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Delineating Poe's literary style in Flannery O'Connor's short stories

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Abstract

Southern Gothic, a subgenre of Gothic fiction, is written by Flannery O'Connor. The genre of Gothic fiction owes a great deal to Edgar Allan Poe, who is considered to be its father. O'Connor borrowed a lot of Gothic motifs from Poe. Despite this, she had been effective in using gothic aspects in her writings in a somewhat different manner than Edgar Allan Poe. In her short works "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "Good Country People," and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," she uses a gothic motif to evoke mental and occasionally physical estrangement, imprisonment, grotesque, macabre, and secluded settings. The selected short stories by this author do not contain any supernatural aspects, yet her characters are flawed and dangerous. They arouse readers' empathy for their circumstances, yet they go above and beyond what is expected of them. Unlike Poe, her villains and wicked characters don't typically commit murder. As in the first two instances, they attempt to physically harm the victims' minds. The theme of estrangement is central to the narrative. In O'Connor's writings, self-absorption is the main factor that leads to alienation, as opposed to Poe's writings where decaying and barren surroundings create an isolated zone. Swindling people involves gruesome elements, such as captivity, according to O'Connor's stories. In Poe's writing, it is, on the other hand, supernatural. Many of these elements are apparent in Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'The Cask of Amontillado' and 'The Pit and the Pendulum'. This paper will study how O'Connor has traced Poe in her selected short stories. Did she directly portray her characters in Poe's sense? How did she use gothic in a different mind than him? What new elements did she add to her short stories in the 20th century, and to what extent has she reproduced Poe in her writing?

Keywords: Alienation, confinement, macabre, grotesque, gothic

Introduction

The Romantic literary movement gave rise to Gothic literature in Europe in the 18th century. It's a genre that puts a premium on unadulterated feelings, fusing fear with pleasure and romance with death. The Gothic is characterized by its ominous atmosphere and eerie, gruesome tales. Its name and creative inspiration come from the Gothic architectural style popular in the middle Ages, which is known for its abandoned aristocratic estates, crumbling castles, and dilapidated buildings. The Gothic fiction subgenre was established with the publication of Horace Walpole's ominous, frightful *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. Since then, gothic literature has thrived and branched out into numerous prominent subgenres. (Pagan 2018).

Horror fiction was significantly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's gothic fiction, American literary heritage, and his own experiences serve as the setting for his horror stories. He borrowed from the tradition of gothic literature and innovated on it to reach the subconscious. Poe's horror stories influenced Southern literature in several ways.

Gothic representation in Flannery O'Connor's stories

Southern farms are the setting for the tale "The Good Country People." The protagonist, Hulga, is estranged not only from everyone around her but also from herself, as shown by her name, stance, and mechanical leg. She chose a different name, which suggests that she finds satisfaction in standing apart from the "Good Country People" around her. The notion of alienation is continued through the mother-daughter relationship's depiction of estrangement. Mrs Hopewell tries her hardest to understand her daughter but finds it difficult to accept her

differences without feeling sorry for her. O'Connor uses Hulga's alienation as a tool for his gain. When the bible salesman observes this, he takes advantage of her. Everyone in this tale is ugly. Hulga is characterised in many ways, especially by Mrs Hopewell, as being unattractive and strange due to her wooden limb and negative attitude on life. Mrs Freeman does not feel free, thus her name contradicts itself. Carramae is only fifteen years old, yet she is already expecting her first child. Glynase realises she has a sty, and a boy dupes her into assisting her in getting rid of it just by pressing her neck.

Manly Porter looks to be trash, while Mrs Hopewell and Mrs Freeman appear to think of themselves as fine country people. However, they are exceedingly dishonest. Everything people say and perceive is a reflection of who they are. Throughout the narrative, Mrs Hopewell denigrates everyone, but she later contradicts herself by saying, "Everyone is different." At the conclusion of the tale, Mrs Freeman and Mrs Hopewell were unaware that Manley had just taken Hulga's leg and run off with it, duping everyone with his slick speech about selling the Bible and endearing country boy persona. Everyone is fascinated by Manley Pointer's innocence. This innocence has a terrible impact on the plot. Later, his identity is made known when he asks Hulga to meet up in person. He gives her a passionate kiss and tricks her into giving him her prosthetic limb to distract her from her fake limb. He utilises his claim that he has heart illness to manipulate people into giving him their trust. He displays his personality to Hulga, which highlights the grisly aspects of the tale. The readers are as horrified by this tragedy as Hulga is. What Manley will do next is a mystery to them. The climax was especially horrible.

Manley Pointer is not your typical individual. Because of his upbringing, he exists. In addition to looting people in the past, he is constantly seeking out fresh prey. Hulga is astonished when he admits to her in the barn that he had before carried out such deeds. Like previous characters in O'Connor's novels, Manley Pointer is a villain. He gains the trust of Mrs Hopewell and Hulga before betraying them. He displays "nice rural people" behaviour. On the other hand, he mistreats and tempts women for his amusement. He displays alcohol, medicine, and playing cards with pornographic imagery cut out of a hollowed-out Bible. Hulga is imprisoned in the barn by Manley Pointer, who takes advantage of her handicap. Her prosthetic limb stands for both her emotional and her strong side. When he takes away her prosthetic limb, she is rendered immobile and feels entrapped. She is unable to request assistance. Hulga is kept confined in the barn.

In "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," the idea of estrangement is present in parallel. Lynell and the elderly Lucynell are confined to their farm by themselves. The age of her daughter supports this. Mrs Crater was wary of Mr Shiftlet when he initially visited her property because of this. Because of her utter helplessness and loneliness, Mr Shiftlet ends up becoming her son-in-law. By sharing the same name, Lucynell and Old Lucynell serve as symbols of a lack of originality. (Arant 13).

Mrs Crater tries to marry Mr Shiftlet to Lucynell because she thinks he will make them feel less lonely. She had some reservations about him, but not legal ones. Also experiencing a sensation of emptiness is Mr. Shiftlet. He leaves Lucynell and stops at a diner called The Hot Spot. Mr. Shiftlet's lecture about the benefits of a mother is

rejected by a hitchhiker, a young lad who feels estranged. He leaps off the sluggish vehicle and commits suicide. Mr. Shiftlet is also left alone after losing his last friend. The impact of this tale extends to O'Connor's private life as well. Each character experiences a psychological void. Mrs. Crater is by herself at the diner, leaving Lucynell all by herself. Mr Shiftlet has completely given up on the organisation. To extricate himself, the hitchhiker leaps. Mrs. Crater wants her daughter to wed a disabled man so he can live on the property permanently. Due to her infirmity, Lucynell is initially restricted to the farm and eventually to a Hot-Spot diner.

O'Connor frequently uses the grotesque in her short works. Shiftlet wants to purchase a car and is prepared to give up both his permanent home and his new wife and family in order to accomplish it. He will do anything to get a car because of his extreme need for one. He takes advantage of his impairment. Before stealing the family, he first earns their trust. The characters' level of naivete is likewise rising. Mrs Crater needs a son-in-law badly, but she never gets one. All of Mr Shiftlet's possibilities for happiness are destroyed. Mr. Shiftlet appears to dodge Mrs Crater's enquiries regarding his identity, exposing the macabre overtones. He responds to them vaguely until he grasps the psychology of his target. He seems to be waiting for the right moment. Additionally, he appears to be preparing to attack them. Although he doesn't murder them, he does plunder them when the time is right.

When she inquires about his reason for being there, he dodges the question and instead says, "lemme tell you something. There's one of these doctors in Atlanta that's taken a knife and cut the human heart-the human heart" (O'Connor 157). The way he reacts just suggests something suspicious. Rather than simply responding to her, he poses the unsettling question, "What is a man?" (O'Connor 158). Since the beginning, Mr Shiftlet has been watching the car. When he visits Mrs Crater's property, he asks about the car rather than her family. He avoids discussing his past. He seems to intentionally provide his family with inaccurate information. He seems accustomed to doing this kind of work. As a result, he is somewhat unaffected by even a strong relationship like marriage.

Like other characters in O'Connor's novels, Mr Shiftlet is wicked. He is a shrewd opportunist who waits for the ideal time to seize what most people would deem insignificant. He restores the car and wins the Crater family's confidence. He does this by teaching Lucynell the "bird language." The automobile, the object of his actual obsession, captures his attention right away. With Mrs Crater, he makes the ideal deal. As a sleepy serpent is roused by a fire, his smile widens.

Besides a monster, a southern character, such as a paralyzed man, is used to convey the bad or peculiar features of a monster. Whose degeneration is essential to the plot of the story. The character is referred to as a grotesque figure who stands out in a bad way from the rest of humanity and inspires both pity and contempt with his looks and conduct. Their identity is determined by his abnormality and a pessimistic outlook on life. In addition, incarceration and victimization are prominent traits. The action takes place on a shabby and desolate southern plantation. Because he only has one arm, anyone could feel empathetic for him at first.

The grandma is mentally and physically isolated in 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'. When the misfit spots them in the

ditch, the Grandmother is physically confined. She was also enslaved by her recollections from the past and wished to go to her favourite place rather than of children. Thus, she was psychologically trapped. Instead of Georgia, she lands in Tennessee. The entire family was caught, and there was no way out except death. The misfit was likewise stuck in a zone of secret locations because he could not face the public for fear of being apprehended by the authorities.

When her family members were being murdered one by one, she was simply concerned about her survival. She did not care about anyone except herself. As a result, she begs the misfit to leave her life. "Jesus!" the old lady cried. "You've got good blood! I know you wouldn't shoot a lady! (O'Connor 144). He should pray, she reminded him. This clearly defines the idea of confinement. She is unable to move, both mentally and physically.

The story contains aspects of the grotesque. The face of Bailey's wife was presented "as broad and innocent as a cabbage." The accident does not affect John Wesley and June Star because they are egocentric. The Grandmother, like the misfit, is a weird person. She has only a semblance of faith in God. This exposes her hypocrisy.

The misfit is shirtless and armed in the very first scene. Rather than killing them all at once, he converses with the grandmother intellectually. His talk demonstrates the wisdom he has accumulated through time. He has also acquired many negative thoughts about the world. He is unconcerned about anyone and murders the grandmother. "She would have been a good woman," The Misfit said, "if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life." (O'Connor 145). Everyone is to accompany Hiram and Bobby Lee in the woods, according to the misfit. They murder John Wesley and Bailey first. The rest of the family could hear the sound of the gunshot. This gives the short story a macabre feel. Bailey had choked as he realised it was time for him and his son to die.

Grandma has been announcing the impending threat to them all since the beginning. The cat is a metaphor for death when it leaps on Bailey, he loses control of the automobile, and it flips upside down. The accident had left everyone shaken. In Flanner O'Connor's short story, the grandma is in mental alienation. Grandma continues to swim in the past. Her present is ruined because of her history. She loses track of where she is supposed to go. As a result, she transports them all to a new area, where they all die.

The misfit is vile and murders Bailey's entire family without compassion. He holds Christ responsible for the resurrection of the dead. The granny has a naïve personality. She has a habit of acting on her impulses. Although she knows the misfit will shoot her, she acts as if she has no idea. She addresses him as if he were a decent person. She is even aware that he has murdered other members of her family. She also believed that he might pity her. Her gullibility had led her to believe that nothing could harm her.

Gothic representation of Edgar Allan Poe's stories

Roderick Usher and his sister Madeline lived at their family's ancestral home in 'The Fall of the house of Usher'. For them, it was largely a restricted space. The element of confinement is vital in gothic fiction. Either the characters are unable to go out or do not consider leaving their home. This is what happens with Roderick and Madeline. He was hearing strange noises all the time, but he never considered fleeing.

Being alone and the absence of human contact that ends in death is the motif of "The Fall of the House of Usher." They reside in an estranged house. They had no family or home nearby. This was the only house in the neighborhood that was surrounded by decaying trees. The narrator's spirit was filled with an indescribable sense of despair when he first saw the edifice.

With which mind frequently gets even the harshest natural impressions of the desolate. There was no human touch in empty eyelike windows on the bleak walls and a few rotting tree trunks with white bark. In the narrator's description of the house as lonesome and wrapped in spooky despondency, there is an undercurrent sense of isolation and sorrow. Because the narrator didn't know much about his special friend because he stayed in his home, the depiction of him as overly and usually reticent set the tone for the story's theme of isolation.

One indication of isolation was the Usher family's ancestry. The complete family fell on the straight path of inheritance. Roderick and Madeline Usher's residence was secluded, indicating that the Usher family had been in self-confinement. Madeline had been noticed by the narrator, but she has never seen again until she was discovered ostensibly dead—a demonstration of her solitude. An extreme example of imprisonment was Madeline's enslavement after she appeared to be dead. The truest expression of solitude and terror is to be buried alive.

Roderick is psychologically trapped, and the narrator does everything he can to help him get out of it, but he is constantly influenced by his sister's misery. Her eerie voice is even picked up by him. When his twin sister dies, it affects him as well. He continues to wither, showing no signs of recovery. The narrator tells him stories in an attempt to heal him, but it is futile. When the entire home shatters into nothingness, the narrator eventually hears the voice and can encounter the evil. The characters in the story are ill. This is the first sign of grotesque. They just keep withering and do not seem to heal. Madeline was sick and did not show any signs that the narrator had come in.

The structure has a crack from the roof to the waters of the tarn. The outside of the Usher's house is infested with fungi, crumbling stone chunks, and zigzag crevices. Everything is worn out and destroyed in the house inside. Some instances of horrible sounds are when Roderick and the narrator hear sounds emanating from throughout the house and realize it could be Madeline emerging from her tomb. When the hefty weight shifted on its hinges, it made a loud noise. Roderick was conscious of the voices but remained silent for many days. Both the narrator and Roderick were terrified when Madeline emerged from the casket. They were now aware that she had been buried alive. To begin with, when the narrator encounters the family apothecary, who accosts him and the ruined buildings already points at the macabre elements of the story. The twin-ailing sister barely notices him. The narrator gets a sight of her, but she never looks at him. When she seems to have died. Roderick decides to bury her in a casket.

They transport the body to the underground vaults, where only torches provide illumination. They become lost in the darkness somewhere. Roderick, who is terrified, wanders around the home. He has begun to hear some weak noises. The narrator can also hear dim and indeterminate sounds on the seventh or eighth day of Madeline's death. The story takes place in an enclosed dwelling where the narrator and

Roderick have no touch with the outside world. Usher is a naïve individual who is unable to deal with the circumstance and hence seeks assistance from his friend. He always appears to be unconcerned. His death was caused by his naivety. Despite the fact that the story 'The Cask of Amontillado' is set in an unnamed Italian city, the catacomb is the central focus. This signifies that whatever occurs to Fortunato, it will be impossible for him to escape. Montresor has him trapped and bound. Montresor buried his friend alive solely to satisfy his need for vengeance. It is damp and chilly here. Fortunato overlooks the danger of not being able to breathe, which is the first indicator of impending death. He keeps moving throughout the catacomb, tasting the wine. Fortunato was imprisoned not only in the catacomb but also in the intoxication of wine.

When Fortunato asks for the sign of his masonry, then like a wily being, Montresor showcases the trowel, the weapon that he will use to kill Fortunato. Montresor, a dangerous man, seduces Fortunato with the promise of wine. This reveals his nasty nature. He makes him intoxicated so that he will go along with him without complaining.

Systematically, he pushes him to the brink of death. Montresor's malevolent nature can be seen in his strategy to have no voice heard during the carnival because of the commotion. He enjoys inflicting pain on his body and psyche by erecting a wall with mortar and bricks. He only leaves enough room for a single brick to hear his shrieks. Then he drops his torch, allowing Fortunato to witness his own death through his own eyes. This story is likewise full of naiveté. Fortunato follows Montresor around like a crazy kid, running to take his lollipop. Montresor is a villain. He is still thrilled with his decision after fifty years. He has no regrets about the murder he committed. He overpowers him by purposefully weakening his physique. The wetness affects him, but Montresor does not seem to mind. In fact, he encourages him to visit the amontillado. Instigating him to not lose the chance, Montresor secretly keeps Luchesi as his rival.

In the story 'The Pit and The Pendulum', alienation is a major theme. The protagonist is confined to a cell. He is unable to leave and must see the torture. No one kills him. Instead, they make his life difficult. He alone witnesses every scene in the story. This reveals his sense of isolation. There is no other character, like in other stories. He finds a different picture that is scarier every time. For any interpretation, the readers must rely on the narrator. His mental state makes him an untrustworthy narrator. In prison, the narrator has no company and only has intrapersonal communication. His unaddressed previous criminal activities have landed him in prison. He is so lonely that he begins measuring the cell's perimeter.

There is a terror in the narrative. The narrator could not understand anything as the story began. The panel of seven stern judges terrified him. The death punishment had horrified him. However, he had no idea how he would be tortured to death. It seemed to him that seven specters had emerged from the seven candles. He was perplexed. He dozed off and awoke in a dark room, much to his surprise. He was curious as to his whereabouts.

Anyone would be terrified by the frequent scary changes in his surroundings. When he awoke from his dream, he found himself in a new and terrifying situation. He is tortured all the time and can only witness it. The room was becoming increasingly crimson and smaller. The Pendulum remained

suspended above him, gently descending. This appears to be the case. The Pendulum hung over him and continued to gently descend. He believes that today is his last day. Because of his terror, he passed out very often.

Conclusion

Flannery O'Connor's short stories are the most influential stories of her time. To her, anything that is in Southern is grotesque. Poe's terrible life conditions caused him to become depressed and wish to die. The protagonist Roderick Usher, preoccupied with pain, cruelty, and premature burial, could be a reflection of the author's wish for self-destruction. Similarly, Flannery O'Connor's fascination with evil, horror, and disfigurement may have stemmed from her situation. They both examined the interior world in their short stories but primarily focused on the darker aspects of human nature. Readers of Poe's and O'Connor's works rarely encounter characters who experience pleasure, calmness, or harmony. Most of her stories abound with alienation, macabre and confinement. The settings of her stories are likewise similar, with the primary storyline taking place in a confined zone or on a farm. It is challenging for the characters to escape. As in Poe's stories, they are mentally and physically alienated. The weird disabled individuals usually gain pity at first, but they turn precisely opposite to their personality. This is frightening. All of these characteristics work together to show that O'Connor has incorporated Poe in her short stories.

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