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## The Role Of The Child Within The Family In Olsen's I Stand Here Ironing And O'connor's Everything That Rises Must Converge

Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" and Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge" relay the theme of parental and child relationships within the family, using strongly developed characters to convey flawed relationships and the resulting impact upon each family member. Written during the time of the Great Depression, each story reflects, to a degree, the theme of loss and the causes that have led to that state.

Flannery O'Connor's widely anthologized short stories often employ humor, irony, and paradox within a system of Christian belief in evil and redemption to express religious themes and southern life. As a social satirist, as well as a religious writer, Flannery O'Connor often highlights American cultural challenges such as random violence, race relations, and class discrimination. Born in Savannah, Georgia in 1925, her father passed away due to complications of systemic lupus erythematosus when she was a teenager. After high school, Flannery O'Connor continued on to study writing at the University of Iowa and published her first short story, "The Geranium," at 21 years of age. Flannery O'Connor spent several months at Yaddo, an artist's retreat, upon graduation from college. Best known for her collections of short stories, Flannery O'Connor received honors including an O. Henry Award and the National Book Award. Flannery O'Connor battled lupus, an autoimmune disease, for over 10 years, eventually dying of it in Milledgeville, Georgia.

Tillie Lerner Goldfarb Olsen, an American writer and social activist known for authoring powerful fiction focusing on the inner lives of the working poor, women, and minorities, brought attention to the long-neglected women authors and inspired the development of academic programs in women's studies at the university level in the United States. Olsen gained popularity, especially with scholars, throughout her lifetime, cited by the American Academy of Arts and Letters for creating a "freshly poetic form of fiction." She held nine honorary doctorates, winning grants and residencies at artists' colonies despite her complicated relationship with her past including having never completed high school. The second child of her parents, members of a largely Jewish and socialist self-defense league seeking to end injustice and the brutal programs of tsarist Russia, they lived in Minsk before her father was arrested after being identified as one having a part in the failed Russian Revolution of 1905. Facing death or exile in Siberia, Samuel Lerner escaped to England, adapting to the language before immigrating to New York City in 1906. Hashka Goldberg, given the title of Ida by immigration officials, followed his lead in 1907 when they moved to Omaha, Nebraska, the residence of Samuel Lerner's maternal relatives.

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Samuel Lerner and Ida Goldberg never married, but raised six children while remaining reformists in the Workmen's Circle. Tillie enrolled at Omaha's Central High School in January of 1925 and began a humor column in the school's paper within a year. An experimental child, she had an unplanned pregnancy at the age of 16, resulting in her withdrawal from school for an "illness" before having an abortion and later returning to school. She did not graduate from Central due to either withdrawal or expulsion, although the cause is unknown. The socialist values of her parents strongly influenced Tillie Lerner, but she began living independently and joined the Young Communist League. Abraham Jevons Goldfarb, a practicing Communist, took Tillie with him to Stockton, California, the place of his parents' residence, upon Tillie's 18th birthday. The remainder of 1930 was spent crusading for the Communist Party of the United States in the Midwest, marrying Abraham Goldfarb on February 14, 1931. Abraham and Tillie returned to the Midwest in the autumn of that year after Tillie was arrested for her involvement in fomenting worker protests. Her contraction of tuberculosis during incarceration bought her release, moving to Omaha and then Minnesota upon release of her picture to the local paper in Omaha. During her stay with Abraham Goldfarb's sister, Tillie began to recover and write (Reid).

During the lives of the authors Flannery O'Connor and Tillie Olsen, significant events occurred, changing and shaping the both the United States and the world. The first diesel engine automobile trip was completed, ranging from Indianapolis, Indiana to New York City, New York. Hostess Twinkies were invented by Jimmy Dewar, and the United Kingdom, Japan, and the United States signed the London Naval Treaty regulating submarine warfare and limiting shipbuilding. The last recorded lynching of African Americans in the Northern United States occurred with the hanging of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana. President Herbert Hoover asked Congress for (United States) \$150 million for the public works program in order to assist in the generation of jobs and better stimulate the economy. The United States, during time, occupied Haiti, fought the prohibition of alcohol, faced the Dust Bowl, and endured the Great Depression. These events and circumstances greatly impacted the lives of Tillie Olsen and Flannery O'Connor, in turn influencing their literary works.

Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing" and Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge" both focus on the toxic relationship of a mother and child. Although Tillie Olsen's mother in "I Stand Here Ironing" is a mother figure to multiple children, the storyline focuses on her eldest daughter, Emily. Emily's mother, in comparison to Julian's mother in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" raises her daughter as a product of "anxious, not proud, love." Julian's mother, conversely, uses every opportunity that arises to brag of her son's achievements, despite the lack of pride he has in himself.

Julian and Emily each are raised without a paternal figure throughout some of, if not the majority of, their lives. The lack of a father figure is substituted and compensated for in different

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manners; Olsen's mother chose to send Emily to a convalescent home in the country where she would be provided the kind of food and care that the mother is unable to manage for her, and then expected to provide the care for her younger siblings and accept Bill (her mother's new husband) as her new father figure. Julian's mother was "a widow who had struggled fiercely to feed and clothe and put [Julian] through school and who was supporting him still." Mother and child relationships are not always positive, despite the effort contributed by one of the involved parties. Emily made effort to connect with her mother in a variety of ways. Julian, however, rejected his mother due to annoyance caused by her. Julian is ashamed of his mother and the prejudice she, and like-minded individuals, maintain against those of color.

"I Stand Here Ironing" by Tillie Olsen is a mother's monologue in reply to a school counselor's request to discuss her eldest daughter, Emily. In her monologue, the mother remembers the obstacles presented by the Great Depression and the consequences they had on Emily. As the daughter of a single mother, Emily was sent to be in the attention of inadequate and indifferent caretakers, "nurseries that are only parking places for children" (Olsen 447). Her mother spends a considerable amount of time worrying about Emily's well-being rather than actually caring for her, and instead of allowing her to be a child and act her age, she encourages her to take care of her four younger siblings acting as a second caretaker. Even when the circumstances improved in her mother's second marriage, Emily was once again separated from the family after contraction of the measles, sent to a convalescent home where Emily learned isolation as a result of minimal parental contact and discouragement of close attachments (Werlock).

"I Stand Here Ironing" is a story following in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II, drawing parallels between two generations represented by the unnamed 38-year-old mother and her 19-year-old daughter, Emily. Tillie Olsen's story highlights the difficulties encountered by a single working parent and the effects these challenges have on the children. The circumstances exemplify the hard times faced by Americans during the Great Depression, demonstrating the poor quality of life as stated by the mother in her reflections, "We were poor and could not afford for her the soil of easy growth" (Olsen 451). The title of the short story itself is an echo of the erasing and reforming of the mother's emotions, in the physical act of eliminating wrinkles with an iron (Snodgrass).

Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is set during the beginning of the Civil Rights movement when the South was still segregated. Many of Flannery O'Connor's short stories involve the Christian concepts of sin and repentance and "Everything That Rises Must Converge" specifically deals with the sin of pride, which Catholics consider to be an attempt to place human power and ability above God's. Set in the South, Flannery O'Connor's story focuses on two white characters: an elderly woman who considers herself above others around her due to her racial heritage and college-educated son, and her son, Julian, who

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considers himself better than his mother based on his open-mindedness and freedom from stereotypical racist views. The plot of the story revolves around a bus ride to town for the mother's trip to the YMCA for her reducing class, and the hat she so cautiously chose and paid for being worn by another woman, a colored woman, on the bus. The analysis of Abby Werlock concludes that:

“Self-discovery in spite of self-deception becomes the major thematic emphasis of this tale. Ironically, however, both Julian and his mother progress from inaccurate self-images to the stark realization that the character traits they so prize are in fact petty and worthless” (Werlock).

Julian's forced interaction with colored people on the bus ride proves to himself that he is tolerant and lacks racial bias, evidence of the superiority of his mind in comparison to that of his mother's. His mother, knowing the act was one of spite, feels superior to Julian, as his actions were insensitive and inconsiderate, placing value on the heart rather than on the head.

Flannery O'Connor's use of repetitive imagery in the purple hat, the one so carefully and thoughtfully chosen by Julian's mother, being worn by a colored woman who boards the bus carrying a small boy helps to emphasize the similarities between these women, which Julian gloatingly points out to his mother. Julian fails to see the similarities between himself and the colored child, being that they both cling to a mother figure in some ways though, in Julian's case, are in denial to the extent to which they are dependent on the mother. As the mothers and sons exit the bus, Julian's mother maintains a condescending attitude of superiority to the colored family, offering the son a shiny penny. Julian feels his mother deserves the blow given by the child's mother and only, when realizing the damage it has caused, makes the conclusion that sin must be met with mercy, and that his own self-righteous attitude has been his downfall.

Both stories' titles relay the theme of erasing sin and wrongdoings, and the resulting equal ground on which everyone and everything will be. Tillie Olsen and Flannery O'Connor were affected by the recent events of the Great Depression and have allowed the circumstances to influence their stories “I Stand Here Ironing” and “Everything That Rises Must Converge.”

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