, the characters are mentally ill and reliant, and can be described as psychological cripples. O’Connor adds an ironic and satirical touch to the story, and her character Julian is preoccupied with the idea of teaching a lesson in which the black lady is the teacher, and the student is Julian, not his mother, throughout the story; and that is the irony of the

story. The story depicts the changing social situation in the American South, particularly during the writer's lifetime. It deals with the collapse of the aristocracy and the rise of the poor whites.

3.2.8. "Revelation"

Ruby Turpin's—the protagonist of "Revelation" (1965),—concerns with social hierarchy uncovers the Southern order's concept of tight economic and racial classifications. The story opens in the waiting room of a doctor's office where Mrs. Turpin has taken her husband, Claud, for treatment and she immediately begins sizing up the patients according to class. She finds herself in a waiting room which is filled with people from several different social categories and most of the humor in the story is provided by Mrs. Turpin's thoughts while in the waiting room. The "lady" is in the waiting area with her daughter, Mary Grace, an acne-prone adolescent who is reading a book titled *Human Development*. Under Mrs. Turpin's observation, the waiting room becomes a microcosm of Southern society and culture. She witnesses a "stringy old fellow with a rusty hand spread out on each knee" who pretends to be sleeping, a "well-dressed" lady and her unattractive daughter, and finally a couple of "white trash" women and their similarly unattractive children (CW, 1988: 633). Mrs. Turpin classifies her fellow patients based on their appearance as well as their manners (or lack thereof):

> *Without appearing to, Mrs. Turpin always noticed people's feet. The well-dressed lady had on red and grey suede shoes to match her dress, Mrs. Turpin had on her good black patent leather pumps …and the white trashy mother had on … bedroom slippers, black straw with gold braid threaded to them—exactly what you would have expected her to have on.* (635)

The concept of the racial and economic Other is hinged upon Mrs. Turpin's identity. She, on the other hand, tries to hide her racism behind her classist biases. She constantly fantasizes about whom she would have chosen to be if she could not be a white middle-class woman. The narrator clarifies:

> *Sometimes at night when she couldn't go to sleep, Mrs. Turpin would occupy herself with the question of who she would have chosen to be if she couldn't have been herself. If Jesus had said to her before he made her, "There's only two places available for you. You can either be a nigger or white-trash" … and finally she would have said, "All right, make me a nigger then—but that don't*

> *mean a trashy one." And he would have made her a neat clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black.* (635-636)

Her hatred for so-called white trash is so deep that she comforts herself with the idea that if God had asked her to choose between being white trash and being a well-behaved and decent black woman, she would choose the latter. She also appears to persuade herself that she is a virtuous Christian woman just because she prioritizes purity and dignity over race in this part of the story. Mrs. Turpin fantasizes and have fun with the concept of a black version of herself in this state of mind.

Turpin is proud of his appearance and charming demeanor. She fantasizes that, "If Jesus had said, 'You can be high society and have all the money you want and be thin … but you can't be a good woman with it,' she would have had to say, 'well don't make me that then. Make me a good woman and it don't matter what else, how fat or ugly or how poor!' Her heart rose" (642). She convinces herself that being a better version of herself at the expense of her morality is impossible. These features convince her of her identity as a decent Christian woman from the middle class. Nevertheless, Mary Grace—which is the name "Grace" is also very ironic with the complete lack of grace that is presented with the girl's appearance and attitudes—ruins that in an instant, by attacking Mrs. Turpin after the latter begins to loudly praise God for making her a decent Christian woman. It's also darkly humorous when Mary Grace exasperated by the mannered politeness which has surrounded her, she hurls the *Human Development* book at Mrs. Turpin, striking her in the head. Then there is no hesitation in her mind that the girl recognizes her, that she recognizes her in a deep and intimate sense that transcends time, location, and circumstance. "What you got to say to me?" She asks huskily, holding her breath, as if expecting a revelation. The teenage girl lifts her brows. Mrs. Turpin's eyes is riveted on her. Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog," she says quietly (645-646). This physical encounter with Mary Grace is as psychologically jarring as it is physically violent. All of O'Connor's work combines these elements of expertise, sharp awareness, and comic distance with zest and a creative accuracy that is almost overwhelming. Her sarcastic tone and religious ethos generate vibrant pictures of her world as sculpted by her unique perspective.

Mrs. Turpin's existential dilemma illustrates the South's complicated interplay between race, gender, and social status. Mrs. Turpin feels she is the epitome

of bona fide Southern womanhood, but her racist and classist behaviors expose her for what she despises the most: an ugly woman with ugly biases. By complicating and finally demonstrating the Old South's social hierarchy as an unstable construction, O'Connor deconstructs the myth of Southern womanhood and the Old South's social hierarchy. The construction of race and racial stereotypes performs a vital function in Southern society, notwithstanding its instability. It allows whites of both genders and all classes to reinforce their smug sense of identity and authority. The brutality, ignorance, and hatred that Southern whites despised and feared in themselves were reflected in black people, making the latter an object of contempt. This reflection validated the South's and, possibly, the United States' systematic mistreatment and exploitation of black people. Therefore, Mrs. Turpin's question can be extended to the genuine men and women of the South who, in the name of social order, committed terrible crimes against the black people: How can a landowner in the South be a cornerstone of the community when his existence is based on the exploitation of black slaves? How can a Southern woman be both a decent lady and a supporter of lynching? As a brief historical look at the racial politics of the South demonstrates, the squalid social system of the South succeeded in these dire and conflicting roles.

O'Connor's criticism in the story falls short of completely annihilating the racist and classist Southern system. Probably imagining a world without distinct racial divisions is too much to ask of a 1950s white Southern female writer. Nonetheless, her complication of these binaries and polarizations is significant in that it dares to challenge racist and classist ideology by revealing the consequences of such ideologies.

Mrs. Turpin's superficial understanding of what is valuable, based on race, appearance, and class, is only questioned and challenged at the end of the story in a vision where these "virtues" are razed to the ground before she can enter the kingdom of God. Mrs. Turpin envisions all the people she despises walking towards heaven when she receives a message and a vision from what she believes is God. This stands for God's universal love, as well as the fact that the deity Mrs. Turpin worships does not condemn people based on anything other than their good and bad behaviors and acts.

3.2.9. "The Enduring Chill"

"The Enduring Chill" (1958) is a one-of-a-kind dramatic depiction of a mystery with clues and a stunning ending. As a moral novelist, essayist, and short story writer, O'Connor makes an effort to depict its aspects of mystery to her contentment. In a letter dated 16 November 57, O'Connor expresses to "A." her ideas on the story as she declares with glee that she has completed the narrative once through as of today, and that she believes she will be finished in approximately three more readings; she estimates another month. She is quite pleased with all its capabilities and everything that is already present. It's possible that this is a hallucination. Monday it may seems hopeless and bleak, but she doesn't believe it. According to O'Connor, no one enjoys her work as much as "A." does (*CW*, 1988: 1050). Then four days later, she writes to "A." she tears up and revisits the story and pondering that it has some humorous parts and a noteworthy Jesuit, but she hasn't quite nailed it yet (1057).

The story primarily depicts the conflict that exists between parents and children, in this case, between the 25-year-old protagonist Asbury Porter Fox and his 60-year-old mother. The mother-son relationship in the story is hilarious as the mother expects that Asbury spends all these years writing a blockbuster and popular novel like Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*: "Mrs. Fox hoped it wasn't going to be just a poem" (*CW*, 1988: 553).

The story is told in the third person, and it opens with Asbury Fox, a young unsuccessful writer who has returned home to rural Georgia from New York City with an undiagnosed and irremediable, but likely terminal disease. He believes he has the spiritual sickness that leads to death.

The readers also discover very early in the story that Asbury has a tendency to be self-pitying. He attributes his failings as a writer to his mother's shortcomings rather than his own lack of talent. While he is still in New York City, he writes a letter to his mother, as a punishment, that he has brought home with him and which he wants her to open it when he dies. In a letter to his mother, he writes that he moved to New York City to discover liberty, to unleash his creativity, to unleash it like a bird from its cage and send it flying off into the spreading gyre. At this

moment, Asbury goes on to tell his mother that this is a phrase from William Butler Yeats. "'And what did I find?'" he goes on to say. "'It was incapable of flight. I was some bird you had domesticated, sitting huffy in its pen, refusing to come out!'" Subsequent words in the letter are underlined twice: "'I have no imagination. I have no talent. I can't create. I have nothing but the desire for these things. Why didn't you kill that too? Woman, why did you pinion me?'" (554). He lists his mother's flaws and explains why he is a disappointment and failure in that letter. More significantly, the reader knows that this is Asbury's only work, and that he has trashed everything else he has penned.

Several times throughout the story, Asbury tries to build some type of connection with others. He spends some time in the dairy when he last visits his mother's farm, researching a play and attempting to create a connection with Randall and Morgan, who work in the dairy. However, Asbury realizes that they are not as interesting as he had hoped. He also tries to create an intellectual connection with a Jesuit priest, but Father Finn can see right through Asbury, describing him as "a lazy ignorant conceited youth" (567). The dialogue between Asbury and Father Finn is significant because it becomes evident to the readers that Asbury requested a Jesuit priest not for spiritual reasons, but for intellectual fulfillment (rejecting the opportunity of grace). Asbury has essentially ignored God in favor of his art, which he has failed at, as seen by his statement to Father Finn that "the artist prays by creating" (566). This is significant because, for some people, the most essential connection they can establish is with God, and while attempting to connect with others in order to boost his own ego, Asbury makes no attempt to connect with God. Ironically, the half-blind, half-deaf Father Finn recognizes that prayer (connection) is the way to God, but Asbury refuses to see or hear this.

Asbury takes it for granted that all Catholic priests must be intelligent and intellectuals. When he insists on calling in the local Jesuit priest, his Protestant mother is terrified. The priest is an old man who has clearly failed to keep up with contemporary innovative literature. When the priest arrives at the residence, Asbury greets him with the words, "'It's nice to have you come.'" And then Asbury continues:

> *"'This place is incredibly dreary. There's no one here an intelligent person can talk to. I wonder what you think of Joyce, Father?"*

> *The priest lifted his chair and pushed closer. "You'll have to shout," he said. "Blind in one eye and deaf in one ear."*
> *"What do you think of Joyce?" Asbury said louder.*
> *"Joyce? Joyce who?" asked the priest.*
> *"James Joyce," Asbury said and laughed.*
> *The priest brushed his huge hand in the air as if he were bothered by gnats. "I haven't met him," he said. 'Now. Do you say your morning and night prayers?"*
> *Asbury appeared confused. "Joyce was a great writer," he murmured, forgetting to shout.* (565)

This conversation is extremely humorous in the flow of the story because Asbury says funny things, even though he is not aware of it. His conversation with the priest in the story reveals his banality and foolishness.

Perhaps the most shocking revelation made by Asbury is that, rather than being terminally ill, he has an extremely common disease called undulant fever, for which a remedy is easily accessible. "'You ain't going to die,'" (571) remarks the rural doctor who cures him, a man Asbury despises tremendously. Then the rural doctor states, "'Undulant fever ain't so bad, Azzberry,' he murmured. 'It's the same as Bang's in a cow'" (572). As a result, all of Asbury's seriously intellectual and sophisticated death preparations turns out to be ludicrous and completely unneeded. Asbury grows even more dissatisfied as it becomes evident that he will not die. He now realizes that he will spend the rest of his life with an undulant fever induced by his consumption of unpasteurized milk.

Asbury is yearning for one final considerable experience (since he believes he is dying). He begs his mother to invite Randall and Morgan into his room after his endeavors to intellectualize life with Father Finn failed. He recalls working in the dairy and sharing a smoke with them (an experience of communion), and he wants to have one more smoke with them in the hopes of recreating the moment. When Asbury delivers Randall the cigarettes, he thanks him, not comprehending that Asbury only intended for him to take one cigarette rather than the entire pack. In addition, despite Asbury's claims that he is dying, both Randall and Morgan assure Asbury that he appears to be in good health. Asbury is disappointed by this, and he understands that there will be no memorable moments left until he passes away. The concept of a crucial occasion for Asbury is essential because it emphasizes to the audience that Asbury is full of his own self-importance (yet again refusing to accept grace) and has failed to attain his goals (just like with his writing).

3.3. CONCLUSION

Finally, before discussing the significance of Flannery O'Connor's humor, it should be noted that critics have frequently overlooked the comic and humorous elements in O'Connor's stories, a situation that may have arisen because O'Connor herself tended to incentivize such a reading by accentuating the theological aspects of her fiction in her lectures, essays, and letters. As she writes to Robie Macauley: "I read [my stories] over and laugh and laugh, then get embarrassed when I remember I was the one who wrote them" (*CW,* 1988: 934). She laughs at her own characters, who she has developed on her own, and she wants us to do the same. To put it another way, she is a truly religious/catholic humorist. Despite critics' tendency to overlook the humor in her stories, O'Connor is certain that they are amusing and humorous, not by chance, not only in unusual circumstances, but in story after story, and without seeming to contradict her serious theological approach to life.

While the characters O'Connor portrays are frequently the center of her stories' humor, it is the situations in which these characters find themselves that provide the most humorous possibilities in O'Connor's storytelling. This is a type of situation comedy in which a character faces an unexpected or challenging circumstance with a mixture of ignorance and mistaken self-confidence. Her characters are raunchy, crude, colorful, and frequently darkly humorous. She appears to cut through the veins of existence to reach the very arteries of human life such as fear, compassion, and primordial instincts. After O'Connor's death in 1964, theologian Thomas Merton[41] writes an essay called "Flannery O'Connor: A Prose Elegy" in which he honors her name for all the sincerity and skill with which she depicts the Fall (of Man) and disgrace in this essay (Merton, 2004: 73). We can identify with the characters' sentiments even when they are revealing their worst and darkest selves.

In her works, comedy and humor serve as a reflection and exercise of a greater mystery, not only as a narrative embellishment or a mere adjunct to serious spiritual matters. In this respect, the humorous aspect in O'Connor's stories serves as a hint from the writer to the Christian context in which her stories take place, a

[41] Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was an American monk, writer, theologian, mystic, poet, social activist, and scholar of comparative religion.

statement of faith, hope, and compassion from the writer. However, the aspect of the grotesque is another characteristic of these stories, which is often humorous. Whether this occurs in the form of physical abnormalities or odd dramatic situations, through the grotesque, as Claire Kahane observes in her "Comic Vibrations and Self-Construction in Grotesque Literature," O'Connor creates in the reader an "oscillation between the comic and the fearful response" (Kahane, 1979: 114-15). Or, to use O'Connor's remarks on Simone Weil's life, it's a near-perfect mixing of "the Comic and the Terrible," which are two interrelated concepts. Everything humorous Weil has written has been more horrible than it is humorous, or only humorous because it is horrible, or only horrible because it is humorous, in her experience (*CW*, 1988: 957). To suggest, for instance, that the ironic, sardonic, and grotesque have a place in our world because they hold serious as well as humorous aspects is an inadequate argument, because it indicates that only the "serious" components are significant, and that humor serves primarily as a vehicle for these deeper truths.

O'Connor's humor is more than simply a source of pleasure; it is a manifestation of love, of faith, and hope. Her novels have a range of humorous aspects that bring joy and excitement to those who are suffering; they are representations of the everlasting world of "manners." Nevertheless, in O'Connor's stories, humor is not only a narrative device, nor is it a less important companion to serious theological and religious themes. Rather, in O'Connor's fiction, the humorous aspect is a demonstration of God's grace as a Christian mystery.

As a Southern Gothic writer, O'Connor scrutinizes race, gender and social phenomena that are unpleasant and shameful to be accepted in the South. Her fiction, like that of many other nineteenth-century American writers, reflects the language and attitudes of the past, particularly United States' racist, sexist, and separatist history. According to Rod Dreher's "Banning Flannery" article, published in 2000 in *The Weekly Standard*, Opelousas Catholic High School in Lafayette, Louisiana banned O'Connor's story "The Artificial Nigger" for using derogatory words and racial epithet, and "Bishop O'Donnell, in ordering the elimination of O'Connor's volume, directed that 'no similar books' replace it" (Dreher). While the removal of O'Connor's work from the high school's curriculum demonstrates sensitivity to the concerns and worries of black parents, it also reflects the ongoing taboo around the

South's racist heritage. The anguish of facing racism in the not-too-distant past, as well as the worry that it may penetrate and invade our contemporary and daily discourse, is at the core of literary censorship for many black people.

In this context, literature and fiction are some of the many arenas in which cultural conflicts and battles erupt, and we frequently find ourselves confronting and fighting with ourselves—our own ignorance, fear, guilt, and shame. I assume that through fiction like O'Connor's that dwells on the oppressive and tyrannical history of the world, readers may begin to evaluate their own relationship with the world's shameful history—especially the American South's—and its impact on contemporary culture. For instance, O'Connor's stories are where we learn to reconcile the painful and traumatic history of the world with individual and collective national identities, and where we learn to heal through humor. In the end, I believe that O'Connor's fiction and literature are vital and relevant to current and contemporary readers because of its ability to effect social and psychological transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE COEN BROTHERS

4.1. HOW AND WHERE EVERYTHING STARTED?

Joel and Ethan Coen have become fixtures of contemporary cinema and storytelling since they debuted on the filmmaking scene in 1984 with the independently funded *Blood Simple*. Their early love for creating amateur home movies, Joel's experiences and education at NYU Film School, and Ethan's philosophy studies and education at Princeton provided a creative, academic, and intellectual context in which the brothers began writing, directing, producing, and editing. Readers who appreciate and are familiar with Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, and Southern literature can easily perceive the Coen Brothers' "admiration for Southern writers like William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor," although they self-admittedly "don't share her interest in Catholicism" (Ciment & Niogret, 2006: 26). Ethan Coen lauds Flannery O'Connor's "great sense of eccentric character" in her grotesque stories, while his brother Joel Coen emphasizes that their characters have "terrestrial" rather than "mystical obsessions" (26-27). Despite the fact that the Coen Brothers make it obvious that their work was influenced by O'Connor's technique, style, and aesthetic more than her spiritual and moral purpose; their characters undoubtedly live in grotesque realms similar to those created by O'Connor.

During their boyhood in Minnesota, where the severe climate limited their pastimes to reading books and watching films in the house, Joel and Ethan Coen have shared a great interest in literature. They have always been sensitive to the process of writing films before creating them, unlike many other filmmakers. Although the Coen Brothers have worked with many competent people—such as Roger Deakins, one of the most prodigious and influential people in the visual and cinematographic process of cinema—in the filmmaking process, and collaborated with many writers, the Coen Brothers are, in a way, "the auteurs"[42] of the

[42] The auteur theory, which emerged in France in the late 1940s, was an outgrowth of the cinematic theories of André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc. Largely derived from Astruc's explanation of the caméra-stylo ("camera pen") concept, the auteur theory oversees all the visual and auditory elements

filmmaking and film industry. They wrote all their film scripts themselves, and reworked existing stories such as Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* (2005) or Charles Portis' *True Grit* (1968), and admittedly drew heavily on several of Dashiell Hammett's novels including *The Glass Key* (1931) and *Red Harvest* (1927) for their gangster film *Miller's Crossing* (1990). They also reinterpreted Homer's *Odyssey* in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), whereas *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013) is a take on Dave von Ronk and Elijah Wald's *The Mayor of MacDougal Street* (2005), and their *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018) loosely based on Jack London's *All Gold Canyon* (1904) and Stewart Edward White's *The Girl Who Got Rattled* (1901). Although his filmmaking career has always overshadowed his passion for writing, the younger brother (Ethan)—who also wrote his college thesis on Wittgenstein—is a published writer.[43]

The two brothers have a distinct interest for dark/noir, hard-boiled detective fiction, pulp Westerns, dime novels, and Southern literature, which influences their films in many ways. Despite all the incongruous, idiotic, cartoonish, grotesque, slapstick, or ludicrous behaviors—which mostly involve violence—of the characters in the Coen Brothers' films, there's usually something intellectually serious going on in their films. Most of their films simply portray the comic side of existential absurdity. They even contribute to this comic side of the existential absurdity in their own lives when they describe their adventures to make their first film in an interview with William Rodney Allen in his *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*; as the brothers freely admit, "their first effort was a 'phony' movie-meaning one taken not from life but based on other films" (Allen, 2006: xii).

The Coen Brothers' zest is watching characters try to cheat the system. There is a pervasive cosmic irony in their stories; where we learn that no good act goes unpunished, and that evil pays off. Whether the protagonists are talented type of people seeking affirmation or ordinary people thrown into situations beyond their control; life is difficult in the Coen Brothers universe, and they remind us that the

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of the motion picture, rather than the screenwriter "author" of the film. In other words, basic visual elements such as camera placement, blocking, lighting, and the length of a scene convey the film's message rather than the plot (Auteur theory. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/art/auteur-theory).

[43] Ethan Coen has published a collection of short stories, *Gates of Eden* (1998), poems *The Drunken Driver Has the Right of Way* (2001), a play *Almost an Evening* (2008), and *Offices* (2010) consisting of three short plays.

universe has an active role in our success and failures. And in many cases, the tone changes abruptly, where violence invades comedy, or humor releases tension.

It is true that the Coen Brothers have consistently offered stylish, clever, and highly eloquent efforts on distinct genres, such as, comedy, drama, film noir, gangster thriller, crime thriller, screwball comedy, black comedy, romance, musical, etc. in most of their work. And while dealing with these genres, they are based on American values. They most definitely make Americana films. Everything they do is deeply related to the United States of America. About this situation, Richard Gilmore quotes Ethan Coen's words in his essay "*Raising Arizona* as an American Comedy" in Mark T. Conard's *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers* as, "We grew up in America, and we tell American stories in American settings within American frames of reference" (Gilmore, 2009: 7). The brothers basically employ these genres to tell, over and over again, the story of tragic and catastrophic consequences emerging from seemingly insignificant and minor missteps.

The Comedy, which forms the most basic form of the Coen Brothers' films, is completely alien and opposed to classic noir. In an interview with Michel Ciment and Hubert Niogret in 1996, the Coen Brothers express their concept and understanding of comedy: "But it seems to us that comedy is a part of life. Look at the recent example of the people who tried to blow up the World Trade Center." The brothers then describe this example as follows: "They rented a panel truck to use for the explosion and then, after committing the crime, went back to the rental agency to get back the money they left on deposit. The absurdity of this kind of behavior is terribly funny in itself" (Ciment & Niogret, 2006: 80). The depiction of their characters as trapped and locked in a maze at the hands of a hostile fate has the ability to shift the tone of the scene from profoundly tragic to ridiculously funny. What appears serious and gloomy at first might become funny with time. This is, in essence, the Coen Brothers' artistic philosophy, which Joel has always expressed bluntly: "If somebody goes out to make a movie that isn't designed primarily to entertain people, then I don't know what the fuck they're doing" (Allen 2006: 11).

4.2. THE ROOTS OF THE SOUTHERN GOTHIC IN THE CINEMA OF THE COEN BROTHERS

Gothic is a genre characterized by a mix of contrast, dark romance, horror and supernatural elements. The macabre and grotesque are outlined in flowery prose. The humor is dark, and angst is evident in the genre. And if we consider the reflection of Gothic in the American South, the definition of the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* will give us a brief overview: "Southern Gothic" is described in the following lines: "the presence of irrational, terrible and intrusive thoughts, desires and impulses; grotesque characters; dark humor and a generally anxious sense of alienation" (Bjerre, 2017).

In the perspective of the Southern Gothic, the subject and concept of "roaming" has always been attractive in a country that is constantly expanding, such as the United States. The Gothic origin of the ramblers and vagabonds is common in Southern literary tradition (with the Southern Gothic genre and grotesque subgenre), and it frequently appears in Western fictions widely recognized as dime novels/pulp fictions (which were extremely popular in the second half of the nineteenth century), and later in films. Barton Fink is, in fact, a version of the Wandering Jew[44] doomed and sentenced to live in Hollywood for a lifetime, and bound by a contract with a movie tycoon who owns him (as Jack Warner owned Faulkner). Moreover, in the film, the Gothic aspect of the rambling is taken to an extreme with the character of Charlie, particularly when Barton's "friendly" neighbor exposes himself to be a serial killer—a travelling killer in the Gothic tradition.

The American South is a treasure trove of literature and cinema that blends the funny, humorous, and the tragic elements in its efforts and attempts to explain and reveal the region's deep-rooted social and socioeconomic turmoil. Southern Gothic literature is one of the most prolific and prominent genres to emerge from the South, and it is recognized for its use of grotesque language, imagery, and dependence on highly charged melodramatic diegetics, but it is not necessarily funny

[44] In the first page of his book *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould describes the "Wandering Jew" character as follows: in Christian myth, the Wandering Jew is a figure condemned to live till the doomsday for mocking and insulting Jesus on his way to the Crucifixion (Baring-Gould, 1866: 1).

or humorous. When these works are humorous, they seek to alter rather than reflect the region's turmoil. This study tries to examine Southern Gothic and grotesque writers such as William Faulkner, Cormac McCarthy, John Kennedy Toole, Walker Percy, Truman Capote, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor's use of dark humor in their works as defiant acts meant to question the status quo and restructure the Southern landscape by creating fractures where marginalized people and oppressed minorities can assert themselves into the norms of American culture. Drawing on several different definitions of dark humor, this and the later parts of the chapter will describe the humorous, Gothic, violent, and horrific aspects of these Southern writers coming together to create particularly the elements of dark humor in the films of the Coen Brothers.

4.3. THE EFFECTS OF SOUTHERN LITERATURE ON THE HUMOR OF THE COEN BROTHERS' FILMS

Complex allusions and literary references abound in the Coen Brothers' films, and sophisticated narrative ideas and concepts drawn from a variety of sources. While some of their films, such as *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), *No Country for Old Men (2007),* and their *True Grit* (2010) are direct screen adaptations[45] of classic stories, their other works have numerous literary, references, allusions, and connections.

The Coen Brothers' concern in combining violence with humor is clearly influenced by Flannery O'Connor's ability to do so. Her detached social observations, commentaries, dark humor (particularly in O'Connor's short story "A Good Man is Hard to Find"), and theological inclinations resound in the Coen Brothers' films like *A Serious Man* (2009) (which is also based on *The Book of Job*), while her understanding of Southern psychology is crucial in *Raising Arizona* (1987), and her short story "The Enduring Chill" is specifically referenced in *Barton Fink* (1991)—especially in the scene, where the protagonist obsessively stares at the ceiling stain in his hotel room recalls a similar obsession in the story.

[45] While the films *No Country for Old Men*, and *True Grit* have the same name as the books they are adapted from, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* is a contemporary adaptation of Homer's *The Odyssey*.

In many of the Coen Brothers' films, fate versus free will is a major issue. This topic has undoubtedly been prevalent in literature since Homer's times; however, Cormac McCarthy's works capture the subtleties of its contemporaneous nuances at its best. Despite the fact that *No Country for Old Men* is based on McCarthy's novel of the same name, the writer's influence can be seen in Coen Brothers' earlier films such as *Blood Simple* (1984), and *Fargo* (1996), as well as other McCarthy masterpieces such as *Child of God* (1973), and *Blood Meridian* (1985).

Sullivan's Travels (1941) by Preston Sturges is a constant reference for the Coen Brothers' films, although it, like many other adventure stories, is based on Homer's *The Odyssey*. Treacherous journeys, and unpredictable odysseys are the Coen Brothers' most basic building tools, even in their loosest interpretations—from absurdist iterations like *The Big Lebowski* (1998) to mournful stories like *No Country for Old Men*—but they most precisely appreciated Homer with *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, which includes storylines and favorite characters from the Greek mythology itself.

Aside from Homer's literary influences and inspirations, the Coen Brothers' films have been reflected William Faulkner's gloomy and dark social landscapes of the South in numerous geographic settings. The despair and alienation in their Southern inspired settings are drawn directly from the psychological misfortunes and struggles of the Southern Gothic writer's most memorable characters in films such as *Fargo*, and *Barton Fink* (which actually bases one of the film's main characters, W.P. Mayhew, on Faulkner himself). While seminal novels of William Faulkner such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) set up the Coen Brothers' dark witted irony and humor; similarly, a lesser-known novel by Faulkner's such as *The Reivers* (1962) provides chaotic storylines resonating in the Coen Brothers' peculiar and idiosyncratic films.

Many of Faulkner's stories undoubtedly nurture the atmosphere the Coen Brothers set in their films. Likewise for Faulkner, settings and the landscape have a very crucial place in the films of the Coen Brothers. The landscape surrounding the characters is just as important as the characters themselves. That is why they often frame the characters in their films in wide and medium shots. For instance, when

they shoot a scene in mid-shot, they try to emphasize the characters, and when they shoot a scene with a wide-angle, the landscape becomes the main character of the scene. In each of their films, the setting becomes a character at least as important as any of the human characters.

Coen Brothers' approach to filmmaking can be as inclusive as the subject matters, they entertain. Additionally, there's an idiosyncratic quality in their work that makes it Coen-esque. Films of the Coen Brothers are stylish and often terrifying. They have a strange sense of humor. In their portrayals of blood, death, murder, crime, mystery, burials, dreams, and nightmares, they combine humor with horror, terror, and tragedy, relying on film noir and Hitchcockian references. Regardless of their films' inherently horrific potential most of the time, the Coen Brothers' works are extremely funny. Horror and violence (as in the example of a hooded kidnapped woman trying to run blindly from her killer kidnappers at a Ku Klux Klan rally in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* failing in the end and being chopped of her toe) are esteemed ludicrous in the Coen Brothers' ironic films. Melancholy and grief prevail in their funniest films, and humor in their darkest films. Frequently, the brothers maintain numerous narratives that appear to have no consistency; their films depict individuals who are lost and rambling in a maze, seeking to comprehend the situations, and control their destiny. Each of their films focuses on a different aspect of the human condition, such as alienation, loneliness, poverty, tragedy, grace, compassion, cruelty, and violence.

4.4. SOUTHERN HUMOR IN THE COEN BROTHERS' FILMS

4.4.1. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

O Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000), the Coen Brothers' adventure, comedy, musical, period, and road film, has gotten a lot of attention because of its relation to Homer's *The Odyssey*. Despite the fact that the film was released in 2000, the project's screenplay development began in the mid-1990s. Indeed, the Coen Brothers were planning a film set in the Deep South as early as 1987, to complete their "Hayseed Trilogy"—which also includes *Blood Simple* (1984), and *Raising Arizona*

(1987). More than their other films, *O Brother Where Art Thou?* balances wittily between deep-fried Southern kitsch and cliché on the one hand, and a sophisticated understanding of Southern culture and literature on the other. The Coen Brothers have created their own complicated set of humorous absurdities inside the film's main narrative structure. And, humbly, a notice at the end of the opening sequence/credits section informs us that the film is "based upon *The Odyssey* by Homer." The Coen Brothers later confess and admit in William Rodney Allen's *The Coen Brothers: Interviews* that, they've never read *The Odyssey*, but instead the comic book version of it (Allen, 2006: 127).

Even though *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* shares structural and thematic similarities with Homer's *The Odyssey*, Joel claims that the script's initial concept was a simple idea of prisoners fleeing from a chain gang in 1930s Mississippi. "Homer was an afterthought," Joel concedes to an interviewer, explaining that midway through the writing process, the brothers realizes their "road movie" is similar to the epic poem, and from there, pirating from *The Odyssey* becomes a running gag, an intertextual dialogue with Homer that amuses them while writing the screenplay (Mottram, 2000: 159). The homeward odyssey of Odysseus after the ten-year Trojan War is recounted in Homer's epic poem, which is a narrative of exile and homecoming. Despite the fact that the mythic protagonist/hero must undergo many years of rambling, he is eager to visit the shores of Ithaca[46] once more. Odysseus faces many perils, and is continually besieged and troubled by trials and tribulations (his Greek name, Odysseus, means "Son of Pain"), but he eventually succeeds and reunites with his wife and son at the end of his voyage. Ulysses Everett McGill's[47] picaresque and darkly humorous homeward ramblings and search for atonement recreate the episodic journey of *The Odyssey* in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

The brothers shoot *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* a few years after preparations, proclaiming to have adapted Homer's *Odyssey*. as a journey across the Deep South, and they quote the poem from *The Odyssey* to underline the prominence of the rambling hero in the film's very first shot:

[46] The Coen Brothers approach Mississippi as Homer's Ithaca in the film.
[47] Ulysses—or more correctly Ulixēs for some—is the Latin version of the Greek Odysseus, a hero in ancient Greek literature, and mythology. The name of Ulysses Everett McGill in the film is also taken as a reference to this Latin version.

Oh Muse!
Sing in me, and tell the story
Of that man skilled in all the ways of contending,
A wanderer, harried for years on end…

Bringing the Gothic tradition to the fore, this Southern-themed film from the Coen Brothers also explores the theme of the rambling sheriff in pursuit of fugitives. The film is set in Depression-era Mississippi and follows three chain-gang prisoners who break away and go on a homeward odyssey in quest of wealth and redemption. Sheriff Cooley (Daniel von Bargen) in the film is a quiet and mysterious person who follows three runaway convicts; Ulysses Everett McGill (George Clooney) is named after the heroic character of Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, from which the Coen Brothers loosely use to tell the narrative of a modern-day Ulysses and his crew, Pete (John Turturro) and Delmar (Tim Blake Nelson), who accompany the hero on his homeward odyssey. Sheriff Cooley never takes off his mirrored-sunglasses and continues to pursue his preys with his hound dog at all hours of the day and night. Throughout the journey, they confront a cast of characters drawn not just from Homer's epic but also from the history of the Deep South in America in the 1930s. All of these characters are targets of humorous clichés, including a bank-robbing gangster George "Baby Face" Nelson (Michael Badalucco), the governor of Mississippi Pappy O'Daniel (Charles Durning), and the man is depicted as the Satan himself Tommy Johnson (Chris Thomas King), the runaway black musician, and portrayed as such by the Coen Brothers who, through Tommy Johnson's voice, once again overstate the Gothic codes to cling to the comic narrative and genre: "[Sheriff Cooley] is white—white as you folks, with mirrors for eyes an 'a big hollow voice an' allus travels with a mean old hound." At first, we only see Sheriff's boots and his dog, then he appears in a low-angle shot, with flames reflecting in his glasses.

Charlie Meadows'[48] Southern equivalent in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* is Big Dan Teague, also played by John Goodman, a rambling Bible salesperson (in Mississippi) who also appears to be a psychopath and a follower of the Ku Klux Klan. Stock characters, to some degree, make a link between Southern and Western cultures by evoking the same Gothic origins with a focus on the grotesque, ostensibly a Southern heritage, but Flannery O'Connor acknowledges its Western influences.

[48] Charlie Meadows, portrayed by John Goodman, is one of the main characters of the Coen Brothers' *Barton Fink*, and he is the insurance salesperson who lives next door at the run-down Hotel Earle.

For her, there was a lot of grotesque fiction from the frontier in nineteenth-century American literature, and it was meant to be humorous; but the current grotesque characters, as witty as they are, are not particularly humorous (*CW*, 1988: 817). O'Connor's talent and aptitude to develop "freaky" characters is perhaps one of the reasons the brothers adore her.

The salesman in the film is a one-eyed giant, a pretty obvious reference to both classical literature (he is supposed to embody the Cyclops) and the Southern grotesque, defined by Susan Castillo in her essay "Reading Signs: Epistemological Uncertainty and the Southern Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*" as: "a Bakhtinian carnival[49] of crazed businessmen, sinister hairdressers, serial killers, con artists, mad housewives desperately seeking for redemption" (Castillo, 2014: 174). As a matter of fact, Big Dan might have been inspired by the Bible salesperson in Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People," who takes full advantage of a young girl's benignity and candor to grab her wooden prosthetic leg.

Big Dan is an incredible example of the exaggerated and repulsive Southern grotesque characters that O'Connor adores. His terrifying physical appearance matches his utter lack of sympathy and brutality toward the vulnerable Delmar. He demonstrates his sadism in one of the film's most notable scenes, when he crushes a frog—that is meant to be Pete—with his bare hands, creating a squishy sound comparable to a bottle of ketchup being squeezed. Nonetheless, the Coen Brothers' fascination with the Southern grotesque resulted in more than just the development of a cast of "freaky characters;" the brothers also used dark humor to respond against the sub-genre's violence and brutality.

Alongside the themes, ideas, and facts stated above, music is one of the most important factors that transports the audience to another time and place. In the film, the depression era Mississippi is presented not only visually but also musically. All of the music chosen for the film is based on bluegrass music from the 1920s and 1930s in the rural South, and all of the songs are used as diegetic sound, originated in

[49] Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian linguist and literary critic who wrote in the first half of the 20th century, used "carnivalesque" in his *Rabelais and His World* (1965) to demonstrate and characterize writing that describes the destabilization or reversal of power structures, albeit temporarily, as in traditional carnival forms. Although this takes the form of writing or otherwise representing (in films, paintings, sculptures, and so on.) about real or imaginary carnivals, it was important for Bakhtin that the work itself embodied the carnival spirit. He does this by mobilizing humor, satire, and grotesque in all its forms, especially if it has to do with body and bodily functions (Bakhtin, 1984: x-xi).

the fictional world, giving the film an extensive musical vibe. In the film, we are introduced to a hot and humid Southern world. And so far, if we consider the literary references, trully little has been written about the film's connection with Southern world and literature—including both William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor—and the use and misuse of Southern history. This part of the chapter aims to look at the numerous ways in which the film references Southern literature and a Southern mindset.

Ulysses Everett McGill considers himself an enlightened and intelligent rationalist who dismisses religious doctrines as illogical superstition towards the end of the film, as he demonstrates in a pretentious speech on the socio-cultural benefits of hydro-electric power that the freshly flooded valley would yield:

> *Yessir, the South is gonna change. Everything's gonna be put on electricity and run on a payin' basis. Out with old spiritual mumbo-jumbo, the superstitions and the backward ways. We're gonna see a brave new world where they run everyone a wire and hook us all up to the grid. Yessir, a veritable age of reason—like the one they had in France—and not a moment too soon…*

A cow on a cotton house roof glides away as Everett's voice fades—a remarkable image that defies the logic of earthly reason. When confronted with the threat of execution by hanging, he prays fervently for salvation: "I'm sorry I turned by back on you, Lord. I know I've been guilty of pride and sharp dealing." Everett's proud confession also recalls the Homeric Odysseus, who is notorious for his narcissism, vanity, and the arrogance of hubris, insulting the gods; and Everett's progress is later hindered by the gods in several catastrophes.

According to the Coen Brothers in William Rodney Allen's *The Coen Brothers: Interviews*, the brothers express their thoughts as follows: "In our minds' [*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*] was presumably the movie [*Sullivan's Travels*] [Preston Sturges] would have made if he'd had the chance. The important movie. The one that takes on the big, important themes" (Allen 2006: 136). Paradoxically and ironically as always, the brothers also remark that *O Brother Where Art Thou?* pretends to be a serious film, but its pretentiousness is clearly a farce. It's a parody, after all (Allen 2006: 129). Nonetheless, in her *The Brothers Grim: The Films of Ethan and Joel Coen*, Erica Rowell describes *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* as a caustic social drama and satirical look into the United States' history that delves into

the country's political and spiritual foundations (Rowell, 2007: 244). Although the film is a satire that touches the core of important socio-political issues of American South, it does not want to be taken seriously as a film that only gives social messages.

Pastiche, dissonance, and reinvention have all been effectively used in the film, but the serious comical/humorous roots are best understood through Henri Bergson and Søren Kierkegaard's intersecting notions of the mechanical, paradoxical, contradictory, ironic, incongruous, and absurd. According to Bergson, in his *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of Comic*, we laugh when we see a human as a "set-up mechanism . . . a jointed puppet" (Bergson, 1911: 30). For Kierkegaard, in *The Humor of Kierkegaard: An Anthology*, the comic represents the unmediated contradictions of the human condition, incongruities that defy resolution but generate laughter (Kierkegaard, 2004: 26-27). In *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, wacky cartoon characters dance over a landscape of existential incongruities like mechanical puppets, occasionally unaware of their ontological position, and at others trying to defy the harshness of law and the rigidity of social norms and personal obsessions.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? illustrates how, even in a frivolous comedy, social history may be addressed in progressive, and intelligent ways. Douglas McFarland discusses the "iconic incongruities" embedded into the film's pastiche, examining how such incongruities convey and express an ethical challenge to postmodern moviegoers' political comfort and apathy (McFarland, 2009: 50). McFarland claims that the scene, which depicts a Ku Klux Klan rally in which Soggy Bottom Boys' musician Tommy Johnson is about to be hung for the crime of being black, clearly exemplifies the functioning of these humorous, and ironic incongruities. The racist and hateful harangue of their "Imperial Wizard" greets the hooded brethren of the Klan as they assemble: "Brothers! We are foregathered here to preserve our hallowed culture and heritage! From intrusions, inclusions and dilutions! Of colour! Of creed! Of our ol' time religion!" Anyone familiar with the Ku Klux Klan and the racist violence perpetrated by its members in the American South throughout the 1920s and 1930s will be struck by the ferocity of this historical event. Ultimately, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* deals with social, ethical, and existential complexities of laughter in the South; and the cinematic techniques and

aesthetics of the Coen Brothers show that, regardless of the prevailing genre of the film, the directors have always drawn heavily on Southern Gothic codes and iconography.

4.4.2. *Barton Fink*

Their most notable and obvious homage to Southern literature occurred early in the Coen Brothers' career, when they devoted their fourth film, *Barton Fink* (1991), to the concept of writing (or, more specifically, not writing), by delving into the issue of writer's block (based on their own experience).[50] It tells the story of Barton Fink, a New York playwright recruited by a Hollywood studio to write a wrestling film. Barton Fink doesn't really fit the reality of everyday life. He tries to find a place for himself and cannot find it. He requests for help from a more experienced writer, W. P. Mayhew (John Mahoney), a daring portrayal of William Faulkner as a Southern gentleman with the attitude of a Texan drunkard. Even though it appears overstated, the Coen Brothers incorporates real facts from Faulkner's life as they appear in German historian Otto Friedrich's book *City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940's* (1986). Friedrich describes how the Southern writer never really fit in with the Hollywood culture and suffered through numerous bouts of serious depression and melancholy until Jack Warner ultimately let him go, among many other incidents (Friedrich, 1986: 267-275).

In addition to such biographical references, Mayhew's mistress Audrey (Judy Davis), a stereotypical figure in Southern literature and film, is inspired on the writer's genuine mistress, Meta Carpenter. Faulkner's real-life situation, to some degree, stands for the old traditional cultural comparison that splits Western and Southern cultures: the educated Southern writer adrift amid Western philistines, or the disparity between Southern education and Western vulgarity. Those clichés, however, would not be tolerated by the Coen Brothers unless they had a more sinister goal in mind.

[50] While attempting to complete *Miller's Crossing*, the Coen Brothers encountered writer's block. They decided to stop working on it and instead write the script for *Barton Fink* as a kind of treatment or therapy. *Miller's Crossing* was eventually completed and filmed before *Barton Fink*.

O'Connor's quote: "Anything I can't stand it's a young writer or intellectual" (*CW*, 1988: 994) perfectly match with the characters we encounter in the Coen Brothers' films—especially in *Barton Fink*. Evaluating the film from a critical distance, the Coen Brothers seem to draw more from literature than just historical events, since their depiction of Faulkner is based on one of O'Connor's "would-be intellectuals." In the film, the character representing Faulkner (W. P. Mayhew) is not a prodigy who has completely lost his path in Hollywood, but a person who writes scripts with the help of his secretary. In fact, through its characterization and settings, Barton Fink makes a highly perceptive observation on America's cultural and regional differences. The first scene creates division between the East and West coasts in the 1940s, with Broadway being regarded highbrow culture and Hollywood being deemed lowbrow. As a "leftist" writer, Barton agrees to compromise his intellectual identity and integrity by going to Hollywood. Nonetheless, the depiction of the North is caricatured in itself: Barton is meant to symbolize the ordinary individuals to whom he devotes his plays, yet he evolves amid a terribly snobby milieu of high society. A lengthy dissolve scene shows a rock being smashed by the waves on a Californian coast, progressively revealing Barton as he stands in the dark and gloomy lobby of a sleazy hotel, where most of the action will take place.

Although Hollywood is depicted as a confined setting, a scene evoking the South, with Mayhew and Audrey having a picnic lunch with Barton, portrays a recreation of what appears to be a Southern landscape in summer, green and bright with a little wind. Unlike Barton, who never leaves his dark brown outfit (his Northern working-class writer's dress), the Southern couple is exquisitely dressed in white according to Southern tradition. Mayhew's asperity and violent behavior with Audrey ruins what might have been a peaceful time for Barton, his reconciliation with Hollywood. The old writer eventually leaves the meal and drinks himself to death while singing Old Black Joe (Stephen Foster, 1853), a typical mournful Southern ballad, as if condemning the destiny of black slaves as if it was his own.

The West (California) is transformed into a terrible realm where allegedly intelligent authors are cursed in the film, oddly reflecting what the Coen Brothers want to avoid in real life. In other respects, in a typical display of cynicism, the Coen Brothers vigorously question the legitimacy of wannabe-artists and intellectuals

through the depiction of Fink and Mayhew, emulating O'Connor's view on the subject as stated by Laurence Enjolras in her *Flannery O'Connor's Characters*. O'Connor's protagonists, according to Enjolras, are intelligent, dissatisfied people who are locked in a conflicted circumstance in which they regard themselves as victims. However, as the writer deftly demonstrates, they are all losers, ineffective beings who have fooled themselves into believing that they know and possess something, or have the ability to do something (Enjolras, 1998: 43). This approach accurately represents Barton Fink, who, although ostensibly attempting to enlighten Hollywood philistines by bringing them "the life of the mind," ends up being called a "phony" by Hollywood tycoon (Lipnick), and loathed by the ordinary man (Charlie). The film's relationship to O'Connor's universe appears to be obvious.

More curiously, the hard-boiled novel's shadow is also noticed in the second half of Barton Fink, when the drama turns into a criminal thriller when Audrey's dead body is found in Barton's bed. The investigation that follows enlists the help of two detectives, who uncover the name of a serial murderer who happens to be Barton's next-door neighbor, Charlie. As such, the film is a unique combination of the brothers' favorite literary genres; Southern grotesque and noir fiction, managed with the critical distance that distinguishes their work. The film is definitely a film noir. Yet it is a film noir parody that portrays the events in the film ironically. It uses the film noir format, but it is also extremely funny. The Coen Brothers present a sort of rambler who corresponds to both Southern and Western traditions with Charlie Meadows, also known as "Mad Man Munch" (John Goodman), a well-known ordinary character of Southern Gothic/grotesque literature found in Flannery O'Connor's or Carson McCullers' works. By definition, a rambling salesperson is an outsider whose goal is to earn people's confidence in order to violate their privacy. He's not only an impostor; he's also a possible danger, which might be linked to the Southern Gothic roots of the rambler.

4.4.3. *No Country for Old Men*

No Country for Old Men (2007)[51] feels quite different from the other films of the Coen Brothers. It is more serious than their other films, or at least it is serious in a different manner. The film is not exactly a comedy, and the character of Chigurh (Javier Bardem) is an epitome of evil. The Coen Brothers are known for tackling dark themes, topics, issues in their films, but none of them were that dark and grim. There is, however, a feeling of detachment, as if their films are supposed to be regarded as just fiction, and that they should not be taken too seriously.

The character of Chigurh provides the impression of a Gothic rambling villain within the Western genre. Especially in his countenance: he is as pale, as the Gothic villain with black-circled eyes; an eerie grin, and a strange hairstyle. Although it may seem vain to compare Chigurh at an evil Gothic figure, no one can deny his atypical appearance for a conventional villain of the Western genre. Aside from his boots, he is out of his genre, as he does not own any of those classical cowboy clothes. He rather resembles a Gothic counterpart of the bounty hunters that can be found in Sergio Leone's spaghetti Westerns (e.g., Sentenza, also known as "Angel Eyes/The Bad," played by Lee Van Cleef in Sergio Leone's 1966 film *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*). Anton Chigurh, especially for his horrific deeds, reminds of a walking slaughterhouse. People are nothing more than animals to him, thus his weapon of choice is particularly relevant. With such an iconic weapon in hand, Anton Chigurh's persona reminds of a classical "Grim Reaper," with scythe, personifying death. He seems like a modern version of the old classic image of Death with his scythe. In additon to Anton Chigurh's quasi Gothic/Western outlook, his inner world, his philosophy and ethics may help to better situate him once one may choose to read Cormac McCarthy or the Coen Brothers at a moment when Chigurh asks Carson Wells (Woody Harrelson) the following question: "If the rule you follow brought you to this, of what use was the rule?" This is a grand human question, as well as a significant philosophical question.

Chigurh is not actually a creation of the Coen Brothers, but rather one of Cormac McCarthy's "creatures of the frontier," a predator prowling the Texas-

[51] The title of the novel, and of the film, comes from William Butler Yeats' poem, "Sailing to Byzantium."

Mexico border. Disciplined, methodical, meticulous, systematic, calm, assertive, and ruthless, Chigurh is on the hunt, treating men like livestock. His target is a traditional cowboy who has made the transition to modern life. Moss (Josh Brolin), armed with a sniper rifle and goggles, is a modern frontiersman who had mastered his hunting and shooting skills in Vietnam, just like another historical frontier figure.

The film's plot may be summarized in these first two sequences: Firstly, the moment when Moss is off hunting antelopes, and Chigurh is out murdering police officers: here, the hunter becomes the prey. In this respect, Chigurh's "pure evil" attitude of reminds us of Flannery O'Connor's characters, stories, and her opinions over evil. Flannery O'Connor was a devout Catholic who believed in the presence of evil and was worried that people had ceased reacting to the violence, cruelty, and injustice that they saw around them. She states that she tries to create "large and startling figures" (*MM*, 1969: 34) —such as "The Misfit" in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"—to protect us from growing numb and indifferent to horror; and to show us that we have the power to change things.

Secondly, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) is disturbed by the corruption that exists in his environment. He says: "Any time you quit hearin Sir and Mam the end is pretty much in sight." In the film adaptation and as well as the novel, a few such soliloquies of the Sheriff highlight the presence of evil: whether it is personified in Anton Chigurh or in everyday news reports about violence and murder.

Most of the characters in the Coen Brothers' oeuvre, whether deliberately or unconsciously, rebel against their circumstances. Therefore, the characters of the Coen Brothers show some similarities with the characters of Flannery O'Connor. Some of the rebellious characters become cynical and nihilistic in both O'Connor's and the Coen Brothers' work, such as Anton Chigurh—who is also the symbol of death in *No Country for Old Men*—and the Misfit, a fictional character of Flannery O'Connor. The serial killer of O'Connor in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" finds no reason to believe in God and concludes: "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. No pleasure but meanness" (*CW*, 1988: 152).

One of Cormac McCarthy's most unforgettable and iconic characters is Anton Chigurh. McCarthy is unquestionably one of the most prominent contemporary American Southwestern writers to date, as a Southern novelist whose literary work became increasingly inspired by Western influences as he rambled west. Chigurh is a weird and enigmatic rambler whose identity remains unknown at first. Chigurh is nicknamed as a "living prophet of destruction;" (McCarthy, 2005: 5) just like Peter Rugg,[52] the Gothic rambler mentioned by William Austin in his *Peter Rugg: The Missing Man* as "the storm-breeder," "a black speck" or "a black cloud" (Austin, 1882: 8). Chigurh is depicted in the story in the role of a Gothic villain. Not naming villains or monsters is indeed a Gothic tradition that was subsequently used in Westerns (e.g. Sergio Leone's characters), and horror literature, and films (e.g. Lovecraft/Stephen King) as a way of highlighting the awe they evoke. Thus, in Cormac McCarthy's books, a gloomy and cynical image of America emerges from the hybridization of Southern and Western traditions and cultures. Susan Kollin explains this situation in her "Genre and the Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western," as McCarthy introduced a sadder and gloomier perspective to the genre by drawing aspects from the Southern grotesque to rest on Western themes and traditions, delivering what looked to be the ultimate stance on Manifest Destiny (Kollin, 2001: 588).

Therefore, many of McCarthy's books by means of the Gothic elements' subordination to the rambler narrative in an attempt to combine Western and Southern cultures, gears in the deconstruction of national myths and stereotypes. Since the rambler is a signifier of cultural assimilation, acculturation, and hybridization, asserting the Gothic/grotesque nature of this character is a way to emphasize the violence that underpins the founding of the United States; because even if Western and Southern cultures are historically and almost conventionally confrontational, they do experience some form of violence and brutality that has become commonplace. The imagery of the Gothic rambler may thus be a vehicle for showing both the artificial or stereotyped distinctions between Southern and Western

[52] Peter Rugg is a fictional character from New England who appears in a number of American short tales and poetry. Rugg, who was born in 1730, is an obstinate and enraged man. He is doomed to drive his carriage until the end of time after riding out into a thunderstorm in the year of the Boston Massacre (1770).

cultures, as well as their horrifying common and everyday violence. In the Coen Brothers' films, the character of the Gothic rambler appears to achieve these goals: Chigurh is the directors' voice, a messenger criticizing mass or popular culture's conventional and clichéd depictions of the South and the West, and the villain stressing the parallels between Western frontier justice and Southern vigilantism, as shown in a humorous way.

4.4.4. *A Serious Man*

The Coen Brothers' film *A Serious Man* (2009) offers a more explicitly Jewish perspective on the subject of cosmic injustice. It takes place in 1967, when Joel was 13 and Ethan was 10, in suburban Minneapolis, where the brothers grew up. The film was supposed to portray two characters, a 13-year-old kid and his father, but while the script was being written, the father came to the forefront. He is Larry Gopnik, a physics professor played with passionately by Michael Stuhlbarg, a stage actor who has never had a leading part in the cinema industry. The Coen Brothers, like naughty angels, seem to delight in showering him with unpleasant things.

A Serious Man is a comedy about a man who is in a dire situation and is suffering. The film responds to a miserable physics professor's question on the meaning and purpose of his existence in the same manner Gabriel Byrne responded to John Turturro in the Coen Brothers' earlier film *Miller's Crossing* (1990). We meet Larry Gopnik, a well-meaning Jew who simply wants tenure, after the opening scene of the film in which a well-meaning Jew brings tragedy into Gopnik's home. Larry is a fine, decent, and God-fearing person who is struggling with some significant issues. He has the typical expression of a man in trouble and distress, yet despite this, he is a nice and likeable individual. Firstly, his wife wishes to divorce him. Secondly, he is being blackmailed. Thirdly, he also believes that God has abandoned him. Larry also has a useless and lousy brother who is a gambler and two obnoxious children to worry about, but it's the "forsaken by God" part that bothers him the most. Larry seeks answers from three rabbis, who provide him with some guidance. First one asserts him that his issues are all a matter of perspective. "Look at the parking lot!" he remarks to Larry. It appears to make the first rabbi quite

delighted. Larry is told a long and detailed anecdote about a Jewish dentist and a gentile's teeth by the second rabbi. The dentist discovers the words on the wall "Help me! Save me!" in the story. These written phrases on the wall could only be read by a dentist. It could be a divine message from God, the revelation and illumination of a significant truth. The second rabbi, on the other hand, signifies Larry that the moral of the anecdote is to be disregarded of its significance and profundity. The last rabbi, Larry can only see through a gap in the rabbi's office door. This last rabbi does not have any suggestions or advice. He is nothing more than a presence. This most recent experience is possibly the most authentic and accurate manifestation of Larry's religious faith. So, it appears that Larry is responsible for dealing with his problems, if he has any problems at all. As various mean and dishonest people use Larry, he never appears foolish, gullible or dumb, which is why we sympathize with him even when he resolutely refuses to become angry. His tragedy is that he is featured in a film by the Coen Brothers. Anywhere else, he would be treated with compassion. But the Coen Brothers—like Flannery O'Connor—are not keen on rewarding decent and nice people. They prefer to show and remind us how harsh and brutal life can be.

The sardonic depiction of a grotesque world in which the odd decent man is surrounded a series of impostors, conmen, counterfeiters, and hypocrites are reminiscent of—I would make a claim—the Southern Gothic landscape of Flannery O'Connor's fiction, despite the fact that neither the characters nor the frameworks in which the narrative takes place are visibly religious in the film. Not surprisingly, both O'Connor and the Coen Brothers have been accused of hubris, arrogance and contempt in relation to the prevailing culture: a Catholic in Savannah, Georgia, in the center and heart of the Bible Belt; two Jews in the suburbs of mostly Christian Minneapolis.

A Serious Man, on the other hand, is almost entirely about the Jewish community and pushes the boundaries of "ethnic-appropriate" casting; it is also the Coen Brothers' most personal and autobiographical film to date. Moreover, Larry's son—Danny Gopnik (Aaron Wolff)—is one of the most important autobiographical elements of the film about the Coen Brothers' childhood. We initially see Danny in his Yeshiva class listening the song of Jefferson Airplane's "Somebody To Love," then his most precious possession (his transistor radio) is snatched from him, he is

brutally tormented and bullied, and then a tornado strikes just twelve feet from where he is standing. As he is a bonehead who enjoys weed (much like his dad), he is also quite interested in Jewish tradition, despite the fact that he does not comprehend a single word of it. On the day of his bar mitzvah, completely under the influence of drugs, he perceives absurdity and meaninglessness all around him. The Coen Brothers make their first serious attempt (I suppose this is one of the many meanings offered by the film title) at evaluating and analyzing their cultural heritage and matching it with their frequently shown philosophical perspective yet keeping the standards of their sardonic humor intact.

Larry accepts his tragedy with a quiet indifference. His lips squeeze together in an effort not to scream, and his face tightens. His science and education will not help him to grasp the forces and dynamics at work in the cosmos since he is teaching Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.[53] Larry consults a bunch of rabbis after a woman with leg braces (the radiant Katherine Borowitz) comments: "It is not always easy to figure out what God is trying to tell us." The first one is a young assistant who encourages him to appreciate and embrace the wonders of God's creation while pointing out the window to a very unremarkable parking lot. The second one, a middle-aged man, claims that God owes us nothing and that we owe God nothing in return. There is a third, elderly rabbi who does not usually have working hours—but when Larry makes his case to an unfriendly secretary, things do not go so well.

This film holds a lot of material from *The Book of Job*. Job is the story of a godly, religious, and devout man who is put to the test by God. After all his travails, when Job's wife tells him in "Numbers 2:10" of *The Holy Bible: King James Version* to "curse God and die," Job says to his wife, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (*KJV*, 2004: 260). If we think Larry in the context of this verse, he goes in search of solutions and meaning between adversities and struggles in his life. Job's story and tragedy inspires the Coen Brothers for obvious reasons: Job is Larry. In a way, Larry stands for everyman characters in the

[53] The uncertainty principle, often known as the Heisenberg's uncertainty principle or the indeterminacy principle, was proposed by Werner Heisenberg, a German physicist, in 1927. Even in principle, he claims that an object's location and velocity cannot be detected simultaneously. Assume that the velocity of a free electron is exactly known but the location is uncertain in this situation. This may be stated simply and broadly as follows: each experiment eliminates some of the system information gathered in prior tests (Heisenberg, 1949: 20).

films of the Coen Brothers. The crucial question is whether God laughs at Job. These questions and the situations that Larry falls into lead us to Patrick O'Neill's "Comedy of Entropy: The Contexts of Black Humour" in Harold Bloom's *Dark Humor* (2010), which O'Neill utters briefly: "Biblical laughter is predominantly born of scorn and mockery," (O'Neill, 2010: 86) which reminds us Larry's inextricable situation.

The Coen Brothers, unlike Flannery O'Connor, do not believe in biblical principles, yet they appear to admire their consistency in a chaotic world. Their perspective is gloomy, absurd and ludicrous, but not nihilistic. *A Serious Man* begins with a quote from Rashi, a biblical scholar: "Receive with simplicity everything that happens to you." The lesson of this memorable film is, "stuff happens," and if you are going to lose, lose graciously. And finally, the words Joel says about O'Connor in an interview with Holly Pyne: "I think of that old Flannery O'Connor thing where she was accused of creating caricatures and she said: 'People who think I'm exaggerating have obviously never been to the American South.' There's a little bit of that with *A Serious Man*. You've obviously never been there if you think that's exaggerating" (Pyne) is an indication of that the Coen Brothers' *A Serious Man*, Flannery O'Connor's universe in her fictions, and the American South have some component commonalities.

4.4.5. *Fargo*

Fargo (1996), a dark/noir detective and crime thriller set in Brainerd, Minnesota, and Fargo, North Dakota, about a working-class man whose life is turned upside down, won two Academy Awards (Best Screenplay and Best Actress—Frances McDormand—awards). Jerry Lundegaard (William H. Macy) is an unethical and unscrupulous automobile salesperson who pressures consumers into buying unneeded accessories like "TruCoat" sealer at the last minute. Jerry is drowning in debt, stress and worry, despite his marriage to Kristin Rudrüd (Kristin Rudrüd), whose father, Wade (Harve Presnell), is affluent. He searches desperately for a way out and finally finds one. Carl Showalter (Steve Buscemi) and Gaear Grimsrud (Peter Stormare) are hired by Jerry to abduct his wife, Jean, and demand a

ransom from his wealthy but penny pincher father-in-law. When the phony kidnapping turns more violent than intended, moviegoers think that this poor and evil plan would become humorously dark. Everything goes terribly wrong when the kidnappers torture and murder first a police officer (after just being pulled over for inappropriate plates and then attempting to bribe him), then two witnesses to the police officer's murder, then Wade, and eventually even their hostage, Jean—making Jerry not just a kidnapper but also an accessory to murder. But no matter how dark this film is, it does not justify the villains.

The film then introduces smart, calm, and sensible Marge Gunderson (Frances McDormand), chief of police in Brainerd, and the figure who stands for and embodies Flannery O'Connor's searcher who "feel[s] about in all experience" for meaning and for God (*MM*, 1969: 159). Despite the fact that she is very pregnant, she evaluates the multiple murder scene and conducts a systematic investigation. She tracks down her men: first Grimsrud while he is shredding Carl's remains in a wood chipper, and then Jerry as he attempts to flee town, hot on the trail of the thugs. Jerry's poor plan becomes as dismal as a result of these events, such as the lies and the car accident that leave the grandmother in the ditch and drive her to her confrontation with the fate—the Misfit—in the Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find."

Jerry's comical and tragic deficiencies, Marge's steadfast determination to investigate the murder, and the many absurd personalities between them provide humor for the film. Marge's investigations take her to Jerry's dealership, where he rushes her away by lying. Shortly after, despite Jerry's insistence that the kidnappers will only deal with him, his father-in-law decides to deliver the one-million-dollar ransom himself to the kidnappers' rendezvous spot, a snow-covered parking garage. When the father wants to see his daughter before turning over the money, Carl takes out his pistol and kills him, but not before suffering a gruesome injury from a gunshot to the jaw. As the kidnappers leave, Jerry arrives to the garage and somberly pops the trunk of his car to make place for his father in law's body, another bizarre and twist in the plan gone horrifically and tragically wrong.

Jerry's decision to work under the laws of a ridiculous and an absurd universe, motivated by fear and dishonesty, leads in escalating chaos. A personal

experience reminds Marge not to accept everyone at face value as she approaches on the case; the film implies that a benign and trustworthy approach will not be enough to confront the world's wickedness. Meanwhile, the film's death toll continues to rise. Carl keeps the exact contents of the briefcase hidden from his partner, gives Gaear his $80,000 portion, and buries the briefcase along a wintry roadway. Carl returns to the hidden cottage where they had held Mrs. Lundegaard to discover that Gaear had murdered her, gets into a petty quarrel with him about the car, and is eventually murdered by Gaear with an axe that had been misplaced. Simultaneously, Marge encounters Jerry, who runs from his own car lot, and she soon heads towards the cabin, where she approaches Gaear, slamming the remainder of Carl into a wood chipper, which rains a constant crimson rain over the snow-covered lawn. This moment is one of the darkest, most sensational and emotional scenes in the film.

Following the climax, the film's calmer periods address the unanswered questions. The film ends with Marge shooting a running Gaear in the leg and dragging him in into custody in her police car, casually speaking with the ruthless criminal about the dubious value of all this murdering and carnage. Police officers catch Jerry in a motel, and Marge slips into bed with her husband as if it were the conclusion of a normal day in the last scene.

The film grapples with the presence of evil in the world and tries to make sense of it through the pregnant chief of police. Marge's first mistaken judgment of who is decent or evil does not lead to her death, but it does lead to the same questioning of her authenticity as the Flannery O'Connor's "the unnamed grandmother" character in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The film has become a cult classic thanks to its dark humor, unique characters, and Minnesota-accented one-liners. The film stands as an illustration of O'Connor's rhetoric—without her religious or biblical messages—because of its implications of how we respond to a chaotic world.

Fargo, at the peak of the genre tradition, has brought themes of social alienation, ontological nothingness, and unscripted babblers to new heights. While the film is simple on the surface, it is also a conceptually unsophisticated crime and murder story, shot through with ontological and historical importance, a genuinely excellent depiction of the modern age's dilemma and crisis, in all its harshness,

isolation, and lack of human connection. With their iconic fabrication of the "true story" title card, the Coen Brothers effectively build a fictional world and fabricated reality in *Fargo*. Reporting for *The Atlantic*, Christopher Orr underscores that in contrary to the stylized settings of their past films, the purpose was to portray a film that very obviously took place in the "real" world, noting that *Fargo* had an almost documentary sense compared to their former work, whatever one may consider of the deceit implicit in it (Orr, 2014). The completely fake "true story" assertion establishes the idea that the events that follow might have, did, or do happen in fact. The audience of *Fargo* may be tempted to consider the incidents as exaggerated and shocking, unexpected events inside a fictional world that includes Midwestern snow, as they do in O'Connor's literary works, as the characters' actions drive the unraveling of their destiny.

Modern storytellers appear to be particularly influenced by Flannery O'Connor's distinctive and characteristic details, despite the fact that Gothic literature has been used for ages. Joel and Ethan Coen are among the talented screenwriters and filmmakers who convey their own grotesque combination of the comic and the violent to the cinema screen, and O'Connor has been mentioned as a huge influence in their work. As do many other works in the Coen Brothers' combined repertory, *Fargo* does certainly employ a number of O'Connor's distinctive characteristics and raise the same concerns of humanity—of violence, evil, and justice—but without O'Connor's attachment for sin and grace. *Fargo* has a lot in common with Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find;" from the Gothic settings, uncanny locations, weird characters, and even sometimes meaningless dialogues. We may approach to *Fargo* as an illustration of O'Connor's current effect on authors or filmmakers by observing their emulation of her enlarged style of Gothic in setting, character, and dialogue, which reflects their own efforts to find goodness and virtue in the world.

4.4.6. *Raising Arizona*

To some degree, the concept of the multi-genre was already a feature of the Coen Brothers' second film, *Raising Arizona* (1987), a crime and comedy film introducing the character of Leonard Smalls aka "the lone biker of the apocalypse" (Randall "Tex" Cobb): He is terrifying, a lone apocalyptic biker with all the forces of hell at his control. He has the ability to transform day into night and decimate to whatever in his path. He is extremely brutal with children, the vulnerable, and delicate creatures. In his wake, he leaves a burnt ground that fouls even the lovely desert wind that blew across his forehead. The narrator has no idea where he came from or why he is here. He is not sure if he is in a dream or a vision. But he is afraid that he has set him free. As soon as Florence Arizona discovers her child Nathan has vanished, he is The Fury That Would Be.

This portrayal is recounted by the central protagonist, Hi (Nicolas Cage) who has abducted one of the "Arizona Quints (quintuplet babies)" with his infertile wife, a policewoman named Ed (Holly Hunter). His guilty conscience appears in his nightmares as the lone biker of the Apocalypse, a terrifying-looking, ruthless bounty hunter who is, essentially, a real man named Leonard Smalls: "My friends call me Lenny. Only I ain't got no friends." He identifies himself as "a tracker-part Hopi Indian, some say part hound dog," and he uses his ferocious look to create a mystical figure (he is dressed in leather leggings and fur boots, has a beard, and a dark dusty face). Smalls is the comic and parodic equivalent of Anton Chigurh; both are frontier hunters pursuing their preys, both are wrapped by a mystical glow that links them to the Gothic genre, and both are the epitome of the modern frontier justice.

Although this film focuses on the American West in general, we can establish its connection with the American South and its humorous effects as follows. As we already mentioned in the earlier sections of this chapter, the Coen Brothers cite Flannery O'Connor as one of their favorite writers. At the macrocosmic level, they make films that explore the evil and the horrible price we pay for our actions and misdeeds. And at the microcosmic level, they employ phrases such as "wart hog from hell" (*CW*, 1988: 648) from Flannery O'Connor's short story "Revelation" and use it in *Raising Arizona*. To cut a long story short, *Raising Arizona* is a comedy, and

it has something to do with the rambling characters and the territory they go through; Texas and Arizona, the South and the West, completely immersed in America's violent past/history.

4.4.7. *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*

The Ballad of Buster Scruggs (2018) loosely based on Jack London's *All Gold Canyon* (1904), and Stewart Edward White's *The Girl Who Got Rattled* (1901). The Coen Brothers' filmography goes from absurdist humor in the first chapter, "The Ballad of Buster Scruggs," to worn out melodrama in the last chapter, "The Girl Who Got Rattled," demonstrating their screenwriting skills. All these stories are set in a world that is undeniably Coenesque—a stylized reality that is harsh and unexpected.

The Ballad of Buster Scruggs is no different from the Coen Brothers' other stories on human flaws; each short story depicts individuals who are envious, lustful, or proud of their imperfections and must deal with the immediate (and vicious) consequences of their flaws. For instance, in the film's first chapter, the outlaw's euphoric pride leads to a Flannery O'Connor-esque revelation of remorse that arrives just one second too late.

Another unifying factor that goes through the six stories is violence. While the Coen Brothers work at their own pace with each chapter—boldly stretching both dialogues and stillness—the suspense of the ultimate gunfight keeps viewers engaged from beginning to end.

The Ballad of Buster Scruggs resembles a visual anthology of Flannery O'Connor short stories in certain aspects. O'Connor, who was well-known for her sarcastic, sardonic and cynical approach to human weakness, was able to enjoy the grotesqueries of our frequently distorted morality. The Coen Brothers share the same innate natural gift for storytelling, linking curses and grace with densely woven emotional allegories. With its foregrounding of the grotesque and the brutal incursion of chaos and death, the Coen Brothers' affection for O'Connor-esque moralism has, of course, always lacked the Catholic touch of grace that gave O'Connor's work at least some degree of redemption.

4.5. CONCLUSION

The values of the American South have always influenced the cinematic perspective of the Coen Brothers. In this context, it is no coincidence that some of the siblings' favorite writers are William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor. These authors, whose works are completely unique to the American South, undoubtedly have a prominent place in the unique character creation of the Coen Brothers. In addition to these writers, the works of Cormac McCarthy, one of the most important names of Southern Gothic, are undeniably important for the cinema of the brothers. If readers, and moviegoers examine the themes, dialogues, script writings, and the characters of the Coen Brothers, it becomes much better to understand how these writers and Southern literature have influenced the brothers' work.

The Coen Brothers' characters, and their characterization methods are probably the most important pillars of these writers' effectiveness. Like the characters of Faulkner and O'Connor, the Coen Brothers' unique characters are extremely ordinary, full of common, and clichés. For modern sensibilities, the Coen Brothers write the opposite of anticipated clichés and unrecognizable characters. They openly discuss this situation in David Edelstein's "Invasion of the Baby Snatchers" as follows: "If characters talk in clichés, it's because we like clichés. You start with things that are incredibly recognizable in one form, and you play with them" (Edelstein, 2006: 24). Almost all of the Coen Brothers' main characters are fools, or individuals who assume they are smarter than they actually are. Andy Lowe draws attention to this point in his "The Brothers Grim" as stated; according to the Coen Brothers, the majority of the figures in their films are miserable—misfits, vagrants, or even both. The brothers, nevertheless, particularly fond of those characters because such characters are rarely shown in films. Burly super-hero types don't appeal to the brothers (Lowe, 2006: 97). Simply said, their characters are uncharismatic, weird, and morally corrupt.

Lastly, the Coenesque characters have maintained the Gothic's mystery and grotesque aspect, which is frequently used as a provider of comic relief or a representation of dark humor. However, they also provide an opportunity to bring up the country's violent past, with frontier justice and vigilantism being prominent motifs in the aforesaid genres of literature. To some degree, those characters allow

the directors to reclaim the Gothic and Southern grotesque as crucial elements in American cinema. Giving them a key role in their films is also a method of paying tribute to the literary traditions of the South and Southwest. And, while the Coen Brothers' films address all these issues, none of them is a carbon copy of the previous one, even if they have certain similarities. In Kristine McKenna's "Joel and Ethan Coen" interview, Ethan once stated: "We don't generally worry about repeating ourselves. Being original and always doing the new thing is incredibly overrated" (McKenna, 2006: 181). Whether original and innovative or not, the Coen Brothers pursue the tradition of writing and creating scenes and characters that look like they have never been written before.

CONCLUSION

As discussed in detail in the first chapter of the thesis, humor is a compelling subject to both theorize and address. This phenomenon, which is divided into many different segments even within itself, creates highly controversial grounds even with such phenomena as dark, offensive, grotesque, gallows, or morbid humor and humor theories. Although there are several important philosophies of humor, such as that of Henri Bergson or Sigmund Freud, it is not possible to make a firm judgment. Theorizing humor allows us to understand what humor reveals about the subjects and the society in which they live. Humor not only reveals the hidden truth of society, it reveals the connections that daily life keeps at a certain distance. In this context, descriptions of humor inevitably seem too broad or too narrow.

Over the years, humor has been addressed from a variety of angles that fall outside of most philosophical disciplines. While this discussion first focused on philosophical approaches to humor, it eventually expanded to include cultural studies, literary theory, psychoanalysis, psychology, religion, and other disciplines. The emphasis on humor as a whole should lead to a more comprehensive understanding of humor and its influence on the human condition. In addition, there have been theories of humor, laughter, and comedy dating back to Plato's era, if not earlier, first from poets and philosophers, then from psychologists, sociologists, neurophysiologists, and semioticians in the early 20th and into the 21st century.

The continental philosophy was the first to return to the study of humor. Thinkers associated with this tradition, such as Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, Henri Bergson, and others; and in addition to, continental philosophy, analytical philosophers, for example, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein talked about the subject long time ago. This topic has also attracted the attention of contemporary philosophers, academics, and thinkers such as Simon Critchley, Slavoj Žižek, John Morreall, and Paul McDonald.

The philosophical study of humor has focused on the development of a satisfying definition of humor that until recently expanded with laughter. The main task is to develop an adequate theory of what humor is. There is no single reason

why a joke is funny and humorous, instead the thesis tried to dwell on the numerous ways in which humor occurs.

The field of humor, as much extensively covered in this thesis, is a surprisingly comprehensive and enjoyable area in its academic as well as empirical content. In this study, the philosophical perspective is rather preferred. However, the study of humor is open to analysis through many disciplines such as: history, literary history, theology, religious history, sociology, and anthropology. One realizes that such disciplinary perspectives have much to offer to the study of humor further it is researched.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, colonial, and post-revolutionary American writers in all fields of intellectual life—largely from Britain—were accused of lacking "originality" in their works. For everything American philosophers, poets, and novelists produced were seen as poor replicas of European culture. From this point of view, everything American philosophers, poets, and novelists produced must be poor replicas of European culture, since most of the writers at that time took their education in the culture developed under European influence. However, when Britain's monopoly faded in the nineteenth century, Americans began to reject the doctrines of British intellect in favor of regionalism. Therefore, American authors are the forerunners of a totally unique national literature, inclusive of humor focusing exclusively on the American phenomena of the "Yankee" of New England, the "backwoodsman and hillbillies" of the South, and the "frontiers" of the Western. At the same time, the South developed the first original, humorous literary works. Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Davy Crockett, William Tappan Thompson, C.F.M. Noland, Madison Tensas, Johnson Jones Hooper, T.B. Thorpe, Joseph G. Baldwin, Joseph M. Field, John S. Robb, H.E. Taliaferro, and George Washington Harris are some of the major names who wrote between 1830 and 1867. These authors are those forerunners who brought forth Southern humor's well-known qualities, and they are still being recognized in our contemporary times.

The American South is an eminent phenomenon in the United States of America, and the prevalent perception is that the American South appears more like a foreign country than any other region inside national borders. Southern studies,

particularly Southern humor studies, are crucial for the continuation of academic studies in the area since they continue to proliferate within these borders. For example, Cleanth Brooks, in his work "Southern Literature: The Past, History, and the Timeless" named three of the most prominent issues he felt closely related to the unchanging aspect of Southern culture. The first topic relates to a sense of place, the second refers at a specific concept of time that takes into account the past, and the timeless, and finally the last one focuses on an interest in and aptitude for narrative that includes the oral as well as the formal tradition of narration (Brooks, 1983: 5). Thus, based upon this knowledge, we may very easily place Southern humor within the four eras that commonly apply to American humor: (1) 1830 to 1860, (2) 1860 to 1925, (3) 1935 to 1945, and (4) 1945 to the present.

Despite being largely disregarded, humor, laughter, and jokes have been a crucial component of the Southern literary imagination for the last 150 years. Southern humor rendered the region's harsh, unpleasant, or intolerable qualities more acceptable and appealing. For Southern literature is inclusive of many bizarre, awkward, and caustic comedy, many people overlook the witty, comedic, and humorous aspects of the stories, focusing instead on their deep-fried grotesque and gloomy aspects.

In contrast to early Southern humorists, the South began to develop its own distinct characters and stories, particularly during the Southern Renaissance. While early Southern humorists were primarily concerned with racial and ethnic humor, later writers such as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor used humor to incorporate grotesque, Gothic, regional, religious, traditional, ethical, minimalist, allegorical, sardonic, and sarcastic subjects into their literary works. Two of the most influential American literary figures of the twentieth century, William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor, have had their works included in anthologies. The usage of regional dark humor is one of these writers' most noticeable characteristics. They make use of dark humor to perplex and arouse their audience. Their wit and humor set them different from their forerunners' usage of clichés that readers are already familiar with. Their sense of humor has been linked to Gothic and macabre themes in the past, particularly in depictions of Southern people and settings. Their humor focuses upon people's flaws and the satire of unexpected situations that fictional

characters experience. The influence of these writers' works are best seen in contemporary literature and cinema, as this thesis have already aimed to display.

Faulkner's humor, which is addressed in detail in the "William Faulkner" chapter of this thesis, both approves and undermines the dominant hegemonies within the societies he portrays; and therefore, it is rarely possible to isolate his humor within his texts written in a rather complex manner. To advance these contentions, this study focused over humor theory in general and especially upon important notions of the American and Southern humor—which was mentioned in more details in the first chapter—and to see how these ideas may contribute to our reading of Faulkner's comic and humorous works.

As we have seen, Faulkner's wisdom and attic wit is all over the place. Even though Faulkner's stories are not often regarded as humorous, they include humor based on careful study, albeit humor may not be his novels' primary instrument. When you look at all of Faulkner's oeuvre, you will see that his humorous occurrences are largely dealt with two categories: dark humor or grotesque humor.

The use of grotesque humor has the potential to be offensive. Yet, it frequently occurs in result of an individual's experience of agony, and it will only succeed once the readers are adequately distanced from the details to see the humor. In grotesque humor, the distance between the readers and the author allows the criticism to shine through, as the intention of grotesque humor is to criticize. Through dark and grotesque humor, Faulkner criticizes the South and the people who lives there alongside an expression of discontent and hatred.

Meanwhile Flannery O'Connor, who was a descendant of a long Southern heritage of detached humor, craved salvation for the people in her world. However, the salvation she sought for was transcendental and it could only be found in God. In the "Flannery O'Connor" chapter of the thesis, her methods are addressed and discussed in detail.

While O'Connor's literature is thematically similar to William Faulkner's fiction, both Faulkner and O'Connor construct and distort reality in quite different ways. Yet many of the effects they produce are similar; Just like O'Connor, Faulkner employs humor and violence to emphasize and magnify his distortions and draw the imaginary closer to the real.

There is a prevalent misconception that if the writer does not care about a character, the reader will not either. It is a form of writing that is intangible. Once the reader manages to establish a distance from O'Connor's handling of her worst protagonists and villains, s/he realizes that O'Connor loves and embraces them all, serial killers, hypocrites, and Pharisees equally.

O'Connor's humor is more than simply a source of pleasure; it is a manifestation of love, of faith, and hope. Her novels have a range of humorous aspects that bring joy and excitement to those who are suffering; they are representations of the everlasting world of "manners." Nevertheless, in O'Connor's stories, humor is not only a narrative device, nor is it a less important companion to serious theological and religious themes. Rather, in O'Connor's fiction, the humorous aspect is a demonstration of God's grace as a Christian mystery.

Finally, the zest of the Coen Brothers, which is discussed in detail in the last chapter of the thesis, is to watch the characters try to deceive the system. There is a pervasive cosmic irony in their stories; where we learn that no good act goes unpunished, and that evil pays off. Whether the protagonists are talented type of people seeking affirmation or ordinary people thrown into situations beyond their control; life is difficult in the Coen Brothers universe, and they remind us that the universe has an active role in our success and failures. And in many cases, the tone changes abruptly, where violence invades comedy, or humor releases tension.

The Coen Brothers' films are marked by complex allusions and literary references, profound narrative insights that are often plumbed from a different medium entirely. Some films such as *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), *No Country for Old Men* (2007), and their *True Grit* (2010) are direct screen adaptations of classic stories, but there's plenty of between-the-lines literary references in their other work.

The Coen Brothers' approach to filmmaking can be as inclusive as the subject matters, they entertain. Additionally, there's an idiosyncratic quality in their work that makes it Coenesque. Films of the Coen Brothers are stylish and often terrifying. They have a strange sense of humor. In their portrayals of blood, death, murder, crime, mystery, burials, dreams, and nightmares, they combine humor with horror, terror, and tragedy, relying on film noir and Hitchcockian references. Regardless of

their films' inherently horrific potential most of the time, the Coen Brothers' works are extremely funny. Horror and violence (as in the example of a hooded kidnapped woman trying to run blindly from her killer kidnappers at a Ku Klux Klan rally in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; failing in the end and being chopped of her toe) are esteemed ludicrous in the Coen Brothers' ironic films. Melancholy and grief prevail in their funniest films, and humor in their darkest films. Frequently, the brothers maintain numerous narratives that appear to have no consistency; their films depict individuals who are lost and rambling in a maze, seeking to comprehend the situations, and control their destiny. Each of their films focuses on a different aspect of the human condition, such as alienation, loneliness, poverty, tragedy, grace, compassion, cruelty, and violence.

The values of the American South have always influenced the cinematic perspective of the Coen Brothers. In this context, it is no coincidence that some of the siblings' favorite writers are William Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor. These authors, whose works are completely unique to the American South, undoubtedly have a major place in the unique character creation of the Coen Brothers. In addition to these writers, the works of Cormac McCarthy, one of the most important names of Southern Gothic, are undeniably important for the cinema of the brothers. Once readers, and moviegoers examine the themes, dialogues, script writings, and the characters of the Coen Brothers, the influence of Southern literature become more discernible in their work.

Ultimately, what appears certain and indisputable throughout the thesis is that there are numerous written or visual content suggesting that William Faulkner was inspired by Mark Twain; Flannery O'Connor was inspired by Faulkner; Cormac McCarthy was inspired by both Faulkner and O'Connor; and the Coen Brothers were considerably inspired by all of these writers. The similarities between such names are often so striking that they don't appear to be coincidences. When their various references and tributes to each other and each other's works are gathered in one place, it confirms what we could have suspected: that they often kept their names in mind while producing their works. Meanwhile, the cinematic perspective and humorous narratives created by Minnesota-born directors based on these writers are an indication of how these Southern writers have influenced the American South, the

United States, and the world outside the United States from past to present; and at the same time, it is also an indication of how the narratives of these writers and the characteristics of the South will influence the literary and cinematic works in the future.

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