
An Analysis of the Agent of Grace Archetype in the Character of the Misfit in A Good Man is Hard to Find, a Short Story by Flannery O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor is quite well known for her usage of the "agent of grace" archetype. This character, who is not necessarily a good person, is used to gift divine mercy onto the main character who up until that point had been blind (sometimes with glasses) to something in life. In O'Connor's short story A Good Man is Hard to Find the character of the Misfit does serve as an agent of grace to the grandmother and the grandmother does indeed truly receive grace from the Misfit. Many critics do not believe that the Misfit, a known serial killer, could be such an agent of grace.

However, upon digging deeper one will find that even down to his name he is very Christlike. Jesus himself is a misfit and was unable to truly fit in, and was constantly persecuted as well until he was crucified. O'Connor is clearly using a direct opposite of Christ to show redemption and grace coming from even the most unlikely of people. Not a soul in Jerusalem in the times of Jesus would have predicted that grace would come from a nobody who is the son of a carpenter. In addition, the Misfit does what Christ himself did which is show people what they truly appear to be and that is why the Grandmother gets grace. Jesus in all of the biblical stories is known for metaphorically holding a mirror to people and allowing them to see themselves the way God does and it is in this way that grace happens. Numerous times the grandmother fails in her faith and even agrees that "maybe he didn't raise the dead"(O'Connor 12) however when she finally touches the Misfit, who is a Christ figure, she is able to see herself as she is and gain grace. It is very similar to the story of Jesus and the bleeding woman and O'Connor is using this parallel and her Catholic background to show that grace is given even in a split second to the grandmother. In this bible story, Jesus is approached by a woman who has been living a life of sin and is bleeding quite terribly. As Jesus walks through the crowds the woman "reached out and touched him"(O'Connor 12), and Jesus upon being touched "sprang back as if a snake had bitten him"(O'Connor 12) and Jesus gave this woman divine grace. It is in this manner that just like the bleeding woman the old woman receives grace.

Some literary critics believe that this supposed grace is just "cheap grace", an idea from theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and that the grandmother "seems to be merely worthy of cheap grace"(Fox 11). At other points critics believe that since "her head only clears for an "instant"(Fox 10) and that it "is simply not enough time to undergo a complete spiritual transformation"(Fox 10). Both of these assumptions, however much merit may appear to them, are completely false. The argument that the grandmother receives only cheap grace is ludicrous

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because of the fact that many in the bible who have become saints have received grace in a similar manner, and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer himself states in his book *Nachfolge* (Discipleship) that costly grace “is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him”(Bonhoeffer). This is exactly what is able to happen with the grandmother because during her moment of epiphany, as short as it is, she is shown how she truly is by the Misfit and submits to Christ.

Now to the second argument, that it is impossible for grace to take place within such a constraint of time which is also ludicrous. In the Bible there are many instances of terrible people, suffering people who touched Jesus and were instantly changed and healed. Paul the famed apostle was a Christian hunter himself and was blinded instantaneously by the light of God and was given costly grace very similar to the grandmother, as was Zacchaeus, the bleeding woman and a host of crippled people. The bottom line of this story is not that grace is unattainable, but that grace is given to all who give themselves to the Lord and realize they need him in their lives which by the end of the story the grandmother does. She achieves this final grace in the moments of desperation of her last bit of life just before her death. This indicates that O’Connor’s usage of a typical Christ figure is apparent in this short story just like her others.

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